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

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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". Subsequent discussions 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 author theory "implies an operation of decipherment; it reveals authors where none had been seen before".[1]

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 deterministic norms. It constrained and guided the choices of the craftsmen 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 the evidence that 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 metaphorical mode, but through metadata designed 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.

Two approaches and their findings

Schatz describes author theory's sharp limitations in a few places[2]. In another he articulates an alternative to organizing and understanding Hollywood studio films — namely, through genre study[3]. 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". 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".[4]

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 little 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 I 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 few others carried in their heads"[5]. These very few men drop out of Schatz's formula and, from below, they dream the formula. The chief architects of a studio's style were its executives[6]. 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"[7]. Does this Great Studio Theory have Great Men at its core, pulling the knobs and spinning the dial?

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"[8], 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[9]. 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 for what needs to be understood as having done what made, rewritten some major ground rules for writing Hollywood studio history. This shift principal
ioption or a result of a desire for something 'good' or something 'different' personifying a history to proceed with minimum — and minimizing — attention to individual personalities and contributions. Magnifying this tendency of affect is the BFT optic's blindness to masterpieces, since focusing on an individual film for too long invariably brings individual persons into focus as well. 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 reality that we shall study.'

BFT sees through a film unless it is one of its 100 randomly selected films or fits one of their definitions of a 'limit case.' Films falling into neither category fail by default between the wide borders of this creative, 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. BFT negates most biographical approaches to threading a historical narrative through studios Hollywood.

Schatz's attention to studio producers, and some other factors we are about to consider, suggest that conditions are favorable 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 auteur 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.' 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-centered 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,' or to claim (after laying down qualifiers) that 'the controlling force, of course, was Irving Thalberg,' or even to state outright that 'the force of his personality and his will had shaped MGM.' The years just preceding The Genius of the System made author-centered approaches among the more dangerous kind of 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.' 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.' Perkins elsewhere brushes a little harder against the producer-as-author idea:

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, cost, 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 plausibly 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 Powdersmoker presents an array of producer types, including Mr. McDonough, Mr. Kowtow, Mr. Schiz 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.' 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 indistinguishable because of "noise" from the producer'.

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 other historians had exposed it.

BFT tracks the rise of the central-producer system and, with it, the rise of the central producer. The authors show how producers come 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 film'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 — including the director. Thanks in some measure to BFT, Schatz's strong conviction that these producers and studio executives have been the most misunderstood and undervalued figures in American film history is less a parochial one 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 actor.'

In Film as Film, Perkins writes that 'the meaning of the film is in the auteur is constructed a posteriori.' 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,' but then goes on to reflect Wollen's view when he clarifies his own: 'For creating
a finished work, [the script writer] offers an outline open to an infinite variety of treatments 9,10. 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 function changed with the coming of the central producer system. "Planning the work and estimating production costs through a detailed script became an essential, and early step in the labor process. ... The script became a blueprint detailing the shot-by-shot breakdown of the film. 12. The script became an 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 described 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 oversees the postproduction process of editing, previews, re-takes and re-cutting. 13."

A short answer to the question "Why produce?" is that, since 1935, the year BST established the foundation for any serious study of American film history 14, producers have made safer boxes for author-centered assertions from directors have. Schatz describes producers at work 15:

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. As a picture was ready for shipment to New York for release. The cause of a producer's typical workday put him in regular contact with events and terms that help side a historical narrative comfortably close to BST's second function: the principles of the Hollywood mode of production. 16. 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 director 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 scholars of classical cinema are well advised to venture an opinion only after quoting Schatz and digging through scores of archival materials from various studios and productions companies 17 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 accepted pantheons than erects any new ones. His project is not to design an author built to withstand the censures 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 Edwad Buscombe, the concept of authorship, "the vantage point from which many of the coherent maps had been drawn, had been severely undermined 18. Another to cite author theory's strengths as a set of ideas in the same sentence is Stephen Craft: "The principle's critical success, however, ballys its theoretical bankruptcy. 19. 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," 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."

