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DEFINITIONS OF GENRE

'Genre' is a French word meaning 'type' or 'kind'. As we shall see, it has occupied an important place in the study of the cinema for over thirty years, and is normally exemplified (either singly or in various combinations) by the western, the gangster film, the musical, the horror film, melodrama, comedy and the like. On occasion, the term 'sub-genre' has also been used, generally to refer to specific traditions or groupings within these genres (as in 'romantic comedy', 'slapstick comedy', 'the gothic horror film' and so on). And sometimes the term 'cycle' is used as well, usually to refer to groups of films made within a specific and limited time-span, and founded, for the most part, on the characteristics of individual commercial successes: the cycle of historical adventure films made in the wake of *Treasure Island* (1934) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1934), for instance (Behlmer 1979: 12; Taves 1993a: 68–9), or the cycle of 'slasher' or 'stalker' films made in the wake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Halloween* (1978) (Clover 1992; Dika 1990).

As these examples illustrate, the definition and discussion of genre and genres in the cinema has tended to focus on mainstream, commercial films in general and Hollywood films in particular. Sometimes, indeed, genre and genres have been exclusively identified with these kinds of films. 'Stated simply', writes Barry Keith Grant, 'genre movies are those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations.' 'They have been exceptionally significant', he adds, 'in establishing the popular sense of cinema as a cultural and economic institution, particularly in the United States, where Hollywood studios early on adopted an industrial model based on mass production' (1986b: ix). However, if (for the moment at least) we accept that genres are simply types or kinds of films, there is no logical reason for excluding either such non-American instances as the Indian mythological, the Japanese samurai film, or the Hong Kong *wu xia pan* or swordplay film, or such 'non-commercial' or non-feature length instances as the documentary, the animated short, the avant-garde film or the art film. Although writing can be found which considers these types of film from a generic point of view, most

of the writing on genre and genres in the cinema has focused on the commercial feature film and on Hollywood.[1]

There are a number of reasons for this. Most can be found either in the history of the study of the cinema, or in the history of genre as a concept within the fields of written fiction and drama. Given that this book will also concentrate on the feature film and on Hollywood, it is important to highlight these reasons at the outset, and to expose some of the limitations and problems to which they have given rise.

GENRE CRITICISM AND GENRE THEORY IN THE 1960S AND 1970S

In her survey of writing on genre in *The Cinema Book*, Christine Gledhill (1985a: 58) points out that books and articles on individual Hollywood genres began to be published in the US and in Europe (especially in France) in the 1940s and 1950s, notably by Bazin (1971a, 1971b), Chabrol ([1955] 1985), Rieupeyrout (1953) and Warshow ([1948] 1975a, [1954] 1975b). However, it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the study of genre and genres began to establish itself more fully in Britain and in the US, in tandem with the establishment of Film Studies as a formal, academic discipline. As Gledhill goes on to indicate, there were two main reasons for the appearance of genre and genres on the agenda of theorists, critics, and teachers of film at this time. One was a desire to engage in a serious and positive way with popular cinema in general and with Hollywood in particular. The other was a desire to complement, temper or displace altogether the dominant critical approach used hitherto – auteurism.

There had always existed reviewers and critics (like James Agee, Manny Farber and Parker Tyler) who had discussed Hollywood films with some sympathy, intelligence and insight. But they had also always been the exception among those who wrote about film in the US and Britain. For the most part, intellectuals, critics and reviewers had been at best patronizing and at worst overtly hostile to Hollywood and its films – on the grounds that they were commercially produced, that they were aimed at a mass market, that they were ideologically or aesthetically conservative, or that they were imbued with the values of entertainment and fantasy rather than those of realism, art or serious aesthetic stylization.

During the late 1950s, the 1960s, and the early 1970s, a generation of intellectuals who had grown up with and who for various reasons liked and valued elements of commercial popular culture in general, and American popular culture in particular, began to debate and to re-assess its value.[2] By then the French film journal *Cahiers du cinéma* had pioneered an approach to the cinema that François Truffaut called 'la politique des auteurs' (Truffaut [1954] 1976), and that came in the US and in Britain to be known either as 'the auteur theory' (Sarris 1968) or else, more simply, as auteurism. *Cahiers*'

auteurism was founded on three basic premisses. The first was that despite the ostensibly collective and impersonal nature of film production, the cinema could be, and often was, a realm of individual and personal expression. The second was that in the cinema, the figure equivalent to the artist or author (*auteur*) in painting or in literature was – or could be – the director. And the third, and by far the most radical, was that directorial artistry and cinematic authorship were to be found not just within the culturally respectable realms of international art cinema (a common idea at that time), nor even, as far as Hollywood was concerned, solely within the realms of the occasional prestige or maverick project (another common idea), but also, perhaps especially, within the realms of its routine output (Hillier 1985b: 7).

