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# Geniuses of the systems: Authorship and evidence in classical Hollywood cinema

*Robert Spadoni*

## Introduction

'If a text should be discovered in a state of anonymity', Michel Foucault writes, 'whether as a consequence of an accident or the author's explicit wish – the game becomes one of rediscovering the author'[1]. Subsequent directions taken in the writing of history – academic histories of Hollywood's studio era as far as this essay considers – have introduced a new probable cause for the state of a text's anonymity. They have also made the game of rediscovering the author more fun or more urgent, depending on one's idea of a game. In either case, the game is harder to play now than when Peter Wollen wrote that auteur theory 'implies an operation of decipherment; it reveals authors where none had been seen before'[2].

On the smooth gray surface of the classical Hollywood cinema, a bulge of anonymity rises at MGM in the 1930s. This force left no signature on any film but left its mark on many. It shaped them like a set of determinative norms. It constrained and guided the choices of the craftspersons and artists who worked on them, like a paradigm. The right piece of evidence could help turn this force into a person. In *The Genius of the System*, Thomas Schatz bases his account of the development of *Grand Hotel* (1932) on such a piece of evidence – on transcribed pages of six story development conferences. But since when is Irving Thalberg a figure papered over by film history?

Thalberg was a darling of press and public in his time and canonized not long afterwards[3]. Today a billion people can still hear his name spoken with solemnity and reverence during the odd Academy Awards telecast[4]. Surely a historian could find a needier beneficiary. Still, while Thalberg might not be teetering on the edge of oblivion, neither has he nor any other studio producer achieved the star status that auteur theory accorded to some studio directors – many of whom enjoy continued favour in film studies today. A good deal of scholarship has, in one way or another, gone around Irving Thalberg. What would it take to shift Thalberg's status within film studies, from film manager to film artist? Why bother? This essay comes at these questions from a few angles and suggests answers based, partly, on the *Grand Hotel* evidence that Thomas Schatz examined.

This essay considers less Schatz's treatment of the evidence than the evidence itself, less *Grand Hotel* than ways it can be written about, less Irving Thalberg than the idea of the film author. We will work toward a historical trace, not in a historical mode, but through metadiscourse intended to bring into line some ideas about film history and theory. Our inquiry will stick close to the idea of the film author and touch down on the *Grand Hotel* evidence, I hope, before making too much of generalizations. The conference transcripts will bring us to our main purpose, which is to ask how historical evidence might get behind a challenge to an influential conception of Hollywood studio cinema and, in the bargain, point an old theory in some new directions.

**Robert Spadoni**, who developed this paper at the New York University Cinema Studies Department, now studies film at Northwestern University. Correspondence c/o Dept. of Radio/TV/Film, 1905 Sheridan Road, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois 60208, USA.

## Two approaches and their findings

Schatz describes auteur theory's sharp limitations in a few places[5]. In another he articulates an alternative to organizing and understanding Hollywood studio films – namely, through genre study[6]. Elsewhere still, Schatz exhibits a belief in film authors. He exhibits it in his discussion of *Grand Hotel*'s development, and in the first pages of *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era*. In his introduction, below the heading 'The Whole Equation of Pictures', Schatz slips a mission statement between two quotes. The first quote simultaneously evokes Thalberg and a calculus in which individuals like Thalberg do not cancel out of Hollywood studio history. The comment is Scott Fitzgerald's, that 'not a half dozen men have been able to keep the whole equation of pictures in their heads'[7]. The second quote follows a general admonition not to credit too much to producers. It is André Bazin's condemnation of auteurist pantheons and his call for recognition of 'the genius of the system'[8].

The genius of the system, then, is calculated by the whole equation of pictures, which slots producers in among its constants and variables. Surely this is not a remarkable formula for a history of Hollywood studio-era filmmaking. Surely a variation of it must figure into any such history. A formula fitting the description figures into David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. However, in that formula, producers are littler variables and they fall in among many more. Fitzgerald's 'half dozen men' tips us off that Schatz's system is not one that moves people, technology and movies around with Marxian determinism – at least it never did that to certain individuals.

Schatz's stated mission is 'to calculate the whole equation of pictures, to get down on paper what Thalberg and Zanuck and Selznick and a very few others carried in their heads'[9]. These very few men drop out of Schatz's formula and, from below it, they *dream* the formula. 'The chief architects of a studio's style were its executives'[10], Schatz writes early on and, later, that 'Thalberg hit his stride in the early 1930s, and his studio machine turned out a steady supply of quality hits'[11]. Does this Great System theory have Great Men at its core, pulling the knobs and spinning the dials?

The authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* do not swerve from an approach that seldom stops on individuals (such as Thalberg) for much longer than a mention. Schatz, on the other hand, finds that certain moments at certain studios call for attention to certain individuals. At these conjunctures, he finds, these individuals had the run of the show. In such chapters as 'MGM and Thalberg: Alone at the Top'[12], Schatz argues that understanding an identifiable piece of the system (and its output) as largely controlled (and shaped) by the hand of one person is not an unhelpful way of understanding these historical conjunctures. While it might seem that no history could chart a course through the studio era without stopping to consider Thalberg significantly, there are other routes: Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson plough through the same time and place with only a cursory mention of the man[13]. Whereas their work draws power from its striking consistency of approach, Schatz demonstrates strength in a capacity to shift gears – to find Great Men emerging, at times, and making great differences. Each approach, as practiced, holds implications for how and where authors might figure into Hollywood history.

Not long before the 1988 appearance of *The Genius of the System*, a shift in the dominant conception of what constituted Hollywood studio cinema, and how films were made there, and who (or what) needs to be understood as having made them, rewrote some major ground rules for writing Hollywood studio history. This shift's principal

Fig. 1. Irving Thalberg – the genius of the system? [Marc Wanamaker/Bison Archives.]

architects were Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, and its blueprint was *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (hereafter 'BST'). Here is an aspect of the new wave that makes it hard for historians with even slightly auteurist leanings to traffic in its wake.

One way BST constructs a cinema definitively shaped by norms and neatly packed into a ruling paradigm, and one way the authors smooth 500 pages into something startlingly uniform and unified, is to sort a great heap of atomized source data into but two bins. The impulses that shaped Hollywood industry and output were toward standardization and differentiation. (*Standardization*, Staiger explains, means both uniformity and a 'criterion, norm, degree or level of excellence'[14].) Tagging every inclination and action as the reflection or result of a desire for something 'good' or something 'different' permits a history to proceed with minimum – and minimizing – attention to individual personalities and contributions. Magnifying this tendency of effect is the BST optic's blindness to masterpieces, since focusing on an individual film for too long invariably brings individual persons into focus as well[15]. The preface states: 'The Hollywood mode of film practice constitutes an integral system, including persons and groups but also rules, films, machinery, documents, institutions, work processes, and theoretical concepts. It is this totality that we shall study'[16]. BST sees through a film unless it is one of their 100 randomly selected films or fits one of their definitions of a 'limit case'[17]. Films falling into neither category fall by default between the wide borders of this ascriptive, descriptive history. On closer examination, the smooth gray surface of the classical cinema is filigreed with rules, films, machinery, documents, work processes, theoretical concepts, and the shifting masses of groups observed from far distances. But, try as one might, it is hard to make out very many persons. BST negates most biographical approaches to threading a historical narrative through studio Hollywood.

Schatz's attention to studio producers, and some other factors we are about to consider, suggest that conditions are favourable for the launching of a new biographical approach. But why producers and not directors? And why history and not theory? Let's back up and approach some answers through the work of auteurist V.F. Perkins.

## New wave authors

Perkins writes in *Film as Film* that 'we can sustain the belief that a good film is necessarily an expression of one man's vision, a communication from the director to his audience, only if we can demonstrate a difference in kind and effect between the personal film and the factory movie'[18]. There is another option: forget directors and lock on to producers. Suddenly the imperative to distinguish factory movies from personal films disappears. Factory movies become the personal films of factory bosses. Schatz uses this approach to study some lengths of some strands of the studio era and suggests that, in studies training their focus on just these lengths, a producer-centred approach might be appropriate. Schatz suggests that it might not be falling back into the worst habits of yesterday's historians to refer, as he does, to 'Thalberg's production system'[19], or to claim (after laying down qualifiers) that 'the controlling force, of course, was Irving Thalberg'[20], or even to state outright that 'the force of his personality and his will had shaped MGM'[21]. The years just preceding *The Genius of the System* made author-centred approaches among the more dangerous kind to attempt, but they also made some new varieties possible.

After many nods to the work's coherence and to collaboration and pure accident as decisive factors in studio production, Perkins places all bets on the director: 'He is in charge of what makes a film a *film*'[22]. But on his way to this conclusion, Perkins writes that 'whatever the function he performs and the privileges he enjoys, his status must under normal circumstances be that of an employee'[23]. Perkins elsewhere brushes a little harder against the producer-as-author idea[24]:

> The film industry is largely controlled by men who not only claim to be able to predict a picture's prospects by reference to its ingredients (story, cast, setting, etc.) but who also 'know probably less about the process of making films than the manufacturers of any other consumer product in the world'.

So, while producers exercise considerable control over the selection of a picture's ingredients, what they lack in creative vision and practical knowledge is sufficient to void all arguments that might profitably proceed from claims to this control. Perkins is not the first to express this view. Above he quotes Joseph Losey. In *Hollywood the Dream Factory*, Hortense Powdermaker presents an array of producer types, including Mr. Mediocre, Mr. Kowtow, Mr. Schizo and Mr. Good Judgment. The rare exception, Mr. Good Judgment 'does not think of himself as a creative genius, but has confidence that he knows a good story when he sees one, and that he has the ability to pick people, such as writers and directors, who can carry it through'[25]. Similar ideas about producers colour much auteurist thinking, including Peter Wollen's, who writes that 'a great many features of films analysed have to be dismissed as indecipherable because of 'noise' from the producer'[26]. Knee-jerk disparagements and dismissals like these helped for decades to mask off a loaded vein of opportunity, one that Schatz didn't tap until after some other historians had exposed it.