Schatz would be unfair to single out author theory for having fallen out of favour. Theory in general had acquired a bad reputation by the end of the decade. 20. In 1970s film studies were, self-consciously, a decade of theory 21, 22. Schatz writes Buscombe, who joins others in railing the rise of film history as solve 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. 23. 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 guarantor of meaning of psychoanalysis," 24 was "whipped through unexpectedly and often, a field dominated by history is colder and more stabilized. As clear seems to be the dividing line between history and theory. History brings with it a whirl of credibility and a life 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."

The rise of film history has not similarly delighted author theorists, who now most likely write author history. Semiotics and psychoanalysis loom smaller than they did before, but as Buscombe explains, now authors 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. 25. 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 paddle an authorly 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" 26, that it is not easy to write on the subject without traversing some part of this collective formalist discourse – even if it roundly disagrees. History is not by its essence inclined to serving formalist ends, though. Years before film scholars would be obliged to engage the problematic (and potentials) of arguing a case through film history, Perkins wrote: 27, 28."

Fig. 2 (and next page). Two pages from Maxine Besston's story conference transcripts. USC Cinema Television Library. Used by Permission Turner Entertainment Co., All Rights Reserved.
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 shifting 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 some thing. Proponents of the old history/theory duality sometimes downplay the role of shared, if not much basic similarity. BST thus simplifies this struggle. The prefix 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.' Some histories just demonstrate—and don't articulate—their theoretical approaches, but no history is without them. Buscombe writes that 'histor i's necessarily a theory,' which might be true in a time when history is the mandated mode for film scholars; but more like it is that history is used as an either/or. A film critic's control over the critic's claim about which of one BST makes of itself, and one we might make of any less forthright (and/or less well knowing) history as well, is 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-prod uction cinema, which has tradi tionally involved collaborative labor, scholars have found it difficult to assign authorship to any individ ual.' Perkins similarly describes a gap that 1970s auteurs, himsl elf 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.' Bordwell pinpoints this same obstacle—though with an opposite intention—to surmounting it. In this case, we see one of the biggest problems facing taking shape in the form of a hole that historical evidence can fill. Foucault frames a broader and 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.'

Imagining a text's unfolding and dispersal at the moment of its creation is a very different kind of activity. It is now a question of 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 shades 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 au torial 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 delineated, 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 accepting, condensing, splicing and all other manner of creative incorporation into accounts chronicling the development of Grand Hotel to the life of Irving Thalberg. The paradoxes 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 musings. 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 certification of evidence and the stuff of romance. Schatz exploits their dual nature.

The dynamics of the Thalberg-Goulding inter-
play demonstrated Thalberg's talent and con-

fidence but also his knack for diplomacy — he

knew when to stroke Goulding and when to

bear down. During an early session, for ex-

ample, 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 space is critical weight,

however, and in this the transcripts prove how valu-

able they are. When Bordwell observes that "both

the author as empirical agent and as instrumen-
tational trademark stand outside the texts them-

selves," he echoes Foucault's claim that "the text

points to this "figure" that, at least in appearance, is inside the

work and goes beyond it." Authenticating and even locating

outside this out and enacting figure has proved dif-

cult. Switching focus to the transcripts brings into

view an author standing inside the text — at least in

appearance. One way to understand this appear-

ance — of those figures' intersubjectivity — is to listen to the

voices speaking through the pages of this

document. Foucault writes: 

"In a novel narrated by a first person, neither

the first-person pronoun nor the present indica-
tive reflexes 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, 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 establish-

ing a shorter and less problematic link be-

tween him and his or her pronouns. Wolinn writes

that "the word "fun" crops up constantly in Hawks's

interviews and scripts. It masks his despair."

Mapping the "fun" in an interview or film text onto a

biological person represents the sort of spindly con-

jectural limb onto which auteurists have habitually

ventured. The discursive fields of film history are

thin with alternative routes.

Perhaps this intersubjectivity is not just in appear-

ance: 

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 —

Beren: Irving thinks we can cut this down.

Goulding: What would you lose if you come to

Presley's booth, without Mulle, or the shov-

eling set or anything — just an ordinary business

man.

