



American
film HISTORY

Selected
Readings,
**1960 to the
Present**



Edited by

Cynthia Lucia | Roy Grundmann | Art Simon

WILEY Blackwell

American Film History

The Editors

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Together they are the editors of the four-volume collection *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film* (2012) and *American Film History: Selected Readings, Origins to 1960* (2016), both published by Wiley-Blackwell.

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Selected Readings, 1960 to the Present

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Additional online resources such as sample syllabi, which include suggested readings and filmographies for both general and specialized courses, are available at www.wiley.com.

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We especially want to acknowledge Robert Sklar. Bob's contribution to these volumes goes well beyond the two essays that appear here. His mentorship, scholarship, and friendship meant so much to us over the years. It is with great respect and gratitude that we dedicate these volumes to his memory.

The Editors

Preface

In many ways, this project began in the classroom. When organizing American film history courses, often taught over two semesters, we encountered the recurring problem of how best to select readings for our students. A strong narrative history seemed essential and several of these are available. But because of their scope and synthesis, these texts do not have space for lengthy discussions of important events, film cycles, or artists. We wanted to create a collection of essays that would provide such in-depth discussions. We also wanted original treatments of “bread-and-butter topics” – the rise of the star system, the place of specific genres like the musical and gangster film, the operations of classical-era studios and their executives – as well as less frequently discussed topics. As a means of introducing new areas of inquiry into our courses and the larger field of film scholarship, we especially wanted essays that would cover film production on the margins, such as the avant-garde and documentary, and films made by and on topics associated with underrepresented groups – whether women, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, or gays and lesbians. Although we gladly reprinted several important essays, we mostly asked scholars to contribute new work, extending arguments they had made elsewhere or tackling entirely new areas. The result was *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film*, published in 2012, in four-volume hardback and online editions.

The book in front of you is part of a two-volume paperback collection of essays selected from the four-volume hardback/online edition. New material has been added, including expanded introductions and brief overviews of individual essays, designed to guide students by highlighting key concepts and separately listing “additional terms, names, and concepts” of importance. Overviews also reference related essays in the paperback and hardback/online editions,¹ encouraging readers to expand their understanding and further their research. Professors adopting this paperback volume(s) also will have access to pedagogically oriented materials online, including sample syllabi for survey courses in American film history and

syllabi using these volumes to create more focused “special topics” courses.

With the classroom in mind, new and expanded introductions address historical time periods marked by each section division. These introductions, it must be noted however, do not pretend to be all-inclusive treatments of their particular periods nor do they systematically survey every essay within each volume – that task is performed by the overviews accompanying individual essays. Rather, the introductions function as a type of establishing long shot, a perspective on some of the more significant events, individuals, films, and developments in a given era, with collected essays providing closer, more detailed views. We also acknowledge that lines of demarcation from section to section, period to period, should always be understood as permeable, never rigid. As such, we do discuss films in the introductory essays that, from time to time, cross these flexible boundary lines.

As with every such collection, and with narrative accounts of film history, we were forced to make difficult decisions about those topics and essays from the 2012 edition that we would include or omit. Undoubtedly, readers will wonder about the inclusion of some subjects and the absence of others. This is perhaps particularly the case when it comes to individual artists. There are essays here devoted to Griffith, Capra, and Wilder but not to Ford, Hawks, and Hitchcock. All historians are painfully aware of who and what gets left out. Moreover, the essays focusing on individuals certainly favor directors over screenwriters or cinematographers. On the other hand, the critical importance of the star is addressed in several essays, many of which simultaneously take up the issue of genre. Our choices grew from the desire to create volumes that could most usefully be integrated into American film history courses as they typically are taught. Although our expanded introductions aim to fill in gaps, we acknowledge that more than a few gaps do, inevitably, remain.

Two approaches to American film history have guided the best work in the field over the past

30 years. The first is a cultural history approach offering an account that combines attention to the industry and its development with a focus on the political and cultural events central to US history in the late nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. A second approach undertakes a far more intensive study of the film industry's production, distribution, and exhibition strategies, tracing the emergence of a "classical" language and recording the shifting authorial forces within the industry. This has been accompanied by important work inside studio archives and with the professional/personal papers of key artists. In writing a history of American film, both approaches are indispensable.

With the 2012 *Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film* and this two-volume edition, we have sought to add a third, vital component – one that pays closer attention to the films themselves. Because the best narrative American film histories have limited space for elaborate, close readings of the films they reference,² we believe there is room in historical studies for attention to the relationship between representational or formal strategies of specific films and their narrative or thematic concerns. At the same time, we recognize that a call to include close reading in historical analysis is not without its problems. The wider historical picture can sometimes get lost in studies too focused on one film or a narrow selection of films. Furthermore, interpretive claims about a film do not lend themselves to the type of verification offered by work that draws significantly on archival sources. Still, we believe that close reading is an essential activity and makes a significant contribution. Although the essays published here adopt a "selected topics" approach, we believe they strike a rewarding balance between close readings that contribute to and those that complement the cultural history and history of industry approaches to American film history.

