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C O N T E N T S

P R O L O G U E

The central theme of this thesis will be an exploration of how possible it is for dissident film makers working within the Hollywood system to make work which is effective on personal and political levels while avoiding compromising their work to the extent where it would lose its' integrity. The term dissidency as applied to certain Hollywood film makers embraces a variety of formal, ideological, personal and aesthetic approaches which operate within the confines of the Hollywood system. This would include directors as dispirate as Schrader and Lynch. The former being regarded as one of the most personal filmakers at present, making work which is explorative on social, personal and artistic levels while working within the formal parameters of the commercial cinema. The latter director achieved noteriety by producing innovative work in terms of their formal properties, but which do not, alas, extend to challenging the dominant ideology.

Essentially the position which all dissident Hollywood film makers share is one which straddles that of the commercial movie-maker with that of the non-commercial cineaste. It could be said that by working with a film structure or form that is redolent of capitalist ideology cancels out a film's ability to offer an effective social or political alternative point of view. Monaco outlined in a "Tentative, rough typology of cinema and politics".(Monaco The Costa Gavras Syndrome 1982, p.2) two other alternative forms of filmaking to that of the regular narrative fulm. One is to be a revolutionary film maker, these film makers, however, according to Monaco, have a tendency to work in Countries where revolution has already happened
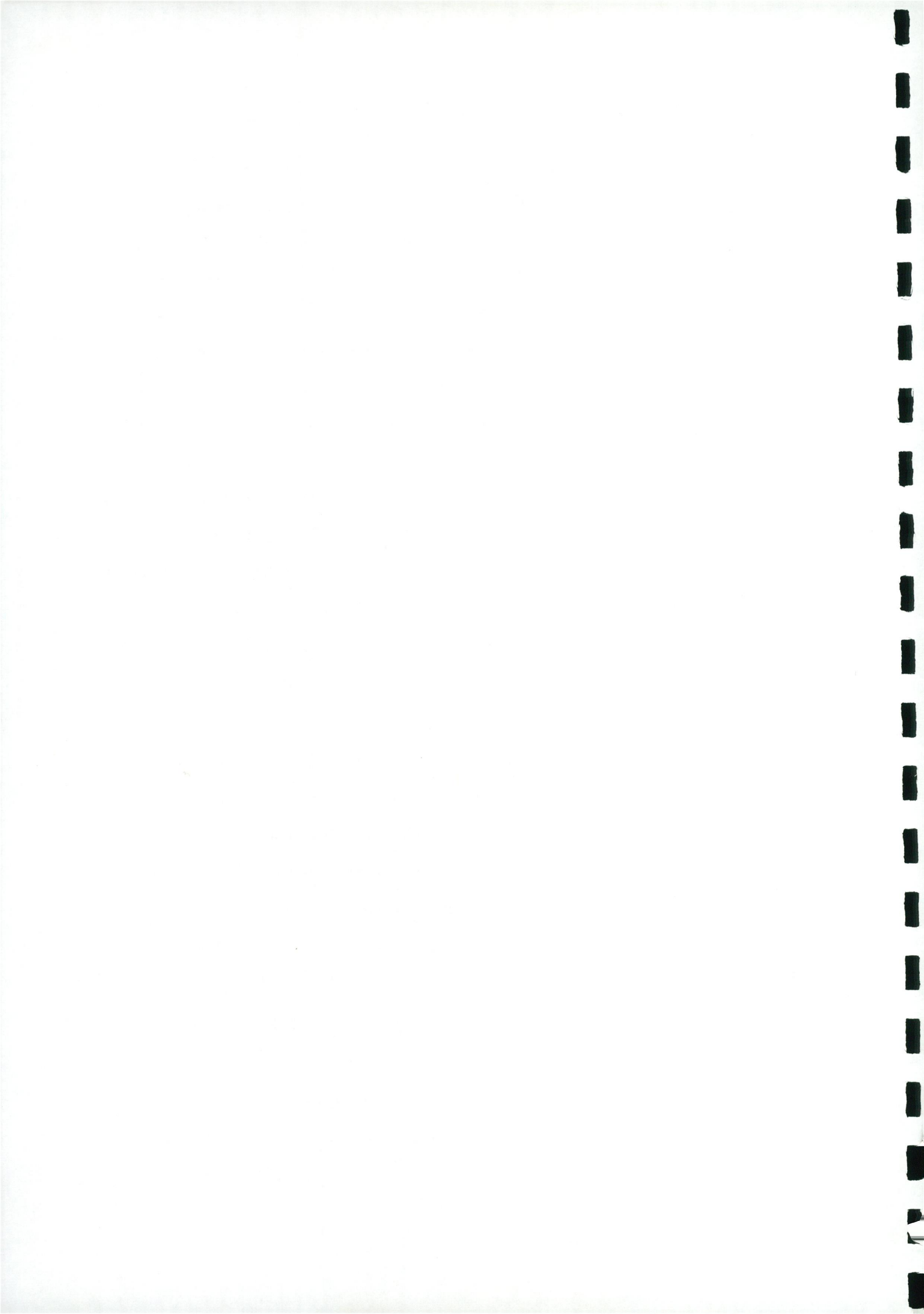
Otherwise, due to its' narrow focus, such cinema has very much
a minority audience appeal. The other category is that of the
structural/analytical, where "form takes precedence over reality
and theory supercedes action...(which) is a kind of aesthetics of
polotics rather than a political aesthetics" (Monaco The Costa
Gavras Syndrome 1982 p.4) The central problem for a film maker
who wants their work to be a political act is that it is essential
to consider the relationship between it and the audience - as
Monaco again so eloquently put it "If noone watches it, a film for
all intents and purposes doesn't exist" (Monace The Costa Gavras
Syndrome 1982, p.3). The most workable solution then is, I beleive,
to make a film sufficiently appealing (for example by using estab-
lished devices) to attract an audience into the cinema, and while
there watching the film, to try and set up a dialectical relation-
ship with the viewer.

Such a solution may also have bearing for those who work with film
on a more artistic than political level. Essentially, someone want-
ing to make a film expressing personal issues, still needs an audience
to make it, in some sense, complete. For a lot of personal film makers
it is satisfactory to experiemnt with form and ideas and present their
work to a like-minded, if small, audience. Others consider it pos-
sible - and preferable - to maintain a personal vision in their work
using accesible narrative structures, and still retain artistic integ-
rity. They body of this thesis will hopefully support their position.

American film making is now in a period called the "New Hollywood"
which began shortly after the second world war, but did not gain
momentum until the mid to late sixties. From this time to the present

the meaning of what "New Hollywood" was about, has at different times meant different things. We could begin by charting its' development from its' inception up to the nineties, in order to identify and explain its' changes, economically, formally, ideologically and/or otherwise. The present identity of "New Hollywood" as outlined will form a basis for a discussion of dissident film makers working within that system. A series of questions will be put forward, relating to the nature of their work, and the motivation behind it. These will be answered in the rest of the thesis, which will hopefully ascertain what degree of success these film makers have had in achieving the usually difficult balance between maintaining artistic and/or political integrity in their work and of making this commercially viable. At the very least, the importance of their work and of their position as a vital alternative film making force within the commercial Hollywood system will be clarified.

The thesis will be presented in several sections, the first two discussing individual film makers, and the last devoted to film makers who have reworked established generic structures. This approach is being used to demonstrate the many diverse voices which give dissident Hollywood its' interest and strength.

INTRODUCTION

Before the Second World War, Hollywood studios operated in a
factory-like manner, mass-producing films, with stars, directors
and crew on contract. The films were shown in studio owned
theatre chains, to a predominantly urban public. Several factors
effectively put a stop to the golden age of Hollywood. One of
the main reasons was the proliferation of television in people's
homes in the early fifties. The second, and more important reason
was the Paramount decree in 1948, by the American Supreme Court,
which changed Hollywood film making into a more freelance
commercial operation. The major studios were deprived of their
theatre chains and were prohibited from using other controlling
tactics of the market. The vertical studio system was thus
fragmented. The film-makers and stars then, being more indep-
endent, came to have a more powerful position, being now able to
choose which films they wanted to do, to command larger fees, and
at times gaining the status of authorship of films they worked on.
Studios then began to assume the role of financing and distrib-
uting independent film projects.

The routine classical films, which the studios produced up to the
forties, generated modest and almost guaranteed profits (any film
ofthis time in Hollywood to gross over five million dollars was
considered a huge success). This gave way, by the mid-fifties, to
a less commercially stable time in Hollywood, when the concept of
the calculated blockbuster movie began to take shape. One of the
earliest examples of Hollywood's calculated blockbusters was
David O. Selznick's hugely budgeted, star-laden epic Duel in the
Sun (1946). After poor sneak preview reportings, a huge promotion
and release campaign was put into operation which resulted in huge

earnings of 11.3 million dollars in rentals. This,

Selznick believed to be a "tremendous milestone in motion

picture merchandising and exhibition".   This would also seem to

have set the pattern for the Hollywood major movie machine

thereafter.(Schatz, Film Theory Goes To The Movies,1993)

Ideologically, the fifties was a conservative time in America,

with a pronounced swing to the right (more than likely one of the

political ramifications of the Second World War, where the extremes

of communism and capitalism became entrenched in the political life

of the Western world). The famous Senator Joe McCarthy played

his part too for President and country, by soldering nationalist

feeling with capitalism, and initiating a latter-day version of the

Spanish inquisition. This had great effect on film-making in

Hollywood, by purging it of anyone suspected of holding subver-

sive ideas or criticisms of the system. Thus, many innovative

film-makers were lost to Hollywood at this time, and if any liberal

ideas were expressed in films then, it was done so indirectly.

