

Chapter 1

History and Genre

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Introduction

History and genre are the two basic parameters used when categorizing films: We want to know both when a film was produced and what kind of film it is.

The history of film is simplified by its shortness. In the case of Hollywood, it is enough to talk about three major historical periods — those of early cinema, classical Hollywood cinema, and post-classical Hollywood cinema. Each of these periods is characterized by certain technological developments and patterns of industrial organization. Artistically, too, films from a given period of film history tend to display certain characteristic features.

Genres are the categories into which, on the basis of shared characteristics, we place artistic, musical, literary or **cinematic** (电影的) works; **subgenres** (副类型, 次类型) are similar, although they are more limited and more precisely defined. There is considerable debate concerning how the concept of “genre” should be defined, which genres actually exist, and how individual films should be classified. Nevertheless, the concept of genre remains the best way of organizing films into meaningful groups, and also a useful guide as to the potentially significant elements of a given film.

Early Cinema

Although the technological **groundwork** (基础) for cinema was laid by the invention of photography in 1826, it would be many decades before it could be adapted to create a motion

picture. The main problem with these early photographs — from the point of view of prospective **filmmakers** (电影摄制者) — was that the exposure time was too long for the production of moving images. Faster exposures were later made possible, but only on glass plate film that could not be fed through a camera or **projector** (投影仪). The key breakthrough came in 1889 with the introduction by **Kodak** (柯达公司) of a thin flexible film base (i.e. **celluloid** (赛璐珞, 明胶)) that could be drawn past the **lens** (镜头, 透镜) at a high enough speed to film and project a series of **frames** (画面, 镜头) in rapid succession. The next step — the development of cameras able to film moving images — was made independently in America and France by Edison and the **Lumière brothers** respectively. However, since Edison was unconvinced of the potential of the moving picture, it was the Lumière brothers who were left to develop the projection system. One of the first public exhibitions of the new technology occurred on 28 December 1895 at the Grand Café in Paris. By this time, the fundamental technology was in place; all that was required was its development and commercialization.

This occurred in parallel in France and in the USA. In France, the Lumière brothers produced an immense number of films — mainly of important events and exotic destinations — in the period up to 1905. At that point they ceased filmmaking altogether, and the French **phonograph** (留声机) company **Pathé Frères** (帕太·弗雷尔公司) took the lead, remaining the largest film company in the world until World War I disrupted international distribution and forced it to cut back production. Meanwhile, in the USA, three main companies had emerged and were beginning to exhibit their films through the **nickelodeons** (五分钱电影院) (small-scale cinemas whose cost of entry was one **nickel** (五分镍币, 五美分), or five cents). These nickelodeons were a **phenomenal** (非凡的) success: Their number rose from 1,000 in 1905, to 6,000 in 1908, and to a peak of 10,000 in 1910, serving an estimated 26 million customers every week. The **fledgling** (初具雏形的) film industry, determined to expand its audience base, also began to invest in large luxurious theatres **catering to** (迎合) the middle classes. Their strategy paid off, and by 1915 audiences had almost doubled again, reaching 49 million per week.¹

Industry structure in the period of early cinema differed significantly from that which would emerge later. Production was based initially on the so-called “**cameraman** (摄影师) system”, according to which films were the product of one individual (the “cameraman”) who took charge of planning, writing, filming, and editing; only towards the end of the period was the director given charge of a group of workers with clearly **delineated** (描绘, 表述)

Lumière brothers: 吕米埃尔兄弟, 法国人, 于 1895 年拍摄了世界上第一部电影——《火车进站》。

roles, and a producer appointed who would take responsibility for planning and budgeting.² The industry in America was monopolized by two companies, **Edison** (爱迪生公司) and **Biograph** (贝尔格拉夫公司), that had jointly set up the Motion Pictures Patents Company (**MPPC** (电影专利公司)), a patent pool that was used to collect royalties from firms licensed to use patented camera and projection technology. This anti-competitive behaviour attracted the attention of the Justice Department, and an **anti-trust** (反托拉斯的, 反垄断的) claim was filed against the MPPC in 1912. The verdict, delivered in 1915, was that the MPPC was to break up, paving the way for a new stage in the history of cinema.