It is commonplace by now to understand cinema not as simple reflection but rather as a form of mediation that produces a perspective on, but by no means a transparent window onto, the world – a world it also simultaneously helps to construct. The relationship between the cinema and the world it represents travels a nuanced route that first passes through the conventions and pressures of the film industry itself. As Robert Sklar has argued in his seminal text *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*,

We need to be wary of postulating a direct correspondence between society and cinema or condemning its absence. Film subjects and forms are as likely – more likely – to be determined by the institutional and cultural dynamics of motion picture production than by the most frenetic of social upheavals.³

With this in mind, we have found it useful to think in terms of groups or clusters of films, closely examining patterns or cycles that form a cinematic landscape. Such clusters or groupings, whether folk musicals of the 1930s and 1940s or comic Westerns of the 1960s, form a coherent field that past audiences had encountered over a relatively concentrated period of time. Essays built along such lines can serve the needs of scholars, students, and teachers who may have time to see or show only one film in class. The significance of that single film hopefully will be illuminated when placed in dialogue with other films with which it is grouped in any one of our essays.

Not all of the essays published here, however, cover clusters of films. Industry practices, significant moments of experimentation, and various modes of documentary and independent filmmaking also are considered, some as parts of larger cycles and some not. Indeed, the scope of these volumes and the larger 2012 collection permits us to place, side by side, a variety of approaches to American film history. We are pleased to showcase the varied methods employed and the range of material now being examined by film historians. We also are gratified to publish the work of so many people in our field, from senior, well-established scholars to those whose important work has garnered attention over the past several years.

Our hope is that, in moving through each volume in a relatively methodical fashion, students and scholars will discover a rich collage that will open new lines of inquiry and contribute to an ever-expanding knowledge of American film history.

The Editors

Notes

1. University libraries and individuals can get information about accessing the online edition at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/book/10.1002/9780470671153>

2. We do not mean so much the type of formal analysis of systems offered in a work like David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985) with its analysis that theorizes an entire mode of production, but, rather, historical writing that includes interpretive claims about the function of specific techniques – mise-en-scène, camerawork, lighting, editing, etc. – as deployed in a film or set of films.
3. Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*. Revised and updated. New York: Vintage Books (1994), p. 322.

Part I

1960–1975

Setting the Stage

American Film History, 1960–1975

Profound changes rocked American cinema in the second half of the twentieth century, many of which reflected new directions in the history of the nation. A number of these developments occurred or, at least, got under way in the 1960s. By mid-decade, the anxiety that American society had initially kept at bay through a spirit of hope and renewal fully came to the fore, and forces of social and moral cohesion rapidly gave way to tendencies of questioning and confusion. From social rebellion and economic inequality there emerged an impulse toward cultural experimentation that also affected American films, but that, in the late 1970s and 1980s, would give way again to more conservative tendencies, as American politics shifted to the right and the US film industry reconsolidated and eventually reorganized itself on a global scale.

Film Industry Decline and Transformation

The old studio system of five majors (MGM, RKO, Warner Bros., Paramount, and Twentieth Century-Fox), vertically integrated with their own theaters guaranteeing certain exhibition of their films, and three minor studios that did not own theaters (Columbia, Universal, United Artists) had been in

place for over 30 years. By the early 1960s this system was largely defunct, its remnants subject to a series of mergers, acquisitions, and restructurings that would install a new generation of leaders at the top of the industry. Their predecessors, the legendary moguls, had run Hollywood as the nation's main purveyor of mass entertainment by defining movie-going as first and foremost a family affair. The new crop faced a dramatically shrinking audience base resulting from demographic shifts brought on by suburbanization and a widening generation gap. During the 1960s, when the nuclear family grew less stable, the industry survived, in part, by targeting the youth market, while not losing sight, for a time at least, of its general audience. And while the relative stability of the classical era had yielded long tenures for studio bosses, enabling them to impart their artistic imprimatur, from the 1960s forward, heads of production became cogs within sprawling corporate structures. In this climate, the rare producers able to flourish long enough to develop a creative oeuvre were semi-independent makers of B-movies, like Roger Corman, and, more recently, writer-director-producers epitomized by Steven Spielberg, whose tycoon status signals a different order of independence.

Hollywood in the 1960s not only found itself in search of a product and an audience, but the industry was also saddled with growing doubt as to how

American it indeed was. By 1966, 30 percent of American films were independently produced and 50 percent were so-called runaway productions – films made in Italy, Spain, and other European countries that beckoned with cheap, non-unionized labor. By that time, also, the effects of the 1948 Paramount Decree, which forced the studios to divest their ownership of theaters, loosened Hollywood’s stranglehold on the domestic market. Beginning in the 1950s, exhibitors’ burgeoning independence had opened the door to foreign imports. Between 1958 and 1968, the number of foreign films in US distribution would gradually exceed the number of domestic productions (Cook 2004, 427). While in 1955 television was Hollywood’s only serious competitor on the media market, ten years later American viewers had an unprecedented array of choices. They could buy a movie ticket to *The Sound of Music* or stay home and watch the *Ed Sullivan Show*; they could (fairly easily) see François Truffaut’s *Jules and Jim* (1963) or seek out numerous other examples of what would become known as the golden age of European art cinema – or, starting in the mid-1960s, they could catch the rising tide of third world films. If they were not keen on reading subtitles, their options included artistically ambitious independent films by such directors as John Cassavetes or quirky, independently made horror and exploitation flicks by the likes of George A. Romero and Russ Meyer. Or they could seek out innovative documentaries made in direct cinema style, or avant-garde films like Andy Warhol’s *The Chelsea Girls* (1966), which had made the leap from urban underground venues and college film societies into commercial exhibition.