Formally, elements such as colour, wide-screen and stereoscopic

sound were established in Hollywood cinema, mainly due to compet-

ition with television as a means of attracting audiences. Some of

the films that best profited from these developments were expansive

musical spectacles (which mainly served to uphold the conservative

ideology of their day). However, a phenomenon of the forties which

which to some extent counterbalanced its reactionary mide of movie-

making was the emergence of film noir, so-called because of its

darkly-lit, shadowy urban dramas. These films combined elements of

the thriller, detective story and melodrama. While some noir films

conveyed a sense of the cold war induced paranoia in America then,

James Maraco suggests that the literary roots of film noir were in

the detective novels of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, both
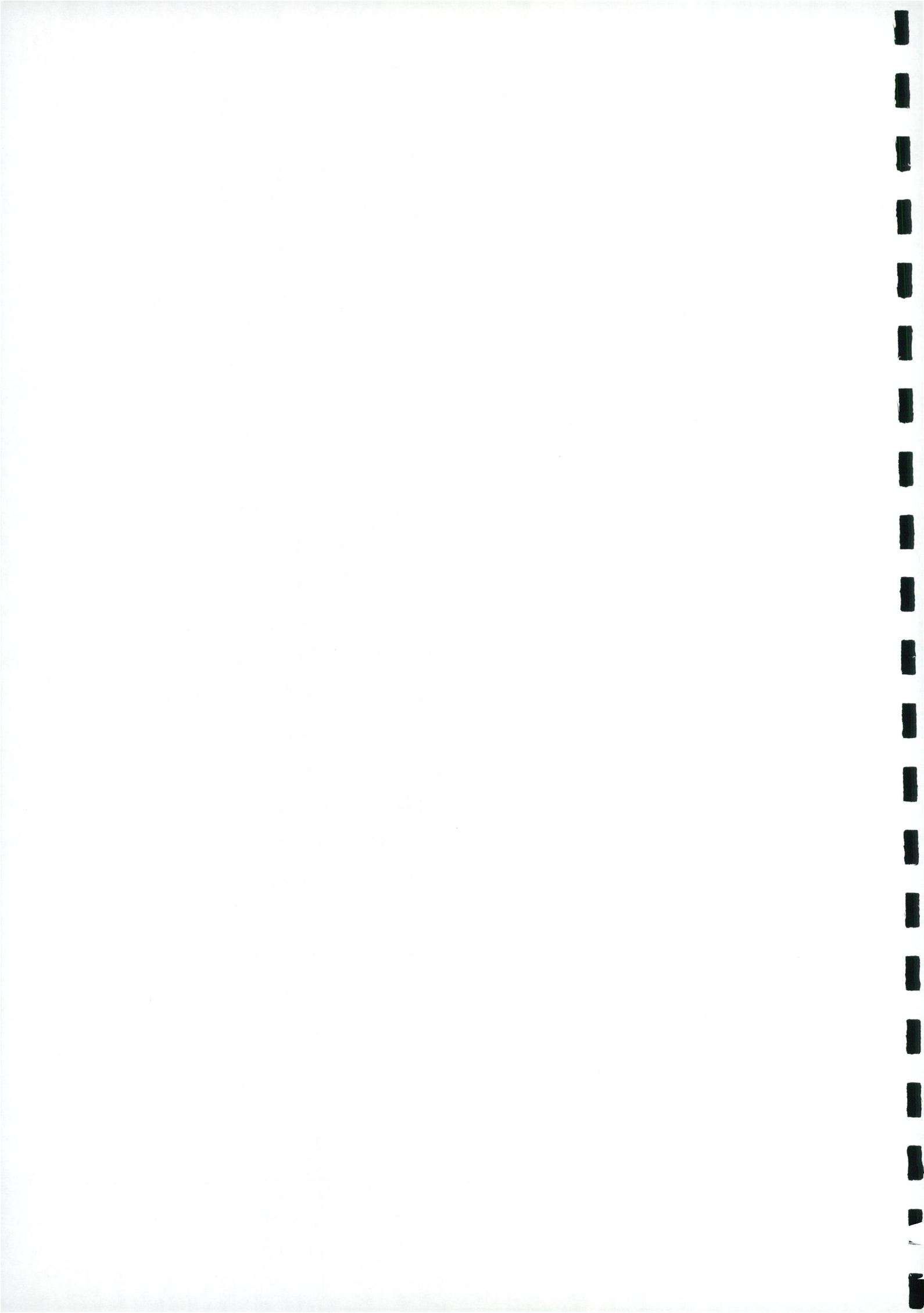
of whom were sympathetic with leftist politics (The Big
Sleep [1946]) one of the earliest films of the genre, was
based on a novel by Chandler). Film Noir had important reper-
cussions on American film-making in later generations,
particularly in style and atmosphere, some examples of which
will be discussed in later sections.

Another ramification of the introduction of television was that
hollywood had to diversify its films to appeal to more
specialised tastes and markets. This came about in the sixties,
where revolutionary changes were taking place, socially and
politically. As a result of the post-war baby boom during this
decade, there was a growing youth culture, which was largely
responsible for initiating these dramatic changes. The
dissolution of the homogenous audience therefore, forced
Hollywood to cater for newly augmented sections of society.
Mainly, these consisted of the emerging youth culture and other
minority groups such as the civil rights movements of the Blacks
and Feminists, which gathered strength in the sixties, demanding
legislation for equality. These social developments may, as well,
have been a response to the breath of fresh air that President
Kennedy represented, being the youngest and one of the most
liberal Presidents in American history. A "New Left" movement
also emerged, mostly as a protest response to America's military
involvement in Vietnam. It was also actively involved in
bringing about social change. Another manifestation of this
revolutionary decade was the counter-culture, which was socially
challenging in a less organised way, being concerned with
preserving a hip life-style of drug sharing and communal living
more than with the political ideology of the "New Left". Anti-
consumerism was about the only common denominator between the two
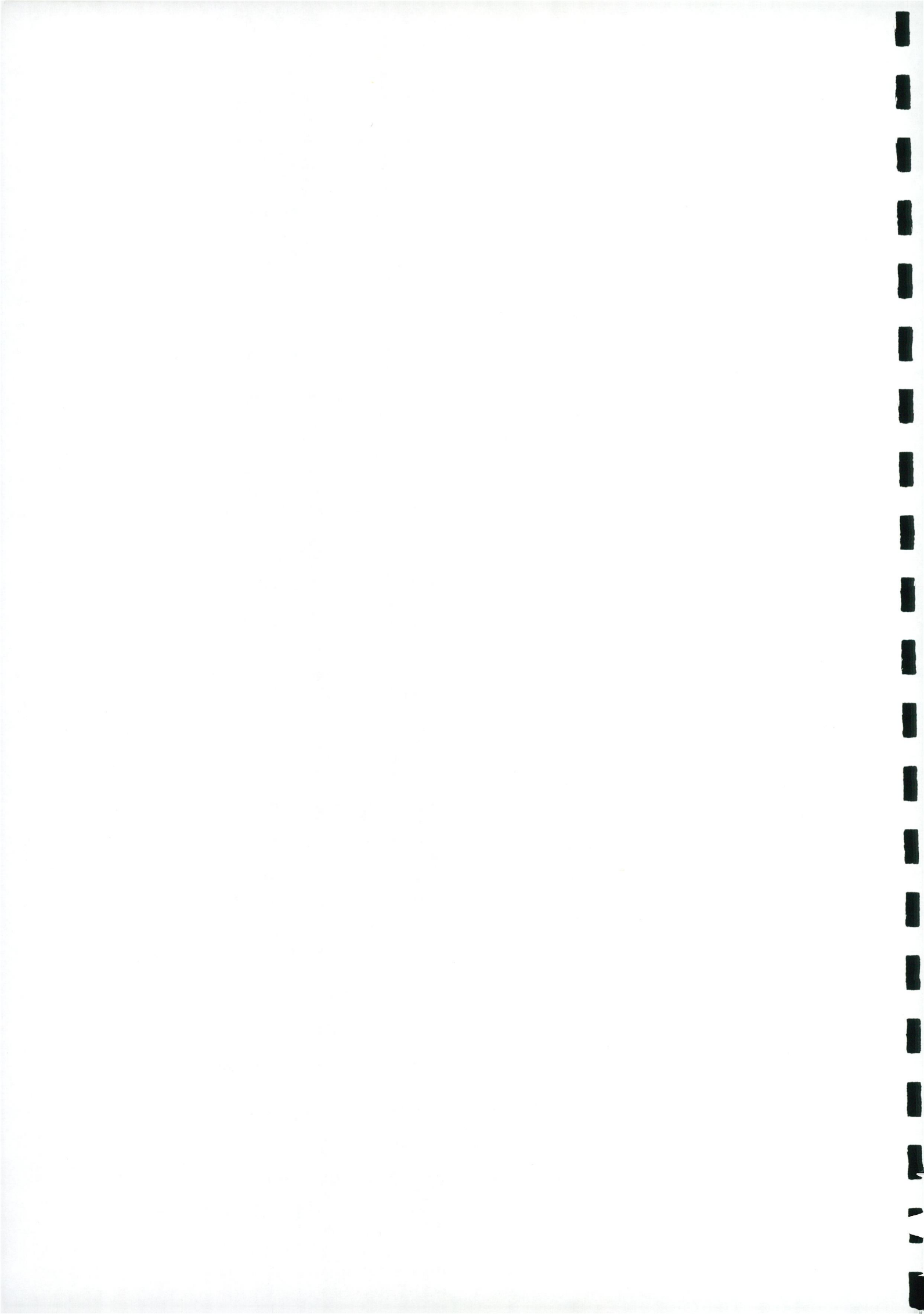
groups. What resulted from this upheaval was a society that was less self-assured, more demanding and questioning.

In 1965, the Hollywood studios blockbuster drive was as healthy as ever, but dangerously ignoring the changing social and economic realities of the road it was driving along. This deceptive sense of self-security the studios felt, was to a certain extent because of the huge success of two blockbuster hits of that year - The Sound of Music and Dr. Zhivago. A number of hugely expensive blockbuster musicals were made in the hope of cashing in on the trend that these two hits seemed to represent. However, they flopped and nearly made Fox Studios bankrupt. Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid and Mash saved the commercial day for Fox. Apart from their economic contributions to Fox, they signified important changes, formally, aesthetically and economically for Hollywood.

