

The break point of classical Hollywood film: an approach to Art cinema on 1966-1975

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ABSTRACT

The discourse of Hollywood cinema is on the basis of the binary-commercial and artistic value. In fact, the conflict seems relieved and witnesses a win-win situation from 1966 to 1975 that is defined as New Hollywood. The aesthetic exploitation of New Hollywood is regarded as the link between the classical Hollywood and European art cinema. The Hollywood cinematic code as the fundament is inscribed on American cinema, and in spite of this, the influence of Cahiers du cinema and the realism make the New Hollywood recognizable. The essay states the characteristics of New Hollywood and the integration of artistic practices and the monolithic commercial Hollywood system.

KEYWORDS

the New Hollywood; Movie Brats; the binary-commercial and artistic value; the assimilation of art cinema into classical Hollywood; American auteurs

1 The traumatic generation/ Introduction

The discourse of Hollywood cinema is on the basis of the binary-commercial and artistic value. As Cook suggests, commercial motivation is the root of the antagonism between the art and interests of commodity production. For a long time, Hollywood as the studio system always approaches to the commerce. However, the conflict seems relieved and witnesses a win-win situation from 1966 to 1975. In other words, the catastrophe of studio system in 1950s gives Hollywood a chance face to face with the European art cinema even if dealing with the art cinema, at the origin aims to save the classical Hollywood. Due to the flourish of television and collapse of the established ideology, the old Hollywood system is faced with a succession of big-budget flops and successful imports of European art cinema, which gives a way to a group of young directors who is defined as Movie Brats(Schatz, 1993). These who retrospect the classical Hollywood while admire European art cinema as the new blood quickly penetrate into the late-1960s Hollywood and bring a new concept 'New Hollywood' distinct from the Old Hollywood. The New Hollywood is the wide conception as it includes the long period and lots of films. *Jaw* released in 1975 as the marker implies that in the mid-1970s, New Hollywood arrives the commercial culmination. The years between 1967 and 1975 as the transition from the old Hollywood and new Hollywood is called 'the Golden Age of the New Hollywood by Elsaesser. It is true, since it breaks the classical Hollywood system and welcomes American film renaissance.

The emergence of New Hollywood is not accidental. That is, New Hollywood to some extent is in accord with audiences' ideological status. After the mid-1960s, the classical movie audience is replaced by the young generation who is college-educated and more affluent. However, such the generation can be seen as the traumatic generation. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, American is trapped in the political and cultural discrepancy. The assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and Vietnam War break down the American dream and furthermore destroy the established values. The young generation placed in traumatic position suffer from the moral bankruptcy of ideological confidence in American culture and consequently, they go against the established culture. Apparently, the Old Hollywood system fails to match with their ideological status and instead, the films made by Movie Brats relieve them of the moral malaise. As a matter of the fact, faced with the disorder, the emergence of New-Hollywood films as a new way guides the traumatic generation to go on.

2 The miscellany of classical Hollywood and European art cinema

The aesthetic exploitation of New Hollywood is regarded as the link between the classical Hollywood and European art cinema. Based on the old studio system, Movie Brats cannot be divorced from the classical Hollywood film. In fact, as Carroll writers, the New Hollywood filmmakers appreciate the past genres and recreate classic codes. No matter of the Old Hollywood or New Hollywood, the Hollywood cinematic code as the fundament is inscribed on American cinema. In spite of this, the influence of Cahiers du cinema make the New Hollywood recognizable. The series of political and social upheavals not only bring the changing modes of perception, but also disillusion the public. Indeed, the audience gets tired of the classical representation of dramatically beautiful life or romantic love and as a result, it gives a way to

'realism'. Bazin argues that cinema is construction of reality; more specifically, he believes in the image and on the basis of it, the ideological reality which is in the mind can be represented. The directors affected by the realism build the dramatic power on the image and practice the aesthetics of *anschauung* that to maximum extent keeps the integral reality of the image. They prefer the long take and depth of field which respects the continuity of dramatic duration and produces levels of ambiguity. Under the realistic impact, some of the New Hollywood films can be included in the group of 'phenomenological realism' that deploy the continuity of action and the temporal narrative dimension. *The conversation* is the vivid example of respecting the continuity of real life; that is to say, the film turns the reality into the spectacle. The dramatic power builds on the relatively complete image instead of tampering with the integral reality. The image of *the conversation* is more neutral such as the use of long take and camera movements at the begging which objectively express the background of the story. Coppola relies all of the expression on the characters and assembles the film on the basis of the existing reality. In contrast to, the assemblage of the traditional studio film artificially break up scenes into shots in order to create dramatic duration.