From an aesthetic point of view, early cinema bears little in common with the cinema of today. The most prominent characteristic of the early films is that they commonly sought to record and represent aspects of “real life”. They usually consisted simply of a single long-distance shot of a single figure (often a celebrity or sports personality), place (perhaps a scenic spot), or action (some kind of everyday activity or news event). Fictional **scenarios** (场景), when they did occur, were usually little more than **gags** (插科打诨), **vaudeville** (歌舞杂耍) performances, or **re-enactments** (再次展现) of real events. This “**actuality filming** (真实摄影)” differs greatly from the predominant tendency of classical and post-classical cinema to present fictional stories. The second obvious difference is that early cinema relied primarily on spectacle rather than narrative. Comedy sketches, magic shows, or simply images of moving vehicles — these are what lay at the heart of the early cinema. It is for this reason that the early cinema has been called “the cinema of attractions”.³

Classical Hollywood Cinema

The period of classical Hollywood cinema is usually taken to run from the early 1920s through to the late 1950s. It witnessed important technological advances, the most important of which were the arrival of sound and colour. Yet neither could be introduced without “**teething troubles** (出牙期的疼痛, <寓>事情开始时的暂时困难)”, and both required a process of gradual adaptation. Sound — introduced by Warner Brothers in *Don Juan* (《唐璜》) (1926) — raised initial problems because the microphones would pick up unwanted background noises, such as the sound of the camera in operation. This **necessitated** (使必需) placing the camera inside a sound booth, which restricted both its movement and that of the performers. Colour technology in the 1920s was initially limited by its expense and crudity; by the 1930s the quality had improved, although it remained expensive and necessitated the development of new lighting techniques. Despite these initial obstacles, both sound and colour were, of course, destined to become **staple** (主要的) ingredients of the Hollywood film.

From the industrial perspective, the period is characterized by the emergence of the “studio system” and the domination of five major companies (the so-called “Big Five”): **Warner Brothers** (华纳兄弟公司), **Loew’s-MGM** (米高梅公司), **Fox** (福克斯公司), **Paramount** (派拉蒙公司) and **Radio-Keith-Orpheum** (RKO, 雷电华公司). Alongside the five majors were three smaller companies (the “Little Three”): **Columbia** (哥伦比亚公司), **Universal** (环球公司) and **United Artists** (联美公司). These eight companies together constituted an **oligopoly** (寡头垄断) and pursued a strategy of vertical integration, whereby each company would seek to combine production, distribution, and exhibition functions. The economic **rationale** (基本原理) is obvious: Vertical integration ensured control of the whole process from production to exhibition, so that a company could guarantee that films were produced according to its own specifications and exhibited as required. The industrial and economic **might** (力量, 威力) of the studios further allowed them to exert control over independent players through methods such as advance block-booking, which forced exhibitors to book in advance a full year’s output from an individual company.

If early cinema was primarily a “cinema of attractions”, classical Hollywood cinema was a cinema of narrative. Early directors had taken the first uncertain steps towards the logic of **linear** (直线性的) narrative, but it was later directors such as D.W. Griffith and Buster Keaton who properly began to employ more sophisticated narrative-based methods of cinematic storytelling. From the period of classical Hollywood **onwards** (向前), the now familiar narrative ingredients of film—such as **causality** (因果关系), **temporal** (时间的) logic, motivated action, and plot resolutions—were all in place. In addition, filmmakers mastered the art of **continuity editing** (连续剪辑), with the result that cutting between one shot and the next would become much less conspicuous. With narrative illogicalities excluded and awkward visual transitions ironed out, Hollywood film gradually became a much smoother and more polished product.