BST tracks the rise of the central-producer system and, with it, the rise of the central producer. The authors show how producers came to be cardinal to studio production in ways that run against the cherished cliché: 'This system introduced a new set of top managers – producers such as Thomas Ince and later Irving Thalberg who meticulously controlled the making of their firm's films ... [The producer] was responsible for the output of a specific number of quality films produced within carefully prepared budgets; the producers selected and coordinated the technical experts '[27] – including the director. Thanks in some measure to BST, Schatz's 'strong conviction that these producers and studio executives have been the most misunderstood and undervalued figures in American film history'[28] is less audacious than he makes it sound. His efforts figure into a wider movement toward new understandings of producers, one that reached a new level of clarity and definition in 1993, when Tino Balio wrote that 'the rise in status of the producer came at the expense of the director. Having lost much of their autonomy, directors became cogs in a wheel, relegated essentially to the task of staging the action'[29].

A second bias that had to be dislodged separates the *auteur* from the *metteur-en-scène*. Wollen makes the difference between them clear where he writes that 'the meaning of the films of an *auteur* is constructed *a posteriori*'[30]. Perkins seems at first to be prefiguring a part of Schatz's author-finding strategy when he writes that, 'in outline at least, the shape of a picture is controlled by the construction of its script'[31], but then goes on to reflect Wollen's view when he clarifies his own: 'Far from creating

a finished work, [the script writer] offers an outline open to an infinite variety of treatments'[32]. The ban on considerations of preproduction activity had to be lifted before authors could credibly be located in script-development conferences.

Again BST is seen to clear away theoretical deadwood and open up a space for new propositions and treatments. BST describes how the script's function changed with the coming of the central producer system: 'Planning the work and estimating production costs through a detailed script became a new, extensive, and early step in the labor process ... The script became a blueprint detailing the shot-by-shot breakdown of the film'[33]. The script became as open to an infinite variety of treatments as the blueprint for a house is – that is, not very open. Schatz takes this thread and interweaves it with the new centrality of the central producer, then personalizes the result, writing that Thalberg 'shepherded each story property as it went through script development and into final preparation before shooting, then monitored production itself through written reports and the screening of dailies, then oversaw the postproduction process of editing, previews, retakes and reediting'[34].

A short answer to the question 'Why producers'? is that, since 1985 (the year BST 'established the foundation for any serious study of American film history'[35]), producers have made safer bases for author-centred assertions than directors have. Schatz describes producers at work[36]:

> These men – they were always men – translated an annual budget handed down by the New York office into a program of specific pictures. They coordinated the operations of the entire plant, conducted contract negotiations, developed stories and scripts, screened 'dailies' as pictures were being shot, and supervised editing until a picture was ready for shipment to New York for release.

The course of a producer's typical workday put him in regular contact with events and terms that help sidle a historical narrative comfortably close to BST's 'economic aims and principles of the Hollywood mode of production'[37]. And yet, while one's narrative rings with all the right words, it retains a hero with passions, dreams, personal triumphs and tragic flaws. Traditional conceptions and figurations of studio Hollywood – some as insightful today as they once were on film history's cutting edge – survive by means of a transference of attention, from directors to producers.

Another short answer is that producers were businessmen and, as such, they generated lots of paperwork, and paperwork – bundled, boxed and forgotten – turns into historical evidence. Any time when scholars of classical cinema are well advised to venture an opinion only after (quoting Schatz) 'digging through several tons of archival materials from various studios and productions companies'[38] is a good time to construct a narrative around a studio producer.

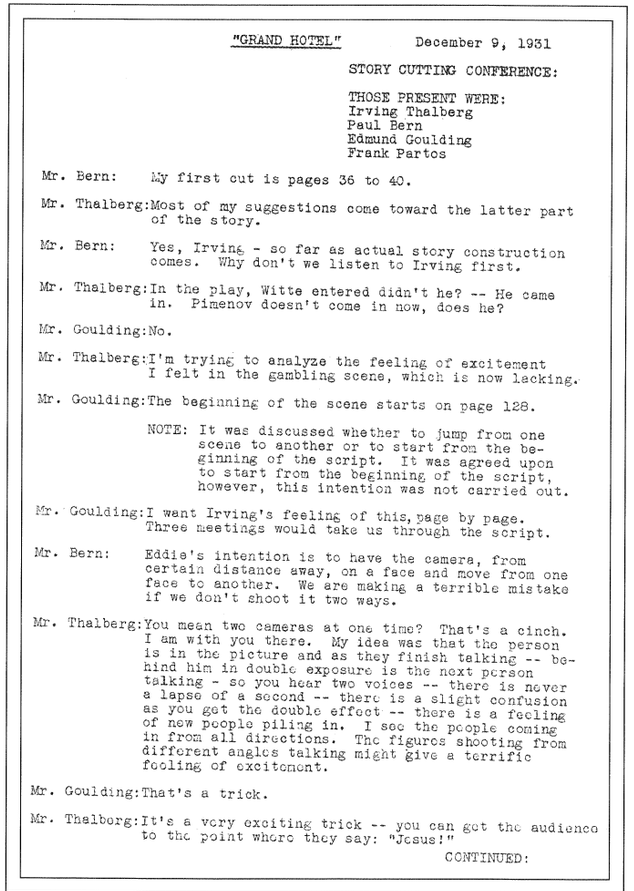
Still, while his book contains what I interpret as seeds, signposts and precursors, Schatz more explicitly tears down existing auteurist pantheons than erects any new ones. His project is not to design an author built to withstand the censure that would likely rush to meet any serious attempt to claim an individual as originating important shifts in classical film styles and production modes. What would these objections be and how might the transcripts assist in an effort to meet them? For answers we must look through Schatz to one of his primary sources, and turn our attention more fully to the project at hand.

## The author inside

By the end of the 1970s, writes Edward Buscombe, the concept of authorship, 'the vantage point from which many of the most coherent maps had been drawn, had been severely undermined'[39]. Another to cite auteur theory's strengths as a set of heuristics and its barrenness as a set of ideas in the same sentence is Stephen Crofts: 'The principle's critical success, however, belies its theoretical bankruptcy'[40]. When Perkins wrote that 'the notion of the director as sole creator, uniquely responsible for a picture's qualities, defects, impact and meaning, must be approached with at least some caution'[41], he was taking his own advice and edging his way, cautiously, toward propounding that very notion. The going was only to get rougher as the decade wore on.

But it would be unfair to single out auteur theory for having fallen out of favour. Theory in general had acquired a bad reputation by the end of the decade. 'The 1970s in film studies were, self-consciously, a decade of theory'[42], writes Buscombe, who joins others in hailing the rise of film history as salve and salvation to a discipline in need of both. Of the 1970s, when new theories ousted reigning ones practically overnight, 'knowledge was power, the power to declare who was in the vanguard and who had been left behind on the scrapheap'[43]. A rock-solid faith seems implicit in this use of the past tense, in the effects of film history on film studies. Compared to a world where 'semiotics played havoc' and 'the gusty squalls of psychoanalysis'[44] whipped through unexpectedly and often, a field dominated by history is calmer and more stabilized. As clear seems to be the dividing line between history and theory. History brings with it a whiff of credibility and a title of authority that, by the end of the 1970s, inconstant theory had lost. Theoretical knowledge was power, the power to bully and jockey – to turn fickle tides with a little inference, some rhetoric, and a good handle on the right jargon. Historical knowledge is something different. Truth maybe.





"GRAND HOTEL" December 9, 1931

STORY CUTTING CONFERENCE:

THOSE PRESENT WERE:
Irving Thalberg
Paul Bern
Edmund Goulding
Frank Partos

Mr. Bern: My first cut is pages 36 to 40.

Mr. Thalberg: Most of my suggestions come toward the latter part of the story.

Mr. Bern: Yes, Irving - so far as actual story construction comes. Why don't we listen to Irving first.

Mr. Thalberg: In the play, Witte entered didn't he? -- He came in. Pimenov doesn't come in now, does he?

Mr. Goulding: No.

Mr. Thalberg: I'm trying to analyze the feeling of excitement I felt in the gambling scene, which is now lacking.

Mr. Goulding: The beginning of the scene starts on page 128.

NOTE: It was discussed whether to jump from one scene to another or to start from the beginning of the script. It was agreed upon to start from the beginning of the script, however, this intention was not carried out.

Mr. Goulding: I want Irving's feeling of this, page by page. Three meetings would take us through the script.

Mr. Bern: Eddie's intention is to have the camera, from certain distance away, on a face and move from one face to another. We are making a terrible mistake if we don't shoot it two ways.

Mr. Thalberg: You mean two cameras at one time? That's a cinch. I am with you there. My idea was that the person is in the picture and as they finish talking -- behind him in double exposure is the next person talking - so you hear two voices -- there is never a lapse of a second -- there is a slight confusion as you get the double effect -- there is a feeling of new people piling in. I see the people coming in from all directions. The figures shooting from different angles talking might give a terrific feeling of excitement.

Mr. Goulding: That's a trick.

Mr. Thalberg: It's a very exciting trick -- you can get the audience to the point where they say: "Jesus!"