These films opened the way for young innovative film makers - Altman, Penn, Copolla, and, later,Scorsese, who challenged the pre-requisites of Hollywood's status quo style of film making. Formally, techniques of editing and shooting which hithertoe in Hollywood were used to create a sense of reality in terms of time and space were now being made using devices such as the jump cut and split-screening which had the effect of distancing viewers from the action. These new style of Hollywood films were given a greater dialectical quality as narration became less linear and more fragmentary and whose characters became more complex and maybe not so easy to sympathise with. The viewer (who was by now one of, or supportive to the rebellious youth culture, and the main consumer of Hollywood film) was being engaged in an analysis of events pertinent to the time.
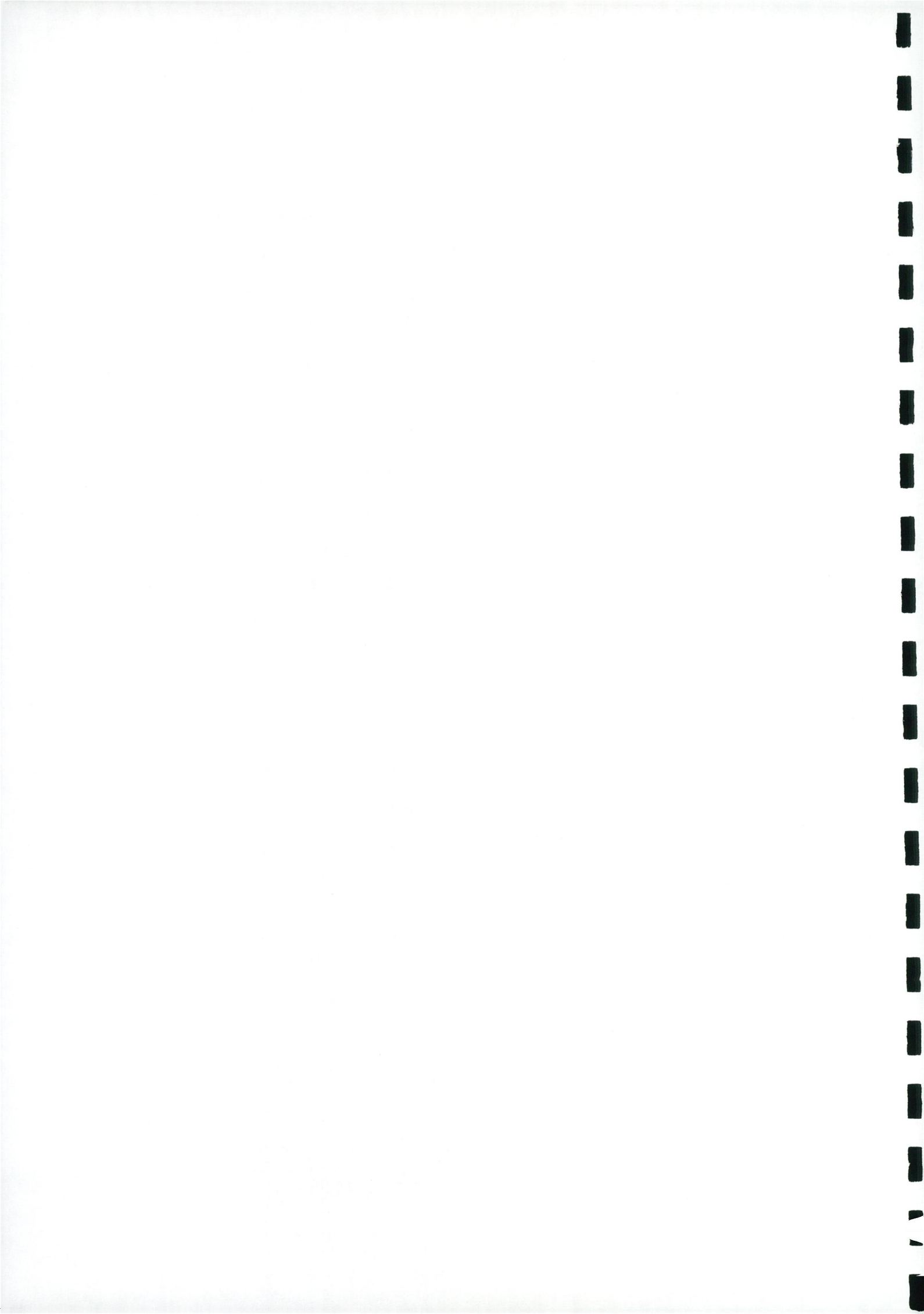
Bonnie And Clyde (1967) is a good example of this phenomenal time in Hollywood. A formally adventurous film, where the heroes of the title were outlaws hunted by the police and thwarted by bank clerks, shopkeepers etc. (an inversion of the tradional ethos of police equals good and outlaws or non-conformists equals bad) seemed to touch on the anti-establishment, revolutionary, us-and-them sentiments of the sixties American youth. It was one of the first films ever to show violence graphically. Penn, who directed Bonnie And Clyde believed that the studios were revising their approach regarding the changing nature of film-making and of film-makers, and restricting themselves solely to operate as the role of financiers. I think that what Penn failed to read between the lines was that the pressure of the youth, black and women's movements on Hollywood was so effective that it had to give these groups - now being the primary source of Hollywood's income - films which reflected their needs, ideals and feelings. Penn would find out later that as soon as the studios percieved a change of social trends, their film products would follow suit.

Social trends did change, with the inaugauration of President Nixon in 1969, these evolved a strong political sentiment called "The American Will". It was first seen when Cambodia was bombed by the Americans, a military excercise demonstrating that America makes no idle threats without carrying them out. There came a reactionary political backlash. Radicals working in the media of newspapers, television, film etc. were no longer tolerated. In the mid-seventies a public poll showed that for the first time in American history the majority of its population were no longer optimistic for the

future prospects of their country. It was an understandable

reaction, in the wake of the Watergate scandal, where the Nixon

administration's illegal activities, notably breaking into the

Democrat's H.Q. were found out. This led to a high degree of

cynicism, apathy and alienation on the part of the American pub-

lic towards their government, which Ford's and later Carter's

weak and unconvincing terms of government leadership did little

to alter. It was also an economically difficult time. Initiatives

set up in the sixties by Johnson (in order to alleviate hardship

on welfare dependents and those seeking cheap medical care) were

dismantled by Nixon. This left a large proportion of the popu-

lation disenfranchised by poverty. Hollywood also did not escape

the hard financial realities of the seventies. But while this

general depression of public spirit out-weighed the frantic, hope-

ful excitement of the sixties, American film-making, for better or

worse, would not undo the challenges and innovations to the Hollywood

system of the previous decade.

During 1969 - 1972, Hollywood lost 500 million dollars. large

conglomerates then started buying up the old studios.. Also,

the relationship between the studios, and television became very

close, being based on pre-sell policies and software merchandising

(videos, music products etc.) This had the effect of abating the

death throes of Hollywood, allowing it to survive and then return

the sum of nearly three billion dollars in the latter half of the

next decade. One benefit from Hollywood's hard times was that it

began to take chances on new film-making talent who differed from
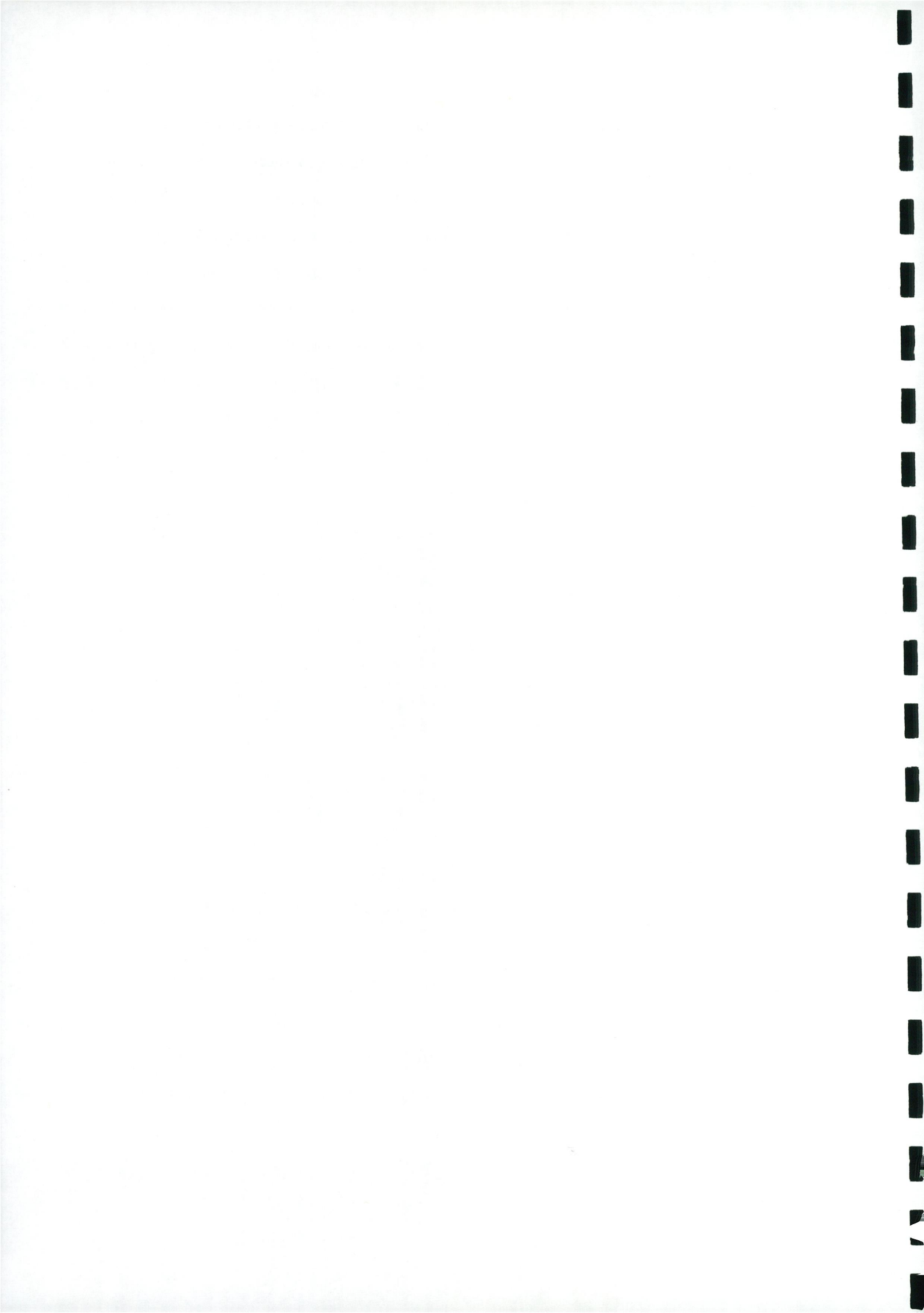
their predecessors in being well-educated in film-history,
who were technically very competent (being for the most part pro-
ducts of film courses set up in the sixties in American colleges)
and in enthusiastically using the powers of the medium to express
their personal and political ideas. While Hollywood did not dis-
pese with its more traditional tennets of film-making, film-makers
such as Scorses took the basic genres, played around with them, and
used them to make critiques of social or political events of the
time and also to express something of the unease and tensions caused
by these.

However, in the second half of the decade, the block-buster gripped
hollywood anew, fuelled principly by two up and coming talents,
Speilberg and Lucas, who initiated the quintessential blockbuster
Star Wars. This and changing social and economic patterns of the
seventies were responsible for the weakening of the alternative
cinema's important position within Hollywood. Other reasons for its
decline was due to the escalation of money spent on movies like
Star Wars, and due to the cessation of tax incentives for investors
which enabled them to financially support independent films. Des-
pite this, there still remained many art cinemas, and a strong-if-
diminished-following for such films, which was established from the
sixties. This assured the survival of independent film-making in
adverse times to come.

The reactionary direction of American politics went from strength
to strength in the eighties owing to the well known phenonema of
Reaganomics. Ronald Reagan who came into term at the beginning of

the decade, effected a 25% cut in taxes; a 25% increase

in spending on "Defence"; cuts in health care, low cost

housing, income maintenance programmes. The gap between the

rich and the poor increased, where the level of impoverishment was

at its worst in American history since the Great Depression.

Anti-Soviet Union feelings also intensified. However, because

this reactionary drive was so intensive, it did,in fact, inspire

a backlash. The Environmental Protection Agency was effectively

broken down, resulting in very little control over pollution

and other practices endangering the air, land and water. This

inspired the re-awakening of environmentalism, anti-nuclear and

disarmament movements.

Reaganomics was also responsible for the raising of interest rates.

This would have had disastrous effects on the Hollywood studios

as so much of their business was reliant on borrowed capital.

By going to conglomerates for financial protection, the studios

were thus able to avoid paying higher interest on loans.

The telecommunications industries also expanded hugely in the

eighties, where movies could now gross a lot more profit through

secondary channels such as home videos, pay cable, etc. So even

if revenue from cinema exhibitions declined, the revenue from the

combined media industries greatly increased.