Beren: 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 reduced to nothing, is certainly smaller than

the one between a film text's pronouns and its bi-

ological author. Moreover, in interviews, where cele-

brities can be models of insincerity, this space is

almost surely larger than the one between the bio-

logical Thalberg and his transcription. The bio-

logical Thalberg was working with his sleeves rolled up

(maybe literally), among hired staff, for hours. One

exchange after another demonstrates his unremit-

ting attention to nut-and-bolt questions and prob-

lems. (Once, when Goulding got off the subject to

complain about studio politics, Thalberg's response

was, 'We're discussing this scene.') All the unglam-

orous shop talk encourages our impression that

this group was not pitching its remarks to a recor-

ding 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 Beason's transcripts and made sig-

nificant changes before they went out to Goulding

and whatever else. Beason might have been

shy and inattentive. Who knows what Thalberg

said to Goulding in the washroom? Maybe Thal-

berg 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.

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. Tran-

scripts can be designated as works, just as Wolinn

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?" he fingers a problem — the slipperiness of

a definition — that grants semantic leeway wherein

conference transcripts become fair game. In this re-

spect, Foucault joins BST, and Schatz, in making 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? No', the auteur

historian might reply, 'but if the individual were an

author ...' and then plough ahead with a working cor-

ollary.

To the question, 'To whom should authorship of

the transcripts be attributed?' two (personalized)

contenders leap: 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 adopted 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;" 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 Thal-

berg as the author of three works.
Meaning unmade and remade

Mr. Goulding: I want living's feeling [sic] this, 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 author historian far enough. Following BST's deployment of the source data if favorable, a new approach will fit the transcripts in a new trajectory that ranges ahead of its more easily de- malished forebears. Again, forebear V.F. Per- kins provides our starting point.

According to Perkins, Perkins is no author10.

If as connoisseurs we wished to place the picture in the context of fourier's work and belief 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 some 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's quite possible that on some intensively personal, private level those lions were seen by Eisenstein as a coherent, even essental, part of his film's pattern. However, that is not relevant to our assessment1." 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 tracks come through films10. Noel Carroll describes Perkins's 'anti-intentionalism: the meaning available on the screen is what is important, rather than possible authorial meanings'.11 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. Reading is fixed in the right 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. From whence do his 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 influenceously 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 entity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality.' BST, stopping to consider films only when they are randomly selected or instructively transgressive, frightens 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 at all works rolling off the Hollywood assembly line and makes many suggestions about the way, too, for 'so powerful is the classical paradigm that it regulates what may violate it.' BST is about the constraining of authors and works.

But swapping works into the margins and over the edges of one discourse does not prevent meanings from proliferating from works that other discourses screen into their centres. Nor does denoting film artists to artists who point by numbers silence discourses that celebrate these same artists as something more special. Meaning as Perkins theorizes it remains a problem. Meanings must be unrolled from film texts and shown to originate in places that do not coincide, overlap, or index film authors. Meanings must coincide 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 circumcised and transformed by two books, both Bordwell's. Narration in the Fiction Film (mainly) addresses meanings 'typical' film viewers en- counter, and Making Meaning tackles meanings turned up by academic critics. While on occasion consider either book separately, fairly rare would yield film studies, 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, and interpretation to film meanings. Making Meaning is part of an ambitious project. As Bill Nichols writes, 'Neoformalism may not simply contest the meanings that a feminism, say, might find, but contest the very grounds on which meaning rests.' Making Meaning and Narration in the Fiction Film umpire a new welling for the meanings Perkins sees coming through the film text. Together they join BST in a convergence on the film author. Of the three phonologies, only one is expressly historical. A long contemplation of the evidence BST marshals seems to lead straight to that book's conclusion. But what about, for example, the Grand Hotel transcripts, the likes of which get effortlessly sidetracked 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.

Crosby sketches a taxonomy of author concepts, two of which are 'author as expressive indi-idual' and 'author as thematic and stylistic properties impressively and unproblematically read off from the film or films.' These numbers 1 and 2, 1, respectively. Bordwell's two books wider and fill the breach between these conceptions -- moments, respectively, of production and consumption -- and problematize readings of type 2.1 to near extinction. Crosby calls the conflation of these moments 'the terms of aesthetic, the conventional mode of Authorship',13 then explains the problem.