In order to minimize risk, studios began to strike international financing deals that shifted their role to co-producer or distributor of internationally made films, exposing the industry to a wave of foreign talent and new artistic influences. Filmmakers like John Schlesinger and Roman Polanski would parlay their new wave cachet into international careers and relocate to the US. Others, like Michelangelo Antonioni and UK-based American expatriate Stanley Kubrick, directed projects that, while financed by Hollywood, were shot overseas. A new generation of American directors, including Arthur Penn, Sidney Lumet, and John Frankenheimer, who had come from television and also were attuned to foreign film, would also help broaden the aesthetics of American films to a significant degree. The so-called “movie brats” of the late

1960s and early 1970s, the first generation of directors trained in film school, including Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, and Brian De Palma, would extend this trend.

By the early 1970s, Hollywood had assimilated stylistic elements from numerous outside sources. The pre-credit sequence it took from television. The long take – while already present in 1940s prestige productions and 1950s widescreen cinema – was extended further through emerging auteurs influenced by European art cinema, independent documentaries, and the avant-garde. These cinemas also helped trigger the opposite trend in Hollywood – the acceleration of cutting and the fragmentation of the image into split screens, multiple slivers (showcased in the credit sequence of *The Thomas Crown Affair*, 1968), or collage-type arrays (as featured in the famous “Pusher Man” sequence from the 1972 blaxploitation film *Superfly*). Finally, the prominence of new wave cinemas inspired a loosening of Hollywood continuity editing conventions. Individualists like Sam Peckinpah, who pioneered slow motion, and Hal Ashby, who popularized the use of telephoto lenses, further broadened the formal palette of studio releases.

When Hollywood staged a return to classical topics and treatments during the Reagan era, some of these devices would be toned down. What ultimately characterizes the era from the late 1960s to the present, however, is the studios’ openness to using most any formal and narrative technique, provided it can be placed in the service of contemporary Hollywood storytelling. Since the 1990s, especially, the increased accessibility of filmmaking equipment (brought about by the digital revolution), the diversification of exhibition outlets (generated by the internet and convergence culture), and the emergence of new generations of auteurs (like Steven Soderbergh, Gus Van Sant, Baz Luhrmann, Todd Haynes, Joss Whedon, and Guillermo del Toro, who work on a global scale and cross over between big studio and indie productions, as well as between film and television) have generated a more elastic, globalized film aesthetic for a youth audience weaned on graphic novels, YouTube, and cellphone movies.

Cold War Anxiety

Even before the emergence of the late 1960s counterculture and its wide-ranging critique of American

institutions, filmmakers challenged the long-standing political consensus that had underwritten the Cold War.¹ After over half a century in which the movies had lent their support to American military campaigns, celebrating the GIs and the officers who led them, a cluster of films released between 1962 and 1964 no longer marched in step with the Pentagon. *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) and *Fail-Safe* (1964) told essentially the same story, the former through black humor and the latter through straight drama. Both questioned the hydrogen bomb as a peacekeeping device and argued that the technology of destruction threatened humanity's power to control it. Although *Fail-Safe* ended with a powerfully frightening montage of freeze frames showing people on the streets just before nuclear detonation – vividly illustrating a population at the mercy of the nuclear age – it was *Dr. Strangelove's* absurdist satire and its eerily incongruent ending – as bombs explode to the song “We’ll Meet Again” – that would resonate for decades after its release. Here, citizens are totally absent as the buffoons in charge of their safety channel their own sexual fears and fantasies into a race toward the apocalypse. *Seven Days in May* (1964) imagined a *coup d'état* planned within the Joint Chiefs to stop the President on the verge of signing a treaty with the Soviets. Even more shocking, if ideologically less coherent, as R. Barton Palmer argues in Volume I of this series, was *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), a returning veteran story at its cruelest, in which Raymond Shaw, falsely decorated a Korean War hero, is brainwashed to become a communist assassin. Caught in the crossfire between Red China and the US, sacrificed by his power hungry mother, and forced to kill his wife, Shaw embodies the myriad suicidal and twisted psycho-sexual impulses woven into Cold War thinking.

Gender Roles and Sexual Mores in Early 1960s Hollywood

During the 1960s, the movies' representation of gender and sexuality underwent dramatic changes, particularly in regard to Hollywood's portrayal of women. Initially, however, change seemed slow to come, as Hollywood's star machinery reflected 1950s ideals of beauty and morality. The reigning box office

star from 1959 to 1963 was Doris Day, whose persona in a string of popular, old-fashioned comedies combined Cold War ideals of feminine virtue and propriety with increasingly progressive attitudes towards female independence. In contrast to the best screwball comedies of the 1930s, in which a man and a woman meet, fall in love, separate, and then “remarry” as true equals, in Day's films marriage was not merely the default mode of heterosexual partnership. It became the idealized goal of her protagonists who, in their mid- to late thirties, were afraid of missing the boat that would carry them into the conjugal haven of motherhood and domesticity. Glossy Madison Avenue settings in *Pillow Talk* (1959) and *That Touch of Mink* (1961) function as a backdrop for Day's smartly coutured female professionals, as she conveys her characters' conflicted feelings about acting on or reining in her carnal desires with comic verve – all indicative of pressure on Hollywood to acknowledge, however timidly, American women's increasing sexual agency.

