

James Bernardoni. *The New Hollywood: What the Movies Did with the New Freedoms of the Seventies*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2001. 240 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-1206-8.

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## The New versus the Old Hollywood

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First published as a hardback “library bound edition” in 1991, James Bernardoni’s *The New Hollywood: What the Movies Did with the New Freedoms of the Seventies* has been reissued in paperback a decade later, as a “classic”; whether that is an appropriate adjective is a moot point. Certainly the texts on which it is based, such as V. F. Perkins’s *Film as Film* (1972) and Andre Bazin’s *What Is Cinema?* (1967), can be considered classic; however, these books were two decades old even when *The New Hollywood* was first published. This gives the book a dated feeling, in particular as other books on the same subject are not cited, such as Hans Blumenberg’s *New Hollywood* (1976), Michael Pye and Lynda Mules’s *The Movie Brats: How the Film Generation Took over Hollywood* (1979), and Robert Kolker’s *A Cinema of Loneliness* (which Bernardoni should also have been aware of since the first edition was published in 1980). Consequently, the debates around *New Hollywood* are not addressed, although it must be admitted that these arose mainly in the 1980s with Thomas Schatz, Jim Hillier, Justin Wyatt, and more recently, Geoff King. The chronology and the various aspects of *New Hollywood* simply pass Bernardoni by. His title does limit him to the 1970s but he does not address fully the Movie Brat syndrome as Peter Biskind does in his *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* or as equally as Robert Kolker. Limiting the period to the seventies creates a vacuum as the first traces of a revival, sometimes referred to as the Hollywood Renaissance, with the cycle from *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance*

*Kid*, and *Easy Riders*, receives only brief passing comments. Equally the key development of the Movie Brats becoming Movie Moguls with the Blockbuster is barely referred to and only in passing. The question more often posed is how the Movie Brats “sold out” rather than how they betrayed Old Hollywood, which is Bernardoni’s thesis.

Bernardoni places his thesis within the context of the New Hollywood and its “new freedoms,” but does not adequately analyze how these freedoms arose or what they were other than to indicate very briefly the decline of the studio system and television’s challenge. Whether these “new freedoms” were due to the changes within the industry or the new technologies, such as the CGI special effects or Dolby stereo, is not discussed at any length. Herein lies one of the main problems of Bernardoni’s approach, which is basically textually oriented through close visual analyses of thirteen films. The multiple entries in the index under “camera angle,” “close up,” “cuts,” “frame/framing,” “overhead shot,” “tracking shots,” etc. clearly indicate this. This reminds me of the sessions in film studies during the eighties where students sat by a wobbly Steenbeck and were asked to do a frame by frame analysis and time the shots and sequences to no great conclusions. However, to be fair, Bernardoni does bring together his analyses and make his points. Nevertheless, without the video or DVD at hand this is tedious. But one advantage would be to use these analyses as heuristic tools within a class seminar where the video or DVD was available and possibly to contrast them with the ap-

proach that David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson take in *Film Art: An Introduction*, which is the standard undergraduate textbook.

Bernardoni does not rank his auteurs in any systematic way within a Pantheon, as would Andrew Sarris, the great champion of auteur theory in America, though he does seem to give Spielberg a special low rung in his Inferno. He covers two Spielberg films, *Jaws* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, both of which he considers “bad.” The other self-styled auteurs he covers are George Lucas, Brian de Palma, Martin Scorsese, Robert Altman, and Francis Ford Coppola, all of whom fit into the Movie Brat pack of the seventies. But he also includes Woody Allen, who fits in awkwardly, as he is neither “new” nor indeed “Hollywood.” He likewise includes Bob Fosse, hardly a typical New Hollywood auteur. Not to be totally negative, Bernardoni concludes with a penultimate chapter on “Redeemers of the Lost Art” to discuss seventies films that nevertheless pass the Bernardoni quality tests. There he places a second Allen film, *Annie Hall*, and a second Altman, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*. But he also places there Don Siegel, who certainly would not have made it to Sarris’s Pantheon’s highest rungs and was very much Old Hollywood, being most famous for his 1956 cult horror B movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and also Peter Yates, famous for his 1968 *Bullitt*.