What is added 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? Judi- ciously mapping 2.1 onto 1 might come to seem less like a wild leap and more like a navigable option. Crosby's pronouncement that 'the author is in fact created by the reader' might come to seem not purely asided as the herset and most unam- plightened auteurist counterpoint.

The transcripts broaden the basis of the tradi-
The scene of a meeting 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 the 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 Mor-ndaunt 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 Gusinskaya's last exit [as Thalberg remembers it playing on Broadway]. Thalberg describes the last feeling to Goulding: "Just as Gusinskaya 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." Thalberg saw it to that the same moment left the same pall on (at least) one viewer.

The definitive 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;" concentrations of intentionality. "Most of my suggestions come toward the latter part of the story;" and hence absences of intentionality, "I don't think it makes a damn bit of difference." 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?" Thalberg answers, description of an audience reaction (or of his own) is inadmissible. Such a description represents but one humble moment of comprehension.

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."

Elsewhere he makes his wishes clear to another posteriori artist, editor Blanche Sewell, where he "showed Blanche on the reports where he wanted her to cut." Interes-

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 certainly things that can not be over-played and be sincere. And one of them is a person feeling sorry for herself. Elsewhere he sends vague 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.' Thalberg even exerts mindful influence on our intake of a costume design: 'When Gusinskaya comes out into corridor to meet Suzanne and Pomeroy pick it up a little later--lose some of that terrible hat.' On whether the author/mettur/scene distinction is worth retaining at all in an estima-

tion 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.' Thalberg, mapping 1 to 2.1, was not nearly as problematic as Crafts would have us believe. In fact he did it all the time. Here he paints a scene between the Baron and Gusinskaya, demon-

strating expertise in his attention to the scene's impact on viewers. 'She wants to give him money--she 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 Kringle's money you don't blame him. You are pulling for the Baron but don't...
want her mood destroyed. Actually, Thalberg here isn’t envisioning reactions of moviemakers but as he does throughout the sessions—recollecting reactions of theatregoers (including his own) on the day he attended a matinee performance. The transcripts thus introduce a complication not anticipated by Crafts, or Bordwell, in which reception 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," The curtain went up. Sent comes in saying, ‘Jesus, no baby yet’ 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 (Grisinskaity’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’. 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’ and, here, he does it again.

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’. All his is enough to suggest, to me, the strong possibility of reading Thalberg’s authorship into another’s work in this film text—in the closeness in style and actual dialogue to the Broadway play that more than one critic noticed. One praised the studio for filming the play practically unaltered as a virtue. Another played up for his readers the apprehension he felt on the day he attended the film.

It was with much uneasiness that ventured the other day to visit the picture version of ‘Grand Hotel’, fearing that it had been desecrated by the impious shownmen of Hollywood. What a chance, thought I, for havoc and deliberate 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.

Bill Nichols writes that Bordwell invokes style (visual 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. 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’. 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, we might claim that the intermittence of authorial presence (as Bordwell defines it, as moments of self-conscious narration) actually affirms the continuous presence of studio 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 moviemaker’s good time. The magician is on stage for the whole show, even when the 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 Balzo 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, one city to another; or action that takes place during the time a boat sails from one harbor to another. The general idea would be that of a 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 dumb things, if they are properly done’. ‘Critic William Boehlert agreed, writing: ‘“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.

Womens’ Employees’ Entrance, which is set in a department store, and Paramount’s Big Broadcast, which is set in a radio station’.

Judith Crist observed the film’s persisting influence in 1970:

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 and kill, get 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, gammon or the clock.

Twenty-five years later this one-location, multi-threaded formula is still with us. Who knew it might endure? Thalberg told a reporter a year before the film’s release:

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...
To what extent does the craftsmanship, vividness, electricity, intelligence, understanding, and even the direction all praised here point—to the transcriptions—to one human source? Certainly to some extent that attaches to the collaborative nature of studio filmmaking, but surely not to one that justifies the short shift that Thalberg and many others have been handed by some prevailing accounts.

