Classical Hollywood Cinema and Post-Classical Hollywood Cinema; Case Study of Modern and Postmodern Film

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1. Introduction

Notions of classical Hollywood film and post-classical Hollywood film belong to distinct eras, traditionally used to signify various elements, specific styles, and approaches. The classical Hollywood era of film dates back to the early 1920's, also marking the end of the silent era in American cinema. The golden age of Hollywood lasted up to the late 1960's, which was primarily characterized by films that were issued by the major Hollywood studios. Although many interpretations of dates refer to the classical era lasting through the late 1950's and early 1960's, a transitional period between classical and post-classical is important to mention when analyzing the incisive eras. Granted, the main centrum of analysis is not historical specificities, placing each era in terms of dates and events will put the topics of focus into perspective.

Classical Hollywood cinema thus, in terms of the focal points of analysis, will start in 1927. Hollywood cinematic studios were in control of the production of films, thus, consisting of a homogenous style and ideologies which ultimately established a one way understanding, not only from the directors and producers, but also from the perception of the audience. The classical era therefore represented linearity in narrative style and motivation which would be understood by a wide range audience. Thus, creating a clean cut narrative with straightforward intentions was of great importance in classical films.

Narration constituted important elements that justify the linear and homogenous style of the golden age. The narration of film during the time can be understood as one of the most important characteristics that provide justification to classical style. Apart from narration, film motivation, reasoning, and purpose are implemented in classical film, which in turn gives way to a films style and genre. *Casablanca(Curtiz,1942)* belonging to the classical age of film, will be analyzed

due to its era specific narration, motivation, style, and genre. Although *Casablanca* is known to be a classic film designated to the golden age of cinema, there are elements within the film that are out of reach, or better said, progressive for its time. Further details on the films narration and plot which mark the classical style and motivation will be key for the case study and differentiation between post-classical Hollywood film.

The classical Hollywood era, carried out to the late 1950's introduced issues connected to the Hollywood studio monopoly, thus, explaining the transitional period between the 1950's and 1970's. Hollywood cinema went through multiple lawsuits, jeopardizing the Hollywood studio production of film and distribution. Although the focus of the case study is to determine the key elements of narration, motivation and style between classical and post-classical Hollywood film, the transitional period is vital to mention due to its influence in post-classical films. Film directors took on a new authorial role which set them apart from the studio traditions. Between the 1950's and the 1960's a movement called *auteurism*[1] arose, which is also referred to as the American New Wave. The idea of a camera pen in the act of film making was a consequence of the liberation period in cinema which greatly influenced film style and the role the new role of the director. This served for the transition into new Hollywood cinema and the important role the director had in the style and motivation film. Entering the post-classical era in the early 1960's, contrasting approaches to narration, motivation and style can be located in film.

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[1] Auteurism: Sarris proposed three criteria for recognizing an auteur; (1)Technological competence; (2) distinguishable personality; and (3) interior meaning arising from the tension between personality and material (Stam,2000:89)
Auteurism thus belongs to the directors artistic freedom of expression which is translated into the film, ultimately recognized by the audience.

The New Hollywood era will be seen through films such as *Pulp Fiction(Tarantino,1999)* and *Inception(Nolan, 2010)*. Both films, although produced well after the beginning of the post-classical period of cinema consist of such conventions that mark New Hollywood productions of film. Within the era of New Hollywood comes a style known as postmodernism. Thus, referring to *Pulp Fiction* as a carrier of the postmodern style will introduce the contemporary movement and determine various differentiating elements between classical and post-classical Hollywood cinema.

In this analysis, classical Hollywood film and its basic principles of narration and motivation will be brought forth to further explain its conventions, style and genre. Through the film *Casablanca(1942)* these basic elements will be proven. The transitional period will also be of importance as it paved an evolution of style and motivation leading into post-classical Hollywood film and the step towards postmodernist style. Lastly, a comparative analysis will introduce the variations and similarities between the two eras of cinema.

2. Classical Hollywood film and its basic principles; narration and motivation

Classical Hollywood cinema refers to a specific style of film which was placed in the American film industry in 1927 up until the early 1960's. Films during the 'golden age of Hollywood' were issued primarily through the Hollywood studios, that is, creating a homogenous style and consisting of norms which were easily placed in films during that time. Aspects such as narration and style were under control of such paradigms and norms which dominated the classical Hollywood era of cinema. Hollywood studios eventually took investments from Wall Street financiers which forced Hollywood cinema into a profit driven entity and ultimately turned films

into commodities. The movie industry in the early 20th century was under the influence of *taylorism*[2], that is, the idea of an assembly line of production. In this case, the movie industry, being directly related to mass culture, adapted to the audience instead of enriching them, ultimately giving the audience what they think they wanted in order to sell (Strinati,1995). There is then a dissolution of aesthetic criteria in favor of fun and pleasure through the process of mass production of films. Although the classical era was the beginning of a new shape to popular culture as a commodity driven element, there are many characteristics in classical Hollywood film that helped pave the way for post-classical and contemporary film. Other than the assembly line production strategy, classical films consist of common collective elements pointing them to the golden age film which have left a mark in the film production as well as film perception. According to David Bordwell, classical Hollywood cinema was "heavily influenced by the ideas of the Renaissance and its insurgence of mankind as the focal point"(Bordwell,1985:24). Bordwell thus, refers to films psychological motivation of the characters rather than socially motivated principles, which is later represented in post-classical Hollywood cinema. Through films such as *Casablanca* the psychological motivation is evident, this being the main point of interest in the production of the film. *Casablanca*, a melodrama released in 1943 presents a seriousness of narrative as well as a psychologic goal oriented storyline. The conflict amongst the characters show the psychological motivation and soon present the goal which is aimed to be reached by the end of the film. Along with a films motivation comes the narration which also provides important elements that are era specific. "The narration thus explains a films motivation and can thus further navigate to the style of a film as well as represent a perception of time and