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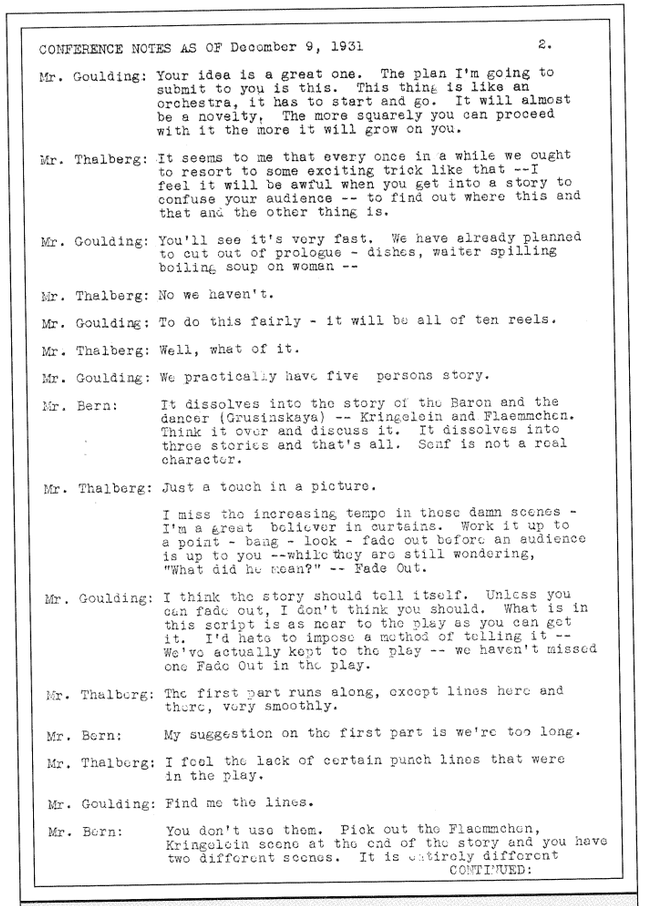
Fig. 2 (and next page). Two pages from Maxine Beeson's story conference transcripts. USC Cinema-Television Library. [Used by Permission Turner Entertainment Co., All Rights Reserved.]

The rise of film history has not similarly delighted auteur theorists, who now most likely write auteur history. Semiotics and psychoanalysis loom smaller than they did before but, as Buscombe explains, now auteurists have other problems: 'The notion that film history, like history on a wider scale, is essentially to be understood as the aggregation of the actions of great men, has been largely expelled from the discourse of contemporary film studies'[45]. The day's big thinkers, those individuals whose tastes and agendas determine where the vanguard is, and who is on the scrapheap, bar history from proceeding in its most comfortable tradition and make the present as inhospitable a time as any to peddle an auteurist viewpoint.

The last decade's academic histories of Hollywood studio cinema have been so influenced by what I have called the BST approach, and others 'the Wisconsin project'[46], that it is not easy to write on the subject without traversing some part of this collective formalist discourse – even if to roundly disagree. History is not by its essence inclined to serving formalist ends, though. Years before film scholars would be obliged to engage the problematics (and potentials) of arguing a case through film history, Perkins wrote[47]:

> Criticism itself is a public activity, concerned only with what can be communicated. I may *feel* a picture to be coherent but unless I can



CONFERENCE NOTES AS OF December 9, 1931 2.

Mr. Goulding: Your idea is a great one. The plan I'm going to submit to you is this. This thing is like an orchestra, it has to start and go. It will almost be a novelty. The more squarely you can proceed with it the more it will grow on you.

Mr. Thalberg: It seems to me that every once in a while we ought to resort to some exciting trick like that --I feel it will be awful when you get into a story to confuse your audience -- to find out where this and that and the other thing is.

Mr. Goulding: You'll see it's very fast. We have already planned to cut out of prologue - dishes, waiter spilling boiling soup on women --

Mr. Thalberg: No we haven't.

Mr. Goulding: To do this fairly - it will be all of ten reels.

Mr. Thalberg: Well, what of it.

Mr. Goulding: We practically have five persons story.

Mr. Bern: It dissolves into the story of the Baron and the dancer (Grusinskaya) -- Kringelein and Flaemmchen. Think it over and discuss it. It dissolves into three stories and that's all. Senf is not a real character.

Mr. Thalberg: Just a touch in a picture.

I miss the increasing tempo in those damn scenes - I'm a great believer in curtains. Work it up to a point - bang - look - fade out before an audience is up to you --while they are still wondering, "What did he mean?" -- Fade Out.

Mr. Goulding: I think the story should tell itself. Unless you can fade out, I don't think you should. What is in this script is as near to the play as you can get it. I'd hate to impose a method of telling it -- We've actually kept to the play -- we haven't missed one Fade Out in the play.

Mr. Thalberg: The first part runs along, except lines here and there, very smoothly.

Mr. Bern: My suggestion on the first part is we're too long.

Mr. Thalberg: I feel the lack of certain punch lines that were in the play.

Mr. Goulding: Find me the lines.

Mr. Bern: You don't use them. Pick out the Flaemmchen, Kringelein scene at the end of the story and you have two different scenes. It is entirely different

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Fig. 2 (continued from previous page).

explain the nature of its coherence my feeling carries no greater critical weight than my response to the colour of the hero's tie.

And, of course, pressure to supply critical weight bears not just on writers of film criticism. Film theorists know this pressure equally well. Moreover, because *weight* suggests a stuffing that can be packed, as and where necessary, into most any structure, it seems to me as appropriate a property to assign to historical evidence as to the persuasive matter in any piece of academic writing. Rhetors seed their discourses with critical weight, and whether they do it in footnotes to Derrida or a dog-eared issue of *American Projectionist*, they do it for much the same reason – to sell something. Proponents of the old history/theory duality sometime downplay this most basic similarity.

BST plays this similarity up. The preface states, 'This book thus stands out not only as a history of the Hollywood cinema but also as an attempt to articulate a theoretical approach to film history'[48]. Some histories just demonstrate – and don't articulate – their theoretical approaches, but no history is without them. Buscombe writes that 'history is necessary to theory'[49], which might be true in a time when history is the mandated mode for film scholars; but more like it is that history is *useful* to theory. In either case, Buscombe's claim stops short of one BST makes of itself, and one we might make of any less forthright (and/or less self-knowing) history as well – that history *is* theory. Research and development into a new theory of authorship might begin with a look at the critical weights holding down many of the most influential theories of the day.

Bordwell writes that 'in mass-production cinema, which has traditionally involved collaborative labor, scholars have found it difficult to assign authorship to any individual'[50]. Perkins similarly describes a gap that 1970s auteurists, himself included, could only work around: 'Intentions and creative processes are invisible. At best we guess them or are given external, often suspect, information about them'[51]. Bordwell pinpoints this same obstacle – though with an opposite intention to surmounting it – when he cites 'problems of attribution, authentication, the relevance of biographical data and statements of intention, etc.'[52]. Here we see one of the biggest problems the auteurist faces taking shape in the form of a hole that historical evidence can fill. Foucault frames a broader but related problem: 'We try, with great effort, to imagine the general condition of each text, the condition of both



the space in which it is dispersed and the time in which it unfolds'[53].

Imagining a text's unfolding and dispersal at the moment of its inception figures centrally into any auteurist game plan. Anything that might flesh out the image and dignify it with some critical weight carries use value. BST's source material, as far-gathered and voluminous as it is, represents but a paper-thin and delicately constituted slice of the accumulable data. A similarly gifted set of *auteur* historians might loot the same repositories and discover the basis for another story, one built on as impressively much data and likewise forged to satisfy the latest dictates of historiographical correctness. Some historians have, to date, turned up traces limning but fragments of the new narratives that might spring up. Schatz happened upon such a trace in his research into *Grand Hotel*.

On 17 November 1931, Irving Thalberg and Edmund Goulding met for the first of six story conferences[54]. Their goal was to turn William Drake's screenplay – based on his Broadway adaptation of Vicki Baum's *Menschen im Hotel* – into a final draft, then, in the final sessions, to turn Goulding's shot footage into a finished picture. Conference reporter Maxine Beeson transcribed all six sessions. Today the transcripts are in the USC Cinema-Television Library, in one of several MGM collections in the United States. These transcripts are packed with details. They are not the patient and meticulous reconstruction of an event their writer never witnessed, but Maxine Beeson's on-the-fly reconstruction of an event as it unfolded around her. The text bristles with the extemporaneity of moments in the making, creators creating, conversations unrehearsed, and vigorous discharges of inspiration and anger. The transcripts do not reveal who paused for effect, where and for how long, or what the attendees were wearing or thinking, but one cannot help but glimpse unique personalities circulating in them[55]. One cannot help but read this document and watch the hotly contested sphere of the classical Hollywood cinema transform into a workaday world that has, refreshingly, never heard of the classical Hollywood cinema. This world is animated in real-time and, as yet, no late-20th century scholar's heavily interpretive cast has covered every last inch if it.

Goulding to Thalberg: 'Don't forget that footage is our great problem – we have one hundred and fifty pages and have to cut it down to one hundred and twenty-five or thirty'. Thalberg to Goulding: 'First we want to get our story and then cut it down. Have you got the play here. To me the play was so far better, Eddie. In my humble opinion'[56]. It's arguable that Goulding is here pushing for standardization (standard running time) and that Thalberg is pushing for standardization in BST's second sense of the term (story quality) and that, in the end, both will be achieved in a resolution of tensions within and by the classical paradigm. I have already suggested that this reasoning, while it shakes a descriptive theory into line from the bottom up, constitutes questionable grounds when it is applied too liberally. BST might have an answer for every instance of distinctly authorial intervention on the transcripts document, but 'That's standardization' and 'That's differentiation' might start to wear thin after the first few citations. Full of specificity and density and colour, a record of spontaneous human activity churning out standardized and differentiated product, the transcripts challenge any theory that would so foreground practices (and background practitioners) almost untheorized, almost by themselves.

But the transcripts do not exist in published form anywhere. Their real value, as it happens, lies in what can be done with them. The transcripts oblige writers with the right historical narratives to construct because, with no help from any writer except Maxine Beeson, the transcripts are a historical narrative. They lend themselves to excerpting, condensing, splicing and all other manner of creative incorporation into accounts chronicling the development of *Grand Hotel* or the life of Irving Thalberg. The parallels that assert themselves, between this record of six moments in a process (these 77 pages of mostly dialogue) and the record of a later moment in the same process (the script), are ripe for rhetorical musing. And, while transcript excerpts do not tax a history's credibility the way anecdotes can, they produce the same enlivening effects. The transcripts rough out the screenplay for a biopic that was never made. Paradoxically, advantageously, this is certifiable evidence *and* the stuff of romance. Schatz exploits their dual nature[57]:

The dynamics of the Thalberg-Goulding inter-

play demonstrated Thalberg's talent and confidence but also his knack for diplomacy – he knew when to stroke Goulding and when to bear down. During an early session, for example, they disagreed over the revision of a scene. 'Have you got the play here?' Thalberg asked Goulding. 'To me the play was so far better, Eddie. In my humble opinion'. Such diplomacy vanished when Goulding pushed too hard, as he did while defending a certain cut ...