Grand Hotel is a no-limit case, to notice, a major, towering figure, perhaps Hollywood’s most typically film. She might make a case for the bromide authorship of a consummately classical Hollywood film.

Out of a complex of effects and causes, one or more authors might emerge. While the approach can and should lead to causes besides authors, only one of its distinctive and determinative features will be that it begins by assuming that such outcomes are conceivable. (Bolder propositions 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-ended author history 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 author of Grand Hotel was MGM’s star system.” The claim all by itself is problematic but it might—

Very tiring between intention and reception bends or breaks—attributable perhaps to Bordwell’s mental sets and schemata, to the Production Code, or Goulding’s intervention, or Freudian sexual forces, or the fact that sound had come to films only four years before the first occasion to depart from the classic communication model. Bordwell writes that “by shifting matters of meaning within the framework of effects, a poetics need not adopt the communication model of sender-message-receiver.” 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” 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 suit old objects with new emphases and meanings. The season’s fashionable discursive mode can cause total revisions to upstage where formerly there had been nothing new to say. Increased interest in conceptions of economic systems as determining 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, [and] censorship files” have all made the time right for the discovery of a new film author. But isn’t film’s only story (not just something of the old film authors)? Cases for reintroducing the film author to film studies are to be found in blind spots in the B ST optic, which is trained at too short a distance from its 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 as.

The historian focused either on the far distance, paying attention to what Baudrillard 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 unregistered brute realities of human life—food, sexual practices, methods of warfare.

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

Authors abound in every approach we have considered here. Foucault writes: [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 perceiving the author as a genius, as a perceptive surger 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 B ST. That B ST constructs a system of constraint is certain. It just happens that the massive object under construction here is not a personalized genius but, through that figure’s radical diminution, a system that enforces a set of constraints on 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.” Such a fit would suggest that limitations on approach finds in the object approaches might point, most emphatically, to limitations in the approach itself. It would suggest that claims to “a limit to authorial uniqueness in Hollywood” might trace, most precisely, a limit of perception. The last sentence of The Classical Hollywood Cinema vibrate with the doubleness Gaines refers to, “by which the object is made to order by the critic,” but the discourses of method and object fit each after 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. The genius of the B ST system lies in the barely concealed second sense, still vibrating after eleven years, just behind this resolve finish. Bordwell’s claim that “conceptions of authorship enable us to appreciate the richness of the classical cinema” 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 concealed with classical norms.” B ST opts to put quotes around author and to leave them off norm, but, by arguing for authorship’s inverse, isn’t B ST just arguing for another kind of Foucault predicts.

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 text 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 B ST’s interpreters can decide whether, in the world of film studies, B ST 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 shortcomings and shortcuts bound up through B ST, one wonders whether the individual was really at the root of authorism’s problems in the first place. And besides, whether producers, directors or norms get the last word—and whether B ST 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.” B ST recognizes as much, that “author critics are right,” like “film noir,” the category of “authorship” does locate important differences within the classical style. And these differences remain important. As Robert Sklar writes:

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Not every Hollywood hero of the Cahiers du Cinéma critics has achieved cinematic immortality, nor have the critics' thematic concerns necessarily persisted. But to some 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 excising approaches and their attendant manifestos and terminologies keep coming and going.14

Can discourses of contemporary film studies afford to expend the notion that great persons figured importantly into the development of Hollywood cinema? Or should we temper, refine, resist, and hold on to that? Is it at all possible that we might not be possible until the paradigm wars themselves are history, a half-dozen producers might turn out to proceed as usefully containing a system as a 'few dozen heroic directors'14 — and the critical paradigm might (I think it will) turn out to contribute immensely to new understandings of classical Hollywood's individual film artist. 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, 1920-1930.15

BS covers a much longer stretch than this book's 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 Technologi- cal Change and Classical Film Style enriches a book that brings other approaches, and emphases, to bear on the subject.16

Why pick one totalizing approach when brand- ing and swapping in as many as are necessary — and as can be kept under control in a single dis- course — enables a scholar to move ever closer to the particularities of the moments and places under examination? Schatz's single-author venture dem- onstrates 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 per- sons 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 narratives and bend, uniquely, according to local circumstances. Perkins winds toward his conclusion with a proposition that is, I think, more pertinent today than when he made it14.