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[2] Taylorism: The transformation of craft production into mass production. Taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_management; 29.06.2015.

space"(Bordwell,1985:16). Narration, first, will be the focus of the analysis and I will further go into detail of the various elements which make up the primary characteristics of the classical Hollywood film such as style and overall genre that is most commonly detected in most classical films.

Narration, the process in which a story is being told, or, describing what is happening, in classical Hollywood cinema is produced through the syuzet or plot. Bordwell breaks down the process of the plot to "three systems; narrative logic, consisting of definition of events, casual relations and parallelisms between events, the representation of time, in other words, order, duration and repetition, and finally, the representation of space, which is the composition and orientation"(Bordwell,1985:31). The plot thus, refers to all three systems which work together to create a films narration. The narrative logic focuses on "psychologically defined and goal oriented characters"(Brodwell, 1985:32) in order to further the narrative into a cause and effect system of production. Motivation in classical cinema provides reasoning to events that are depicted through the actors which ultimately create a sense of reality, which was a primary factor in classical Hollywood narrative. *Casablanca*, through its opening scenes confirms the elements of classical narration. The opening scenes of the film display a map of Africa as well as Western Europe constituting political and economic conflicts which are justified for the audience to immediately recognize as the main issue in the film. Through voice over narration the plot and issues directly inform the audience which represents the narrative logic. The voice over provides information of the political events occurring in Germany and France, the takeover of Europe by the Nazis and the refugees escaping to the neutral town of Casablanca, which supplies the audience with a simple, linear trail of observation through out the film, a key characteristic of

classic narration. This linear approach leaves the audience with no questions of narration, location and purpose. The classical narrative provides the audience with a continual and progressive story, with little disruption, making it easier for the audience to follow. The narration during the era of classical cinema thus, consisted of continuity editing, eliminating any room for disruptive elements or movements in a film, that is, edited for the audience to see a linear and fluid movement of scenes, events and places. The cause and effect relationship was the motivation seen throughout classical cinema, providing a beginning, middle and end, therefore, providing a linear and clean cut plot. Any problem that was introduced in the film was almost always solved by the end of the film. The classical cinema industry stressed on creating a natural and cohesive plot that would easily be perceived by the audience. "As the spectator recalls salient causes and anticipates more or less likely effects. The ending becomes the culmination of the spectator's absorption, as all the causal gaps are filled" (Bordwell,1985:38).

The chronological approach in *Casablanca*, disregarding the short flashback of the previous love affair with the main characters, explains the continuity of editing and the tactic of linear and fluid movement of narration. The chronological order of the film confirms the cause and effect motive most commonly seen during the classical era of cinema. Bordwell also described various levels of motivation that proposes an understanding in the coding and decoding processes of a film.

 "One is *compositional:* certain elements must be present if the story is to continue. A story involving a theft requires a cause for the theft and an object to be stolen. The classical causal factors we have reviewed constitute compositional motivation. A second sort of motivation is *realistic* motivation. Many narrative elements are justified on grounds of verisimilitude. In a film set in nineteenth-century London, the sets, props, costumes, etc. will typically be motivated

realistically. Thirdly, we can identify *intertextual* motivation. Here the story (or the plot's representation of it) is justified on the grounds of the conventions of certain classes of art works. For example, we often assume that a Hollywood film will end happily simply because it *is* a Hollywood film. The star can also supply intertextual motivation. The motivation thus, justifies any given person, place or thing within a film" (Bordwell,1985:18).Thus, the motivation works as a supporter to a films narrative, ultimately justifying any given events or actions represented in a film. The compositional motivation of the film Casablanca is the love triangle between Rick, Ilsa and Victor Laszlo. Rick and Ilsa previously having a love affair were forced to separate due to the political conflicts of the West. Bordwell gives an example of motivation through a cinematic technique known as a flashback. A flash back thus, "could be motivated compositionally, (giving us essential story information), realistically (proceeding from a character's memory), and intertextually (occurring in a certain kind of film, say a 1940s 'woman'melodrama')"(Bordwell,1985:39). In classical Hollywood cinema, compositional motivation ensures a secured linear justification through the films psychological traits and goals of orientation, located within the narration. The compositional motivation in some ways creates a realistic motivation, that is, persuading the audience towards a perception of reality that is otherwise constructed on behalf of Hollywood ideological paradigms. Frances Marion confirms the idea of realism in classical cinema and "claims that the strongest illusion of reality comes from tight causal motivation: 'In order that the motion picture may convey the illusion of reality that audiences demand, the scenario writer stresses motivation—that is, he makes clear a character's reason for doing whatever he does that is important" (ibid:39). Based on the proposition of causality and motivation, narration is created with the help of such characteristics. The narration of any film consists of a primary goal of transmitting a story line through a