From the mid-eighties onwards, the Blockbuster binge seemed to pan

out. The numbers of films earning ten million or more in rentals

increased, as did those with fifty million or more, whereas prev-

iously in the first half of the eighties, a smaller number of films

were produced but brought in one hundred million dollars or over in

profit. In 1990, three modestly budgeted films, Home Alone, Ghost

and Pretty Woman were the three top hits, and seemed to suggest an

emerging pattern. Moderately priced films were becoming
more recognised as being important in keeping the movie-
machinery well-oiled; for developing new talent; and for keeping
a consistent supply of dependable routine features going. With
this middle level - or tier - of film-making, are those films
produced by independent studios, for the small but established
followers of alternative cinema.

Thomas Schatz has proposed that although there seem to be three
classes of film-making, as outlined above, they are not,in fact,
mutually exclusive (Schatz The New Hollywood 1993). A
certain amount of straddling does occur between them, most not-
ably with the films of auteur - Directors such as Scorsese,
Schrader, Lynch, etc., who seem to imbue a personal, artistic
sensibility with commercial saleability, quite successfully.
For so long, it seemed that a film's commercial potential was
inversely proportionate to it being a work of political or
artistic substance. It had also seemed that a film which was
to be in any way profitable appeared to be made with a carefully
pre-determined recipe, designed for success. These recipes were
often based on simple plots, uni-dimensional characters played by
highly bankable stars, with saturation advertising, and with a
close eye for the movie's ability to be translated easily to other
media, such as music recordings, theme parks, computer games, etc.
While many major movies are based on such a recipe, it seems to
happen increasingly that a modest or low-budget film seems to
catch the public's imagination, or touches base with the community
subconcious. Taxi Driver (1976) by Scorsese seemed to show the

possibility of this. The Last Temptation Of Christ
(1986), Blue Velvet (1986), Do The Right Thing (1989) Silence
Of The Lambs (1990) and Blue Steel (1990) demonstrated that what
were previously thought of as incompatible qualities of film -
profitability and personal integrity of the film-maker - could
co-exist in one film. This is not to say that their co-existence
is easy. This issue of compatibility will be addressed in relation
to each of the film-makers under discussion. The question of whether
compromises being made for the sake of saleability diminish the value
of a politically critical film will be raised. The sociological
aspects of the politically orientated alternative Hollywood films -
in how they comment on issues pertinent to the present time in
America - will be discussed, as will the degree of leeway critical
film-makers are given by their financiers to question the values
and ideas of the audience. This is related to the idea of the Dis-
sident New Hollywood Film-maker itself. If, in making a film, that
not only the economic, but also the formal and ideological line
has to be toed for the sake of the market, can the director in
this instance really be regarded as being dissident?

These are the basic questions and arguments around which the film-
makers I chose to be representative of the more personal and/or
politically committed form of New Hollywood Film-making will be
looked at.

C H A P T E R   O N E

PAUL SCHRADER

Schrader grew up in the predominantly Calvinist community of Grand Rapids in Michigan, the midlands of America. In the University there he studied theology, and wrote film reviews in the college magazine.

Owing to the Calvinist's opposition to popular culture Schrader was prevented from seeing films until he was eighteen which left him in a unique position later, in Hollywood, his teenage years being un-touched by any movie memories, whereas the work of the rest of his counterparts was greatly influenced by the adolescent, and so primar-ily an emotional experience of the movie. Schrader tried to rectify this deficiency by immersing himself in films throughout his first two years at U.C.L.A. however, being a late starter viewing films within a university context left him experiencing them on an analyt-ical level. Schrader explains this possible effect on his work:

> Movies don't have those (adolescent) emotional associations for
> me.....Pauline Kael writes of me ....that Patty Hearst is the
> work of a brilliant film-maker who lacks the ability to make the
> audience feel, it's something I hate to hear and don't want to
> agree with, but to the extent to which it is true comes from the
> fact that I'm a film-maker who never learned to feel about film-
> making during his formative years.

> Schrader 1990 p.121

This aspect of Schrader's work, rather than being a drawback, is one of its attractions. There is a sense of distance, leaving room for the viewer's speculation. It is as though Schrader presents certain situations and characters, and allows the film to evolve in front of the viewers rather than absorbing them into it and manipulating their reactions. We can see what's happening more objectively, and have

a greater dialectical freedom. Regarding Pauline Kaels reference
to Schrader's inability to make the audience feel, I think that
the important distinction here is that the viewer is emotionally
reacting as a witness, rather than as a participant in the drama.
It is a slightly different way of apprehending a film, where there
is a greater independence allowed the viewer, in choosing how to feel
or what to think. Schrader tempers the emotional substance in his
films with an analytical distance. This separates him from other
Hollywood film-makers, a separation he sees as an advantage in that
he is not competing with anyone else on the same level; "Walter Hill
would go off and make his John Ford films and I would go off and make
my Grand Rapids film" (Schrader 1990 p.21)

An exception in his ouvre, to this rule of Schrader's masked differ-
entiation to other Hollywood film-makers is Blue Collar (1977), his
directorial debut. In style, it is as Schrader describes it "meat
and potatoes" (Schrader 1990 .) in content and in plot it is a
basic comedy caper genre movie, which switches to the stuff of
serious political/sociological critique with ominous undertones and
is unlike anything that Schrader would write or direct afterwards,
possibly because it seems to be like a formal excercise in how to
make a film. It centres on three Detroit auto workers in financial
difficulties where their union manipulates the workers, pitting one
against the other on racial grounds. Blue Collar was not a film
written due to a political bias on Schrader's part, in fact, Schrader
has said that even though the plot seemed logically to come to a
Marxist conclusion, he would have equally been comfortable if it
had gone in a reactionary direction. The only political idea

Schrader feels he puts forward is that of the "Politics of resentment and claustrophobia, the feeling of being manip- ualted and not in control of your life" (Schrader 1990 p. 148).

Being such a straightforward movie, there were very few quest- ion marks on the part of Universal Studios, except to shoot another ending to the film as it was felt that the conclusion Schrader presented would have incited race riots. However, Schrader skillfully argued to conclude Blue Collar according to his own original ending.

Schrader's analytical approach to his work is just one aspect describing his very particular and unique identity in Hollywood. Apart from a couple of exceptions, he has avoided appropriating genres, in making films referential to film's own traditions. Instead, his dramatic structures, being more character oriented, serve to more strongly highlight his concerns. His characters enact Schrader's own artistic, spiritual and psychological concerns (apart from undegoing psychoanalysis, Schrader's appr- oach to film is informed by Freud's ideas and to a lesser extent Jung's). These concerns are unprotected by various generic or other devices that contain Scorsese or Bigelow, for example. By using generic devices and their traditional narrative structures that the viewer would be familiar with, enables such film-makers to make credible their characters and helps effect a smoother development of their films. In abandoning these devices, Schrader's work is somewhat less viewer-friendly. By going his own way and bending formal elements to his own vision leads some critics to believe Schrader's work to be badly flawed in plot and character development.

For many critics, this was the problem with <u>Mishima</u> (1985). It is a film which might on first sight seem confusing, by its' collage like effect of presenting various aspects and concerns of this figure. However, <u>Mishima</u> has an innate and strong sense of order, which became apparent in subsequent viewings. In terms of the rest of Schrader's work to date, <u>Mishima</u> seems to be his most organised film to date. To explain why <u>Mishima</u> might seem to be problematic in relation to the way it is percieved by the audience, it is worthwhile to refer to Barth's idea on the politics of reception. He outlined two forms of texts through which an audience may access a novel or film: a readerly text and a writerly text. Where the substance of a work is framed within clear, definite perametres, it enables the reader or viewer to relate to such a piece with greater facility. With a writerly text, the work can be percieved on many levels, and the perameters given to read into the work are not so dogmatically outlined. An appreciation of a film such as <u>Mishima</u> operating as it does on a writerly text, is greater enhanced by further viewing. In the main, however, the Hollywood feature is primarily a commercial product, to be consumed preferably just once, so that the public can progress onto another product for consumption. Therefore a readerly text is favoured more by the Hollywood establishment, and so has bng been in use in Hollywood films. This has in effect educated the public to percieve films in a certain way and any deviation from this (and <u>Mishima</u> certainly did) could leave the viewer confounded, being unpractised in the art of percieving films using a writerly text. Therefore, it could be said that the responsibility for the difficulty of aprehending a film such as <u>Mishima</u> lies within the commercial imperatives which Hollywood sets up for itself. It could also be said that it is due to the politics of reception which both brings Schrader under criticism, and what mainly sets him apart from his other Hollywood colleagues.

If Mishima needs to be characterised in any way, the term !"Bio-Pic' could be attached. It centres on a Japanese writer who committed ritual suicide in 1970. Schrader dramatises three of Mishima's works. These are inserted into pertinent parts of the first nar- rative stream which is based on Mishima's life history. Essen- tially it is a presentation of Mishima's stream of consiousness during his last hours. By examining the way in which it is struc- tured, it becomes apparent that Mishima's chronological developement is in fact tightly ordered; The first of four sections Beauty is concerned with Mishima's obsession with his youth, with beauty, of which dramatised passages taken from an early novel The Golden Pavilion illustrate. In the second section Art, Mishima's narcisism and homosexuality - or maybe sexual ambiguity - is explored via Kyoko's House, the third Action describes the planning of returning Japan to its' pre-capitalist glory and emperor worship by rebel student cadets. The final section Harmony Of Pen And Sword synthe- sises Mishima's - and Schrader's - struggle, how to unite the hithertoe problematic dichotemies of words/art and action. In the film, Mishima's past was shot on black and white stock and the scenes of his last day were shot in a subdued, almost monochromatic, quasi-documentary style. His literary pieces were shot in sublime shades of colour and light, in expressive post-modern stage-like sets. These sets of obvious artifice are the scenes which for many have the most compelling and memorable effect. The artifice inhabiting these ficticious scenes, function more than to be aes- thetically pleasing gems decorating the film, they also suggest that it was in fiction where reality was more within Mishima's grasp, functioning as a stage for his alter ego. Where the highly coloured dramatisations were cut off before their climatic highpoint, in the final section everything coalesces, signified

when at the end of Mishima's life, they are brought into his own final conclusion. As Mishima commits seppuku, which is not actually seen, the climaxes from the dramatised sequences are cut in. It is the ficticious young cadet's suicide that is actually seen, signifying the unity of Mishima's demise with that of his creation's. The loss is therefore gained by the furfillment of unity, joining Mishima's dispirate facets into one, unifying words that didn't "touch the world" with his self-sacrifice by his knife. Schrader has said that as with Taxi Driver and also with The Last Temptation Of Christ, both films which he wrote the script for, "the suicide impulse is to do with the artistic impulse to transform the world." (Schrader 1990 p.175) Of all of Schrader's work, both as director and as scriptwriter, it is maybe Mishima that best achieves his ideal of effecting, or of making active, self-expression. It can be said that Mishima was Schrader's seminal piece of work, as its' importance can be seen in the way in which many of the concerns that he brings up in his other films seem to transpire directly from Mishima. These reasons may be explained in part why Mishima would be viewed by Schrader as being his favorite, albeit "bastard", film progeny.