Adapted, modified, reworked in various ways, these premisses were adopted by Andrew Sarris, film critic for *The Village Voice* in the USA, and by *Movie* magazine, and later *The Brighton Film Review*, *Monogram* and *Cinema*, in Britain (Caughie 1981). The impact of auteurism on film criticism in general and on the criticism and appreciation of Hollywood films in particular was immense. It enabled both a systematic charting of a great deal of Hollywood's output, and much detailed discussion of form, style, theme and *mise-en-scène*. It thus provided those wishing to analyse – and validate – Hollywood cinema with a valuable critical stance and with a valuable set of critical tools. However, given its evaluative base (auteurs were preferred to non-auteurs and to mere '*metteurs-en-scène*'), and given its commitment to individual directors and hence to individualized corpuses of films, auteurism was of little help in dealing with the range of Hollywood's output overall, or in charting broader trends and developments within it. Moreover, the third of *Cahiers*'s premisses in particular required the adoption of a 'perverse' attitude to Hollywood, a way of looking at and thinking about its films which neither Hollywood itself nor society at large encouraged. (Hence the tendency of *Cahiers* in particular and of auteurism in general to lapse into cultishness.) It thus encouraged an approach to Hollywood films which either ignored or defamiliarized their institutional status, their institutional conventions and the audiences to whom they were principally addressed. It is precisely for these reasons that the auteurism of *Cahiers*, *Movie*, Sarris and *Monogram* was – and is – of interest. However, it was for these reasons too that those interested in identifying these conventions and in taking account of the institution and its audiences found untrammelled auteurism unhelpful. Towards the end of the 1960s, they began to turn their attention instead to issues of genre.

As Gledhill has pointed out, an American art critic, Lawrence Alloway (1963, 1971), had already made the case for paying more attention to genres and cycles, arguing that they were fundamental not just to Hollywood cinema but to popular art as a whole. 'Alloway . . . resists the temptation to establish "classic" timeless dimensions in popular forms', she writes. 'He insists on the transitional and ephemeral character of genres, of cycles, and of any individual popular film (1985a: 59–60). In an overview of the writing on

genre that followed, Tom Ryall restates the case against auteurism and reiterates Alloway's point about the nature of popular art: 'The auteur theory, though important and valuable during the 1950s and 1960s for drawing attention to the importance of the American cinema, nevertheless tended to treat popular art as if it were "high art"' (1975/6: 28). He also makes explicit the importance and the role of the audience. And he offers a definition of genre itself. 'The master image for genre criticism', he writes, 'is a triangle composed of artist/film/audience. Genres may be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the film maker, and their reading by an audience' (ibid.).

I shall return to this definition in a moment. However, at this point it is worth stressing the extent to which Ryall is critical of some of the writing on genre that immediately preceded his own. 'By and large', he writes, 'genre criticism has confined itself to producing taxonomies on the basis of "family resemblances", allocating films to their position within the generic constellation, stopping short of what are the interesting and informative questions about generic groupings'. (1975/6: 27). To a degree these remarks are well-founded. Some of the writing that preceded (and followed) Ryall's article was indeed taxonomic, devoted to the discovery and analysis of the components of individual genres rather than to the pursuit of theoretical questions about the nature of genre as such. However, while writing of this kind has its limitations, it also has its uses, providing as it does an initial means of 'collating the range of cultural knowledge . . . genres assumed' (Gledhill 1985a: 61).

Moreover, not all the writing on genre in the late 1960s and early 1970s was taxonomic in kind. Both Buscombe (1970) and McArthur (1972), for instance, were concerned, among other things, to demonstrate the active role played by genre conventions in shaping the form and the meaning of individual Hollywood films. Here, for example, is Buscombe on *Guns in the Afternoon* (a.k.a. *Ride the High Country*) (1962), a western:

> Knowing the period and location, we expect at the beginning to find a familiar western town. In fact, the first few minutes of the film brilliantly disturb expectations. As the camera moves around the town, we discover a policeman in uniform, a car, a camel, and Randolph Scott, dressed up as Buffalo Bill. Each of these images performs a function. The figure of the policeman conveys that the law has become institutionalised; the rough and ready frontier days are over. The car suggests . . . that the west is no longer isolated from modern technology and its implications. Significantly, the camel is racing against a horse; such a grotesque juxtaposition is painful. A horse in a western is not just an animal but a symbol of dignity, grace and power. These qualities are mocked by it competing with a camel; and to add insult to injury, the camel wins.
>
> (Buscombe 1970: 44)

He later continues:

> the essential theme of *Guns in the Afternoon* is one that, while it could be put into other forms is ideally suited to the one chosen. The film describes the situation of men who have outlived their time . . .
>
> The cluster of images and conventions that we call the western genre is used by Peckinpah [the film's director] to define and embody this situation, in such a way that we know what the West was and what it has become. The first is communicated through images that are familiar, the second through those that are strange. And together they condition his subject matter. Most obviously, because the film is a western, the theme is worked out in terms of violent action. If it were a musical, the theme might be similar in some way, but because the conventions would be different, it would probably not involve violence . . . And if it were a gangster picture, it seems unlikely that the effect of the film's ending, its beautifully elegiac background of autumn leaves, would be reproduced, suggesting as it does that the dead Judd is at one with nature, the nature which seems at the beginning of the film to have been overtaken by 'civilization'.
>
> (Buscombe 1970: 44–5)

In this particular essay, Buscombe attempts also to advance a general theory about the aesthetic characteristics of popular genres. He borrows the concepts of 'inner' and 'outer' form from Warren and Welleck, who argued that 'Genres should be conceived as a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific metre or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose - more crudely, subject and audience)' (1956: 260). These particular concepts were not taken up by subsequent writers. But in illustrating the idea of 'outer form', Buscombe talked about 'visual conventions'. His work here thus drew on and fed into a concept that was to become much more influential – the concept of iconography.