As votaries of Cahiers du Cinéma, Movie Brats expresses the mania of 'auteur theory' that in effect supports them in antagonism toward the classical studio system. The New Hollywood claims that filmmakers as the auteur-artists is the focal point of organization of the film. As a matter of the fact, 'La camera-stylo': the term first mentioned by Astruc means that filmmakers write with cameras as writers write with pens which gives filmmakers more freedom to create films and consequently, the films is marked with the directors' personal style. Auteur theory supports the young American directors to do more than capitalistic voice and instead, makes authorial voice heard in films, which counter to the old industrial system. Thus, to some extent Movie Brats arms themselves with auteur theory. In fact, since the 1960s the theory is introduced into film schools, Movie Brats enthusiastically follow the footprint of their worshipful auteurs, regardless of whether they are American auteurs such as Hitchcock, Ford and Welles or European auteurs such as Truffaut, Godard and Antonioni. *Easy Rider* comes out from the ash of the studio system and shocks American cinema as it builds on the auteur's cinema and goes against the aesthetic imperatives of the old Hollywood. The film is totally different from the classical films; more exactly, Hopper makes the authorship strong and conspicuous in the film. As Bordwell suggests, the authorship is imprinted on the film by the different cinematic codes and in general, any breakdown of cause-effect logical motivation can be regarded as the authorial commentary. Hopper more than ones intrudes into *Easy Rider* and as a result, the film looks like the experimental cinema. Specifically, the film adopts the flash frames and hand-held shooting. The sequences is several times cut into interjected scenes such as hallucinatory dream and previous/afterward sequences, which destroys the causal continuity.

3 Face to face: the two kinds of Blow-Up

Due to the loss of confidence in fixed American social institution and culture, Movie Brats conceives the idea of transforming the old system into the new artistic system that assimilates into the European art cinema. *The Conversation* can be considered as *Blow-Up* of the American version because it inherits the style and motif from the *Blow-Up*. According to the conventional editing, there is the "content curve": once the content of an image peaks up the content curve, the shot should be cut. However, Antonioni betrays such the classical rule. In *Blow-Up*, the image is cut after the curve, which is one of the salient features of Antonioni's style: keeping the camera going even the shot where nothing happens. Such the characteristic can also be perceived in *The Conversation*. In the film, there are several shots that last bit longer than would be strictly necessary for them to make point; for example, the camera fails to move with Caul that leaves the empty room in the screen.

The classical Hollywood has definite and formulaic narrative and on the basis of it, the character always has a clear goal to achieve, which shows the classical Hollywood attitude to the world is affirmative. Compare with it, art-house point of view is opposite; that is, it represent the world based on the ambiguous attitude and art-cinema protagonists is powerless and negative to be shifted from one situation to the next. As Bordwell argues, the characters is placed at aimless and void situation. Furthermore, in contrast to the classical Hollywood characters' psychologically-round personality, art cinema is inclined to represent the real personality that retains real innermost paradox and sensibility. These features make art cinema unique and New Hollywood film distinct from old Hollywood film. Specifically, New Hollywood filmmakers put depressive and oddball characters on the screen and the films are enriched by delicacy mood and sensibility. In *The Conversation*, Caul as the isolated even self-destructive hero has complex psychological status. At the begging, he seems confident and clear to control what he is doing but gradually he realizes the situation out of his control and finally, he is trapped into the helpless disaster paralyzed with powerlessness. According to Deleuze, the hero is caught in traumatized status and fails to respond. Deleuze mentions the sensory motor schema constituted by three images: the perception-image, the affection-image and the action-image respectively. Normally, characters percept the situation then react to it and finally the reaction leads them to take action. However, New Hollywood characters break the sensory motor link since they are left paralyzed by the situation beyond their actions where they cannot do any reactions. In fact, such the

disruption of causality cannot match with the linear narrative and instead, it is suitably represented by art-cinema narrative. Johuston defines such the narrative as the drifting episodic narrative discourse and moreover, the picaresque narrative depends on characters' subjective status. In *The Conversation*, the spatial and temporal continuity is obstructed by the images of the couple's conversation as they walk through crowded Union Square. Such the image with the record is cut again and again throughout the movie. Also the sequence of Caul's imagination and dream constructs a kind of subjective verisimilitude rather than the verisimilitude of fictional time and space. For example, the scenario that Caul flushes the clogged toilet and torrents of blood come flowing out visualizes his fear and helpless. Compared to the subordination to plot of classical narrative system, the loose structure privileges the characters' mood. Therefore, the spectators identify with real and complex heroes, especially their emotion rather than action.

The final image of Harry Caul playing his saxophone amidst the wreckage ends the film with the open-ended closure and leaves the ambiguity. As Bordwell suggests, ambiguity is one of permanent motifs in art cinema since the life is too complex to present by the neatness of art so that the only way to restore the nature of life as much as possible is to leave questions unanswered.

4 The genuine transition / Conclusion

As Elsaesser suggests, the cinema stands on the unique place since it owes its existence to the interaction of capitalism and state. As a matter of fact, from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, American political and cultural cataclysm breaks down the old social institution and cultivates a new ideology. In 1966 the breakdown of Hollywood's production code and in 1968 the establishment of new ratings system, all of these prove the existence of the group of young audiences who experience the upheaval and dissatisfy with the old ideas. The appearance of New Hollywood accords with their new values. In addition, the collapse of the classical studio system opens the way for developing the new cinematic style; that is, New Hollywood film. New Hollywood as the feedback from European art cinema to classical Hollywood film, at the origin stands on the intermediate place. The crossover in essential, is the communication between art and commerce. It is undeniable that there is a clear gap between art cinema and commercial cinema. However, New Hollywood attempts to fulfill the gap by integrating the artistic practices into the monolithic commercial Hollywood system. Such the pastiche intelligently relieves the Hollywood crisis, opens the classical genres and styles and gives the old Hollywood new vitality.

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