sequence of events and information. "Conversations, figure position, facial expressions, and well-timed encounters between characters all function just as narrationally as do camera movements, cuts, or bursts of music"(Bordwell,1985:43). Many elements are key in creating a narration that will ultimately tell the story through a directors eye, which is consciously constructed for the audience to perceive in a way the director intended. The classical style of cinema has been stated to be a fluid transitional and coherent sequence of events whose techniques are close to invisible to the audience. According to Meir Stenberg, classical narration can be placed into three levels; "narration as self conscious, knowledgable and communicative" (Stenberg;Bordwell,1985). "In the opening passages of the film, the narration is moderately self-conscious and overtly suppressive. As the film continues, the narration becomes less self-conscious and more communicative. The exceptions to these tendencies are also strictly codified. The end of the film may quickly reassert the narration's omniscience and self-consciousness"(Bordwell,1985:44).

The characters are the key story and information carriers to causality and motivation in classical cinema. "They are the holders of all information delivered to the audience and the carriers of narration in order to ensure the audience of a films realness"(ibid:44). They are ultimately in control of any shifts that occur in a plot and hold the ground for the compositional level of a film, that is, providing evidence for any events and occurrences that happen through out the films narration. Thus, narration, being one of, if not the most important element to any classical film. consisting of various levels of motivation, in turn influence the cause and effect through the representation of characters, easily noticed in the classical era of film. *Casablanca*, a well known classical film, distinguishes these various elements, as well as specific style, narrative motivation, perception and genre.

2.1 Classical Hollywood style and genre

As Bordwell has mentioned, the style of classical film was influenced by the ideas of the Renaissance and redirected its focus towards humankind. The psychological motivation thus, plays an important role in the film's style. The psychological role has two perspectives, that is, in terms of the film itself and its goal oriented element, as well as the photographic perspective which can be translated to cinema theory according to Andre Bazin.

The psychological motivation is usually represented through the main characters of a film who are introduced to some conflict or issues early on in the film, much like in *Casablanca*. The focus thus, is primarily on human conflict and interaction with an ultimate goal of solving the conflict by the end of the film. Rick and Ilsa's past relationship along with the political conflicts in Western Europe introduce this idea of human conflict and leaves the audience in dispense with how the issues will be solved by the end. There is no question weather or not the issue will be solved in the classical era, it is just a question of how and in what way. In contrast, Andre Bazin introduces a different side to psychological motivation in cinema. "Photography and the cinema on the other hand are discoveries that satisfy, once and for all and its very essence, our obsession with realism"(Bazin,1967:197). Realism in classical Hollywood film, that is, a continuity in plot and style was the primary factor of intention. Robert Stam claims that realism in the 1940's was influenced by the war, therefore, films interpreted the war from the perspective of the producers. "In the 1940's, realism takes on a new urgency. In a sense, postwar film realism emerged from the smoke and ruins of European cities; the immediate trigger for the mimetic revival was the calamity of World War II"(Stam, 2000:73).

Casablanca thus, represented a reality with romance incorporated in the plot, that is, "the point was not to invent stories which resembled reality, but rather turn reality into a story"(ibid:73).

Casablanca and its plot have the intention of creating a continuos story that turned a reality into a romantic drama. However, the style of a continuos plot was toyed with a flashback, therefore, the linearity occurs only after Rick's flashback, which transpires while sitting at the bar one night. The scene in which Ilsa and her husband, Victor Laszlo, are sitting at a table in Rick's cafe in Casablanca, leaves the audience puzzled. Ilsa's conversation with the piano player, Sam, refers to a past encounter with the musician, and a close one, as the two exchange personal interests when Ilsa asks Sam to play one of her favorite songs, stating that no one has been able to play that song the way Sam does. Sam's playing alerts Rick as he rushes to Sam, demanding him to stop playing. This introduces the first encounter and raises questions of Rick and Ilsa's past, demanding an explanation in order for the plot to move on. The song thus, represents a metaphor for Rick and Ilsa's past relationship. This specific scene in the film leads to speculation of a past love affair. Thus, the linear plot is disturbed when the two run into each other. Later on, through the perspective of Rick's thoughts, the film clarifies the audiences perception by providing the details of Rick and Ilsa's relationship and Rick's trip to Casablanca. The flashback then, puts realism and continuity back to the film, as a representation of basic styles and genre of classical Hollywood film. The psychological motivation of Rick and his virtuous character of gaining back the love of Ilsa, as well as sticking to his moral implications, introduces the primary issue in the film, which is aimed to be solved by the end. The "melodramatic and heroic sacrifices; sharp, noir dialogue; and the triumph of idealism over cynicism in a 'world gone mad'"(Tunc,2007) are the primary intentions and style of *Casablanca*. Two principles determine the style of classical cinema; "One concerns shot arrangement and editing style, and the other focuses on the centrality of a particular form of narrative (or story) organization"(King,2002:13).