The temptation is to deny the validity of judg- ment 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 sub- jectively perceived, relies as much on a per- sonal response, as judgement.

Dignified and documented, history is descrip- tion; an judgement folded into it. Critical weight, no matter how heavy and no matter how 'scientific' the methods by which we process it, is got for the mill — whatever mill a historian happens to be work- ing in. The Grand Hot transplant scripts are not unique in their versatility. Like almost any trace, they could accommodate almost any thesis. They lend them- selves to plugging many sorts of holes, steering readers toward a variety of predetermined conclu- sions and, most importantly, to creating the im- pression 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, Bus-combe 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 Bo- gart and John Garfield as author figures.16 And the references to D.W. Griffith as a genius after all15. A chapter in Grand Design 'suggests that powerful department heads, such as MGM's Cedric Gibbons and Paramount's Hans Dreier, and individual art- ists, such as Anton Grot, William Cameron Men- zies, and Gregg Toland, exerted an enormous in- fluence over the look of a picture.17 Individuals are reinvesting. Another author is surging back into film studies and studying the gate of the film studios.18

Notes


4. The Irving Thalberg Award was awarded eleven times between (and including) 1966 and 1994. (First 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 'intuition itself would not be worth bothering with if it hadn't been so influential, effectively steering film history and criticism in a prolonged stage of adolescent romanticism'.


8. Ibid., 8

10. Ibid.

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 op- portunity 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 Steiger and Kristin Thompson, The Classical Holly- wood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 320 and 327.


15. Names of films widely considered masterpieces occasionally do come up in BST, although consist- ently in contexts and for purposes that tend to undercut — or at least to overtake — their recognized status somehow. For example, Citizen Kane re- ceives attention as Bordwell endeavors to show that, in it, Gregg Toland's experiments in deep-focus cinematography exceeded conventional bounda- ries. Bordwell then shows, in an examination of a subsequent work, that Kane came back within classical boundaries after Kane and stayed there (345-352). Kane stands out, therefore, as a lone case, an instance in which an artist temporarily managed to violate classical codes before the sys- tem corrected his behaviour.

16. Bordwell, Steiger and Thompson, 100.

17. BST unspecified sample is introduced on page 10 and listed in Appendix A (388).


20. Ibid., 100.

21. Ibid., 175. The reference is to Thalberg

22. Perkins, 186 (original emphasis).

23. Ibid., 160.

24. Ibid., 164. Another to top briefly with this idea is Raymond Durgnat. He writes that William Dieterle's style might have come closest to Selznick's ideals, 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, "Kings, Vipper, II", Film Crit- ics' J (September/October, 1974). 17. Durgnat takes the possibility no further.

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[Page Numbers]