More valuable than spice is critical weight, however, and in this the transcripts prove how valuable they are. When Bordwell observes that 'both the author as empirical agent and as institutional trademark stand outside the texts themselves'[58], he echoes Foucault's claim that 'the text points to this "figure" that, at least in appearance, is outside it an antecedes it'[59]. Authenticating and even locating this outside and anteceding figure has proved difficult. Switching focus to the transcripts brings into view an author standing *inside* the text – at least in appearance. One way to understand this appearance – of these figures' intratextuality – is to listen to the voices speaking through the pages of this document. Foucault writes[60]:

> In a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first-person pronoun nor the present indicative refers exactly either to the writer or to the moment in which he writes, but rather to an alter ego whose distance from the author varies ... It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance.

Foucault plants an author function in the space between a biological author and the first-person singular pronouns in a text, if any. (The transcripts are filled with them.) Shrink this space and it follows that one shrinks the author function proportionately to both restoring authorship to the real writer and establishing a shorter and less problematic link between him or her and those pronouns. Wollen writes that 'the word "fun" crops up constantly in Hawks's interviews and scripts. It masks his despair'[61]. Mapping the 'fun' in an interview or film text onto a biological person represents the sort of spindly conjectural limb onto which auteurists have habitually ventured[62]. The discursive fields of film history are thick with alternative routes.

Perhaps this intratextuality is not just in appearance[63]:

> Thalberg: I think you can still cut it.
>
> Goulding: I know what I'd like to do with that fellow – I would make it, if you had Beery playing it – Could you compromise on this –
>
> Bern: Irving thinks we can cut this down.
>
> Goulding: What would you lose if you come to Presying's booth, without Mulle, or the shaving set or anything – just an ordinary business man.
>
> Bern: That's the only time you introduce his wife.
>
> Thalberg: Awfully important.

The space between the transcribed Thalberg and the man at the conference table, while it can never be argued to nothing, is certainly smaller than the one between a film text's pronouns and its biological author. Moreover, in interviews, where celebrities can be models of insincerity, this space is almost surely larger than the one between the biological Thalberg and his transcription. The biological Thalberg was working with his sleeves rolled up (maybe literally), among hired staff, for hours. One exchange after another demonstrates his unremitting attention to nuts-and-bolts questions and problems. (Once, when Goulding got off the subject to complain about studio politics, Thalberg's response was, 'We're discussing this scene'[64].) All the unglamorous shoptalk encourages our impression that this group was not pitching its remarks to a recording device and not thinking about the eyes of posterity. Finally, any text can only get so close to the person(s) who generated it. Thalberg might have reviewed Beeson's transcripts and made significant changes before they went out to Goulding and whomever else. Beeson might have been sloppy and inattentive. Who knows what Thalberg said to Goulding in the washroom? Maybe Thalberg kept his most brilliant intentions to himself. A caliper measure of the distance is less to the point than the fact that it can be *theorized* as smaller than ones that have haunted many auteurists' most basic claims.



Fig. 3. Joan Crawford studies her script on the *Grand Hotel* set.

The foregoing has avoided considering the *Grand Hotel* screenplay and film as works in favour of considering the transcripts as one – a minor proposition, possibly, but not an invalid one. Transcripts can be designated as works, just as Wollen can tacitly designate a Hawks interview as a work when he finds authors and meanings in it. When Foucault asks, 'How can one define a work amid the millions of traces left by someone after his death'[65]? he fingers a problem – the slipperiness of a definition – that grants semantic leeway wherein conference transcripts become fair game. In this respect, Foucault joins BST, and Schatz, in marking out a course for a new auteurism – one that looks outside the borders of film texts for works that circumscribe (and point to) authors. Foucault asks, 'If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind in his papers, or what has been collected of his remarks, could be called a "work"[66]? 'No', the auteur historian might reply, 'but if the individual *were* an author ...' and then plough ahead with a working corollary.

To the question, 'To whom should authorship of the transcripts be attributed?' two (personified) contenders lead: Beeson, who *wrote* the work; and Thalberg, whose talk in large measure *produced* it. But the transcripts index other works and so call up other ranges of possible authors. Who wrote the screenplay and the film? These ranges include more people: Vicki Baum, who takes credit on the film's title screen; William Drake, who adapted her play for Broadway and wrote a draft of the screenplay; Frances Marion, who worked on the screenplay (and got no credit for it) with Drake[67]; Goulding, who turned the results of each session into the next draft; and Thalberg. If we credit Thalberg and not Beeson with authorship of the transcripts (they *are* mostly his words) and recognize in his dominance of the proceedings that he, at least as much as anyone else, orchestrated the creation of this film, then we find the transcripts coming forward to assist the auteur historian by simultaneously positing Thalberg as the author of three works.

## Meaning unmade and remade

> Mr. Goulding: I want Irving's feeling of [sic] this, page by page.
> – Transcript of 9 December 1931, page 1

Demonstrating Thalberg's authorship of the transcripts, a work discovered a few years ago by one historian and – passed along in the form of narrativized snippets – by his readers, is not going to take the auteur historian far enough. Following BST's deployment of the source data *it* favours, a new approach might fit the transcripts into a discursive trajectory that ranges ahead of its more easily demolished forerunners. Again, forerunner V.F. Perkins provides our starting point.

According to Perkins, Perkins is no auteurist[68]:

> If as connoisseurs we wished to place the picture in the context of Tourneur's work and beliefs it would be important to find out how far *Night of the Demon* embodies a sincere attitude to the occult. But so long as we are concerned, as critics, with the meaning and quality of this particular movie such information remains irrelevant.

Critics are different from connoisseurs because they can, at will and when appropriate, abandon consideration of the director's intentions. Perkins makes a point of demonstrating this willingness a few times, here for example: 'It is quite possible that on some intensely personal, private level those lions were seen by Eisenstein as a coherent, even essential, part of his film's pattern. However, that is not relevant to our assessment'[69].

Critics know when to take the hard line on directorial intentions. However, Perkins reveals himself to be the auteurist that he is when he discusses film meanings. These he tracks coming through films[70]. Noël Carroll describes Perkins's 'anti-intentionalism: the meaning available on the screen is what is important, rather than possible authorial meanings'[71]. But how did the meanings get on the screen? Who or what made them available? What gives Perkins away is his assumption that meanings are there to be read. Meaning so fixed is the front anchor of an author construct, even if the rear anchor goes unnamed (or its intentions are declared irrelevant). Foucault writes, 'We are used to thinking that the author is so different from all other men, and so transcendent with regard to all languages that, as soon as he speaks, meanings begin to proliferate, to proliferate indefinitely'[72]. From whence do Perkins's meanings proliferate?

They proliferate from the work. But the work as a handy theoretical concept is far from the safe bet it used to be. Foucault writes influentially that 'it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work itself. The word *work* and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality'[73]. BST, stopping to consider films only when they are randomly selected or instructively transgressive, freights this undermining notion of the work into film studies. BST designates as important a collection of films that are, of themselves and as a group, not especially important. Meanwhile, the classical paradigm gets final cut on all works rolling off the Hollywood assembly line – and makes many suggestions along the way, too, for 'so powerful is the classical paradigm that it regulates what may violate it'[74]. BST is about the constraining of authors and works.

But sweeping works into the margins and over the edges of one's discourse does not prevent meanings from proliferating from works that other discourses screw into their centres. Nor does demoting film artists to artists who paint by numbers silence discourses that celebrate these same artists as something more special. Meaning as Perkins theorizes it remains a problem. Meanings must be unloosed from film texts and shown to originate in places that do not coincide, overlap, or index film authors. Meanings must coalesce independently from works. The connection between intentions (contemplated during production) and impressions (collected during consumption) must be cut before the film author can be pronounced dead.

Two zones wherein film meanings register are circumscribed and transformed by two books, both Bordwell's. *Narration in the Fiction Film* (mainly) addresses meanings 'typical' film viewers encounter, and *Making Meaning* tackles meanings turned up by academic critics. While an attempt to consider either book adequately and fairly here would yield flimsy results, I mean to suggest a couple of pertinent links between them and BST.

*Narration in the Fiction Film* buries the film author under an electric haze of cognitive activity. 'No trait we could assign to an implied author of a film could not more simply be ascribed to the narration itself'[75], Bordwell writes, then – opting for the simpler description – effectively boxes the implied author (and the biological author who might be attached) out of the discussion. The very notion of an implied author is 'anthropomorphic fiction'[76]. Reader comprehension is what makes meaning, not a work's coherence and not an author's intentions. Meanings are still constrained under this view, just not by works or authors anymore. Now they change as their manifold sources do. Now 'comprehension of films changes through time as we construct new schemata'[77]. Bordwell joins Buscombe and Crofts in recognizing the worthwhile results that auteur theories have produced, but finds the approach misapplied in analyses of classical narration: 'Nor is this to say that a film produced within the protocols of one mode cannot be construed according to the protocols of another; we saw this occurring with Hollywood films at the hands of auteur critics'[78].

*Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* slides the spotlight from the spectator's mind to the critic's page. There Bordwell finds critical inference over textual implication and craft of rhetoric over truth of ideas. The subtitle alone is enough to set this theory in clear contradistinction to Perkins's *Understanding and Judging Movies*. In a sense, Bordwell's metacriticism is fervent with assertions of authorship, only now the authors are critics. With respect to film authors, *Making Meaning* has much the same effect as *Narration in the Fiction Film*; that book describes the classic communication diagram, wherein 'a message is passed from sender to receiver' – to which Bordwell adds: 'I suggest, however, that narration is better understood as the organization of a set of cues for the construction of a story. This presupposes a perceiver, but not any sender, of a message'[79]. *Making Meaning* likewise presupposes no sender.