The films plot is edited to appear as a continuous, non disturbed story. Camera angles and positions present a point of view to persuade the viewers of this realistic, continuos and linear plot. Psychological motivation contributes to classical films genre and style, represented in films such as *Casablanca.* The main characters Ilsa and Rick produce the psychological motivation thus creating a melodramatic film. The films plot also contributes to the films style. Casablanca was produced during World War 2, ultimately influencing the plots realistic approach. Psychological motivation and realism subsidize the films genre and style, which give evidence to the classical Hollywood industry and specific film characteristics. Leading up to the 1950's, a new era and stylistic approach of film begins known as post-classical Hollywood film.

3. Introduction to post-classical Hollywood film

New Hollywood cinema simply cannot be placed into one definition and time period. "The term has been used on various occasions to describe different aspects of Hollywood Cinema in the post-war period"(King,2002:1). Although there are clear differentiations between New Hollywood and classical Hollywood, the time period in which both eras of film occurred is quite difficult to locate. There are however, "two sets of claims that can be identified; New Hollywood represents a style of filmmaking different from that which went before, and second, that it signifies a changed industrial context"(King,2002:11). As apposed to the classical style and the homogenous production of film, New Hollywood takes on a new approach, that of the importance of the director and his role in style, genre, casting and general approach towards the films production and execution. Films of classical Hollywood were constrained in part of major studio productions and held the homogenous ideology up until the 1950's. King refers to the

New Hollywood era of film as the renaissance of cinema. Films began "to go beyond the confines of conventional studio fare in terms of their content and style and their existence as products represented birth (or rebirth) of the Hollywood 'art' film, or something very like it"(King, 2002:22). Although there are clear contrasting elements between the two eras of Hollywood cinema, the conversion between the time periods can be noticed as an evolution of style and innovation of content. However, what motivated this exceptional change in style and content? It is important to mention a transitional period that occurred, although rarely mentioned, in the early 1950's, ultimately leaving a trail for the future of Hollywood renaissance.

3.1 Transitional period

1948 was a year that hit Hollywood cinema by surprise and would later contribute to major changes for the New Hollywood era of film. United States v Paramount Pictures, inc.[3] was a case that accused the major studios of the Sherman Antitrust Act[4] and the studios control over production and distribution of their movies. Seven of the major film studios controlled the countries theater chains, this "either through ownership of their own theater chains or through a process known as block booking, in which independent theater owners signed contracts with the studios that required them to show a given number (or block) of films"(U.S. Supreme Court Decides Paramount Antitrust Case,Web). This of course restricted independent producers and directors form the production of film, given the monopoly the major studio companies had upon

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[3] "On May 03, 1948, the Supreme Court issued that the case of United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc. Et Al. (docket no. 79) should be affirmed and reversed (or vacated) in part and remanded and upholding the law in question [Sherman] as constitutional"http://supreme-court-cases.insidegov.com/l/218/United-States-v-Paramount-Pictures-Inc-Et-Al. Accessed: 22.5.2015.

[4] "The Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 was the first measure passed by the U.S. Congress to prohibit trusts"http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=51. Accessed: 5.22.2015.
The act prohibited monopolies of businesses.

cinema in the United States. The vertical integration of production studios restricted fair trade upon other minor production companies, ultimately holding a type of monopoly. After the verdict declared the seven production studios guilty, there were consequences which reached even movie goers. Before the supreme courts interference, the movie studios owned the theaters, which meant lower charged rents and movie tickets. However, after the verdict, the prices increased due to the studios being forced to release ownership of their theaters and their block booking. There were of course positive outcomes with the supreme courts decision in that "more independent producers and studios to produce their film products free of major studio interference"(United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc; *Wikipedia*). This then marked the end of the Golden Age of cinema. "From 1915 to 1952, as film evolved and its relationship to society and politics shifted"(Hwang).

3.1.1 The Miracle Decision 1952

In 1949, producer Fredrico Fellini and director Roberto Rosellini embarked in the creation of a film which would soon spark negative attention by the catholic church and would be the start of a battle of film censorship. The film *L'Amore(Rosellini, 1958),* told the story of a woman who becomes pregnant with a man she believes to be St.Joseph. The film has two parts, the first of which is called *Il Miracolo.* She is tormented by the people living in the village and decides to escape to another village where she gives birth in a church, resulting to the ending scene in the film. The film was soon criticized by the Catholic Legion of Decency who demanded the film was too indecent to be shown. However, the reasoning for banning the film was proven to be too vague and was out ruled by the First Amendment. "In 1948, for the first time, the Supreme Court

applied its new view of the First Amendment to film in *United States v. Paramount Pictures*

when Justice William O. Douglas noted in dicta that the Court had "no doubt that moving

pictures, like newspapers and radio, are included in the press whose freedom is guaranteed by the

First Amendment"(Hwang). Following up to the supreme court hearing on the Miracle

Decision[5]"the "Big Five" studios (MGM, Paramount, RKO, Twentieth Century Fox, and Warner

Brothers) controlled not just the production of most films, but also about eighty percent of the

urban first-run theaters. As a result, the Big Five were able to price-fix entrance fees and

manipulate theaters across the nation into accepting whatever films the studios

released"(Hwang). In other words, the control the major five production studios had upon the

film industry also determined the restriction upon artistic freedom and film content, ultimately

confirming censorship. The Miracle Decision 1952 influenced future films of becoming a form of

artistic freedom as well as form of speech. "The Court's view of both protected speech and film

as a medium had transformed; that which was once mere spectacle, was now a powerful form of

expression and speech"(Hwang). The transitional period, consisting of Supreme Court cases

protecting smaller businesses from monopolies and film directors from censoring artistic content

would be the beginning of a transitional period between the classical era and post-classical, or,

the American New Wave in film.