ICONOGRAPHY

Along with its twin, 'iconology', the term 'iconography' derives from art history, and in particular from the work of Erwin Panofsky. Panofsky himself discussed the application of these terms to popular cinema ([1934] 1974), but it was Lawrence Alloway who sought to apply them in a systematic way to the analysis of genres and cycles (1963).

In 'Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art', first published in 1938 and reprinted in his *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Panofsky distinguishes between three possible levels or stages in the analysis of Renaissance paintings, corresponding to three possible 'strata' of meaning (1970: 51–81). The first involves the identification and description

of what he calls 'motifs' (essentially, the objects and events depicted through lines, colours and volumes). The second involves the identification and description of what he calls 'images' (the 'secondary or conventional' meanings conveyed by these motifs, as determined in particular by reference to the Bible and to other written sources. This for Panofsky is the realm of iconography). And the third involves the interpretation of these images. (This for Panofsky is the realm of iconology.)

In arguing for the application of the concept of iconography to the cinema, Alloway writes that

> The meaning of a single movie is inseparable from the larger pattern of content-analysis of other movies. And the point is, that this knowledge, of concepts and themes, is the common property of the regular audience of the movies. It comes from 1) exposure to runs of related movies (soap opera, westerns) and from the fact that 2) the movies connect with other topical interests and activities of the audience. Such themes as kitchen technology and domestic leisure in soap opera and male outdoor leisure clothes, as well as attitudes towards violence in westerns, exist outside the movies, but aid identification with the movies once you are inside the cinema.
>
> (Alloway 1963: 5)

He precedes this passage with another example, and with another facet of this argument:

> iconography is not to be isolated from other aspects of film making. For instance, *The Thousand Eyes of Dr Mabuse* and *Rear Window* can be related to a persistent theme of American movies since World War II. There were the F.B.I. movies in which the Department of Justice kept spies under observation with a battery of voyeuristic electronic devices. Since *The Glass Web* television monitor devices of every kind have been brilliantly handled in urban films: for instance, a telephone wired with a bomb, as in *The Case Against Brooklyn* or the difficulties of telephone tapping in the '30s in *The Scarface Mob.*
>
> (Alloway 1963: 4–5)

It should be noted that 'iconography' here tends to mean the objects, events and figures in films, as well as their identification and description. It should also be noted that Alloway tends to avoid interpretation. Partly for this reason, iconology does not even figure as a term. (It tends to disappear altogether in subsequent writing on genre. Only McArthur, in an unpublished paper written in 1973, briefly resurrects both the term and the conceptual distinction Panofsky originally designed it to make.) Finally, it should be pointed out that although Alloway discusses and exemplifies iconography

in relation to genres and cycles, he also discusses its application to stars and to star personae.

The concept of iconography was widely used by genre theorists and critics during the course of the next decade. There were two main reasons for this. One was the extent to which, in Alloway's formulation at least, it dovetailed with a sympathetic interest in popular films. The other was the extent to which it could be used to stress the visual aspects of popular films (in keeping with the stress placed on style and *mise-en-scène* by auteurism, and in contrast to the emphasis placed on character, plot and theme by more literary-minded theorists and critics). Hence Buscombe's synonym for iconography – 'visual conventions'. Hence his insistence on the argument that 'Since we are dealing with a visual medium we ought surely to look for our defining criteria on the screen' (1970: 36). And hence the stress placed on 'visual conventions' as well as on the 'relationship between genre and audience' in the chapter on the iconography of the 'gangster film/thriller' in McArthur's *Underworld USA*:

> In *Little Caesar* (1930) a police lieutenant and two of his men visit a night-club run by gangsters. All three wear large hats and heavy coats, are grim and sardonic and stand in triangular formation, the lieutenant in front, his two men flanking him in the rear. The audience knows immediately what to expect of them by their physical attributes, their dress and deportment. It knows, too, by the disposition of the figures, which is dominant, which subordinate. In *The Harder They Fall* (1956) a racketeer and two of his men go to a rendezvous in downtown New York. As they wait for the door of the building to be opened they take up the same formation as the figures in the earlier film, giving the same information to the audience by the same means . . . In *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *Tony Rome* (1967) there are carefully mounted scenes in which the central figure is walking down a dark and deserted street. In each case an automobile drives swiftly towards him; and the audience, drawing on accumulated experience of the genre, realises that it will be used as a murder weapon against the hero. Both these examples indicate the continuity over several decades of patterns of visual imagery, of recurrent objects and figures in dynamic relationship. These repeated patterns might be called the iconography of the genre.
>
> (McArthur 1972: 23)

McArthur goes on to categorize the genre's iconography, subdividing the patterns of its imagery into three basic types: 'those surrounding the physical presence, attributes and dress of the actors and the characters they play; those emanating from the milieux within which the characters operate; and those connected with the technology at the characters' disposal' (ibid.: 24). However, it is unclear as to whether this taxonomy is meant to be applicable to other

genres as well. It is also unclear as to whether iconography is to be thought of as one of the defining features of a genre.