Bordwell rankles more than a few peers with his claim that the dominant conceptual framework into which they set their practice is faulty: 'The artwork or text is taken to be a container into which the artist has stuffed meanings for the perceiver to pull out ... Comprehension and interpretation are assumed to open up the text, penetrate its surfaces, and bring meanings to light'[80]. Bordwell offers another model entirely for relating film comprehension and interpretation to film meanings. *Making Meaning* is part of an ambitious project. As Bill Nichols writes, 'Neo-formalism may not simply contest the meanings that a feminism, say, might find, but contest the very grounds on which meaning rests'[81]. *Making Meaning* and *Narration in the Fiction Film* unstop a new wellspring for the meanings Perkins sees coming through the film text. Together they join BST in a convergence on the film author.

Of the three phalanxes, only one is expressly history[82]. A long contemplation of the evidence BST marshals seems to lead straight to that book's conclusions. But what about, for example, the *Grand Hotel* transcripts, the likes of which get effectively sidelined by the BST approach? Much of the assault I just described can be concentrated into a single anti-auteurist charge to which the transcripts voice an answer.

Crofts sketches a taxonomy of author conceptions, two of which are 'author as expressive individual' and 'author as thematic and stylistic properties impressionistically and unproblematically read off from the film or films'[83]. These he numbers 1 and 2.1, respectively. Bordwell's two books widen and fill the breach between these conceptions – moments, respectively, of production and consumption – and problematize readings of type 2.1 to near extinction. Crofts calls the conflation of these moments 'the terms of auteurism, the conventional mode of Authorship'[84], then explains the problem[85]:

> What is elided in this process is consideration of any potential difference in assumptions between, on the one hand, the biological individual and, on the other, the reader's construction of the author from the film(s) ... a wild leap of faith from the moment of production to the moment of reading.

The faulty claim, then, is that the author authors what the reader reads. But what if some validity could be argued back into this old claim? Judiciously mapping 2.1 onto 1 might come to seem less like a wild leap and more like a navigable option. Crofts's pronouncement that 'the author is in fact created by the reader'[86] might come to seem as patently one-sided as the hoariest and most unenlightened auteurist counterclaim.

The transcripts broaden the basis of the tradi-

Fig. 4. Edmund Goulding, behind the sofa, lining up another shot with 'the camera ... floating all over the place'.

tional auteurist stance, which has been a vulnerable one because auteurism has stood, traditionally, on one foot – the film text or, just as shaky, the film oeuvre. 'Auteur criticism has relied almost completely upon thematic interpretation'[87], Bordwell writes and – although auteur critics worked wonders with their idea of *mise-en-scène* – as Buscombe points out, 'Well before the 1980s arrived it had become evident that simply staring at the text wasn't enough'[88]. The transcripts provide a place to stare that is, relative to the film text, elsewhere. This is useful because it permits emplotments that link moments of film production to cues on film texts to moments of film reading. It permits claims about a film to be braced up in discursive trajectories that are fired from a point in time and space *through* the text and out to another point. One or two such passes is not enough to moor a discourse, but examples set by some film-studies best sellers of the past ten years suggest a robust practice that is.

An emplotment I find especially worth exploring proceeds backwards through time and begins by asking a question that is central to the historical poetics Bordwell compellingly proposes at the end of *Making Meaning*: 'What *effects* and *functions* do particular films have'[89]? Working up answers necessitates 'the reconstruction of earlier acts of comprehension[90]' and leads to another question, which (I suppose) is mine: What *caused* the effects? An advantage to reasoning backwards is that it leaves what auteurism's attackers find most objectionable – authorial intentions – for the end of the argument. Few are likely to complain that a critic's description of an audience reaction (or of his or her own) is inadmissible. Such a description represents but one humble moment of comprehension.

Mordaunt Hall wrote in his review of Grand Hotel:[91]

> And later, wearing a chinchilla coat, she is gay and light-hearted, for love has beckoned to the temperamental dancer. Grusinskaya leaves the screen hopeful of meeting the Baron at the railroad station, but the audience knows that the good-natured and sympathetic thief has met his doom.

Less important (and verifiable) than the accuracy of Hall's gauge on what the audience knows as they watch this scene is what Hall knows. This is the only one of the dancer's moments he mentions, and one of only two moments in the whole film he mentions at all.

The moment has made an impression on Mordaunt Hall. The transcripts indicate that the moment was transplanted from the play at Thalberg's insistence. Goulding's latest changes to the script have altered the feeling of Grusinskaya's last exit (as Thalberg remembers it playing on Broadway). Thalberg describes the lost feeling to Goulding: 'Just as Grusinskaya went out of the hotel, everybody realized that she didn't know the Baron had been killed. It left a pall of death on everybody'[92]. Thalberg saw to it that the same moment left the same pall on (at least) one viewer.

The determinative play of an author's intentions across a text can be charted with reasonable confidence and described in some detail with the help of documents such as the transcripts. Such documents can take guesswork out of reporting what an author must have thought or decided or said during the course of a film's development. The transcripts pinpoint *degrees* of intentionality, 'Personally my slight one tenth of one per cent preference would be concentrating it in a room'[93]; *concentrations* of intentionality, 'Most of my suggestions come toward the latter part of the story'[94]; and even *absences* of intentionality, 'I don't think it makes a damn bit of difference'[95]. The raw potential of the document is plainest in exchanges such as this one, in which Goulding asks, 'What is your intention with the Baron'? and Thalberg answers, 'My intention is this ...'[96] An alternative to casting doubt on the relevance of all statements of intention, etc. and then moving on to one's preferred relevances would be to pick out a statement – such as the one above – and seeing if it is not possible to anchor one or more causal chains with it.

The transcripts make it clear how completely the *auteur/metteur-en-scène* distinction breaks down on a Thalberg project. Elements of *mise-en-scène* are seen here to issue straight from Thalberg's mouth: 'My idea was that the person is in the picture and as they finish talking – behind him in double exposure is the next person talking – so you hear two voices'[97]. Another time, after viewing some footage, Thalberg comments, 'The scene is a great scene until the point where the camera starts floating all over the place where it starts following her over to the pearls. Get a closeup of her'[98]. Elsewhere he makes his wishes clear to another *a posteriori* artist, editor Blanche Sewell, where he 'showed Blanche on the reports where he wanted her to cut'[99]. Interestingly, Thalberg at one point expresses something of the opposite of the bias that, for decades, helped to keep him out of (the auteurist's) sight: 'Directors, on the whole, are not clever enough to get contrast out of dialogue'[100].

Thalberg coaches Garbo from the conference room: 'Eliminate her saying: 'I'm *so* tired'. Have her say: 'I'm so tired' very simply. There are certain things that can not be over-played and be sincere. And one of them is a person feeling sorry for herself'[101]. Elsewhere he sends vaguer and more sweeping directions into Goulding's territory: 'The writing is all right but the playing of it has got to be different from the impression you get from the script'[102]. Thalberg even exerts mindful influence on our intake of a costume design: 'When Grusinskaya comes out into corridor to meet Suzette and Pimenov pick it up a little later – lose some of that terrible hat'[103]. On whether the *auteur/metteur-en-scène* distinction is worth retaining at all in an estimation of this ubiquitous, hands-on author, the transcripts back a claim, vividly and for a project's duration, that Schatz makes more generally – regarding 'one of Thalberg's basic tenets of studio filmmaking – namely, that the first cut of any picture was no more than the raw material of the finished product'[104].

For Thalberg, mapping 1 on to 2.1 was not nearly as problematic as Crofts would have us believe. In fact he did it all the time. Here he paints a scene between the Baron and Grusinskaya, demonstrating expertise in his attention to the scene's impacts on viewers: 'She wants to give him money – he doesn't take it, but says he'll be on the train. You get suspense against hope, against hope that when he tries to steal Kringelein's money you don't blame him. You are pulling for the Baron but don't

want her mood destroyed'[105]. Actually, Thalberg here isn't envisioning reactions of moviegoers but – as he does throughout the sessions – recollecting reactions of theatregoers (including his own) on the day he attended a matinee performance[106]. The transcripts thus introduce a complication not anticipated by Crofts, or Bordwell, in which receptions *precede* intentions, and in which theatre-bound receptions – both as witnessed and experienced – serve as a film author's blueprint.

'I see it clearly', he tells Goulding and the others[107]. 'The curtain went up. Senf comes in saying: "Jesus, no baby yet"'[108] and on goes Thalberg with another page-long description of a Broadway-staged scene. Thalberg consistently bases instructions to Goulding (and some to Sewell and the actors) on recollections of how the stage melodrama worked its audience. At one point, after describing the feel of a scene as it played on stage – and before expressing dissatisfaction with Goulding's rewrite of it – Thalberg says: 'We can't lose that mood of [Grusinskaya's] in the play of this terribly dejected creature who went around saying how terrible life is and then completely changes. It was so beautiful'[109]. Elsewhere he lays it on the line for Goulding: 'I've seen the other scene played, it's a great scene and I've read yours and it reads like hell'[110] and, here, he does it again[111]:

> Thalberg: Lousy fade out.
>
> Goulding: It is a cut.
>
> Thalberg: Lousy cut. In the play it was better.

Another time he simply dictates: 'Scene two, act two – love scene, page seventy one of script. Create transposition from play in it'[112]. All this is enough to suggest, to me, the strong possibility of reading Thalberg's authorship into another wrinkle in this film text – into the closeness in feel and actual dialogue to the Broadway play that more than one critic noticed. One praised the studio for 'filming the play practically unaltered in form'[113]. Another played up for his readers the apprehension he felt on the day he attended the film[114]:

> It was with much uneasiness that I ventured the other day to visit the picture version of 'Grand Hotel', fearing that it had been desecrated by the impious showmen of Hollywood. What a chance, thought I, for havoc and delirious rebuilding, for laying waste and for indiscriminate replacement ... It is a disappointment, therefore, to report to similarly sceptical theatregoers that 'Grand Hotel' is as excellent a play when performed by machinery as it is when done by human actors.