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[5] "On May 26, 1952, the Supreme Court issued a 9-0 decision stating that the case of Joseph Burstyn, Inc. v. Wilson, Commissioner Of Education Of New York, Et Al. (docket no. 522) should be reversed and upholding the law in question [First Amendment (Speech, Press, And Assembly)] as constitutional. The judgment rested on the Court's authority over judicial review at the state level. It was decided by an opinion of the court (orally argued) and was liberal in nature" http://supreme-court-cases.insidegov.com/l/659/Joseph-Burstyn-Inc-v-Wilson-Commissioner-Of-Education-Of-New-York-Et-Al. Accessed: 22.5.2015.

3.2 New Hollywood 1960's and 1970's; New transition into postmodernism

"Post-1975 ear best warrants the term the New Hollywood, and for essentially the same reasons associated the classical era. Both terms connote not only specific historical periods, but also characteristic qualities of the movie industry at the time-particularly its economic and institutional structure, its mode of production, and its system of narrative conventions"(Schatz, 1993). Although the focus of this case study is not the historical context of the film industry, technological advancements which lead up to the 1970's influenced film style of the post-classical era. After 1968 "filmmakers were experimenting with more politically subversive, sexually explicit, and/or graphically violent material"(Schatz,1993:15).

Artistic freedom became on aspect in film style that was not seen in classical film. The American New Wave[6], beginning in the 1960's clearly showed distinctive differences between the classical era and style of film to New Hollywood. Influenced by the French New Wave[7], films and their directors strived for a counter culture approach while incorporating an aesthetic that began during the French New Wave. The American New Wave in the 1980's introduced "a new generation of filmmakers working outside the studio system"(A History of American New Wave Cinema), allowing the filmmakers to contribute their artistic freedom. The American New Wave stretching its ideologies to the 1980's, introduced a new style and era in the arts such as film

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[6] American New Wave: 'New Hollywood' by the press, their films were mostly financed by the major studios, but they introduced subject matter and styles that set them apart from studio tradition. They re-worked and re-imagined some of Hollywood's classic genres – such as the crime film, the war film and the western – and by so doing, presented a more critical view of America past and present. Taken from; http://www.newwavefilm.com/international/new-hollywood.shtml

[7] French New Wave: Although never a formally organized movement, the New Wave filmmakers were linked by their self-conscious rejection of the literary period pieces being made in France and written by novelists, along with their spirit of youthful iconoclasm, the desire to shoot more current social issues on location, and their intention of experimenting with the film form. "New Wave" is an example of European art cinema. Taken from; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_New_Wave. 29.06.2015.

known as postmodernism. From the 1960's through the 1970's a new transition is noticed through the American New Wave, introducing a new era that will be used for analysis, specifically referring to *Pulp Fiction*. With technological advancements and the role of the director in terms of style, plot, narration and casting freedom, there are clear distinctions between classical Hollywood film and post-classical Hollywood film. "At a cursory glance, the process of rejuvenation that the film industry en- forced after 1967-68, and which resulted in a "New Hollywood", was a product of this same logic. "Perhaps the crucial difference lay in the intensity of the social movements, changes, shocks and crises, which rocked American society in the Sixties and early Seventies, and moreover, in the intensity with which popular culture registered these shocks. During the Eighties and Nineties the real crises were certainly none the less intense, but the modalities of their narrative transformation into popular discourse had entirely shifted"(Elsaesser,Thomas, Alexander Horwath, and Noel King,2004:12).

4. Postmodernism and film

Postmodern film produces fragmented and disjointed narratives which leaves viewers unsettled and forces film to move away from classical linear storytelling. Many other characteristics such as intertextuality and a blurring of boundaries between truth and fiction and the manipulation of time and space are elements used in postmodern film. Time and space specifically is of drastic opposition from classical cinema as postmodern film focuses on the liminal space[8]. Modernist cinema, or, the classical period of film places the focus on psychological motivation and constructing a linear story with clear perspective of time and space, which is situated as the focus

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[8] Liminal space: The meaning is often generated most productively through the spaces and transitions and collisions between words and moments and images. Taken from Wikipedia; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liminality

of consciousness. Postmodern film, putting the focus on the liminal space means that meaning is often generated through the spaces and transitions, often difficult to notice. Postmodernism and film is usually taken for granted as meaningless and produced for the mass culture, however, many films through its pastiche, irony, intertextuality and liminal space contain symbolism and metaphors, relating to a deeper meaning and message of the film. Films which incorporate postmodern characteristics while presenting meaning can be noticed in films such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Inception*. Determining key characteristics will be important for further analysis and comparison to classical Hollywood film, *Casablanca*.