Fear of female sexual independence also played itself out in a number of early 1960s dramas about prostitutes: the Hollywood prestige film *Butterfield 8* (1960) starring Elizabeth Taylor, the quirky overseas production *Never on Sunday* (1960) shot by grey-listed Hollywood director Jules Dassin, and two of Billy Wilder's satirical comedies, *Irma La Douce* (1962) and *Kiss Me, Stupid* (1964). Sex for sale served as a displaced arena for exploring various facets of America's uneasy relation to female sexual agency, while ultimately conforming to the logic of a deeply puritanical and patriarchal culture. In best Academy Awards tradition, *Butterfield 8* depicts the prostitute as a tragic, doomed figure whose choice of profession is rooted in an unhappy childhood. *Never on Sunday* and *Irma La Douce* draw on the stereotype of the hooker with a heart of gold, though both are social satires, with left-winger Dassin exploring what happens when prostitutes organize and Wilder lampooning the role of the state in upholding bourgeois mores. *Kiss Me, Stupid* is more abrasive in its indictment of male greed and hypocrisy, as Robert Sklar argues in his essay on Wilder in Volume I of this edition. Perhaps not surprisingly, the film's zany plot – revolving around a small-town composer's scheme of trafficking women to trick a Las Vegas crooner into buying one of his songs – was widely panned as offensively tawdry. As these films indicate, Hollywood was willing to entertain the notion of female sexual agency

only if the woman ultimately was punished or the story was moved off-shore to exotic locations and couched within comedy's more outlandishly carnivalesque conventions.

“A Jumpin’ Jackpot of Melody”: The Musical in the 1960s

In their efforts to domesticate the sexual revolution, the studios were eager to manipulate genre conventions, and none more so than those of the musical. A case in point is MGM's cannibalization of Elvis Presley, whose anarchic musical talent and erotic charge were wasted in dozens of mediocre musical comedies during the 1960s. Even the mildly self-reflexive *Viva Las Vegas!* (1963), one of Presley's better films, heeds mainstream mores by turning his Rusty, a daring race car driver with a musical streak, into an old-fashioned romantic suitor of his sweetheart (Ann-Margret). The film reflects the contradictions of its time by straddling various musical subgenres. Backstage conventions serve to exploit the couple's sexual magnetism in steamy yet safely contained stage rehearsals and show numbers, while off stage the romance plot unfolds with the help of fluidly integrated serenades. Added to the formula are elements of the folk musical and action-packed car racing and crash sequences. Touted by its trailer as “A Jumpin’ Jackpot of Melody,” *Viva Las Vegas!* is exemplary of how Hollywood, by 1963, extended its time-honored strategy of blending various genres into the musical (Altman 1999), having become so uncertain of its target audience that it tried to be all things to all people.

The trajectory of the musical during this period poignantly illustrates that, despite babies of the earlier boom having grown up to be among the nation's most sophisticated and regular of moviegoers, and the youth market having become an increasingly important demographic, Hollywood still often aimed at a general audience. Family fare remained popular through such vehicles as *Mary Poppins* (1964) and *The Sound of Music* (1965). Industry attempts to recreate that film's overwhelming success failed, however, in such hopelessly old-fashioned yet high-budget extravaganzas as *Dr. Dolittle* (1967), *Camelot* (1967), *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968), *Star!* (1968), *Paint Your Wagon* (1969), *Darling Lili* (1970), and *On a Clear Day*

You Can See Forever (1970) (Cook 2000, 496). The reasons for such failures in the post-studio era are multiple, as Karen Backstein argues in this volume.

As America's musical tastes greatly expanded in the post-war period, especially under the influence of rock 'n roll and rhythm and blues, the repertoire of Hollywood music adapted as well. While a growing number of films incorporated songs by new and emerging artists – Simon and Garfunkel for *The Graduate* (1967), Leonard Cohen for *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971), Isaac Hayes for *Shaft* (1971), and, of course, a small catalog of rock hits for *Easy Rider* (1969) – there remained an important place for traditional scores, especially given the later box office success of futuristic or spectacle cinema. Among those whose music crossed over into popular listenership, but were best known for the movies, was Henry Mancini. After a year at Juilliard and World War II service, Mancini went to work at Universal where he created the stunning music for Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958). Best known, perhaps, for the soundtrack to Blake Edwards's comedy *The Pink Panther* (1963), the Mancini sound became attached to the early 1960s, with sophisticated scores tinged with sadness, as those written for *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) and *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962).

Gender, Race, and the American Family

Hollywood had been furnishing sober, at times ominous, assessments of the state of the American family even before the inception of suburbia. In the 1960s, however, when the family was far less stable, surprisingly few films dealt with this subject. One reason was the decline of the melodrama – a genre traditionally focused on the family. Peaking in popularity with such films as *Written on the Wind* (1957), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), and *Home from the Hill* (1960), 1950s-style depictions of family strife would appear overwrought just a few years later. Stories involving sex and social mores, as featured in such films as *Peyton Place* (1957) that, upon release, were considered daring and controversial, by the mid-1960s found themselves serialized for television. The family dramas that did get made in the early and mid-1960s were just as claustrophobic as their precursors, but they were

filmed in a more realistic style that no longer relied quite so heavily on melodramatic excess and overly ornate mise-en-scène. Adult themes, however, continued to function as a signifier for realism in these films, even as directors like Otto Preminger and Elia Kazan raised the bar on what “adult” would come to mean. As had been the case in the previous decade (and, to a certain extent, before World War II), the industry continued to look to the Broadway stage for adult source material, reaffirming the link between American film and American theater throughout the 1960s.