Bernardoni has a deep nostalgia for the Bazinian approach. Thus, in the index there are multiple entries for “long take,” while realism, *mise en scene*, and deep focus are constantly repeated as mantras of filmic virtue. On the other hand, brownie points are quickly lost for montage, symbolism, expressionism, and modernism. He worries that audiences are distanced, but that allusion, presumably to Brecht, is never explored (see p. 71, for example). Much was written in the eighties about Classical Hollywood style, but he does not engage with the key book on that subject by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson (*Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 1985), nor with Colin McCabe’s thesis about it being a continuation of the nineteenth-century realist novel, by other means. Much of film theory after Bazin and Sarris seems to have passed Bernardoni by.

Bernardoni organizes his criticisms around four “fallacies,” as he terms them, that these auteurs fall foul of. First is the television fallacy where the commercial TV mode of visual expression is copied to the detriment of film language by excessive cuts. He does not mention the aesthetic of ads nor the MTV style. It seems doubtful if directors, let alone studios, consciously attempted

to copy the TV “hyperactive visual style,” as he claims (p. 4). Here he is seriously outdated, for even though TV is becoming more and more digital, he still refers to “five hundred lines.” But the aesthetic is surely with us, though not necessarily just from TV. Indeed one wonders what he made of the whip pans in Welles’s *Magnificent Ambersons*. The literary fallacy he admits has long been with us, that film should be like novels and indeed based on them. But here he is most troubled by the modernist as opposed to the realist aesthetic. One might well argue that it was high time that American cinema caught up with the times, but Bernardoni considers that an inappropriate film language which must be realist by its very nature. Rather oddly Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* is the butt of that critique and Bernardoni claims Conrad’s novel has been betrayed. The Hitchcockian fallacy is “the belief that a film can properly be regarded as an exercise in style” (p. 9), where mere virtuosity replaces organic style. Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* falls foul of that. Finally the fourth, the Hawksian fallacy, is where auteurs aim to copy Howard Hawks but fail to emulate his moral seriousness and the moral camaraderie of groups of men using their skills to achieve a common end. He maintains that Hawks’s two modes of adventure and comedy have been debased to “mere entertainment” in the contemporary action/adventure or comedy. He clearly is in thrall of Howard Hawks, as is demonstrated by the multiple entries on Hawks in the bibliography, and considers that “the Hawksian canon is the quintessential expression of the art of the Old Hollywood” (p. 117). So *M\*A\*S\*H* and *Jaws* get reviled. Most interestingly, Bernardoni critiques two Spielberg films and writes, “Steven Spielberg, until his apparent decision to become the Walt Disney of the computer age, was the New Hollywood director who had seemed most interested in working in the adventure drama tradition of Howard Hawks. Spielberg’s exploitation of a genre Hawks raised to an art form is another indicator of the aesthetic decline that has befallen the American film during the New Hollywood era” (p. 127). Here is betrayal indeed! But the very nice phrase “the Walt Disney of the computer age,” which is so much more appropriate to the contemporary Spielberg of DreamWorks, merits far more development.

What at times makes this book seem unreliable and irritating is Bernardoni’s off-the-cuff judgments. He praises *Bonnie and Clyde* but derides *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. He summarizes Milos Forman’s career as moving “from ... the excellence of *Taking Off* into the television fallacy of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest* (1973) then recovered with *Hair* before moving onto the

Hitchcockian fallacy emptiness of *Amadeus*" (pp. 222-223). The exact opposite seems to me, at least, a sounder judgment.

Possibly the most glaring omission of this book is that of the 1977 Blockbuster, George Lucas's *Star Wars*, which barely gets a line as falling into the Hawksian fallacy of tending towards the aesthetic of the comic book rather than that of the morality play (p. 141). But there is nothing on how it transformed the whole industry and aesthetic of New Hollywood, or on how the Blockbuster is considered by many, like Geoff King, the cornerstone of New Hollywood.

This book has not been much used, as far as I know, partly because it was originally issued in the expensive hardback version. I have found it cited only in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (1988) by editors Steve Neale and Murray Smith, but not in *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (2002) by Geoff King. Bernadoni's "fallacies" have not engendered significant debate. Caveats aside, this book is worthy of a place in libraries of universities and colleges for it is clearly aimed at such, possessing all the required trappings of bibliography, filmography, footnote references, and indeed some good illustrations. Where film studies is taught, it will make a useful contribution on reading lists for studying the Movie Brat pack and for close textual analyses on Bazinian lines.

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