4.1 Postmodern characteristics

"Postmodernism has gained a reputation for complexity and inaccessibility, and it is certainly the case that some elements of postmodern thought, because they run counter to the dictates of what has come to be regarded as ''common sense,'' are a bit difficult for the ordinary person to grasp. It is also the case that the specific films used by academic critics to illustrate the phenomenon of postmodernism in film have sometimes been difficult and abstruse, though most theories of postmodernism suggest that it is a far-reaching phenomenon that should have an impact on virtually every area of contemporary cultural production"(Booker, 2007:18). Booker, in his statement on postmodern film as being difficult to concretely defined is accurate when looking to postmodernism style generally, however, various characteristics and elements can be found in the postmodernism style in film. Postmodernism style in film have distinct characteristics which are era specific, those being; intertextuality, fragmentation, pluralism, manipulation of time and space that is, hyperreality, and a blurring of boundaries between truth and fiction. David Harvey

explains postmodernism and its characteristics by stating "its total acceptance of the ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity, and the chaotic that formed the one half of Baudelaire's conception of modernity"(Harvey,1990). Other than the characteristics within the film production and style, cultural and economic aspects have influenced such characteristics and elements. John Hill best exemplifies these influences within three theories. The first relating to the film industry, "the organization of the film industry itself has often been taken to exemplify postmodern features. Thus, it has been argued that Hollywood has undergone a transition to the more flexible forms of independent production"(Hill,2000:96). Hill specifically refers to the numerous entertainment interests which "exemplify a postmodern blurring of boundaries between industrial practices, technologies, and cultural forms"(ibid:98). Thus, postmodernism as a phenomena is incorporated into various cultural forms, influencing its characteristics and style, specifically in film. His second theory relates to films reflection of society, "The dystopian character of the contemporary science fiction film might be seen to be connected with a postmodern loss of faith in the idea of progress"(ibid:97). Meta narratives therefore play a vital role in this theory. Grand narratives are rejected in postmodern theory and have shown a mistrust in a universal truth such as progress. Rather, postmodernism looks to micro or local narratives, putting the focus on smaller events which then influence a wider picture, while classical films insert the meta narrative of realism. "Finally, films have been seen to display the aesthetic features that are characteristically associated with postmodernist cultural practice"(ibid:99), which is in relation to previously numbered stylistic characteristics in film.

5. *Pulp Fiction* and postmodernism

Quentin Tarantino's film *Pulp Fiction(1994)* represents elements within postmodernism such as intertextuality, fragmentation and lack of covering its mode of construction, that is, the transitions within the film are unsubtle enough the viewers are able to notice the breaks between the 'film' and natural conversations which refers back to liminal space in film. *Pulp Fiction* consists of a series of smaller stories, each intertwined with each other, influencing one another. The stories are shown in backward chronological order, thus, the beginning scene is also shown in the ending scene. The main characters, Jules Winnfield and Vincent Vega are hit-men on a mission in finding a stolen suitcase. The mission progressively gets complicated as various smaller factors are intertwined in each story, resulting to the ending scene of an attempted robbery. In general, when speaking of postmodernism and film, it usually refers to a critique against modernism. Fredric Jameson stated that after the modernism movement,"The enumeration of what follows, then, at once becomes empirical, chaotic, and heterogeneous"(Jameson,1991), which is appropriate when analyzing *Pulp Fiction*. Intertextuality is shown through Tarantino's mixing of elements such as the roles of robbers, boxers and gangsters as well as throwing in ironic aspects within the three themes. The robbers, who are shown in the opening scene as well as the closing scene in the film fail to keep their composure and intimidation as Jules Winnfield beats them at their own game. The gangster Jules Winnfield and Vincent Vega also have their moments of comedic relief and irony when Vincent Vega accidentally kills a victim in the car, creating a set back to their mission. The boxer, Butch Coolidge, on his escape from the main man in charge, Marsellus Wallace, in the end become friends. All three incidences are examples of ironic playfulness to cliche roles. The three

different stories that are told in the film, 'Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace's Wife,'The Gold Watch' and 'The Bonnie Situation' show characteristics of postmodernism. The three story lines are not shown in chronological order but each affect the next story. The film is presented backwards, that is, the starting scene is also the last scene in the movie. Thus, the fragmentation in the film also represents postmodernism. Another way in which fragmentation is used in the film is through the characters, Jules and Vincent. The two characters constantly shift from their intended 'film' characters of intimidating and dangerous gangsters to having natural conversation as normal people, often having debates given specific situations. The audiences perception and their ability to have a subjective perception, in regards to the era of postmodernism, is also an aspect of postmodernism in the context of film. Post-classical film allows for subjective interpretation given its more complex narrative, contrasting classical Hollywood film linearity. The film may have many interpretations, much like Jules Winnfield's famous biblical passage which he comes to the realization at the end of the film; their are many interpretations of the passage, and change his outlook on punishing the robbers and possibly future murder missions. Vincent and Jules's last argument in the diner metaphorically represent modernism and postmodernism. While Vincent believes their is scientific answer for everything, Jules believes there are some things in this world that are inexplainable and are up for subjective interpretation. While Vincent represents modernism and a meta narrative approach, he indirectly presents classical Hollywood narration, motivation and causality. Jules however represents the fragmented and minor narrative belief of post-classical film.