Kazan had been one of Hollywood’s top directors in the 1950s with such adult dramas as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *On the Waterfront* (1954), *East of Eden* (1955), and *A Face in the Crowd* (1957) – several of which had led to clashes with censors. His 1961 *Splendor in the Grass*, set in late 1920s rural Kansas, is a story about two teenage lovers whose relationship is stifled by a poisonous climate of materialism, sexual repression, and family hypocrisy. Written by William Inge, whose 1950s plays on small town sexual mores, *Picnic* (1955) and *Bus Stop* (1956), became Hollywood box office hits, the film dealt with such issues as premarital sex, rape, abortion, and society’s double standards concerning male and female promiscuity. As Cynthia Lucia points out in Volume I of this edition, such issues were just as prevalent in early 1960s America of John F. Kennedy as they were in 1929 – both moments in history on the cusp of sweeping change. *Splendor in the Grass*, like many 1960s family dramas, reflects Hollywood’s own anxieties about changing perspectives on gender and sexuality.

Although Hollywood made fewer family dramas during this period, it expanded the scope of the genre by incorporating the issue of race in films like *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961), which depicts a black working-class family’s internal and external struggles as they aspire to leave their inner city apartment and move to a white suburb. Made independently by Broadway and TV producers David Susskind and Philip Rose for Columbia Pictures, *A Raisin in the Sun* was, of course, a white production. The studio, however, did allow black playwright Lorraine Hansberry to write the script (under tight supervision), adapting her own 1959 New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award-winning Broadway play, which skillfully combined an indictment of racism with so called “cross-over issues” concerning education, entrepreneurship, and

home ownership. The film got made, in large part, because of Hollywood’s interest in filmed literature and in the rising African-American star Sidney Poitier (Reid 1993, 58).

For black-themed treatments in Hollywood, Poitier’s popularity proved a blessing and a curse. He became the first black superstar in American film, but the success of his vehicles hinged on stripping his characters of any political dimension. The formula was at its peak in the biggest – and, as it would turn out, the final – hit of Poitier’s career, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967), a mixed-race family film in which a white family’s liberal ideals are put to the test when their daughter announces that she intends to marry a black man. While hugely popular, the film deeply divided the black community given Hollywood’s knee-jerk attempt to ennoble and whitewash Poitier’s character – an overachiever and paragon of moral virtue embodying a stereotype Poitier often was forced to play. Although the Civil Rights Movement was at the forefront of national attention in the early 1960s, the studios limited their treatment of race to fewer than a handful of dramas, many of which featured mostly white casts, as true of many Poitier films.

It fell to independent cinema to furnish overtly political stories of black families and black struggle, although these films still were made by white filmmakers. Paul Young and Michael Roehmer’s nuanced and gripping drama, *Nothing But a Man* (1963), tells the story of Duff, a railroad worker in the deeply racist South, who struggles to overcome racism and economic adversity in order to found his own family. While the film was poorly distributed, it launched the career of its male lead, Ivan Dixon, who ten years later directed *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1973), a film both serious and satirical about the history of the civil rights struggle. These films, as Alex Lykidis discusses in this volume, provide enlightening bookends to the civil rights era.

If Hollywood’s adaptation of Hansberry’s drama indicated that the industry was becoming interested in black-themed plays, the playwright most popular with studios up until the early 1960s was Tennessee Williams, whose dramas about dysfunctional and taboo aspects of white southern family life had generated solid box office. In 1962, however, a new play signaled a changing of the guard. *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by the then unknown Edward Albee upped the ante with its unsympathetic, at times

absurdist, portrait of the combative marriage of a middle-aged couple, George and Martha. With a nod to Williams's legacy, Albee's play references the older playwright's 1947 drama *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Although *Streetcar* concludes with the birth of a child, however, *Virginia Woolf* ends with the death of a child – a child that was never more than a fantasy functioning as both tonic and glue for a marriage founded on lies, denial, and false hopes. This same toxic combination dramatically alters the marriage of *Streetcar*'s young couple, the Kowalskis (with Stella Kowalski choosing to stay with her husband even after learning that he raped her sister). As bookends to the baby boom years, both plays represent American families devolving from dysfunction into horror story. Warner Bros. adapted both into highly acclaimed and commercially successful films. The 1951 Williams adaptation, produced under the watchful eye of the still intact Production Code, changed the play's ending, forcing Stella to leave her brutish, rapacious husband. The film thus suppresses the true meaning of Stella's acquiescence in the play, which penetrates the sheen of morality and emotional commitment to reveal the family as an institution driven by practicality and accommodation aimed at securing material comfort and economic stability. With the Production Code all but buried, the costly, high-profile 1966 adaptation of *Virginia Woolf*, by contrast, placed such hypocrisy front and center. The horror of middle-class family morality heavily informed Elizabeth Taylor's Oscar-winning performance as Martha, a character who, like Poitier's Walter Young in *A Raisin in the Sun* and Ivan Dixon's Duff Anderson in *Nothing But a Man*, takes the frustrations of her stunted existence out on her family rather than society. While Walter and Duff's anger must be seen in the context of the Civil Rights Movement, Martha's rage gained resonance with the publication of Betty Friedan's 1963 bestseller, *The Feminine Mystique*, arguing that beneath the façade of married middle-class existence, American women were roiled by unhappiness and frustration. Soon, the facts unearthed by Friedan seeped into an increasing number of films debunking the myth of a "consensus society," including Arthur Penn's 1965 tale of small town violence, *The Chase* – a film as notable for its coterie of unhappy, promiscuous housewives as for its study of male paranoia and violence and that, in many ways, may be regarded as a sequel of sorts to Kazan's stinging depiction in *Splendor in the Grass*.