There are certainly traces of such a position in McArthur's book. He says at one point, for instance, that the iconographic patterns of a genre 'set it off visually from other types of film and are the means by which primary definitions are made' (1972: 24). However, he himself does not elaborate, and it is Buscombe who comes closest to arguing a position of this kind. Although stressing that not all generic conventions are visual in kind, he argues nevertheless that 'the major defining characteristics of a genre will be visual: guns, cars, clothes in the gangster film; clothing and dancing in musical (apart from the music, of course!); castles, coffins and teeth in horror movies' (1970: 41). This argument occurs during the course of a much more detailed discussion of the western. Nevertheless, the paucity of these examples (together with the taxonomic tendencies both of genre criticism in general and of iconographic analysis in particular) is strikingly apparent. One of the major reasons for this is that the possible connections between the items (or icons) listed is unclear. Another, more important, reason is that it is actually very difficult to list the defining visual characteristics of more than a handful of genres, for the simple reason that many genres – among them the social problem film, the biopic, romantic drama and the psychological horror film – lack a specific iconography.

It is no accident, therefore, that the genres discussed at some length by Buscombe and McArthur are the western and the gangster film, two of the genres which (along with the gothic horror film and the biblical epic) the concept of generic iconography seems to fit rather well. The failure to apply the concept productively to other genres suggests on the one hand that the defining features of Hollywood's genres may be heterogeneous in kind (some visual, others not). It suggests on the other that a number of fundamental questions – to do with definition, to do with identification, and to do with the nature and role of genre theory – still needed to be asked. They began to be asked first by Tudor (1974a: 131–52, 1974b: 180–220) and then by Ryall. They were displaced during the decade that followed as attention was turned to structuralism, to semiotics and to psychoanalysis – to general theories of method and meaning (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis 1992). Structuralism, in particular, played a part in work on individual genres like the western (notably by Kitses 1969 and Wright 1975). However, although some or all of these theories were to have an impact on writing on genre in the 1980s, notably by Neale (1980) and Altman ([1984] 1986, 1987), and although feminist inflections and reworkings of these approaches were to find an important place in writing on hitherto neglected genres like the woman's film (see Doane 1987), issues and theories of genre as such were largely put to one side. Hence some of these questions remained unanswered and had to be re-raised, firstly by Alan Williams (1984), and then by Neale (1990a).

THEORETICAL QUESTIONS

The questions raised by Ryall derive from a distinction he draws between two types of analytical activity:

> The key to understanding the theoretical foundations of the concept of genre lies in pushing beyond . . . classificatory exercises and confronting the crucial distinction between, on the one hand suggesting that a film is a Western; and, on the other, suggesting that a film is a genre film. The former simply involves observing similarities between films, while the latter urges us towards a more generalised theoretical activity in which our conclusions would not merely link one film with another under some category such as 'Western'; but rather, would link the established genres (Westerns, gangster films, musicals, etc) under the more general concepts of 'convention' and 'expectation', and would explore the variety of questions associated with the area of 'reading' film.
>
> (Ryall 1975/6: 27)

Ryall goes on to note the multi-dimensional aspects of genre, insisting on the importance of audience knowledge and audience expectation on the one hand, and of the industry and film reviewers on the other. It is clear, therefore, that for Ryall genres are not simply groups of films linked by common characteristics. He argues in addition that the problem of defining genre as a term is exacerbated by its pervasiveness: 'its widespread usage by film distributors, by reviewers and critics, and by popular audiences, poses problems for criticism insofar as ordinary usage carries with it the implication that the concept of genre is clear and well-defined, non-problematic' (1975/6: 27).

Similar points are made by Tudor (1974a), who tends both to pursue them further and to raise other issues as well. He begins by raising questions about genre identification and genre recognition:

> most writers tend to assume that there is some body of films we can safely call the western and then move on to the real work – the analysis of the crucial characteristics of the already recognized *genre* . . . These writers, and almost all writers using the term *genre*, are caught in a dilemma. They are defining a western on the basis of analyzing a body of films that cannot possibly be said to be westerns until after the analysis . . . To take a *genre* such as the western, analyze it, and list its principal characteristics is to beg the question that we must first isolate the body of films that are westerns. But they can only be isolated on the basis of the 'principal characteristics', which can only be discovered from the films themselves after they have been isolated. That is, we are caught in a circle that first requires that the

> films be isolated, for which purpose a criterion is necesary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the films. This 'empiricist dilemma' has two solutions. One is to classify films according to a priori criteria depending on the critical purpose. This leads back to the earlier position in which the special *genre* term is redundant. The second is to lean on a common cultural consensus as to what constitutes a western and then go on to analyze it in detail.
>
> (Tudor 1974a: 135–8)

This is a fundamental point. It raises questions about the nature and purpose of genre criticism. And, implicitly at least, it raises questions as to how 'a common cultural consensus' is established. What agencies and institutions are involved? What is the role of the film industry? What is the role of film critics, film reviewers and the like? On the one hand it helps underline Ryall's point about the importance of distributors, reviewers and critics. On the other it helps stress the culturally relative, and therefore the culturally contingent, nature of genres themselves:

> In short to talk about the western is (arbitrary definitions apart) to appeal to a common set of meanings in our culture. From a very early age most of us have built up a picture of the western. We feel that we know a western when we see one, though the edges may be rather blurred. Thus in calling a film a western a critic is implying more than the simple statement 'This film is a member of a class of films (westerns) having in common x, y, and z.' The critic is also suggesting that such a film would be universally recognized as such in our culture. In other words, the crucial factors that distinguish a *genre* are not only characteristics inherent in the films themselves; they also depend on the particular culture with which we are operating. And unless there is a world consensus on the subject (which is an empirical question), there is no basis for assuming that a western will be received in the same way in every culture. The way in which the *genre* term is applied can quite conceivably vary from case to case. *Genre* notions – except in the case of arbitrary definition – are not critics' classifications made for special purposes; they are sets of cultural conventions. *Genre* is what we collectively believe it to be.
>
> (Tudor 1974a: 139)

The stress here on culture and cultures, rather than just on films, leads Tudor, like Ryall, to stress the role and the importance of audiences too. And this leads him in turn (and for the first time in work on genre and genres in the cinema) not just outside the realm of Hollywood but outside the realms of mainstream cinema altogether:

> the genre concept is indispensable in more strictly social and psychological terms as a way of formulating the interplay between culture, audience, films and filmmakers. For example, there is a class of films thought by a relatively highly educated middle-class group of filmgoers as 'art movies' [Tudor goes on to cite *The Seventh Seal* (1956), *L'Avventura* (1960) and *La Dolce Vita* (1959) as examples]. Now for the present purposes *genre* is a conception existing in the culture of any particular group or society; it is not a way in which a critic classifies films for methodological purposes, but the much looser way in which an audience classifies its films. According to this meaning of the term, 'art movies' is a *genre*.
>
> (Tudor 1974a: 145)

Thus, to reiterate, 'there does not seem to me to be any crucial difference between the most commonly applied *genre* term – the western – and the art-movie that I have been discussing. They are both conceptions held by certain groups about certain films' (ibid.: 147).

It is here, in including art films under the rubric of genre, and in defining genres as 'conceptions', that Tudor departs most radically from most of the ideas and definitions of genre in the cinema advanced hitherto. The questions he asks are radical ones. They challenge conventional notions as to the cinematic and cultural site of genre and genres. They open up the issue of groupings and classification. And they place spectatorial and audience activity and the cultural and institutional contexts within which that activity takes place firmly at the centre of theoretical debate. To that extent they are echoed not just by Williams and Neale, but also by a number of linguists, philosophers and literary theorists who have written on genre in recent years.

LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS AND GENRE

On a number of occasions in the 1960s and 1970s, writers on genre in the cinema referred to definitions and theories of genre in literature. Some, like Cawelti (1976), made use of particular literary theories (in Cawelti's case, those of Frye 1957). However, while the existence of literary theory was explicitly acknowledged, it was in practice usually ignored. One of the reasons for this, as Ryall points out, was the apparent discrepancy between generic terms and 'divisions' in literature, and the terms and divisions familiar to critics and theorists of the cinema:

> As well as the widespread usage within film, the critic also has to contend with the term as it occurs in the discussion of other arts, notably literature where genre divisions have been made on the basis of formal distinctions (the novel, drama, poetry) compared with the subject or content divisions more usual in film criticism. The term,

> therefore, while having an apparent stability within the discussion of film becomes somewhat confusing in the context of, for example, genre definitions in literature.
>
> (Ryall 1975/6: 27)

Hence while Buscombe, for instance, referred in passing to the divisions in Aristotle's *Poetics* between 'tragedy, epic, lyric, and so forth' (1970: 33), they were effectively forgotten by the time he turned to the gangster film, the western and the musical.

It was not until 1984 that this discrepancy was re-raised and discussed as an issue, during the course of Williams's review of Schatz's *Hollywood Genres* (1981):

> Perhaps the biggest problem with genre or genre criticism in the field of the cinema is the word *genre*. Borrowed, as a critical tool, from literary studies (or at least having resonances from that area – the word does have a life of its own in the film industry) the applicability of 'genre' as a concept in film studies raises some fairly tough questions. Sample genres are held to be Westerns, Science Fiction Films, more recently Disaster Films, and so on. What do these loose groupings of works – that seem to come and go, for the most part, in ten- and twenty-year cycles – have to do with familiar genres such as tragedy, comedy, romance, or (to mix the pot up a bit) the epistolary novel or the prose poem?
>
> (A. Williams 1984: 121)

Williams continues:

> For the phrase 'genre films', referring to a general category, we can frequently, though not always, substitute 'film narrative'. Perhaps *that* is the real genre. Certainly there is much more difference between *Prelude to Dog Star Man* and *Star Wars* than there is between the latter and *Body Heat*. It's mainly a question of terminology, of course, but I wonder if we ought to consider the principal film genres as being the narrative film, experimental/avant-garde film, and documentary. Surely these are the categories in film studies that have among themselves the sorts of significant differences that one can find between, say, epic and lyric poetry.
>
> (A. Williams 1984: 121)

The first point to make in response to this is to highlight the extent to which genres and genre categories in literature are by no means always as systematically coherent or long-lived as Williams – or Ryall – seem to suggest. Comedy, romance and tragedy are long-lived as terms, but the

criteria that define them, along with the types of work they encompass, have in each case changed over time (see Beer 1970 on romance, and Koelb 1975 on tragedy). Moreover, comedy and romance, at least, are familiar as terms and as genres to critics and theorists of film. In addition, the criteria that define, say, the epistolary novel and epic poetry on the one hand and comedy and romance on the other are very different in kind, varying from the purely formal (in the case of the epistolary novel), to a mix of criteria involving form, content and tone (in the case of most of the others). And to switch the focus of the argument, the western and science fiction are both literary genres as well as cinematic ones. Even the disaster film of the late 1960s and early 1970s has its analogue – indeed its origins – in contemporary novels written by Arthur Hailey, Paul Gallico, Richard Martin Stern, and others.