5.1 2000's postmodernism-*Inception*

"A genre that began in the 1990's and expanded in the 2000's, the smart or puzzle game film, or what Thomas Elsaesser has described as 'mind game' films"(Corrigan,2000:14). Christopher Nolan's Inception presents the new genre in the 2000's in that it "shares narratives and visual styles that involve the audience in various cognitive and imagistic 'games' about what is happens and why, or in some cases, about the challenge of distinguishing interior subjective realities from exterior objective realities"(ibid:14). *Inception(2010),* directed by Christopher Nolan, embodies clear elements of postmodernism and the new genre of 'mind games', both directly and indirectly. The films interchange between reality and dreams introduces dangers to an individuals subconscious desires, bringing them to the surface. In this case, the film clearly brings forth elements of hyperreality which takes part in the puzzle film concept. Indirectly speaking, the film represents mind games through the films narrative itself which may represent the new postmodern genre as a whole. Cobb, the main character in the film, extracts information from people by stealing valuable secrets deep within the subconscious during the dream state, when the mind is most vulnerable, this then references indirectly to the genre introduced in the early 2000's. Cobb is offered one last job that differs from any other information extracting job he has yet done. Instead of stealing ideas, he has to plant one. The success of this last mission determines weather Cobb gets his life back and return home to his children. Hyperreality[9] thus play a vital role in the film itself as well as determining the films success of the mind game element. Through the story itself, hyperreality is presented through the layers of dreams the characters travel through which are representations of ones subconscious ideas of

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[9] Hyperreality; Hyperreality is seen as a condition in which what is real and what is fiction are seamlessly blended together so that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins. Taken from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperreality#cite_note-1. 15.05.2015.

reality. In a dream everything is controlled and manipulated by the person dreaming. Architecture, physics and even the sense of time and space are manipulated to create a desired reality in a dream. "The growing immediacy of global space and time resulting from the dominance of the mass media means that previously unified coherent ideas about space and time begin to be undermined, and become distorted and confused"(Strinati,1995:214). The manipulation of dreams in the film thus, represents this distortion of perception of time and space and leaves the audience questioning weather reality or dreams are being presented through the characters. "Rapid international flows of capital, money, information and culture disrupt the linear unities of time, and the established distances of geographical space"(ibid:214). In order to be able to determine when one is in a dream and in reality is by the use of a personal totem. The totem thus, represents the reality in which the characters live in, however, the last scene in the film especially plays the mind game for the character as well as the audience when the scene is cut off before establishing if the totem stopped spinning, meaning Cobb's last mission was successful. Still referring to postmodernism theory in film, although adding the new genre of mind games, Intertextuality, the shaping of text's meanings by other influences, also is recognized in *Inception* and is important when speaking of postmodernism as a style in film. Often, films are influenced and reference to other films, texts and other forms of art, which was previously proven in *Pulp Fiction*. Christopher Nolan incorporated and mixed various genres in the film such as film noir and science fiction. Film noir is represented through Cobb's late wife, Mel. Mel, often making an appearance in Cobb's dreams effects the ability of extracting information and distinguishing the line between reality and dreams. Mel represents the essence

of a femme fatale in the film, a main characteristic in noir film[10]. A reference to Orson Welles's film *Citizen Kane(1941)* was made when "Ariadne was put into a dream where she created two mirrors and positions them to create an infinite series of images of herself and Cobb. This is almost identical to the film *Citizen Kane* as Charles Foster Kane walks past two facing mirrors and an infinite amount of images of the character is shown" (Westfah,2010.Web). Many elements are taken into account to produce the new postmodern genre of mind games. Hyperreality, the manipulation of time and space and the narrative itself in films such as *Inception* successfully execute the puzzled games for the audience, ultimately playing with their perception of reality. [11]

6. Classical Hollywood v.s. post-classical Hollywood film

Classical Hollywood film and post-classical Hollywood film, Old and New Hollywood, consist of defining differences in style, modes of production, and plot. Classical Hollywood inheres a transgression of events within a plot, that is, the motivation of resolving problem by the end of the film. It adheres to a linear sequence of events with little disruption and the goal to produce a story with a distinct beginning, middle, and end. Classical Hollywood film was produced through ideological norms within the era and were in the hands of powerful major studios in the industry which controlled the production of film. As Bordwell defined Classical Hollywood cinema, he states; "Hollywood cinema sees itself as bound by rules that set stringent limits on individual

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[10] Film noir: **Film Noir** (literally 'black film or cinema') was coined by French film critics (first by Nino Frank in 1946) who noticed the trend of how 'dark', downbeat and black the looks and themes were of many American crime and detective films released in France to theatres following the war. Accessed 4.7.2015. Taken from: http://www.filmsite.org/filmnoir.html

[11] Taken from an unpublished seminar: *Popular Culture; Inception and American Beauty.* Sarah Radulovich

innovation"(Bordwell,1985:118), thus, Hollywood cinema being tightly linked to ideological and hegemonic values, the industry lacked auteurism and individual, subjective expression. "Telling a story is the basic formal concern"(ibid:119) therefore the continuity was vital for the story to come across as realistic and natural. "Hollywood film strives to conceal its artifice through techniques of continuity and invisible storytelling; that the film should be comprehensible and unambiguous; and that it possesses a fundamental emotional appeal that transcends class and nation"(Bordwell, 1985:124). This, in short, describes the motivation behind the production of classical cinema. The clean cut story telling with little to no disruption within the narrative, consisting of a clear goal, motivated by the issues presented in the plot. *Casablanca* provides proof of the classical style and motivation within its narrative. The film portrayed the struggles brought upon the war as people relentlessly fight for visas to move to the United States. However, love seems to bring conflict upon the main character Rick, as he is forced to choose between emotion and reason; providing visas for Ilsa and her husband, or having her stay with him. The continuous story telling is represented only after Rick's flashback, giving the love affair between Rick and Ilsa context within the story and ultimately leading the plot back on track for the audience.