The Family According to Alfred Hitchcock

Perhaps no director furnished more disturbing portraits of the American family during this period than Alfred Hitchcock. Adapted from a pulp novel and filmed in black and white on a low budget, *Psycho* (1960) – the story of disturbed serial killer Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins), who, after killing his mother, adopts her personality and dresses in her clothes when stabbing his female victims – became a box office hit and now is regarded as a modernist masterpiece. While Hitchcock's understanding of the American family as locus of horrific crimes dates back to the immediate post-war era with *Shadow of a Doubt* (1948) and while the intersection of horror and crime already characterized his Gothic dramas *Rebecca* (1940) and *Suspicion* (1942), it was Hitchcock's late work that both rediscovered and elevated the psychological thriller by demonstrating its suitability for telling critically inflected stories about deep disturbances rooted in family.

If *Psycho* anticipated developments in the horror film (it is now widely considered a precursor to the slasher sub-genre, with the 1974 classic, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, in its own way, very much a family film), Hitchcock's next effort, *The Birds* (1963), on first glance looks back at the genre's 1950s preoccupation with monstrous creatures, in this case, swarms of birds bringing death and destruction to a coastal town in northern California. Yet, more significantly, as mundane inhabitants of our natural world whose behavior remains unexplained, the birds allegorically embody the abysses of the modern age. They thus function as a narrative framework for probing the state of the family – as true also, in a different setting, of the source story by Daphne du Maurier. Intimations of failed relationships, hints at female homoeroticism, constant reminders of an absent, deceased father, and, most of all, the birds' attacks on the town's children convey a deep, multi-layered skepticism as to whether the very concept of family is capable of surviving or, for that matter, worth saving. As in so many of Hitchcock's films, the cast of characters includes attractive women who, because they know too much (to cite an argument by feminist critic Tania Modleski, 1988), cause male anxiety, for which they are punished in one or another way. *The Birds* also extends

the Hitchcockian tradition of a domineering mother who attempts to wield influence over a long line of male protagonists and antagonists. Although *Psycho* attributes Norman's pathology at least partially to the abusive effects of maternal power, *The Birds* shifts emphasis by depicting the mother's possessive behavior primarily as a symptom of her inhabiting a role she did not choose – that of family matriarch expected to uphold patriarchal structures.

In *Marnie* (1964), the mother is once again key to what, within limits, may be regarded as an indictment of patriarchy. Here, mother and daughter are two parts of a broken family whose story the film uncovers by tracing the behavior of the daughter, Marnie (“Tippi” Hedren) – a thief with fake identities, a deep distrust of men, and a phobic response to the color red – to a traumatic childhood episode in which she killed a client of her then prostitute mother. The secret is uncovered through “therapy” undertaken by a man (Sean Connery) who forces Marnie to marry him and then rapes her, thus rendering the film problematic, if perhaps also more realistic, as its narrative becomes complicated through characters' mixed motives. These qualities link Hitchcock's 1960s horror-inflected family dramas to films of the European art cinema, even as they made his films less popular with mass audiences. After flocking to *Psycho*, audiences were confused by *The Birds*, all but shunned *Marnie*, and showed little more interest in his cold war spy thrillers *Torn Curtain* (1965) and *Topaz* (1968).

With no musical score, *The Birds* relies heavily on atmospheric sound design, on which composer Bernard Herrmann was a key consultant. Herrmann's contributions to Hitchcock's films cannot be underestimated. His scores range from the screeching violins of *Psycho*'s shower sequence – an aural assault on the audience matching the violent knife-stabbing assault on the body of Marion Crane – to the persistent, insistent chords of urgency that drive Marnie simultaneously forward into her schemes and backward into her own entrapping psyche. Most notably, Herrmann masterfully tempers the lush Wagnerian romanticism of *Vertigo*'s musical score (1958) – in which longing and unrequited desire pulse palpably at key moments – with haunting minor-key melodies that darkly hint at the inevitable deceptions lurking beneath the ideal surface of voyeuristically-inspired attraction.

The Star System in Transition

If horror infused several subcategories of the American family film in the 1960s, it was Elizabeth Taylor's mid-decade transformation in *Virginia Woolf* from 1950s glamour goddess and nervy heroine of Williams adaptations into a middle-aged harridan that would foreground yet another facet of horror – what critics have called “the horror of personality” (Derry 1974). The trope was showcased to great popularity in a string of Gothic family dramas about murderous, diabolical spinsters, which included *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962), starring Bette Davis and Joan Crawford; *Hush ... Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (1964), starring Bette Davis and Olivia de Havilland; and *Strait-Jacket* (1964), starring Joan Crawford. While the frightening and freakish nature of characterization and casting placed these films in the horror tradition, the fact that the horrors generated by spinster rage hailed from psychological trauma and emotional frustration rather than Transylvania or outer space illustrated nothing so much as the abiding influence of the melodrama. It seems apposite that the stars of this new brand of horror were Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, two great actresses of the studio era who shrewdly recycled their respective star personas – each closely shaped by the woman's film – for the twilight phase of their careers.