This leads me to a second point, a point that is crucial for understanding why genre and genres have so often been identified with Hollywood (rather than, say, the art film), and hence why some of the contradictions and discrepancies to which Williams points have arisen. Within a great deal of modern writing on literature, the kind of fiction exemplified by disaster novels and science fiction is often the only kind labelled as generic. The rest is 'literary fiction' or simply 'literature' proper. The latter is the province of 'genuine' literary art and 'authentic' authorial expression. The former, by contrast, is usually considered formulaic, stereotypical, artistically anonymous, and therefore artistically worthless. Hence the following, from Sutherland's *Fiction and the Fiction Industry*:

> Another feature of the increasingly 'packaged' nature of all fiction – including the quality novel – is the advance of 'genre' or the categorised product. By 'genre' is meant such forms as Science Fiction, the detective novel, Gothic, etc. . . .
>
> Genre incorporates a high ration of familiar to strange elements. Habitually it eliminates the bewilderment associated with avant garde and experimentalism. It specialises in books without shock. If, as Ezra Pound says, the modernist's motto is 'make it new' then the genre author's motto is 'make it the same' . . . Genre fiction is, characteristically, convention-governed . . . There is a soothing quality to much genre fiction; a high incidence of what Q.D. Leavis calls 'living at the novelist's expense' . . . generally the material is bland, despite its claims to unbearable excitement. Similarly genre may have a superficially impressive specialised knowledge . . . But in the end there will be nothing to task the reader's capacities.
>
> (Sutherland 1978: 192–4. For a very different view, see Bloom 1996.)

It will be readily apparent that those writing on Hollywood's genres in the 1960s and 1970s decisively rejected – indeed often symmetrically inverted – the values and judgement evident in a passage like this. McArthur, for

instance, argues that genre conventions can play a positive role in curbing authorial 'excess and self-indulgence' (1972: 94). However, the point to emphasize here is that they share its definitions and its terms, and that these definitions and terms, along with the values and judgements of someone like Sutherland, have a distinct and particular history. As Kress and Threadgold have pointed out:

> *Genre* is valorised very differently in different contexts. From the Romantics through modernism to postmodernism, *genre* is a devalued term in the dominant literary/aesthetic discourse. To be 'generic' is to be predictable and clichéd; within that ideology, literature and art generally has to be free, creative, individual . . . hence literature cannot be generic . . .
>
> In classical periods, for example the English Neo-classical period in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, or even before then in the Renaissance, the reverse was the case. Literature had to be generic to be considered literature (consider Dryden's famous essay on Dramatic Poesy), and notions of genre were so intimately tied up with what was to be literature that they overtly and in very conscious ways affected both the reading and writing of literary texts.
>
> (Kress and Threadgold 1988: 219–20)

Threadgold reiterates these points elsewhere, stressing the role of conceptions of genre within and across the cultural divisions in artistic practice, in particular those between 'high' and 'low', 'popular' and 'elite':

> Before Romanticism what was Generic was Literature. The rest, the 'popular culture' of political pamphlets, ballads, romances, chapbooks, was not only *not* generic; it escaped the law of genre, was excluded by that law, suffering a kind of rhetorical exclusion by inclusion in the classical distinction between high, middle, and low styles. It was seen as a kind of anarchic, free area, unconstrained by the rules of polite society and decorum, by *genre* in fact.
>
> (Threadgold 1989: 121–2)

Thus genre has undergone 'a fundamental shift of positioning' (ibid.: 120). And this shift runs parallel with shifts both in cultural and aesthetic production and consumption, and in the history of the term 'genre' itself. As Cohen has pointed out, the use of the term in English to refer to aesthetic practices and products is a nineteenth-century phenomenon (1986: 203). Thus although the concept is clearly much older, the term itself emerges with industrialization, mass production, new technologies, new capital, new means of distribution (notably postal systems and the railways), the formation of a relatively large literate (or semi-literate) population – and hence a potential

market – at a point of profound transformation in the conditions governing cultural production and the discourses and debates with which it was accompanied.[3] Now it is the new popular culture, the new mass culture that is marked – with a new term – as 'generic'. Repetitive patterns, ingredients and formulae are now perceived by many cultural commentators not as the law of Culture, but as the law of the market. It is therefore hardly surprising that genre was – and still is – principally associated with an industrial, commercial and mechanically based art like the cinema, and with its most obviously industrial, commercial and popular sectors like Hollywood in particular. And it is thus particularly important to consider ideas, definitions and theories of genre which challenge conventional conceptions.