Throughout all of Schrader's work, the them of transcendence predominates, and indeed could be regarded almost as his hallmark. His interest in this can be traced back to a book he wrote for his Master degree in U.C.L.A. called Transcendental Style. This in turn can be further traced back to Schrader's exposure to Calvin's teachings and ideas, in his youth. The main hypothesis of Transcendental Style was that if conventional emotional associations are stripped down and suppressed, in film, there is a moment when we need to express this, which has been kept under pressure all

this time, explodes. This tiny moment, Schrader puts forward, is so emotionally intense that it becomes something spiritual, and has a redemptive value. This idea was inherited from Calvin who according to Schrader, tried to "reduce the window of faith to as small an aperture as possible... the tinier the aperture the more blinding the light of faith becomes" (Schrader 1990 p29) This approach Schrader has tried to use in his work. however, Schrader recognises that in commercial film-making, getting this moment of transcendence is extremely difficult, because so much has to be denied in order to achieve this effect. So, a compromise is made in order to comply to the needs of a commercially geared narrative, where a certain amount of emotional substance is allowed, but the blinding moments are not so apparent. If the emotionally blinding moments could be more powerfully expressed by working within the underground cinema, why does Schrader still compromise on this spiritual element, which seems to be so important to him? The answer to this, Schrader believes is due to an evangelical impulse to communicate to as many viewers as possible. This require Schrader to stay working within the Hollywood system although he recognizes that the most true or pure film-making is the underground.

Whatever Schrader feels about the purity of expressive integrity of the commercial cinema, he also feels duly bound to the "Christian notion of stewardship" (Schrader 1990 p.29) in that if money is invested in a film by the audience there is an obligation to deliver the goods. It is possible that this state of affairs may

be due to Schrader conforming to his Calvinist background, exploring the spiritual or existential difficulties of his characters on the one hand and going against the Calvinist grain, desiring the exhilarating "ride" of the popular movie on the other hand? A double reflection seems to be in operation here, as Schrader's Hollywood film-making tensions run parallel to his own personal tensions, rejecting his Calvinist faith, yet not being able to let go of it entirely.

The moments where Schrader's characters reach the point of achieving their own reality, or true and pure sense of themselves, are arrived at via different methods. In Mishima, it is where the myriad elements of a personality struggle to unite themselves, finally culminate in one pure whole, via self-destruction as art was insufficient to change him, and therefore the world. In Taxi Driver and The Last Temptation Of Christ again, it is through the self-destruction impulse - although in Taxi Driver this impulse becomes extraverted.. Both of these films dealt also with the possibility of transcendence through sexuality - the protaganists first trial method of attaining this.

Richard Combs, in an article on the horror film Cat People (1981), one of Schrader's most obvious forays into popular movie making, writes that, paradoxically, the film being scripted by someone else has enabled Schrader's transcendental filming style to transcend his own limitations as a writer. (Combs MFB p.198). Cat People was an adaption of the original version made in the early forties by Lewton/ Tourneur. However, it was a loose adaptation and only where Schrader does dip back onto the original does the film weaken. The emphasis in the original film was on the jealosy over the zookeeper, Oliver, between Irena, the main character, and Cathy, his girlfriend. In Schrader's version, the most important issue is of Irena coming to

terms with her real nature. Irena "prowling" Cathy in the swimming pool and again later when Cathy is jogging in a park, are needless insertions into the film, and confusing to the issue at hand.

Cat People is essentially about a girl, Irena, reuniting with her hitherto unknown brother, Paul. They are both descendents of people who mated with rather large cats, and when cat people become sexually active, they transform into these cats. Irena meets a zookeeper called Oliver, and is hired to work in his zoo. They become attracted to each other as Oliver, not being too good with people, senses Irena's inner nature, half-human, half-animal, she represents his ideal woman. However, the practicalities in which initiating such a relationship would bring, might present some problems. What to do when his partner post-coitally turns into a roving black cat being the main one. The solution presented is for Oliver to tie Irena to their bed, and to house her in a cage in his zoo.

Cat People, being a film of the horror genre (substantiated by incorporating special effects particular to the genre) allows Schrader to get away with this plot. The structure also provides an ideal base for Schrader to thresh out the issue of transcendence. For Irena, it is only by releasing her animal nature through her sexuality that makes her into a whole being. From the level of repression, she finds that by going into another repression (that of the cage), that she achieves her redemption. Another interesting dimension, and possible additional support for the inner necessity to free itself, is the use of Jung's idea of the collective unconscious. Schrader has siad that what he wanted to incorporate into Cat People was the idea of myth and the kind of primal images that are embedded in our genes. This is a fascinating extra dimension in Cat People. Irena initiates her own transcendence, by freeing her genetically inherited pattern of behaviour. It suggests

the possibility that our personal unconscious (in Irena's case, her own fears of her sexuality - of being in control of it, as opposed to her brother who is sexually active without suffering from Irena's personal difficulties, despite even the fact that he is a practicing Calvinist and works in the local church) is strongly formed by information form our collective unconscious. It is "an instinctive action (which) is inherited and unconscious and occurs uniformly and regularly". (Fordham 1990 p. 32 Introduction to Jung's Psychology). The transformation of Irena and Paul illustrates just that.

Unfortunately, although Schrader's excursion into the horror genre proved fruitful for him personally, and cinematically, viewers weren't as satisfied. Those expecting something as usually more apparently sophisticated form Schrader, perceived at as just a horror film. Others going to see Cat People on the basis that it was a horror film didn't get what they expected, so Cat People as a result was not commercially successful.

The struggle of transforming the self in Patty Hearst (1988) was presented as being more difficult and in a less conclusive way than Cat People. The treatment of the main character masks some-thing of a departure for Schrader. Previously, his protaganists were actively involved in initiating their own transcendence, the subject of Patty Hearst is portrayed as being a very passive player in her own fate. This is signified by images in flashback of her as a child being blindfolded, then shown blindfolded, incarcarated in a closet by her captors. The values Patty received to form herself come from two sources; the first source was her strict Roman Catholic family upbringing, and the second source was from the S.L.A., her kidnappers and would-be fanatical revolutionaries whom

she presently joins. She is later captured by the police and
arrested. Schrader considers the problems of Patty Hearst's
identity to be that of a "genuine conundrum" (Schrader 1990 p.193)
as did the lawyers and public during her trial. Is she the succ-
essful, confident person who thought she knew who she was, as she
stated at the beginning of the film? Or is she the revolutionary
made manifest during her time with the S.L.A.? Or again, was she
assuming different roles as her "if you can't beat them, join
them" method of survival? Ultimately, she never seems to achieve
the totality of what she could be, although there are glimpses of
a character trying to emerge, one which happens in the final scene,
with her father, in prison. It is only in this final context of
imprisonment that Patty begins to talk more assertively of letting
the "people see the real me" and by doing so changing their opinion
of her. Throughout the film, the theme of imprisonment comes up
again and again. At first, she is terrified, and feels claustro-
phobic (at the beginning of her captivity, Patty imagines herself
being buried alive). She then learns to see it as being a possible
catalytic environment for her, to the extent where she says of her
final entry into prison that "at the door into the prison, the crush
was so great that I could not get in ... a prison official grabbed
my hand, lifted me up ... I had to fight my way into prison."
(Comb 1988 p.201).

In both Patty Hearst and Mishima there is the common thread of being
imprisoned within the self. There is a mistaken sense of liberating
possibilities, but both characters go from one impasse to another,
unable to escape their own prison. However, it seems as if the real
Patty Hearst is still waiting to emerge and resolve herself. She
describes her present living environment in her book Every Secret
Thing, as being "on a private, protected street ... behind locked

doors ... equipped with the best electronic security system available". Richard Combs in another article on Schrader has suggested that the reason behind the ambivalent ending, and the instability of transcendence is that the

> Film itself is just one more reflection, one more prison. It in
> turn needs to be transcended, because Schrader's film liturgy
> doesn't have the self-contained logic of Bresson's, whereby char-
> acters who freely choose what has been ordained by God, set them-
> selves free ... Schrader ... who didn't grow up with film doesn't
> quite trust his medium to deliver the goods - like the Mishima
> who doesn't trust words to change the world. Hence his statements
> that ... moral conflicts will have to be decided by audiences
> later. (Combs 1988 p.201).

Cat People seemed more adamant about the necessity of recognising aspects of the self and unifying them to achieve self-redemption, than Patty Hearst. The reason why Patty Hearst is less dogmatic about the issue of self-redemption may be because it was made much later on, when Schrader's burning evangelical flame had diminished. I have to disagree with Richard Combs regarding Schrader's films needing to transcend themselves. To return to a point made near the beginning of this chapter, Schrader has, by the space he has left the audience to work out their own conclusions, giving Patty Hearst more of a dialectical quality. Schrader may have illustrated by this particular treatment of the film, that in order to change people's perceptions, it is potentially more effective to allow the viewer more space to interact with his work, than to present a theme dogmatically and seduce the audience to passively watch. The film signifies developing maturity on Schrader's part.

For Schrader

> The greatest thing about movies is that they are a truly popular
> art, and you can't dictate to a popular art; you have to let it
> live in all its perverse permutations ... I've always tried to be
> a Hollywood Director ... "All I want is to entertain people and
> earn a few bucks" and they say "no, you're not a Hollywood Director",
> and I say "yes I am, believe me!" (Schrader 1990 p.208).

So speaks Schrader the populist. The purist in Schrader permits him to regard American Gigolo (1979), a trendy Hollywood film, as being

really pure, and <u>Cat People</u>, a film in keeping with the expect-ations of the horror genre, as being "really about" Dante and Beatrice. Whatever qualities are lost due to the commercial imperatives of film-making within Hollywood, they are made up for by the fact that even if a film communicates a tenth of a strongly personal or important concern, it will reach several million people by virtue of the movie being a mass-media product. Schrader is very aware that the perverse qualities of his work are what makes it both interesting and precarious in terms of balancing on the line between commercial and non-commercial film-making - "it is an attempt to make it all really redemptive, to say 'this looks commercial and ordinary, but its not, its really spiritual and extraordinary'". (Schrader 1990 p.30).

CHAPTER   TWO

MARTIN SCORSESE

As the oft-reviewed facts and interviews with Scorsese reveal, the seeds of the conceits depicted in his work, and even of some of its formal elements, in particular those of his earlier films, were sown from experiences growing up in the Little Italy quarter of New York. Specifically, these related to Roman Catholicism, Italian style; urban paranoia; classic movie influences; violence and its ramifications; and the nature of being a celebrity.

Despite working within the Hollywood system, Scorsese has qualified himself as a personal film-maker as he has pursued his concerns obsessively in his work throughout his career from Mean Streets (1970) to The Age Of Innocence (1993). For the most part, Scorsese has kept his head reasonably above water on financial terms, making low enough budgeted movies, which permits him enough room to make his personal signature marks in his work, and for experimenting with generic modes. In fact it is probably because Scorsese does utilise genres, that he is somewhat more commercially successful than his colleague Schrader, who by and large eschews generic boundaries in favour of his own individually constructed narrative formats. By exploring his concerns through generic frameworks, Scorsese has been able to present his themes subtly, utilising in this way, Shaw's advocation of sugar-coating a message. Yet his work still retains a dialectical ability, raising questions for the viewers on issues that are very much relevant to American society and even to Western Society as a whole.