Whether it suffused a low-brow shocker or was performed in the register of prestige drama, the horror of personality heavily drew on camp, an act of recycling an outdated artifact or style to ironic effect and a phenomenon that in the 1960s became influential on all arts. Despite all their differences, what 1960s superstars such as Taylor and Burton had in common with faded Hollywood greats like Crawford and Davis was that, in a decade of rapidly evolving tastes dictated by youth culture, their styles quickly became outdated, which made them subject to recycling. Crawford and Davis's horror vehicles shrewdly referenced their stars' old movies, while Taylor and Burton allowed their movie roles to become conflated with their widely publicized real-life relationship. While camp has multiple facets and implications, its presence in Hollywood films of the 1960s was a portent that the star system was about to undergo a sea change. The days of stars created by the studios were numbered, with successive generations of thespians including Susan Hayward, Lana Turner, Ava

Gardner, Doris Day, Rita Hayworth, Kim Novak, and Janet Leigh bound for retirement, while others, like Davis, Crawford, Olivia de Havilland, and Gene Tierney were enjoying a comeback (however short-lived), and still others, like Barbara Stanwyck, had transitioned to television.

While many of their successors possessed beauty, none of them would become goddesses. And while some had blond hair, none were archetypal blondes like Marilyn Monroe, whose untimely death in 1962 widely signified the death of old Hollywood. Male actors were affected in a similar way, though the movies proved more forgiving of aging male stars. If Montgomery Clift suffered a similarly tragic, premature death as Marilyn Monroe, Paul Newman and Marlon Brando never lost their superstar status after experiencing mid-1960s career slumps (Newman rebounded at the box office with *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, 1969, and went on to play leading roles in the 1970s). Burt Lancaster skillfully picked roles that enabled him to showcase both his imposing physique and his acting talent. In many ways

the most successful male star of the 1960s, Lancaster turned in memorable performances in many of the decade's high-profile films, including Luchino Visconti's internationally produced art film *The Leopard* (1963) and the Hollywood prestige films *Elmer Gantry* (1960), *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), *Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962), *Seven Days in May*, and *The Swimmer* (1968). By contrast, Rock Hudson's career as a leading man in movies came to an end during this period, though he was able to transition to television, while John Wayne, Henry Fonda, and William Holden garnered attractive roles into the 1970s, continuing to hold their own against the new generation of stars that included Warren Beatty, Robert Redford, Dustin Hoffman, and Steve McQueen.

The generational turnover was paralleled by the shifting status of the star in the industry. Already the 1950s had seen a change in ground rules "from the studios who owned stars to the stars who owned the picture," as David Cook points out (1994, 427), by virtue of the rising power of talent agencies that packaged movie deals sealed by star power (a development



Figure 1.1 The enraged Martha (Elizabeth Taylor) and the heavy-drinking George (Richard Burton), in Mike Nichols's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966, producer Warner Bros. Entertainment), are not quite the perfect Production Code couple.

signaled by the 1962 takeover of Universal by Lew Wasserman’s powerful talent agency MCA). Freed from long-term contracts and now often receiving a percentage of the profits, stars, by the early 1960s, had more power than ever before, but were also more vulnerable to the marketplace. No one experienced this more acutely than Taylor and Burton, who, after starring in *Cleopatra* (1963), *The Sandpiper* (1965), and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966), were arguably the biggest movie stars in the world, but who complained about a dearth of good parts after pricing themselves out of the market – which, however, in no way diminished their status as global celebrities.

Thus, the 1960s not only witnessed a generational changeover with regard to stars but also an ironic bifurcation of the very concept of movie stardom. On the one hand, the industry during this decade produced a sizable number of films that self-consciously thematized the commoditization of personality and presented stardom in a critical, even skeptical light – whether in dramas like *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962) and *The Legend of Lyla Clare* (1968), in horror films like *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, or in musicals such as *Gypsy* (1962), *Inside Daisy Clover* (1965), *Star!*, and *Funny Girl* (1968). On the other hand, as Taylor and Burton demonstrate, the concept of movie stardom was eclipsed by another concept – global celebrity – for which starring in movies was no longer as central a requirement. While this shift may have placed traditional movie stardom at a remote distance for the performers who would rise to prominence in the years of the New Hollywood, it also arguably freed them up to express with greater conviction their interest in and commitment to acting as a craft. With the exception, of course, of Raquel Welch – a throwback to the Hollywood sexpot.

A New Immorality

In the course of the 1960s, studios became increasingly unwilling to compromise the integrity of controversial but promising properties of the kind Warner Bros. had on its hands with *Virginia Woolf*. Preparing for the film’s release, the studio requested an exemption from the Production Code Administration,

offering to release it with announcements on theater lobby placards warning audiences that the film was not suitable for children and that anyone under 18 would not be admitted without parental accompaniment. The PCA agreed because it already was working on its own new classification system that *Virginia Woolf* could help catalyze (Leff & Simmons 1990, 258–265). *Virginia Woolf*’s chipping away at the Code more seriously extended the challenges that director Otto Preminger had earlier posed in releasing *The Moon Is Blue* (1953) and *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955) without a seal of approval. In 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) announced that motion pictures would now be reviewed by a new Code and Rating Administration (CRA) that would apply a set of audience-advisory ratings: G for films acceptable to all audiences, M for films appropriate for adults and mature youth, R for films with “theme, content and treatment, [that] should not be presented to persons under 16 unless accompanied by parent or adult guardian” (Maltby 2003, 599). The CRA also established an X rating for films that did not qualify for a Code seal of approval and to which no one under 18 would be permitted admission. In 1970, the R rating was broadened and the operative age for restriction was raised from 16 to 17. The new ratings guided parents about movie content but also served as a continued form of industry self-censorship and as a marketing device for distributors.