(Schatz might be quick to add that what made the difference here was *whose* machinery was doing the performing.) With the transcripts supplying the vital linking term, signs of fidelity to the Broadway source material become signs of the Hollywood producer[115].

Bill Nichols writes that 'Bordwell invokes style (unusual camera angles or movement, odd editing patterns, disjunctive sounds) as the narrative's mechanism for calling attention to itself. This schema neatly isolates the narrational process from reference to anything beyond itself'[116]. Moments of self-conscious narration do call attention to narration, but they call attention to more than that. After recommending a bit of flashy camera work for a scene, Thalberg adds: 'It seems to me that every once in a while we ought to resort to some exciting trick like that'[117]. What Bordwell calls a moment of self-conscious narration, Thalberg calls an exciting trick. Where Bordwell claims that 'the intermittence of authorial presence works to reaffirm classical norms'[118], we might claim that the intermittence of authorial presence (as Bordwell defines it, as moments of self-conscious narration) actually affirms the *continuous* presences of subtler authors. To restrict all signs of authorship to moments of flashy filmmaking is to give free reign, over the vast remainder of the text, to codified norms. Another way to see it is that Hollywood's best authors knew that too many unusual camera angles or odd editing patterns or disjunctive sounds would get in the way of a moviegoer's good time. The magician is on stage for the whole show, even when she or he is not performing some exciting trick. Bordwell's view is, perhaps, not less or more correct than mine. The difference is one of emphasis, opinion and agenda.

Tino Balio writes that 'the so-called "one locale" setting of MGM's *Grand Hotel*, which provided the basis for interweaving several unrelated narrative threads, inspired such pictures as Columbia's *American Madness*, which is set in a bank, Warners' *Employees' Entrance*, which is set in a department store, and Paramount's *Big Broadcast*, which is set in a radio station'[119]. Judith Crist observed the film's persisting influence in 1970[120]:



Fig. 5. Lewis Stone in *Grand Hotel*'s unitary locale, the work of [uncredited] unit art director Alexander Toluboff.

> The *Grand Hotel* formula has served moviemakers (and playwrights) well through the decades, with a variety of folk from all walks of life brought into brief conjunction to love a little, gag it up a bit and then part, each to his own reward. We've encountered these little cross sections at bus stops, aboard ship, on doomed planes, at lonely inns, at the mercy of the elements, gunmen or the clock.

Twenty-five years later this one-locale, multi-thread formula is still with us[121]. Who knew it might endure so? Thalberg told a reporter a year before the film's release[122]:

> I don't mean that the exact theme of 'Grand Hotel' will be copied, though this may happen, but the form and mood will be followed. For instance, we may have such settings as a train, where all the action happens in a journey from one city to another; or action that takes place during the time a boat sails from one harbor and culminates with the end of the trip. The general idea will be that, of drama induced by the chance meeting of a group of conflicting and interesting personalities.

Thalberg also knew this formula did not demand 'story quality'. Story quality might even get in this formula's way. He told Goulding, 'To me this is a lousy play that only succeeded because it is lousy. It's full of life – a painted carpet upon which the figures walk – audiences love those damn things, if they are properly done'[123]. Critic William Boehnel agreed, writing[124]:

> 'Grand Hotel' is a melodrama which in literary design is undistinguished. But so craftily has it been put together and so entertainingly has it been directed that it seems better than it actually is. More than that, it shows how vividly characters can be drawn and how electric situations may become when treated with intelligence and understanding.

To what extent does the craftiness, vividness, electricity, intelligence, understanding, and even the direction all praised here point – through the transcripts – to one human source[125]? Surely to some extent that attests to the collaborative nature of studio filmmaking, but surely not to one that justifies the short shrift that Thalberg and many others have been handed by some prevailing accounts.

*Grand Hotel* is no limit case, not to popular historian Ethan Mordden – who ballyhoos the film as 'surely the most glamorous, possibly the most entertaining, and arguably the definitive Hollywood movie'[126] – and not to the current mainstream of academic film history. The cover of the fifth installment in the History of the American Cinema series features a photograph, from the film, of Garbo and John Barrymore in a romantic embrace. The photograph appears under the title *Grand Design*. What can a rhetor make of the transcripts and all they disclose about the sources of the effects and functions of this, 'perhaps all Hollywood's most typical film'[127]? She might make a case for the bonafide authorship of a consummately classical Hollywood film.

Out of a complex of effects and causes, one or more authors might emerge[128]. While the approach can and should lead to causes *besides* authors, one of its distinctive and determinative features will be that it begins by assuming that such outcomes are conceivable. (Bolder practitioners might begin by mentioning that such outcomes are *desirable*, but this is a matter of style.) The pairing of an effect with an *opposite* intention steers the open-minded auteur historian toward considerations of, for example, tensions between Studio Relations Committee guidelines and Thalberg's desire to turn out a hit. Or a discordant pairing might point to factors associated with *Grand Hotel*'s stars or MGM's (and Hollywood's) star system. Mordden claims that 'the auteur of *Grand Hotel* was MGM's star system'[129]. The claim all by itself is problematic but it might – together with the conventional modes of Authorship and the BST approach – point toward more complete answers than have yet ben articulated. Surely, and as importantly, a combining of approaches will lead to questions that have yet to be asked.

Whenever the line between intention and reception bends or breaks – attributable perhaps to Bordwell's mental sets and schemata, or the Production Code, or Goulding's intervention, or Freudian psychosexual forces, or the fact that sound had come to films only four years before the first conference – will provide occasion to depart from the classic communication diagram. Bordwell writes that 'by situating matters of meaning within the framework of effects, a poetics need not adopt the communication model of sender-message-receiver'[130]. It need not, but sometimes – and maybe often – a poetics worth its salt will need to adopt precisely this model in order to get the effects and causes scrupulously correlated. Sometimes, when evidence and instinct point that way, a film author's intentions will be shown to determine a film cue's effects. Sometimes Foucault's claim that 'these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection'[131] will seem incomplete. Sometimes meanings will come through.

## Conclusion

Changes in regard for one type of critical weight over another can give rise to narratives that outfit old objects with new emphases and meanings. The season's fashionable discursive mode can cause total revisions to upsurge where formerly there had been nothing new to say. Increased interest in conceptions of economic systems as determinants of film styles and modes of production, shifts in attention – from some moments and agencies of film production to some others – and the currently soaring market value of 'interoffice memos, corporate correspondence, and other general records, along with the budgets, schedules, story conference notes, daily production reports, [and] censorship files'[132] have all made the time right for the discovery of a new film author. But isn't film studies only just now pulling clear of all the old film authors?

Cases for reintroducing the film author to film studies are to be found in blind spots in the BST optic, which is trained at too short a distance from its (selected) primary sources to register an object as large as *Grand Hotel*, and which simultaneously surveys from too great a distance to register an object so small. Buscombe describes film history's alignment with the most serious and best that historiographic tradition has to offer[133]:



> The historian focused either on the far distance, paying attention to what Braudel called the *longue durée*, the slow-moving but massive shifts in human conditions of existence, or on what was immediately under his or her nose: changes in the previously unregarded brute realities of human life – food, sexual practices, methods of warfare.

Such an approach allows a historian to crunch and spray data into smooth curves that nicely limn this or that thesis, but seminal films and influential persons fall through cracks that, between practiced microscopy and macroscopy, are wide.

Authors abound in every approach we have considered here. Foucault writes[134]:

> [The author] is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion.

So it goes for directors in Perkins, a half-dozen producers intermittently in Schatz, and the classical paradigm continuously in BST. That BST constructs a system of constraint is certain. It just happens that the massive object under construction there is not a personified genius but, through that figure's radical diminution, a system that enforces a set of constraints all its own. Jane Gaines writes that 'it is the genius of criticism to will its own position into being so effectively that the discourse of the object of analysis fits the discourse of the method like a glove'[135]. Such a fit would suggest that limitations an approach finds in the object it approaches might point, most emphatically, to limitations in the approach itself. It would suggest that claims to 'a limit to authorial uniqueness in Hollywood'[136] might trace, most precisely, a limit of perception. The last sentence of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* vibrates with the doubleness Gaines refers to, 'by which the object is made to order by the criticism'[137]. Here the discourses of method and object fit each other so perfectly that it is not clear whether, in this last sentence, this discourse of method is referring to the object or to itself: 'The historical and aesthetic importance of the classical Hollywood cinema lies in the fact that to go beyond it we must go through it'[138]. The genius of the BST system lies in the barely concealed second sense, still vibrating after eleven years, just behind this resolute finish.

Bordwell's claim that 'conceptions of authorship enable us to appreciate the richness of the classical cinema'[139] is equally defensible with its terms switched; conceptions of the classical cinema (might) enable us to appreciate the richness of authorship (if we let them). Another assertion that runs as smoothly in reverse is one that 'authorial presence in the Hollywood cinema is usually consonant with classical norms'[140]. BST opts to put quotes around *author* and to leave them off *norm*, but, by arguing for authorship's inverse, isn't BST just arguing for another kind? Foucault predicts[141]:

> I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint – one which will no longer be the author.

Foucault's and BST's interpreters can decide whether, in the world of film studies, BST marks the inception of such a mode, or whether that system might as easily be termed an author construct as its replacement. Gone is the individual but, when one examines some of the shortfalls and shortcuts bound up through BST, one wonders whether the individual was really at the root of auteurism's problems in the first place. And besides, whether producers, directors or norms get the last word – and whether BST liberates film studies from the author or merely reconstitutes that figure out of a powder of data – there is another way to evaluate a theory.