Classical Hollywood was the era in which the “star” was born, and “star vehicles” — films built specifically around a number of major stars — became the most reliably profitable of the Hollywood productions. Unlike modern-day stars, however, the stars of classical Hollywood were controlled by long-term contracts signed with the major studios, and the studios determined the roles they were to play. Studios would also take it upon themselves to construct a “star **persona** (角色, 人格面貌)” for the star in question, generating **extra-filmic** (电影之外的) publicity and gossip to promote and sustain interest in the star as a commodity. Stars also had the secondary economic function of generating interest in other commodities through the techniques of the “**tie-in** (销售一些和电影有关的商品的行为)” and product placement.

The period of classical Hollywood was, finally, the period in which the major cinematic genres emerged. The development of sound technology by Warner Brothers was originally motivated by the intention of displaying vaudeville acts on the big screen; the unintended result was the evolution of the musical as a genre, with its characteristic use of **musical numbers** (插曲) inserted into a linear narrative. Most of the other major genres — **horror** (恐怖片), **gangster** (黑帮片), **science fiction** (科幻片) and **war** (战争片), as well as *film noir* (黑色电影) — also developed into relatively well-defined forms in this period.

The Ideology of Classical Hollywood Cinema

The classical Hollywood cinema is not a “value-free” set of aesthetic norms and formal principles; it also embodies an ideology. This ideology is never stated explicitly, but can nevertheless be detected through the set of values and assumptions underlying Hollywood film of the period.

Some of the main features of this ideology are, according to Robin Wood:

- * **Property, Enterprise** (事业), **Initiative** The fundamental American values.
- * **The Work Ethic** Classical Hollywood applauds the notion of “honest toil”, and is suspicious of idleness; work is associated, positively, with the **sublimation** (升华) of the **libido** (“利比多”<弗洛伊德心理分析学说中的精神动力, 实际上即是性的本能>).
- * **Marriage, Family, and Home** The notion of marriage here extends to include that of property: “my house, my wife, my children”.
- * **Progress, Technology, the City** (“New York, New York, it’s a wonderful town.”)
- * **Success and Wealth** Classical Hollywood implicitly **extols** (赞美) success and wealth, but is at the same time ashamed to do so and seeks to cover its tracks with a contradictory ideology of “money isn’t everything; money corrupts; the poor are happier”.
- * **America as a Land of Happiness** Classical Hollywood persistently suggests that everyone can potentially achieve happiness in America, even if they haven’t yet done so, and that radical change is not necessary. Hence the **ubiquitous** (无所不在的) “happy ending”.
- * **The Ideal Male** The ideal male is a **virile** (有男子气概的) man of action; his opposite, the stable homemaker, is dependable but dull and unattractive.
- * **The Ideal Female** The ideal female is wife and mother, perfect companion and **mainstay** (支柱) of the home; her opposite, the **erotic** (具有性吸引力的) woman, is fascinating but dangerous.⁴

This ideology is most prominent in the period of classical Hollywood but — since it is at root part of a much broader *American* ideology — these values may structure the films of any period.

Post-Classical Hollywood Cinema

Hollywood faced a number of significant challenges from the 1960s onwards. The statistics give a clue as to the magnitude of the problem: In 1946, one third of the American public went to the cinema once a week; in 1980, the numbers had dropped to fewer than one quarter going once a month.⁵

From the perspective of the major studios, one of the first major problems was the 1949 anti-trust case **lodged** (正式提出) against Paramount, alleging that its ownership of cinemas as well as production and distribution facilities constituted monopolistic practice; the result was that the majors, who had been able to control the industry through domination of both distribution and exhibition, were prohibited from owning cinemas. Now reduced to distribution alone, they had no guaranteed market for their products. The situation was **exacerbated** (恶化) by the growth of television in the 1950s, which drew audiences away from the big screen and towards the small. The prosperity of the American economy as a whole might have brought some cause for optimism, had it not also allowed many Americans to move away from the cities (where cinemas were located) and into the suburbs (where they weren't). All this was made worse by Hollywood's own over-investment in production.