26. Wollen, 104.
27. Bordwell, Steiger and Thompson, 136.
30. Wollen, 78.
31. Perkins, 179.
32. Ibid., 185.
37. Bordwell, Steiger and Thompson, xv.
41. Perkins, 158.
42. Buscombe, 3.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 5.
47. Perkins, 189–190 (original emphasis).
48. Bordwell, Steiger and Thompson, xv.
49. Buscombe, 4.
50. Bordwell, Steiger and Thompson, 77.
51. Perkins, 172. Durant 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 Victor felt these killings to have [like Zola’s, or his Billy the Kid?] some sort of emotional “unification”’ (17–18).
52. Bordwell, Steiger and Thompson, 77.
53. Foucault, 104.
54. The six sessions were: 1. 17 and 18 Nov. 1931; 9, 9 December 1931; 8, 10 December 1931; 26 December 1931; 5, 17 March 1932; and 6, 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 Kringleby (Einar Barymire’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 done down 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.
58. Bordwell, Steiger and Thompson, 78.
60. Ibid., 112.
61. Wolfen, 84.
62. Crafts describes the director of the film, that self­same person who sometimes finds obsessive interviewers so as to his/her “real intentions” (17); Crafts would likely argue that reading an opposite meaning into an interviewee’s statement, as Wolfen 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 Bullo, 185.
68. Perkins, 174–175.
69. Ibid., 189.
70. Ibid., 185.
72. Foucault, 118.
73. Ibid., 104.
74. Bordwell, Steiger and Thompson, 81.
75. David Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 62.
76. Ibid. The change is not the same as a repetition 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.
81. Nichols, 54.
82. However, in both Making Meaning and Narration in the Fiction Film, Bordwell skillfully moves from theories, facts, and attitudes of all three modes. Of Narration in the Fiction Film, Nichols writes that Bordwell’s analysis of narrative process has many strengths, not least among them its supply biased of theory, criticism, and, to a more limited extent, history (155).
83. Crafts, 17.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid., 18.
86. Ibid., 17.
87. Bordwell, Steiger and Thompson, 80.
88. Buscombe, 3.
89. Bordwell, Making Meaning, 263 (original emphasis).
90. Ibid., 266.
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 unnoticed 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 Actors’, New York Herald Tribune 15 May 1932: sect. 7, 1.
100. Transcript of 26 December 1931, 6.
101. Transcript of 17 March 1932, 2 (original emphasis). According to some tests, Thalberg might have caused 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 swaggery, sometimes staggery’. 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.
105. Transcript of 18 November 1931, 12–13.
107. Two often in regular attendance were Paul Bern and Frank Partos.
108. Transcript of 9 December 1931, 3.
110. Transcript of 26 December 1931, 12.
111. Transcript of 17 November 1931, 5.
112. Ibid., 3.
together under the authority of a man pushing to capture the moods and effects of a stage play, from
night THEATRE EXTRAVAGAZA to what is: the white
ode, and practices which are extraneous to classical
drama. The goal of classical drama is to picture
Richard Wood directly from his - from a Broadway
materialistic antecedent? Richard Ainsen writes that
continuum, and Thompson may give too much attention to the
possible contribution of materialistic material to the
classical paradigm (Richard Ainsen, 'Disorders
Griffith, and Film Theory Today', Classical Holly-
wood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars, ed. Jane
current tendencies and sources within film theory is
the neglect of cinema's debt to materialistic stage
adaptations symptomatic? (1.14) The answering of
this broad and far-reaching question might begin with
the asking of smaller, more specific, ones.

116. Nichols, 66. Bordwell demonstrates the validity of
Nicholas's charge here: "When in Psycho Norman
Bates, the star of his mother's room, the camera
continuously follows him up and comes back to a
bird's-eye view just outside the door, self-
consciously displaying its deliberate withholding of
information. By exploiting certain stylistic
possibilities at the classical schematic of narration, Hitchcock's
authorial persona oscillates between being modest
and omniscient within very narrow limits (i.e. presenting a single character's point-of-view
and flouting its omniscience by suppressing crucial
information; see 66). Portrait of a Scientist (1929).
At least as plausible as Bordwell's explanation is
Hitchcock's. I didn't want to cut, when he carries
her away, 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
and Schuster, Inc., 1983), 276). So far from favoring
annunciation is Hitchcock's attempt (if I can take
the director of his word) to call all possible attention
to it as possible. Bordwell's explanation foregrounds,
merely, narration: Hitchcock's, the opera-
tions of a crafty author.

117. Transcript of 9 December 1931, 2.

118. Bordwell, Steiner and Thompson, 80.

119. Ballo, 101. For more references to Grand Hotel as
originating in a formula and providing inspiration, see

120. Judith Crist, The Private Eye, the Cowboy and the

121. Critics Richard Watts, reporting on the buzz sur-
rounding the film's release, suggests, that the
maker's script was all he had no previous
'Velvet And the Kiss 'tainty to the author's original.
Watts adds his report by means of a theatrical
release (or release, or video release), or
confined by the least of their symptoms;
the latest advancements in the
study of historical film reception. Mixing
for causes can, unexpectedly, reworked into a biographical
investigation of, for example, Barthes's rumination
on the face of Garbo: (Roland Barthes, Mythologies (New
York, The Noonday Press, 1972), 56–57), and
provide fresh angles from which to interrogate
these editor this cl aer's films how (and have
held) on ideal (and presumably historical) specula-
tors.