Perkins writes that 'the most telling argument for a critical belief in the 'director's cinema' is that it has provided the richest base for useful analyses of the styles and meanings of particular films'[142]. BST recognizes as much, that 'auteur critics are right; like "film noir", the category of "authorship" does locate important differences within the classical style'[143]. And these differences remain important. As Robert Sklar writes[144]:

> Not every Hollywood hero of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics has achieved cinematic immortality, nor have the critics' thematic concerns necessarily persisted. But to a remarkable degree, the figures in whom they were interested – rather than, for example, 1950s winners of Academy Awards for directing – are those who have continued to hold critical attention over the years.

And these figures keep holding our attention, while encircling approaches and their attendant manifestos and terminologies keep coming and going[145].

Can discourses of contemporary film studies afford to expel the notion that great persons figured importantly into the development of Hollywood cinema? Or should we temper, refine, reign in, and hold on to that notion? In a final analysis that probably won't be possible until the paradigm wars themselves are history, a half-dozen producers might turn out to provide as usefully constraining a system as a 'few dozen heroic directors'[146] – and the classical paradigm might (I think it will) turn out to contribute immensely to new understandings of classical Hollywood's individual film artists. We see something of the latter happening already in, for example, Bordwell and Thompson's chapter in *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939*[147]. BST covers a much longer stretch than this books' mere nine years, but even with the narrower scope factored in, Thalberg is simply larger in this whole equation of pictures. Bordwell and Thompson's chapter on Technological Change and Classical Film Style enriches a book that brings other approaches, and emphases, to bear on its subject[148].

Why pick one totalizing approach when braiding and swapping in as many as are necessary – and as can be kept under control in a single discourse – enables a scholar to move ever closer to the particularities of the moments and places under examination? Schatz's single-author venture demonstrates a switch-hitting ability that suits the study of an era that broke down by period, and by studio, and – he shows – sometimes quite usefully by persons in charge. The past, even a classically ordered one, is more myriad and inconsistent than any one unswerving approach can ever provide access to.

But it is not just the course of past events that follow various natures and bend, uniquely, according to local circumstances. Perkins winds toward his conclusion with a comment that is, I think, more pertinent today then when he made it[149]:

> The temptation is to deny the validity of judgement altogether and to confine criticism to a descriptive role with no claim to be able to evaluate. But this position turns out to be a sham. Even description depends upon forms of evaluation which are no less 'subjective' than judgement. A descriptive analysis will need at the least to make claims about the distribution of the film's emphasis; and emphasis is as subjectively perceived, relies as much on a personal response, as judgement.

Dignified and documented, history is description with judgement folded into it. Critical weight, no matter how heavy and no matter how scientific the methods by which we process it, is grist for the mill – whatever mill a historian happens to be working in. The *Grand Hotel* transcripts are not unique in their versatility. Like almost any trace, they could accommodate almost any thesis. They lend themselves to plugging many sorts of holes, steering readers toward a variety of predetermined conclusions and, most importantly, to creating the impression of assiduous research. The transcripts hold out the promise that framing these luminous objects of truth is an ever-so-thin margin of space wherein a historian has room to invent or lie. Bridging a decade of film theory to one of film history, Buscombe writes that history is necessary to theory. The deference is gracious but misleading. History is useful to theory. History is a very popular flavour of theory. As such it is prone to all the same failures, and demands of us all the same vigilances. History is also – just as all those flavours that nobody ever samples anymore were in their day – a piquant means by which to persuade other people to come over to one's beliefs. A recent work of historical scholarship figures James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart and John Garfield as authoring forces[150]. Another refigures D.W. Griffith as a genius after all[151]. A chapter in *Grand Design* 'suggests that powerful department heads, such as MGM's Cedric Gibbons and Paramount's Hans Dreier, and individual artists, such as Anton Grot, William Cameron Menzies, and Gregg Toland, exerted an enormous influence over the look of a picture'[152]. Individuals are resurfacing. Authors are surging back into film studies and crashing the gates of the film studios.✪



## Notes

1. Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author'? *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 109.
2. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. (London: BFI, 1972), 77.
3. For a description of Thalberg's public image during his lifetime and afterwards, see Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915–1928* History of the American Cinema, vol. 3 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994), 251–253. See also Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 123.
4. The Irving Thalberg Award was awarded eleven times between (and including) 1969 and 1994. (Fact obtained from a call by the author to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.)
5. For example, Schatz writes near the start of *The Genius of the System* that 'auteurism itself would not be worth bothering with if it hadn't been so influential, effectively stalling film history and criticism in a prolonged stage of adolescent romanticism' (5).
6. See Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1981). Also in this book, Schatz describes how genre-based and author-centred approaches are not mutually exclusive (7–10).
7. Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 8. Schatz slightly misquotes this line from *The Last Tycoon*: 'Not half a dozen men have ever been able to keep the whole equation of pictures in their heads'. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Last Tycoon* (1941; New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Co., A Scribner Classic, 1986), 3.
8. Ibid., 8.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 7.
11. Ibid., 108.
12. Ibid., 98–124.
13. The authors bring Thalberg into the picture when they describe, in a paragraph, how he organized associate supervisors below him and how his approval was required on their major decisions. The main purpose seems to be to show how Thalberg exemplifies the strong central producer. Thalberg later returns, as briefly, in a description of how L.B. Mayer took advantage of Thalberg's absence (due to illness) to make changes in MGM management hierarchy and personnel. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 320 and 327.
14. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 96.
15. Names of films widely considered masterpieces occasionally do come up in BST, although consistently in contexts and for purposes that tend to undercut – or at least to overlook – their recognized status somehow. For example, *Citizen Kane* receives attention as Bordwell endeavors to show that, in it, Gregg Toland's experiments in deep-focus cinematography exceeded conventional boundaries. Bordwell then shows, in an examination of subsequent work, that Toland came back within classical boundaries after *Kane* and stayed there (345–352). *Kane* stands out, therefore, as a limit case, an instance in which an artist temporarily managed to violate classical codes before the system corrected his behaviour.
16. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, xiii.
17. BST's unspecified sample is introduced on page 10 and listed in Appendix A (388).
18. V.F. Perkins, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 173.
19. Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 36.
20. Ibid., 105.
21. Ibid., 175. The reference is to Thalberg.
22. Perkins, 184 (original emphasis).
23. Ibid., 160.
24. Ibid., 164. Another to toy briefly with this idea is Raymond Durgnat. He writes that William Dieterle's 'style may have come closest to Selznick's ideas, or he may best have understood and translated certain of Selznick's intentions (whether the second way of putting things would imply that he isn't an auteur is a nice point; it would imply that Selznick was)'. Raymond Durgnat, 'King Vidor, Part II,' *Film Comment* 9:5 (September/October, 1974), 17. Durgnat takes the possibility no further.
25. Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood the Dream Factory* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1951), 129.

26. Wollen, 104.
27. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 136.
28. Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 8.
29. Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939* History of the American Cinema, vol. 5 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 9.
30. Wollen, 78.
31. Perkins, 179.
32. Ibid., 185.
33. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 135. Staiger shows that scripts were serving as film blueprints well before the advent of the central producer system in Janet Staiger, 'Blueprints for Feature Films: Hollywood's Continuity Scripts', *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 173–192.
34. Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 108.
35. Balio, viii.
36. Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 7.
37. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, xv.
38. Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 8.
39. Edward Buscombe, 'Film History in the 1980s', *The Velvet Light Trap* No. 27 (Spring 1991), 3.
40. Stephen Crofts, 'Authorship and Hollywood,' *Wide Angle* 5:3 (1983), 17.
41. Perkins, 158.
42. Buscombe, 3.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 5.
46. See for example, Bill Nichols, 'Form Wars: The Political Unconscious of Formalist Theory,' *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars*, ed. Jane Gaines (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), 55.
47. Perkins, 189–190 (original emphasis).
48. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, xv.
49. Buscombe, 4.
50. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 77.
51. Perkins, 172. Durgnat provides an example of the sort of groundless guessing that has characterized some auteurism: 'Unless the film, at certain stages, looked altogether different from the release version, I can only surmise that Vidor felt these killings to have (like Zeke's, or his Billy the Kid's) some sort of emotional justification' (17–18).
52. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 77.
53. Foucault, 104.
54. The six session dates: I, 17 and 18 Nov. 1931; II, 9 December 1931; III, 10 December 1931; IV, 26 December 1931; V, 17 March 1932; and VI, 18 March 1932.
55. Schatz takes dramatic license and inserts a pause – and motivates it – where Thalberg insists on the addition of a line for Kringelein (Lionel Barrymore's character): '"It doesn't matter that life be long, but that one feel it entirely – drain it to the last. Then collapse". Thalberg waited for the effect to sink in. "That scene alone can make a picture", he said' (117).
56. Transcript of 17 November 1931, 2. All references are to page numbers as marked. Used by Permission Turner Entertainment Co. All rights reserved.
57. Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 111.
58. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 78.
59. Foucault, 101.
60. Ibid., 112.
61. Wollen, 84.
62. Crofts describes 'the director of the film, that self-same person who sometimes fools obsequious interviewers as to his/her "real intentions"' (17). Crofts would likely argue that reading an opposite meaning into an interviewee's statement, as Wollen does, is no less naive than taking the statement at face value.
63. Transcript of 26 December 1931, 3.
64. Ibid., 6.
65. Foucault, 104.
66. Ibid., 103.
67. See Balio, 185.
68. Perkins, 174–175.
69. Ibid., 189.
70. Ibid., 185.
71. Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 175.
72. Foucault, 118.
73. Ibid., 104.
74. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 81.
75. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 62.
76. Ibid. The charge is not the same as a repudiation of the biological author, but it helps account for the biological author's conspicuous absence in this theory of narration.
77. Ibid., 310.
78. Ibid., 335.
79. Ibid., 62.
80. David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London England: Harvard University Press, 1989), 2.
81. Nichols, 54.
82. However, in both *Making Meaning* and *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Bordwell skillfully mixes flavours, feels, and attributes of all three modes. Of *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Nichols writes that 'Bordwell's analysis of narrational process has many strengths, not least among them its supple blend of theory, criticism, and, to a more limited extent, history' (55).
83. Crofts, 17.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid., 18.
86. Ibid., 17.
87. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 80.
88. Buscombe, 3.
89. Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, 263 (original emphasis).
90. Ibid., 266.
91. Mordaunt Hall, rev. of *Grand Hotel*, *New York Times* 13 Apr. 1932: 23.
92. Transcript of 9 December 1931, 4.
93. Transcript of 17 November. 1931, 2.
94. Transcript of 9 December 1931, 1.
95. Transcript of 10 December 1931, 1.
96. Transcript of 17 November 1931, 16.
97. Transcript of 9 December 1931, 1.
98. Transcript of 17 March 1932, 4. The camera's reserve was noticed by critic Percy Hammond: 'One expects, from past experiences with the camera, to see Miss Baum's narrative amplified by spectacular photography, showing the characters as unlimited in the scope of their movements as they are in the novel. There is not much of this pageantry, however'. Percy Hammond, 'The Cinema Again Atones,' *New York Herald Tribune* 15 May 1932: sect. 7, 1.
99. Transcript of 18 March 1932, 4.
100. Transcript of 26 December 1931, 6.
101. Transcript of 17 March 1932, 2 (original emphasis). According to some tastes, Thalberg might have coaxed Garbo a little further along these lines. The *Variety* critic wrote that 'Garbo gives the role of the dancer something of artificiality, risking a trace of acting swagger, sometimes stagey'. Rush. (full name not given), rev. of *Grand Hotel*, *Variety* 19 April 1932: 14.
102. Transcript of 18 November 1931, 13.
103. Transcript of 18 Mar. 1932, 5.
104. Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 37.
105. Transcript of 18 November 1931, 12–13.
106. An interview Thalberg gave a year before the film's release places the performance close to 3 May 1931. 'Producer Discusses Pictures,' *New York Times* 3 May 1931: sect. 8, 6.
107. Two others in regular attendance were Paul Bern and Frank Partos.
108. Transcript of 9 December 1931, 3.
109. Transcript of 18 November 1931, 13.
110. Transcript of 26 December 1931, 12.
111. Transcript of 17 November 1931, 5.
112. Ibid., 3.
113. Rush. (full name not given), rev. of *Grand Hotel*, *Variety* 19 April 1932: 14.
114. Percy Hammond, 'The Cinema Again Atones', *New York Herald Tribune* 15 May 1932: sect. 7, 1.
115. These signs of fidelity might impel another critique of BST as well. If this, 'perhaps all Hollywood's most typical film' (Ethan Mordden, *The Hollywood Studios: House Style in the Golden Age of the Movies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 105), came