Scorsese's preliminary contact with his religious faith took place in St. Patrick's school in New York, which he has stated within a year

induced in him a desire to become a missionary, contract leprosy

and be sent to the worst place on earth. (Scorsese The Face

1987 Feb. No. 2). Added to this was the experience, in the early

fifties, during the cold war, of being sent with his classmates to

the catacombs beneath St. Patrick's Cathedral during the school

air raid drills. Decades of the Rosary would be said

> echoing among the graves. That was very grim. We were told
> that this is what the fires of hell would be like ... I've not
> been able to get past a lot of that stuff. Images from then
> are always coming back to me. The camera movements in a lot
> of my films certainly come from creeping around those catacombs.

(Scorsese The Face 1987 Feb. No. 2).

Scorsese graduated from film studios in New York University with

Who's That Knocking On My Door.   Mean Streets (1970) was his

second feature film, one that was critically acclaimed and served

to position Scorsese as a future landmark film-maker. Many reviews

of the film have attested to its strong rhythmic energy, fuelled by

the formal components of the music, camerawork and editing working

with and off one another. It is maybe due to this that Mean Streets

has still maintained its resonance. It is a film which overtly

expresses Scorsese's own relationship with his faith, or lack of it.

By placing the Church in context of the Little Italy urban setting,

he illustrates that, not only are the dogmas, which both impose on

Charlie's way of life, incompatible, but in fact are destructive if

one can not decide which rules to follow.

Scorsese has maintained that he never intended the film to be anything

more than a record for future times of what Italian- American society

was like. This is probably responsible for its docu-drama feel. It

is also to a large extent autobiographical, particularly in relation

to the tensions it shows between the Church and the street, which

Scorsese unhappily experienced in his youth, Mean Streets is essent-

ially a film exploring in its main theme the two irreconcilable facets

of the Italian-American way of life. On the face of it, they seem
like two social clubs co-existing to provide a strong social struct-
ure for the Italian community. Charlie is seen in a home movie piece
at the beginning of the film shaking the hand of the Parish Priest.
He also is seen shortly later in church, communing with God and with
his conscience, and throughout is strongly connected to his faith
either through his own utterances or by reference from others (espec-
ially during Fat Joey's pool hall brawl where Charlie is trying to
solicit peace between his street gang and another one, he is referred
to as "Saint Charles"; and later on in Tony's bar, Charlie announces
"I've come to create order, may God be with you"). His faith clearly
has a strong gravitational pull on Charlie, as also has his street
gang of friends. The issue of male friendship and intense bonding
occurs a lot in Scorsese's work, and is seen in Mean Streets as a way
for Charlie to express and assert his own masculinity. Yet again,
the tension between the spiritual and the sexual surfaces, as Fat
Joey asks Charlie to "bless my balls", and when Charlie views a black
strip dancer in action, part of his voice-over of him praying in
church in the previous scene, transposes over to this one.

Charlie's role in Mean Streets, apart from functioning to highlight
the irretrievable differences between Church and street, is that of
the arbitrator and peace-keeper, as his friend Johnny Boy says of
him: "Charlie likes everybody, everybody likes Charlie, a fucking
polititian". Charlie is seen arbitrating between Johnny Boy and
his creditor Michael; he tries to ease the tensions between the two
gangs in Fat Joey's pool hall; and he apologises to the hotel maid
after his girlfriend, Teresa, has been rude to her. In a sense,
Charlie seems to be appropriating the role of a priest, extending
the responsibilities on to the street. Charlie's character heralds
other of Scorsese's characters in his later films, regarding his

messianic impulse and his efforts towards redemption. Our first

introduction to Charlie entails a statement in voice-over from

his conscience on the ineffectiveness of penance. The importance

of this conceit in <u>Mean Streets</u> is here given emphasis by the voice-

over from his conscience being presented over a visually unadulterated

blank screen. Charlie is seen shortly later, praying in the church

for solace from his worldly anxieties. He reiterates that "those

things don't mean anything to me" (confessional, Our Fathers, etc.)

"they're just words". Charlie knows that this form of redemption

can't address itself to the difficulties encountered in street life

or with sexuality, because its problems and tensions can't be tackled

in this way. Yet he acknowledges a need for some form of reparation.

He knows and is troubled that his life is not blameless and throughout

<u>Mean Streets</u> he is caught between doing what he shouldn't be doing,

and knowing this. As if to remind himself that such weakness must

be atoned for, he extands his hand into fire several times during the

film, which has purgatorial associations. Significantly, it is at

the end of <u>Mean Streets</u> where he, his girlfriend and Johnny Boy, his

deliquent friend he takes charge of are shot by Johnny Boy's gullible

and peeved creditor, that it is Charlie's hand that is wounded.

Charlie's bar owner friend Tony has reminded Charlie that to survive

is by your wits, not by your faith. Charlie's swaying between loyal-

ties has effected his self-destruction for survival, there is really

no choice between which set of rules to follow: those of the street

which won't forgive any straying from its dogma.

The next three films under discussion were collaborations between

Schrader and Scorsese (Schrader was the scriptwriter). Scorsese's

work is similar to Schrader's in the sense of their characters being

imprisoned. The sense that they are not quite the controller or

master of their own life permeates much of their work. The
feeling of enclosure and paranoia, strengthened by using the
subjectivity of the character's own viewpoint, furthers the sense
of malaise. But the opposing force is felt to be invisible, with
no one definable enemy responsible for it. One can only define
it as being a sense of malevolent urban omnipresence. When
considering the films Scorsese and Schrader have made together,
and those that they have made alone, all have characters searching
for some kind of redemption or transcendence, although with Schrader,
it seems that only through violent means do his characters come in
any way near to achieving this. With Scorsese, it seems that yes,
although his main characters do make efforts to redeem themselves,
it is usually at considerable loss to themselves and to others. No
doubt such quasi-religious themes which seem to unify Scorsese and
Schrader come from, as Schrader puts it the "closed-society Christ-
ian morality" that they share. "We can basically agree on everything
in life, but we don't express it in the same way"; their slightly
different angles in perceiving issues in common are "what makes it
(their collaboration) vibrate". (Schrader 1990 p.117)

I outlined earlier in the Introduction, some of the ramifications of
American politics in the seventies and how films then reacted to
what was happening. With the winding down of the alternative social
ideologies and with the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, a certain
uneasy introspection seemed to take place in American society. It was
a much more self-oriented decade where a strong sense of unease and
disillusion permeated all strata of American society. Taxi Driver
(1976) was but one film of many produced in Hollywood at this time
where such a sense of social chaos, alienation and political corrupt-
ion found strong expression. Robert Ray in his book A Certain Tendency
In Hollywood Cinema has said of Taxi Driver that, even in retrospect,

its commercial success was one of the most surprising things about it (it achieved twelfth place in the box office in 1976), particularly in light of its violence and profanity. In fact it is probably due to these elements, used within their particular context, that it was so successful, mirroring something of the way many people were feeling in the seventies.

Travis Bickle, the main character, is a microcosmic representation of this feeling of malaise. With him, Scorsese constructs a psychological study of a barely sane individual, seen in the context of his relationship to his environment, which the film almost unrelentingly illustrates within Travis' own paranoid, roving viewpoint. The city is portrayed in all its garish, night time seaminess through the eyes of the night time cab driver, locked in his metal shell. It is an environment that Travis refers to as being "filth" and "venal" and he looks forward to when "some day a real rain'll come and wash all this scum off the street". Subsequently, due to his disillusion after his misfired attempts to court a politically active woman, whom he saw as being nothing short of an angel, Travis finds himself driven by violent means to clean it all up. Many critics point to Scorsese's philosophy regarding violence. In particular, Pam Cooke and Michael Bliss hold the view that violence for Scorsese is normal and even necessary (Bliss Scorsese & Cimino 1985, Cook Screen 1982)) however, violence as portrayed in Scorses's films seems to be more than an expression of the healthy which seems to be the result of its unhealthy supression due to social impositions on one to behave in an an acceptable and controlled manner.

Bliss and Cooke have both referred to violence, as Scorsese presents

it in his work, as having a curative or regenerative effect. This observation seems, however, to be limited to individual characters using violence as a form of temporary, (somewhat understandable), relief. In a way Scorsese may be marked with more pessimism than Schrader, in that although characters like Travis, or la Motta try to achieve something through violent means, as in shooting or beating up a perceived enemy, it really is ineffective. The oppressiveness of their society still exists. Robert Ray underlines this point further, on the ultimately ineffectual powers of violence, seeing Taxi Driver as in fact a "corrected" right film. Right films, like Death Wish (1974) used violent lonely heroes to take up arms, singlehandedly, against unsavoury elements of society, usually as a form of revenge. By providing the "naive" audience with their "sustaining myth, the belief in the continued applicability of Western-style, individual solutions to contemporary complex problems" Scorsese, having satisfied their desire to be able to identify with a familiar hero figure, could then afford to deconstruct this myth. Not only is Travis' violent actions useless, but they manifest his growing insanity. The audience was encouraged to identify with Travis up to the point where the camera moves in on Travis' feet in the crowd around Palantine, the politician he plans to kill. It moves upwards to shockingly expose Travis' new image; a jacket full of weapons and a new viciously-styled punk haircut. From here on in he is revealed as being insane. Scorsese has, in fact, illustrated "that behind the Right's cycle's fantasies lay madness (and) dismant-led the American myth of regeneration through violence". (Ray, A Certain Tendency Of The Hollywood Cinema, 1985).

Likewise, in Raging Bull (1980), La Motta, the main character, tries to somehow transcend himself. On the surface, the film presents seemingly disparate tableaux-like scenes, juxtaposing moments of his

career with those of his domestic life. Connecting patterns do,
however, emerge. The frustations of one feed into, both negatively
and positively, into the other. Raging Bull commences with a scene
of the older, overweight La Motta clumsily practising his lines for
a show in his dressing room. He then proclaims "That's entertain-
ment" which echoes on top of a scene, showing him winning in the
ring of his boxing heyday. We see then his progression in his career
and home life from his youth up until his decline, as fighter and
as husband, the decline being caused by his eventual loss of control
over the forces he used to hone his agressive energy in the ring.

Robin Wood puts forward two readings of Raging Bull (Wood 1986).
The first reads La Motta's progress towards an understanding of him-
self - to reach some sort of Salvation and to come to terms maybe,
with his Italian ghetto inheritance of sexism, assertion of masc-
ulinity through aggression, etc. These traits he could not get rid
of, despite his efforts to escape his working-class background and
to achieve recognition. They eventually effect his breakdown,
feeding his paranoid jealousy. In jail, towards the end of the film,
he has nothing left but to confront this.

Scorsese is adamant that La Motta has in fact redeemed himself, but
what is seen finally is a man empty of the positive aspects of his
violent energy, that enabled La Motta to overcome being exploited by
the Mafia, and the freedom from a dead end existence. The stage
which he now uses to define himself to the world, projects him
delivering second-hand lines and cliches appropriated form more
successful public figures.