One source of and for such ideas is the literary critic E. D. Hirsch (a surprising source, perhaps, given his commitment to traditional literary values). Hirsch insists on the fundamental role played by genre – not just in the framing and interpretation of works of art but also in the framing and interpretation of any kind of utterance. He also insists on the fact that genres centrally include – even consist of – a set of expectations. A reader's or interlocutor's 'preliminary generic conception', he writes, 'is constitutive of everything that he subsequently understands, . . . and this [always] remains the case unless and until that generic conception is altered' (1967: 74). In elaborating this view at greater length, Hirsch makes clear that genre in this sense is as much a phenomenon of everyday discourse as it is of literary texts:

> quite apart from the speaker's choice of words, and, even more remarkably, quite aside from the context in which the utterance occurs, the details of meaning that an interpreter understands are powerfully determined and constituted by his meaning expectation. And these expectations arise from the interpreter's conception of the type of meaning that is being expressed.
>
> By 'type of meaning' I do not, of course, intend to imply merely a type of message or theme or anything so simple as content. The interpreter's expectations embrace far more than that. They include a number of elements that may not even be explicitly given in the utterance or its context, such as the relationship assumed to exist between the speaker and the interpreter, the type of vocabulary and syntax that is used, the type of attitude adopted by the speaker, and the type of inexplicit meanings that go with explicit ones. Such expectations are always necessary to understanding, because only by virtue of them can the interpreter make sense of the words he experiences along the way. He entertains the notion that 'this is a certain type of meaning,' and his notion of the meaning as a whole grounds and helps determine his understanding of details. This fact reveals itself whenever a misunderstanding is suddenly recognized. After all, how could it have been recognized unless the interpreter's expectations had

> been thwarted? How could anything surprising or puzzling occur to force a revision of his past understanding unless the interpreter had expectations that could be surprised or thwarted? Furthermore, these expectations could have arisen only from the genre idea: 'In this type of utterance, we expect these types of traits.'
>
> (Hirsch 1967: 72–3)

During the course of his discussion of genre, Hirsch draws in particular on the structural linguistics of Saussure ([1959] 1974). Issues of genre and parallels with Hirsch's position have been more apparent, however, in speech act theory and pragmatics. Speech-act theory and pragmatics are branches of linguistics and of analytical philosophy, respectively. They are both concerned with language in use, and in particular with the rules and conventions that govern the production, reception and comprehension of specific kinds of linguistic utterance in specific kinds of context.[4] Mary Louise Pratt (1977), for instance, has written a pioneering book on speech-act theory and literature stressing the generic aspects of all forms of discourse, indeed of 'literature' as such. More recently, in an essay on the short story, she highlights the role, importance and ubiquity of genre in literary and in non-literary discourse alike. 'Genre is not solely a literary matter', she writes. 'The concept of genres applies to all verbal behavior, in all realms of discourse. Genre conventions are in play in any speech situation, and any discourse belongs to a genre, unless it is a discourse explicitly designed to flaunt the genre system' (1981: 176).

Speech-act-oriented theories of genre have recently been drawn on (and sometimes modified, extended or criticized, though always from within a recognizable similar ambit of concerns) by Derrida (1992), Freadman (1988), Hunter (1989), Reid (1989) and Ryan (1981). Derrida criticizes speech-act theories of genre on the grounds that texts can always exceed specific expectations, contexts and labels. He would therefore contest Pratt's notion that texts 'belong' to genres. He would also deny, though, that any text or instance of discourse could ever escape being generic. A text or an instance of discourse might be able to 'flaunt' a particular 'genre system', but they could never flaunt the 'law of genre' as such, for the simple reason that all texts, all utterances, all instances of discourse are always encountered in some kind of context, and are therefore always confronted with expectations, with systems of comprehension, and in all probability with labels and names. Freadman gives a good example of this:

> When the title 'Untitled' started appearing beneath paintings, it corresponded to the claim of abstract painting to be non-representational: to be 'painting', simply . . . It is a title that represents the non-representational. Now, since the titles of paintings – place-names, personal names, the names of historical or legendary events, or kinds

> of subjects – designate not only their represented subjects but also, through the naming conventions themselves, their genres, the title 'Untitled' claims above all to transcend genre. Reflect on this. For 'untitled' paintings are themselves a genre; and the title 'Untitled' points to genre in the very act of its denial.
>
> (Freadman 1988: 67)

A less spectacular example from the cinema would be a film like *Un Chien Andalou* (1928), which certainly flaunted the genre system predominant in Europe at the time it was made. It also flaunted the genre 'narrative feature film', and the genres of the contemporary European art film. One of its makers, Luis Buñuel, claimed it was not even an instance of avant-garde film-making, but rather 'a desperate appeal to murder' (Aranda 1975: 63). However, it is precisely for all these reasons that it is usually now understood, and now usually labelled generically, as an exemplary instance of Surrealism. Hence, to return to Derrida, 'Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text.' Although 'participation never amounts to belonging', 'there is always a genre or genres' (1992: 230).

Derrida's use of the phrase 'one or several genres', his stress on the possible plurality of generic participation, may not resolve the discrepancies between some of the genre terms used in literary studies and the terms that tend to dominate the study of the cinema. (Such discrepancies are historical in origin, and are thus not entirely susceptible to logical or conceptual resolution.) But it does point to a way of resolving Williams' dilemma about 'real' genres, and the validity of categories like the western and science fiction on the one hand, and 'narrative film, experimental/avant-garde film, or documentary' on the other. For from a Derridean perspective, this dilemma is ultimately false. Any film (like any text, utterance or instance of representation) can participate in several genres at once. In fact, it is more common than not for a film to do so. Thus, without trying to be too exhaustive (and leaving aside for the moment the issue of overt generic hybrids), both *Star Wars* (1977) and *Body Heat* (1981), to use two of Williams' (1984) examples, participate in the genres 'film', 'fiction film', 'Hollywood film' and 'narrative feature film'. The former also participates in the genre 'science fiction', and the latter in the genre 'thriller' (and possibly also 'neo-*noir*'). *Prelude to Dog Star Man* (1965), meanwhile, participates in the genres 'film' and 'avant-garde/experimental film' – and also, for some of its viewers at least, the genres 'mythopoeic' and/or 'visionary film', categories first suggested by the influential critic and historian of American avant-garde film, P. Adams Sitney (1979).