together under the authority of a man pushing to capture the moods and effects of a stage play, then might the transcripts testify in a case in which norms, codes, and practices which are *extrinsic* to classical cinema are piped into a classical film – more-or-less directly through its producer – from a Broadway melodramatic antecedent? Rick Altman writes that 'Bordwell and Thompson pay little attention to the possible contribution of melodramatic material to the classical paradigm' (Rick Altman, 'Dickens, Griffith and Film Theory Today', *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars*, ed. Jane Gaines (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), 25) and, elsewhere, he asks: 'Of what current tendencies and stresses within film theory is the neglect of cinema's debt to melodramatic stage adaptations symptomatic'? (14) The answering of this broad and far-reaching question might begin with the asking of some smaller ones, such as ours.

116. Nichols, 66. Bordwell demonstrates the validity of Nichols's charge here: 'When in *Psycho* Norman Bates climbs the stair to his mother's room, the camera tentatively follows him up and cranes back to a bird's-eye view just outside the doorsill, self-consciously displaying its deliberate withholding of information. By exploiting certain polar possibilities of the classical schemata of narration, Hitchcock's authorial persona oscillates between being modest and omnicommunicative within very narrow limits (i.e. presenting a single character's point-of-view) and flaunting its omniscience by suppressing crucial information' (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 79). At least as plausible as Bordwell's explanation is Hitchcock's: 'I didn't want to cut, when he carries her down, to a high-shot because the audience would have been suspicious as to why the camera has suddenly jumped away. So I had a hanging camera follow Perkins up the stairs, and when he went into the room I continued going up without a cut ... Meanwhile, I had an argument take place between the son and his mother to distract the audience and take their minds off what the camera was doing' (Francois Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1983), 276). So, far from *flaunting* omniscience is Hitchcock's attempt (if we can take the director at his word) to call as little attention to it as possible. Bordwell's explanation foregrounds, merely, narration; Hitchcock's, the operation of a crafty author.

117. Transcript of 9 December 1932, 2.

118. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 80.

119. Balio, 101. For more references to *Grand Hotel* as originating a formula and providing inspiration, see Balio 164, 185, 187, 230–231, 268, 272, 279, 287and 297.

120. Judith Crist, *The Private Eye, the Cowboy and the Very Naked Girl* (New York: Paperback Library, 1970), 20.

121. Critic Richard Watts, reporting on the buzz surrounding the film's release, suggests that the formula's (optional) all-star element had no precedent: 'Then comes the debate as to the wisdom of the Metro-Goldwyn group in providing the screen followers with such a wasteful banquet. There is a strong faction which ... feels that the film manufacturers went too far. Audiences that have been shown a film containing a large proportion of the Hollywood hierarchy will not, it is held, be satisfied to go back to the days of the one-star films'. Richard Watts, Jr., *New York Herald Tribune* 24 April 1932: sect. 7, 3.

122. 'Producer Discusses Pictures,' *New York Times* 3 May 1931: sect. 8, 6. Falling on the line between Thalberg and Crist is critic William Boehnel, who wrote: 'And before you leave [the Grand Hotel] you have met and learned to love and admire, hate and sympathize with the little group whose destinies the author has skillfully woven into a thrilling and exciting melodrama'. William Boehnel, rev. of *Grand Hotel*, *New York World Telegram* 13 April 1932: 14.

123. Transcript of 9 December 1931, 5.

124. Boehnel, 14.

125. A film encyclopaedia notes that Goulding 'lacked a distinctive personal style' (Ephraim Katz, *The Film Encyclopedia* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 496), and another, of his films, that 'it is generally assumed that such films were primarily authored by the studio and the stars' (Samantha Cook, ed., *The International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers – 4: Writers and Production Artists* (Detroit, Washington DC and London: St. James Press, 1993, 343). None of this, however, is to suggest that Goulding – no matter how heavy Thalberg's influence (or light his own) – did not bring an especial quality to this film. The encyclopaedist writes: 'We must give Goulding credit for the exceptionally involved choreography of faces, voices, and bodies in *Grand Hotel* when we look at the same stars in other movies of the period ... We need only see Garbo as directed by Clarence Brown or George Fitzmaurice to appreciate the contribution of Edmund Goulding. He is exceptionally sensitive to the time it takes the actress to register thought through her mere act of presence' (343). While *how much* credit Goulding is due for such details as shot lengths becomes clearer on examination of the transcripts, that credit is due is not contested here.

126. Mordden, ii.



127. Ibid. 105.

128. The range and number of sources from which a film's effects may be harvested and across which they may be cross-referenced – suggest the potential sweep of the auteur historian's compass. Effects may be reported by reviews concurrent with a theatrical release (or rerelease, or video release); or confected by the densest 1970s symptomatic criticism; or inferred through the latest advances in the study of historical film reception. Mining for causes can, unexpectedly, refract into a metacritical investigation of, for example, Barthes's ruminations on the face of Garbo (Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972), 56–57), and provide fresh angles from which to interrogate effects this viewer claims some films have (and have had) on ideal (and presumably historical) spectators.

129. Mordden, 14.

130. Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, 270.

131. Foucault, 110.

132. Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 9.

133. Buscombe, 3–4.

134. Foucault, 119.

135. Jane M. Gaines, 'Introduction: The Family Melodrama of Classical Narrative Cinema,' *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars*, ed. Jane Gaines (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), 1.

136. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 78.

137. Gaines, 2.

138. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 385.

139. Ibid., 81.

140. Ibid., 78.

141. Foucault, 119.

142. Perkins, 185.

143. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 77.

144. Robert Sklar, *Film: An International History of the Medium* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993), 351.

145. Bordwell's dead-on comment here about film criticism applies to – and across – all three official arms of film studies: 'The history of film criticism is largely that of predecessors ignored or forgotten, ships passing in the night, people talking at cross-purposes, wholesale dismissals of prior writers' work, and periodic cycles of taste' (Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, 39).

146. Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 5.

147. Balio, 109–141.

148. Moreover, *within* Bordwell and Thompson's chapter are signs of divergency from the approach as practiced in 1985. While basic tenets remain the same, the authors have modified their rhetorical style in ways that impact the presentation. The first sentence of their section titled 'Sources of Innovation' reads, 'While technological and artistic innovation can usually be attributed to individuals, those individuals operate within a broader context' (119). Focus on broader contexts – studios, firms, and professional organizations – is softened here, in the introductory subordinate clause of this sentence, with a reference to individuals. This tendency – of individuals to pop up in the beginnings of sentences that are really about broader contexts – exhibits itself a few times. 'For all his autonomy', the authors claim about the executive head of Technicolor, 'Kalmus was obliged to work with related service firms' (129). Elsewhere, following a quote that describes two ways a director might choose to begin a scene, the authors comment, 'While Michael Curtiz uses neither tactic at the start of the specimen scene [described earlier in the chapter], he does obey Cromwell's suggestion in other sequences' (127). Here, as in BST, the classical paradigm imposes limits on individuals, but in an instance whose implications are allowed to let stand, this individual's options are not fully circumscribed by stated limits. (If an unstated limit hemmed Curtiz in at the start of the specimen scene, the authors – notably – seem content to leave it that way.) The general relaxation of policy permits a paragraph about a technological innovation to end on a note that would have been uncharacteristic in 1985: 'The boom won Arnold an Academy Technical Award' (128).

149. Perkins, 191.

150. Robert Sklar *City Boys: Cagney, Bogart, Garfield* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

151. Tom Gunning *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

152. Balio, 10.