May 1931: sect. B, 6. Falling on the line between
Thalberg and Crist is critic William Boorstin, who
wrote: 'And before you leave [The Grand Hotel] you
have not need and love to admire, hate and
sympathize with the little group who has
skillfully sloughed into a thrilling and exict-
ing melodrama'. William Boorstin, rev. of Grand

123. Transcript of 9 December 1931, 5.


125. A film encyclopedia notes that Gauding "likely a
distinctive personal style" (Ephraim Katz, The Film
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
at Writers and Production Artists (Demos, Washing-
None of this, however, is to suggest that Gauding
was necessarily the only influence for Gauding's
own) - did not bring an original quality to this
film. The encyclopaedia writes: 'We must give
Gauding credit for the exceptionally involved
choirography of faces, voices, and bodies in Grand
Hotel where we look at the same settings in other movies of the
period ... we need only see Garbo as directed
by Clarence Brown or George Cukor to appreciate the
contribution of Edmund Gauding.
Gauding is exceptionally sensitive to the time it takes
the actresses to register thought through her gaze out
of presence' (343). While much how much credit
Gauding is due for such deeds as shot lengths
clarity of exposition on the transcripts, that credit
is due is not contested here.

126. Mordden, n.

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 poten-
tial sweep of the author historian's compass.
Effects may be reported by reviews, concurrent with a
theatrical release (or release, or video release),
or confined by the least of their symptoms;
the latest advancements in the
study of historical film reception. Mixing
for causes can, unexpectedly, reworked into a biographical
investigation of, for example, Barthes's rumination
on the face of Garbo: (Roland Barthes, Mythologies (New
York, The Noonday Press, 1972), 56–57), and
provide fresh angles from which to interrogate
these editor this cl aer's films how (and have
held) on ideal (and presumably historical) specula-
tors.

129. Mordden, 14.

130. Bordwell, Making Meaning, 270.

131. Foucault, 110.


133. Buscombe, 3-4.

134. Foucault, 119.

135. Jane M. Gaines, 'Introduction: The Family Mel-
drama of Classical Narrative Cinema,' Classical
Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars, ed. Jane
(1999), 1.

136. Bordwell, Steiner and Thompson, 78.

137. Gaines, 2.

138. Bordwell, Steiner and Thompson, 385.

139. Ibid., 81.

140. Ibid., 78.

141. Foucault, 119.

142. Perkins, 185.

143. Bordwell, Steiner and Thompson, 77.

144. Robert Sklar, Film, An International History of the

145. Bordwell's deductive comments here about film critic-
ism 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-pur-
pose; wholesale dismissals of prior writers’ work,
and periodic cycles of taste' (Bordwell, Making
Meaning, 30).


147. Ballo, 109–141.

148. Moreover, within Bordwell and Thompson's chapter
are signs of divergence from the approach as prac-
ticed 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, these individ-
uals operate within a broader context' (119). Focus
on broader contexts -- studios, firms, and profes-
sional organizations -- is a softened here, in the intro-
ductive subordinate clause of this sentence, with a refer-
cence to individuals. This tendency of individ-
uals 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, 'Kalma 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 was
never static at the start of the specimen scene
(described earlier in the chapter), he does obey
Crawford's suggestion in other sequences' (127).
Here, as in BST, the classical paradigm imposes
limits on individuals, but in its instance whose
implications are allowed to stand, individ-
uals' options are not fully circumscribed by stated
limits. (If an unstated limit harming Curtiz in at
the start of the specimen scene, the authors -- notably
seem to leave that to the 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 on Academy Technical Award' (128).

149. Perkins, 191.

150. Robert Sklar City Boys: Cagney, Bogart, Garfield

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

152. Ballo, 10.