Robin Wood's second and preferred reading is that the incoherence
of the film reflects La Motta's own incoherence and lack of comp-

rehension of self and of others and with the violence that is
its product. Two forms of violence are presented in <u>Raging Bull</u>,
one against men and one against women. Wood suggests that both
forms are manifestations of La Motta's denial of his repressed
homosexuality. Bearing in mind Wood's thesis regarding socially
repressed bisexuality, it does seem to offer an unusual and con-
vincing reading of La Motta. However, these readings are not
necessarily mutually exclusive. La Motta used violence in a cont-
rolled way, to climb out of impovrishment and anonymity; then as
his incomprehension of self and others caught up with him, he lost
psychological control of it. This loss of control over his animal-
istic violence, could have been caused by it no longer being as
effective in controlling others, and by the denial of his innate
bisexuality. This is fine - if one agrees with Freud's assertion
that everyone is innately bisexual and that this is repressed by
society. It seems more appropriate for La Motta's character to
control those around him through primarily violent means, and that
he lacked the psychological discipline to be able to consistently
effect his influence over others in this way. Sarris has regarded
<u>Raging Bull</u> as an incoherent film, which is correct, but rather than
seeing this as an innate fault, formally in <u>Raging Bull</u> it must be
seen as a true expression of La Motta himself.

The issues of redemption and of identity is pursued further again by
Scorsese and Schrader in <u>The Last Temptation Of Christ</u> (1988). The
film follows the progression of Jesus through various developments
of an identity crisis, to finally coming to understand what he em-
bodies and then acting on this realisation. Throughout, Jesus is
seen caught up in a tension between the human and the supposedly
divine parts of his personal make-up. Various topics are brought
up for discussion, ranging from the philosophical (knowledge, truth

and love) to the political (whether passive or active resistance is more effective; whether revolution should be initiated through spiritual/cerebral change or physical challange). Jesus' revolutionary disciple , Judas, who at first bullies Jesus into proving himself, becomes later his friend and source of support. John The Baptist confirms to Jesus his divinity and purpose to save prople. Jesus later realises that to be crucified is God's plan of action to effect this. The real transgression (which caused so much public furore) fom the Christian belief/myth was Jesus' imaginings on the cross. The devil disguised as a guardian angel persuades him to live happily-ever-after in marital and fatherly bliss. Jesus meets the convert Paul, who says the truth is irrelevant, but the power of the myth to offer hope to people is. Judas comes to the old, infirm Jesus on his deathbed and angrily accuses him of denying his integrity and duty as saviour of the people. Jesus crawls out of his house and returns to his cross. We are then shown the younger Jesus, during his last years of life.

Regarding the theme of redemption, The Last Temptation Of Christ, must have been the ultimately irresistable temptation for both Scorses and Schrader to make into a film, from the book by Kazantakis, as Schrader put it "If you've been fooling around with redemptive themes in various surrogate guises, tackling the prototype is pretty irresistable." (Schrader, 1990, p.135). One of the earliest debates of the Christian church centered around two major heretical ideas regarding the identity of Jesus. The Arian heresy put forward that Jesus was a man who pretended to be God, and the Docetan heresy saw Jesus as a human manifestation of God. Since then, the church has kept with the latter theory, but in The Last Temptation Of Christ the former theory was addressed. Jesus is essentially seen as a

man, struggling to be God, and with his own sense of divinity. Jesus, finally is able to transcend his own human limitations and fears and achieve a "kind of Superman triumph" (Schrader, 1990, p.137). By force of will he commits himself to be crucified, "the emphasis is definately on the man who wills himself back to the cross rather than on the God who puts him back." (Schrader, 1990, p.137)

Rosenbaum points out that

> The film's depiction of Jesus wavering, which remains at the centre implying that Christianity is a battle which must perpetually be fought, it brings the question of faith alive in a way that few religious films have attempted.(Rosenbaum, Screen, 1988)

Rather than the temptation scenes being included as a deliberate call for controversy, they were pivotal to the idea of a man through his own efforts, being able to transcend himself. Their inclusion was a rigourous, and necessary, commentary on the otherwise biblically "true" scenes. It is the first time that a Scorsese' character has been able to rigourously and successfully struggle with the questions of personal identity.

Together, Scorsese and Schrader have given us films which powerfully comment on important social problems and questions. Clearly their mutual fixation on issues of personal transcendence, and of characters who are in the main "about lonely, self-deluded, sexually inactive people" (Schrader, 1990, p.138 (especially as portrayed in Taxi driver and The Last Temptation of Christ) has had an enormous impact, - as witness the controversy that both films received. Even during the times when Scorsese is financially prevented from making films reflecting concerns close to his heart, his dedication to the art of

film allows him to mark time doing work which content wise is not personally significant. The Colour Of Money (198) or even Cape Fear (1990) would be examples of this. They also demonstrate that Scorsese can be, if nothing else, an excellent craftsman. Apart from his in-clination to use generic frameworks for his films, his greater output of work in relation to Schrader at least, is also due to his willing-ness to take on purely commercial projects.

Now it would seem that he has reached a turning point regarding his thematic concerns. Scorsese has said that when one creative avenue closes, he would find another one that would suit his creative sens-ibilities. (Scorsese, The Face, 1990).   One has to wait and see what new developments are in the offing which his forthcoming film The Age Of Innocence (1993) might demonstrate.

CHAPTER THREE

DAVID LYNCH AND KATHRYN BIGELOW

Flms made in Hollywood, especially those made just within it's peri-
phery in the eighties and nineties, have manifested postmodern ten-
dencies, possibly as much as any other art form. Denzin has defined
these tendencies as being:

> An effacement of the bounderies between the past and the present
> (typically given in the forms of pastiche and parody).... Second,
> these films which I shall call late-postmodern nostalgia, bring
> the unpresentable (rotting, cut off ears, sexual violence ...
> insanity ... degredation of women ... drug and alcohol abuse) in
> front of the viewer in ways that challenge the bounderies that
> ordinarily seperate private and public life.

Denzin, Blue Velvet: Postmodern Contradictions 1986

By and large, these have proven to be excellently crafted pieces of
work, seemlessly mixing various genres established from classical
Hollywood. One of the latest examples of this tendency would be
Tarantino's Resevoir Dogs (1993) and Blue Velvet (1986) would be one
of the earlier examples. By the time Lynch Blue Velvet was made,
he was already a well established Hollywood maverick. Lynch was cited
as an auteur in Hollywood without making artistic compromises.

What must be asked, regarding this view, is why such an apparently
uncompromising film-making approach is tolerated within Hollywood,
especially as previously, film-makers such as Schrader and Scorsese
had, and still have, a relatively hard time in realising their per-
sonal vision within the Hollywood system. Wood has provided an ex-
plaination to this. (Wood, Screen, 1986).   In Lynch's films to
date, the components of dialogue, mise en scene, sound and composi-
tion add up to an idiosyncratic style, that for many critics is
enough justification to uphold Lynch as a personal film-making

visionary. While this could be so, in that Blue Velvet could be

percieved as being a film of substantial personal vision, Wood puts

forward that Blue Velvet, its' reception, the way it expresses itself

and the "almost unanimous critical adulation, have all to be understood

in relation to a particular phase of our cultural development." Simply,

it is a film firmly located within the eighties. Hitchcock is one of

the classical Hollywood film-makers whose influence can be ascertained

in Blue Velvet. His film Shadow Of A Doubt has several similarities to

Blue Velvet. Both films are set in "small town America" whose inno-

cense apparently confronts the more deviant underworld that co-habits

the same environment. Benevolent fatherly figures appear throughout

both. However, Hitchcock's portrayal of his characters in this in-

stance, are three dimensional and resonant. He evokes audience sym-

pathy, with the positive and negatively drawn characters, creating a

dialectical relationship to the viewer. Lynch seems to portray his

figures symbolising goodness in a tongue-in-cheek way, sending them

up. The exaggerated treatement of the brightly smiling fireman early

on in the film is an example of this. His treatment of his characters,

the mix of stylistic influences from various eras, etc., suggests that

Blue Velvet is truly a post-modern product. This is all very well,

but the issue of personal vision must be brought up again now, in the

light of Blue Velvet being termed as a post-modern film. In Lynch's

work what is manifested as personal vision, can in fact be reduced to

adventurism with the formal aspects of film. There are some interest-

ing Bonvellian-like camera angles and ideas, such as the zooming in on

the rather horrible and microscopic insects working their way through

Jeffrey's front lawn, and of entering a severed ear is another exciting

example of Lynch's interesting and unusual camera work. The innovative

sound "design" as well is often commented upon, but what about the

substance of Blue Velvet. The issue of substance, or lack of it, poses

a problem in many postmodern films. So much of the time occupied with appropriating elements of past "isms", or genres, playing around with them, mainly on formal levels, is due to the perception that there is nothing more to be originated or said. This duly leaves us with the notion then, that most such works operating under the post-modernist banner are conceived as art for art's sake. If Blue Velvet is saying something, what is it? According to Lynch, "Blue Velvet is a trip beneath the surface of a small American town, but its also a probe into the subconscious or a place where you face things you don't normally face ... real ignorance is bliss. Thats what Blue Velvet is about".(Ferry, The Face, 1987).Thematically, it can then be said that it is about Jeffrey's coming of age, looking at the darker side of himself and transcending this to become a responsible adult and marrying Sandy.

Basically, the story of Blue Velvet begins when Jeffrey, the main character, finds a severed ear in a field and brings it to the town Sheriff. Jeffrey then begins to investigate the mystery behind the ear. He breaks into the flat of a nightclub singer, Dorothy Vallens, whom he knows is implicated in this crime. He hides in her closet and sees Dorothy being hit and sexually degraded by her masochistic lover Frank. On discovering Dorothy and Jeffrey together later on, Frank brings them to a club where his fellow drug abusers hang out. After witnessing their bizarre behaviour, Jeffrey is taken along with Dorothy to a desolated spot by Frank who then beats him up. The next night, Jeffrey and Sandy come home from a dance to find Dorothy naked outside Sandy's house. She is sent to hospital. Jeffrey returns to Dorothy's flat, hides in her closet again, as Frank comes in, and then kills him. The film ends as Sandy and Jeffrey dine with their respective families.

Apart from showing us their union at the film's closure, what also happens is that patriarchy is restored. (Jeffrey's father recovers from his stroke and Jeffrey becomes the Sherrif's son-in-law. Dorothy is restored to her correct position as a mother, rid of her sado-masochistic illness). Although Lynch presents the "nice" side of this small American town in an ironic manner, it is, at the same time, the only actual alternative offered to that of the repressed, deviant and subversive sexuality that Frank represents. Blue Velvet's frighteningly reactionary conclusion seems to be very much of an affirmation of Reagan-flavoured eighties American conservatism, which is to do with the preservation of the status quo of patriarchal structures and of family values. Thematically then, Blue Velvet does leave us with a rather questionable taste in our mouths. By virtue of Blue Velvet's thematics, one of my earlier and central questions regarding the film is answered; which was to do with why Lynch's personal form of film-making is tolerated and even pushed by the Hollywood establishment. Lynch's reactionary messages in his work pose no threat to the conservative American establishment - and read mainstream Hollywood as well.