The industry had no choice but to respond. One tactic was to adjust the supply and demand **dynamic** (动态, 对抗性态势) by, on the one hand, restricting the supply of films; and, on the other, seeking to stimulate demand by increasing the proportion of budgets spent on marketing. Another tactic was to deal with the problem of television through cooperation rather than direct competition—by selling/leasing films to TV, making films especially for TV, or even merging with TV companies. Associated problems created by the popularization of video, DVD, **pay-per-view** (付费点播电视服务) TV and **cable** (有线电视) were tackled in a similarly cooperative manner through the use of “distribution windows” to ensure that the maximum audience would be captured: The film would be released first on the big screen for a window of about 6 months, followed by a release on DVD/video for a window of an indefinite length; after this would come a release on pay-per-view TV, premium cable film channel, and then network TV. The net result of these industrial-level readjustments has been a growing awareness that the future of the film industry lies not only on the big screen, but also on the increasing variety of other exhibition formats now available.⁶

In terms of the films themselves, post-classical Hollywood can be divided into two major sub-periods. The first is that of the “New Hollywood” (or “renaissance”) period of the late 1960s and 1970s, in which a new generation of directors came to the **forefront** (最前线) with a series of immense hits — **Francis Ford Coppola** with *The Godfather* (《教父》) (1972), **William Friedkin** with *The Exorcist* (《驱魔人》) (1973), **Martin Scorsese** with *Taxi Driver* (《出租汽车司机》) (1976), **Steven Spielberg** with *Close Encounters* (《第三类接触》) (1977) and **George Lucas** with *Star Wars* (《星球大战》) (1977). These directors, who had been trained in university film schools rather than the studio system, came to be known as the “movie brats (小孩, 小家伙)” ; they combined a mastery of the technical aspects of filmmaking with a thorough knowledge of the aesthetics and history of the cinema. Despite being admirers of the tradition of classical Hollywood, they were also able to draw for ideas and inspiration on the “art films” of the European tradition. Since the 1980s fresh talents have emerged as pioneers of a “New New Hollywood”. Some of these later **entrant** (新加入者) have come from outside the USA, and others have worked in the independent sector prior to their arrival in Hollywood. The result is a highly diversified array of directorial talent.⁷

Post-classical Hollywood is a cinema that draws on the traditions of classical Hollywood in a flexible, **eclectic** (兼容并蓄的, 变通的) manner. Genres remain, but their conventions are observed less strictly. Causal relationships still form the basis of Hollywood narrative, but the connections between events are looser and temporal logic may occasionally be **flouted** (轻视). **Protagonists** (主角) in classical Hollywood are normally motivated to achieve a goal; in post-classical Hollywood, the protagonist may instead be “aimless”. And where classical Hollywood is marked by the attempt to achieve an “invisible style”, post-classical Hollywood sometimes foregrounds its **stylistic** (<艺术>风格上的) devices — whether in an attempt to demonstrate the filmmaker’s artistic **pretensions** (主张, 意图) or simply in order to attract and stimulate the audience.

Francis Ford Coppola: 弗朗西斯·福特·科波拉, 1939年生于美国底特律, 祖籍意大利。代表作有《教父》系列、《巴顿将军》(编剧)、《现代启示录》、《斗鱼》等。

William Friedkin: 威廉姆·弗莱德金, 1935年生于美国芝加哥。执导的电影包括《驱魔人》、《法国贩毒网》等。

Martin Scorsese: 马丁·斯科西斯, 1942年生于纽约, 祖籍意大利。执导的电影包括《出租汽车司机》、《基督最后的诱惑》、《纯真年代》、《纽约黑帮》等。

Steven Spielberg: 史蒂文·斯皮尔伯格, 1946年生于美国俄亥俄州。执导的电影包括《第三类接触》、《E.T. 外星人》、《辛德勒名单》、《拯救大兵瑞恩》等。

George Lucas: 乔治·卢卡斯, 1944年生于美国加利福尼亚州。执导的主要作品是《星球大战》系列。