Films that contained nudity and explicit representations of violence – and an ever-growing body of films included both – were generally cut to the measure of an R rating. On the other hand, the X rating came to designate films produced in a realm beyond the boundaries of the MPAA in which the explicit representations of sex earned the title “hard core.” That realm had its own long history, as Eric Schaefer points out in this volume, one that ran parallel with and, at times, entered the margins of the mainstream. In the post-war period, the sex-exploitation film achieved both profits and wider popularity in the work of Russ Meyer, whose first film, *The Immoral Mr. Teas*, was produced in 1959 for \$24,000. Fifteen years later, his *Super Vixens*, made for a little less than \$220,000 grossed in excess of \$16 million (Donahue 1987, 243). Against the backdrop of the New Hollywood and its somber projections of diminished personal power, Meyer’s films were

fantasies of abundance, a sexual world with few limits.

But Meyer's films were only the most conspicuous examples of a wave of relatively low-budget productions that would swell in the 1960s and climax in the 1970s. Built around various exploitation formulas, these films traded on Gothic horror, youth cycles about beach parties and motorcycle gangs, and soft-core voyeurism featuring stewardesses and cheerleaders. By 1970, close to 900 theaters exhibited some form of "sexploitation" cinema and a quarter of these were drive-ins (*Report* 1970, 97). Heir to the 1950s B-film, American International Pictures (AIP) was the most prolific producer of independent exploitation movies and its most influential figure was Roger Corman. Corman's forte was cheap thrills that sacrificed narrative complexity for action and a production mode that quickly moved projects from script to screen in order to cash in on movies addressing popular trends – whether in horror flicks such as *The Raven* (1963), an atmospheric Edgar Allan Poe adaptation, or films with a strong subcultural appeal, such as *The Wild Angels* (1966), a biker film precursor, of sorts, to the phenomenally successful *Easy Rider*, which was initially developed at AIP. With a keen eye on youth culture, music, and sex, another AIP product, *Wild in the Streets* (1968), about the rise and fall of a crypto-fascist rock singer-turned-president, worked as both a teen exploitation film and a political satire capitalizing on America's obsession with youth and middle-class perceptions and projections of countercultural hedonism.

For the most part, films produced by AIP or its low-budget contemporaries flew under the critical radar. Hard core, on the other hand, did not. *Deep Throat* (1972), shot by Gerard Damiano in six days in January 1972 for under \$25,000, forced explicit cinema into the national consciousness, as Linda Williams explains in the hardcover/online edition. The film would rank eleventh in box office grosses for 1973. Damiano would follow up the next year with *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973) which would rank seventh. The exhibition of *Deep Throat* brought charges of obscenity and a very public 11-day trial resulting in a \$3 million judgment against its exhibitor. Yet, despite the judge's pronouncement that the film was "indisputably obscene by any measurement," *Deep Throat* played in 70 cities over an 18-month period (Turan & Zito 1974, 145). Ultimately, the XXX

cinema, as it came to be known, was more licentious than liberating. The formal economy of hard core, its close-ups of genitals in action and its claustrophobic living-room-as-studio interiors, for the most part drew much greater attention to the body than the body politic. In its above-ground popularity, *Deep Throat* represented a moment of middle-class transgression for a population negotiating a shift in social mores. While hard-core cinema would migrate rather quickly to home video, it would remain, after 1973, an extremely lucrative component of movie-making, one with its own star system and fan base.

The Avant-garde

While the institutional and formal conventions of commercial movie-making lend themselves to a more coherent chronicle, the array of forms, philosophies, and artists that compose the avant-garde resists any brief overview. Still, some of the most important contours can be articulated, but only after two essential questions are addressed. First, as several historians of the avant-garde have argued, experimental cinema is no less embedded in economic and social factors than the products of Hollywood. Nor does it exist in some parallel realm totally isolated from the commercial cinema. While artists like Stan Brakhage and Paul Sharits created films in a language radically different from the mainstream, others such as Kenneth Anger, Bruce Conner, and George Kuchar entered into a critical, sometimes comic, dialogue with popular culture and the Hollywood cinema. Second, the post-war avant-garde, like its ancestors of an earlier era, developed not as a random set of personal experiments but with the assistance of an institutional structure of theaters, magazines, and distributors.

The exhibition component of that structure was initially set in New York and San Francisco. In New York City, the most important site of exhibition would be Cinema 16, founded in 1947 by Amos Vogel, who operated it until its end in 1963 (James 1992, 6). In 1962, Jonas Mekas, émigré filmmaker and champion of what some were now calling the New American Cinema, established the Film-Makers' Cooperative, which would become a crucial source for the distribution of experimental films. Around the same time, filmmaker Bruce Baillie began a series of informal screenings of experimental