An example of a film operating on the opposite side of the formal and thematic scales to Blue Velvet is Blue Steel (1990), directed by Kathryn Bigelow. The story of Blue Steel is about the trials of a newly graduated New York cop, Megan Turmer, as she tries to track down a serial killer, Eugene Hunt, who, obsessed by Megan, shoots people with bullets carved with her name. Eugene's obsession started when in a supermarket hold-up, he takes the gun of the robber who drops it as Megan shoots him. Eugene then organises a "chance" meeting with Megan, and takes her out to dinner. They start seeing eachother, until due to his odd behaviour, as he

seduces her in his apartment, Megan realises that he is the killer.
She tries to get him arrested but fails due to lack of evidence. A
couple of more unsuccessfull efforts are made now with Detective Nick
Mann, to incarcerate Eugene. After another failed chase after Eugene,
Megan and Nick return to her apartment where they make love. Eugene
meanwhile is hiding in her bathroom. He shoots Nick and tries to rape
Megan, who fights him off, he escapes. Megan and Nick are taken to
hospital. She knocks out one of the cops on guard, dons his uniform
and goes after Eugene. A stalking ensues, finally effecting a gory
blood-letting in the streets as Megan kills Eugene.

Formally Blue Steel contains elements of detective story, thriller
and film noir. The trajectory of the film is one viewers are well
familiar with. A cop tries to prove herself, her abilities are
doubted by her superiors. She hunts down a killer, motivated by
personal revenge (Eugene killed Megan's best friend and continually
trespasses on her private and intimate moments). She steps outside
the law and kills him. The camera work, sound, editing, dialogue,
mise en scene are excellentry crafted without being pushed to extremes
of formal innovation, (although Bigelow's visual sensibilities are
strongely apparent throughout, having started out as a painter).
But it is the thematic realm of Blue Steel that shows Bigelow as an
exciting newcomer to the periphery of New Hollywood film-making.

Like her previous feature film Near Dark (1987) a vampire western,
Blue Steel, apart from being a generic melange, is, to quote from
Pam Cook, about an innocent central character "who discovers within
herself demons she never knew existed, and which drive her to risk
everything in a primeval battle for survival ... (which) is as much
a matter of coming to terms with internal dark forces as of vanquish-
(Cook, BFI, 1988)

ing external evil". In order to get rid of Eugene, Megan, like him, steps outside the law, the socially legitimised bounderies of violence available to the police which as an officer she has access to. One suspects that Megan fetishises guns as much as her psychotic opponent, which is hinted at when she jokes that she likes killing people, in reponse to being asked why she bacame a cop. She exhibits an obvious pride in her uniformed appearance, and the power and independence that this and her gun grants her. In her need to hunt Eugene down, Megan is forced to confront her own darker motivations for using violence as protection and empowerment. Through Eugene, who is possibly her dark distorted mirror image, she sees it's possible direction towards depravity. In a sense it could be construed that in her hunt for Eugene, Megan is struggling with her own darker alter ego. She knows that to be in complete control of this force, she must fight and deafeat it before she can use physical force and aggresive wit again in a positive way.

What does make Blue Steel different from previous thriller cop movies is that the central character not only is a female cop, but who also refuses to be victimised or fetishised by her opponent. Indeed male response to Blue Steel, after its' showing in a Berlin film festival, was that for the first time in male viewer's lives, they identified with a woman and for her fight for survival. Within its' relatively conventional formal structure, Bigelow raises some important issues, questioning the hitherto accepted statusquo of how women were represented in films. Bigelow says that the motivation for making Blue Steel was that she wanted

> to do a "woman's action film", putting a woman at the centre of a movie predominantly dominated by men ... I was interested in creating an ... everyman that both women and men could identify with ... (where) finally the notion of self-preservation is universal.

(Bigelow, MFB, 1990)

So , more than Megan being presented as a woman who is very strong
and in control of her life, tha camera sympathises with this notion
as well. Quite different from the element of voyeurism in Blue
Velvet, Megan is never presented in the frame as a sexual fetish
object of Eugene's. Eugene describes her "brightness" and "unflinch-
ing power", but we are never allowed to see his perspective of
Megan. Christine Holmlund has accused Blue Steel of portraying
female use of violence as being erotic. (Holmlund Moving Targets).
While the camera does linger in close-up of a Smith and Wesson gun
at the start of the film, this idea of the erotic import of a gun is
shown, via Eugene's sexual fixation on it, as being a potential
root of insanity. In the shootout at the end, Megan is far from
being portrayed as an erotic, gun-toting figure. She appropriates
this phallic object of power to defeat her opponent and gets
wounded in turn like other heroic avenging cops. We also see
Megan buttoning her police shirt over a lace bra in our first intro-
diction of her, which rather than providing an erotic element, seems
to underline Megan's duality in the rest of the film. She merges
a vulnerability with a toughness throughout. She even manages to wear
her police uniform in a sassy and confident way, getting admiring
looks and comments from passers by, on her way home from her police
graduation ceremony.

Criticism has also been thrown at the Megan character, in that she
never questions her role in serving as an enforcement officer in a
traditionally male structure of power. By appropriating access to
this power, she becomes just like them. One senses however that for
Megan, being a police officer is more to do with her desire for indep-
endence and for being in control of her life and surroundings (this is
seen especially when she uses her position to arrest her father for
beating up her mother). In a review on Thelma & Louise (1992), one

critic stated that certain feminists saw feminism "as having to do with responsibility, equality, sensitivity, understanding - not revenge, retribution or sadistic behavour.

However, this seems like buttonholing women again. While these qualities are very important, it must be realised that women, like Megan, also have tendencies and even need to express aggression, physical capability, especially towards ensuring their survival. It must be understood that these qualities, questionable as they may be, can also be intrinsic to women. Even if this is not directly an issue with Blue Steel, Megan does seem to offer something of an improvement on the usual macho cop characters, maybe because of her more sensitive or intuitive qualities. But finally the purpose of Megan straddling successfully, two possible identities, is that Bigelow wanted to portray her as an "everyman" who could be accesible to everyone. In this sense Bigelow's Blue Steel does come close to demonstrating female equality.

Blue Steel shows that, in its' appropriation of past classical Hollywood genres, that it is possible for a postmodernist work to speak eloquently on and examine rigourously the culture that has produced it.

(Moore, Looking For Trouble 1991)

Like Blue Velvet, Blue Steel is also a film which proves that it is possible to be commercial and to use film as a personal art form as well. Unlike Blue Velvet, Blue Steel didn't gain commercial success by manipulating audience repulsion/fascination with socially taboo subjects. Blue Steel maintained its' success by stretching possibly tired genres into becoming a tense, suspenseful, elastic and exciting story, and imbuing into the film an important social investigative commentary.

CONCLUSION

So, how successful are these film-makers in achieving the balance of
making work which is entertaining enough to reach a large audience,
while at the same time avoiding compromise to the extent where it
would make their work ineffective on a personal or political level?
At this point, it may be instructive to return to a couple of central
points brought up in the introduction to this thesis. One of the
first issues was concerned with the compatability of profitability
and personal or political integrity being able to co-exist within a
hollywood film. For the most part, especially in Schrader's case,
these elements have not easily been brought together. Schrader and
Scorsese have both used reasonably accessible narrative or generic
formats within which to construct their personal vision. As was
shown, their motivation behind their utilisation of such formats were
for reasons other than simply for commercial exigencies. They have
both maintained that they are happy with modest financial returns
for their films, as it has been allowed far greater creative freedom.
For Schrader, one of the main attractions of film-making is in its
potential to be an effective platform for social commentary and for
moral and intellectual enquiry. It has clearly been important for
Schrader for his work to have a dialectical relationship with the
viewer, as well as to reach as many viewers as his film-making appr-
oach will allow. Film as an investigative tool, socially, morally
and otherwise has also been seen as of primary importance to Scorsese.
He has, however, more so than Schrader, been particularly involved
with and fascinated by generic structures and classical Hollywood.
This has resulted in his work being more commercially successful.
His personal vision seems to have thrived more than been tarnished
by re-working classical Hollywood genres, due maybe to his unique
perspective on them.

David Lynch on the other hand seems to have experienced no diff-
iculty in mixing his own brand of somewhat reactionary personal
vision to substantial profit making. This is surely due to his know-
ledge of what taboo buttons to push, recognising our, on the surface
distaste of, but underneath fascination with, certain subjects such
as deviant sexuality. Kathryn Bigelow, in common with Scorsese, has
delighted in appropriating past generic devices of storytelling,
finding here very fertile ground for expressing personal concerns.
Like Lynch, she has confronted very little difficulty in marrying
her personal vision with profitability. Unlike him however, she has
maintained a strong dialectical approach in her work, and can just-
ifyably state, as she has done, that she is "an artist working fully
within mainstream cinema". (Bigelow, MFB, 1990).

None of the film-makers discussed have had to make artistic comp-
romises in realising work of personal importance. Scorsese had many
production difficulties with The Last Temptation Of Christ. It took
almost a decade to be made and attracted considerable public uproar
even before it was filmed, but it was completed and exhibited without
any artistic sacrifices. Schrader and Lynch undertook film projects,
which in return for a minimal budget granted them complete creative
freedom (the films concerned are, respectively, Patty Hearst and
Blue Velvet). The tendency thus has been for film-makers on the
periphery of the Hollywood system to opt for a low budget but more
creative freedom, than for a project with more money but also more
rules attached.

The term dissidence, as applied to certain Hollywood film-makers
using the system in order to effect their personal vision in a
broad public domain, was described at the beginning of the thesis.
As far as challenging the Hollywood established approach of film-

making, formally, ideologically and artistically, the films

discussed (and others besides, such as <u>Spike Lee</u>) have not been

unusually non-conformist. But their concern has not been, in

essence, to challenge the system, rather it has been to take

advantage of it, in its ability to reach a wide audience. It is

here, where the meaning of dissident film-making regarding its

practical application and social effectiveness has its true res-

onance. In order to provoke ideas about or to question, or comment

on issues and/or problems effectively within the public conscious

or unconscious, it is not only necessary to have the intellectual

or creative ability to do so, but also to be able to do so in a

medium which is widely available and accessible to the public.

The film-makers discussed in this thesis were chosen, by virtue of

their varying political or artistic differences, to be representative

of the dissident section of Hollywood film-making. They have proven

that it is possible to make films of a uniquely personal or politic-

al nature (whether critical or approving of the dominant ideology)

and still be justifiably termed as "Hollywood Film-makers". This is

because their films are entertaining and accessible for the most part

to a broad section of the viewing public, even as they function as

political or personal enquiries or commentaries. At the same time,

their highly individual approaches towards their political, personal

and/or artistic concerns also sets them apart from their mainstream

Hollywood colleagues. These film-makers working on the edge of

Hollywood, function by helping to make New Hollywood film-making

as a possible, significant and rigorous form of investigation

into our society and culture.

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