The transitional period between the late 1940's to the early 1970's gave way to a new era known as New Hollywood. New Hollywood, inspired by the French New Wave took a leap away from classical Hollywood norms of production and inserted an individualistic point of view and expression to film. Post-classical Hollywood cinema began roughly in the 1960's, with the New Hollywood bringing forth innovative conventions and style in the world of cinema. Parting from the classical narration of continuity and clear structure, post-classical introduced intentions of the

adopted by the French New Wave and that is art film. Post-classical cinema went beyond classical studio production and introduced new expressionism.

Postmodernism, belonging to a stylistics approach within the postclassical period, presents differences between classical Hollywood and postclassical Hollywood cinema. Fragmentation, clearer forms of intertextuality and non linearity are characteristics within postmodernism that differ from classical film. Such characteristics are evident in films such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Inception*. Jameson argues the production of postmodernism is meaningless and depthless, however, the eclectic elements within postmodern film leaves more room for subjective interpretation. Unlike classical film, where the linear story and psychological motivation presents clear narrative goals of interpretation, post-classical styles, such as postmodernism, encourages individualistic expression not only in the production of the film, but also through the audience's subjective perception. Other characteristics such as the manipulation of space and time through hyperreality influences the non linearity of story telling and leaves the audience unsettled, contradicting classical Hollywood style. Post-classical film however, cannot be regarded as a mere opposite of classical Hollywood film. Although there are distinctive differences in style and genre, postclassical film enhances classical aesthetics. Continuity is not completely disregarded, however, it is approached at a different angle, that is, treated as an element in film to be manipulated with in order to play with fragmentation and perspective. The transitional phase thus, influenced the move away from classical studio production cinema and encouraged individualistic expression and art film. The New Wave lasting up until the 1980's paved the way for the era of postmodernist film, classified in films such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Inception*.

7. Conclusion

Classical Hollywood film and post-classical Hollywood film each contain specific characteristics and elements which differentiate one from the other. The classical era of film started in the late 1920's and maintained its basic notions until the 1950's, while some argue the golden age of film lasting even to the 1960's. Basic principles such as narration, motivation and style are characteristics which help distinguish the classical era with the post-classical era. The Hollywood studio had a tremendous influence on the production of film during the golden age, therefore being the primary source of production and control of ideologies, style and genre. The historical periodization then is important when defining classical Hollywood style and motivation and the reasons behind such principles. World War 1 allowed American cinema to gain control of the global cinema market while defeating competitors such as Italy and France. The Hollywood studios then gained power to invest in Wall Street financiers, ultimately leading to a monopoly based control system in American cinema. World War 2 also brought upon influences to the classical period of film. Realism was of great significance to classical style. The war was represented in many films, from the perspective of Americans, such as in *Casablanca.* Thus, the struggle to gain a visa to move to America introduced the negative perspective of the war, while suggesting the psychological motivation often noticed in classical films. The goal oriented plot between the characters therefore reassures mankind as the focal point in the narrative and the psychological motivation.

The transitional period between 1948 and 1960 proposed many set backs for the classical Hollywood studios, resulting the the transition into the post-classical period of film. United States v Paramount Pictures, inc. accused the American production studios of the Sherman

Antitrust Act, arguing against the studios power and control over the distribution of films. The Miracle decision also affected the transition into post-classical film as it disputed the importance of individualism and the role of the director as the sole provider of subjective creativity. The transitional period thus, abolished the monopoly the studios had upon film production while emphasizing the importance of the director and the freedom of creativity.

The post-classical Hollywood era of film has varied in specifying the exact starting point, however, the most appropriate date in terms of analysis begins in the 1960's. After 1968 filmmakers began venturing in more politically provocative, sexually explicit and experimenting with violent material in order to accentuate individual creativity. Thus, artistic freedom became one of the primary differences between the golden age of film and the New Wave of film. With the help of technological advancements and the importance of the director in terms of artistic style, plot and narration, distinct variations are noticed between the two eras of Hollywood film. Post-classical Hollywood cinema thus contain postmodern elements, which are shown in movies such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Inception*. Postmodernism as a style in film has specific characteristics, belonging if course to the post-classical period. Postmodern characteristics include, intertextuality, fragmentation, pluralism, manipulation of time and space belonging to the idea of hyperreality and the blurring of boundaries between truth and fiction. All characteristics thus, present differences in style and motivation between classical Hollywood film and post-classical Hollywood film. The order of events within a film seem to be the greatest difference between the two eras. While classical films, like Casablanca, contain a linear storyline with obvious goals and psychological motivation toward solving issues, post-classical films are not interested in answering questions or containing a goal oriented plot. This then introduces the difference

between the meta narrative of the classical era as opposed to micro or local narratives of the post-classical period. The golden age of film contained a clean cut narrative, goal oriented plot and psychological motivation while the New Wave of Hollywood film introduced new perspectives in a fragmented, disjointed style while emphasizing artistic freedom of the director.

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