While challenging traditional definitions of genre, it is worth noting that there remains a degree of common ground between speech-act-oriented theorists like Pratt, Hirsch and Derrida and theorists like Tudor and Ryall. All agree that genre is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and that its dimensions centrally include systems of expectation, categories, labels and names,

discourses, texts and corpuses of texts, and the conventions that govern them all. Some stress the primacy of expectations, others the primacy of texts, still others the primacy of categories, corpuses, the norms they encompass, the traditions they embody and the formulae that mark them. What seems clear is that all these dimensions need to be taken into account. What also seems clear is that they need to be distinguished one from another.

However, the argument that genre is ubiquitous, a phenomenon common to all instances of discourse, ignores or collapses the distinction between those instances which are relatively formulaic, relatively predictable, relatively conventional, and those which are not, between those produced in accordance with the conventions of a pre-signalled genre or genre system and those designed to flaunt them. It also ignores or collapses the boundaries between different ways of categorizing texts and of grouping expectations. The expectations triggered by the name of a star or director are as generic as those triggered by terms like 'western', 'thriller' or 'horror film'. One would normally want, though, to distinguish between the two.

These boundaries and distinctions underlie a great deal of traditional thinking about genres. They have often been tied, as we have seen, to issues of evaluation. They have often been linked to the establishment of aesthetic and cultural hierarchies. And they have often inhibited the development of genre theory. However, while it is important to question traditional thinking and to expand the definition, the meaning and the field of application of genre as a term, it is also important to recognize the differences these boundaries and distinctions serve to mark.

GENRE AND THE GENRE FILM

One way of acknowledging some of these differences without falling into the usual conceptual or cultural traps is to note that they apply to high art as well as to low: a sonnet is formulaic in a way that free verse is not; a Restoration comedy is conventional in a way that a modernist novel is not; and so on. In addition, it should be noted that when Warshow talked about the pleasures and characteristics of aesthetic 'types', he was referring to Restoration comedy and Elizabethan tragedy as well as to westerns and gangster films: 'For a type to be successful', he wrote

> its conventions have imposed themselves upon the general consciousness and become the vehicle of a particular set of attitudes and a particular aesthetic effect. One goes to any individual example of the type with very definite expectations, and originality is to be welcomed only in the degree that it intensifies the expected experience without fundamentally altering it.
>
> (Warshow [1948] 1975a: 129–30)

Within the realms of cinema, numerous movements or trends in art cinema and in avant-garde film-making are or become as predictable (and as typically pleasurable) as any Hollywood western. However, and conversely, there is a difference between academic or programmatic aesthetic formulae and formulae which arise as a result of commercial conditions. And there is a difference between films which are designed to conform, however broadly, to pre-existing categories, expectations and models, and those, like *Un Chien Andalou*, which are not. The latter may encounter expectations and those expectations may be based on previous films or on the tenets of a movement or a group. They may conform to labels or descriptions circulated in advance by critics, distributors, reviewers, perhaps even film-makers themselves. And they may all establish their own internal norms and hence become more familiar – and more predictable – as they unfold. But many of these norms are often unique to the films themselves. Thus the films are less predictable in advance, and at more or less every level. That does not necessarily make them better. But it does make them different.

Altman makes a further distinction. He points out that

> not all films engage spectators' generic knowledge in the same way and to the same extent. While some films simply borrow devices from established genres, others foreground their generic characteristics to the point where the genre concept itself plays a major role in the film.
>
> (Altman 1996a: 279)

Parodies are an obvious instance of the latter, as Altman goes on to indicate. So too are films like *Silverado* (1985), *Chinatown* (1974), *Scarface* (1983) and *Back to the Future III* (1990), films which pastiche, rework or in other ways foreground particular generic traditions, norms and conventions. Altman, following Schatz (1981: 16–18), goes on to propose two different terms, 'film genre' and 'genre film,' in order to mark this particular distinction:

> By definition, all films belong to some genre(s) . . . but only certain films are self-consciously produced and consumed according to (or against) a specific generic model. When the notion of genre is limited to descriptive uses, as it commonly is when serving . . . classification purposes, we speak of 'film genre'. However, when the notion of genre takes on a more active role in the production and consumption process, we appropriately speak instead of 'genre film', thus recognizing the extent to which generic identification becomes a formative component of film viewing.
>
> (Altman 1996a: 277)

While these terms and definitions are useful, Altman here tends to conflate genre as a category and genre as a corpus of films: *Stagecoach* (1939) is both a

singular instance of the category 'western' and part of an expanding corpus that includes films like *Hell's Hinges* (1916), *Riders of the Range* (1923), *Bend of the River* (1952), *El Dorado* (1967) and *Tombstone* (1993). The two are distinct. He also tends, through the term 'self-conscious', to conflate routine generic production and routine generic consumption, both of which entail specific generic models and in both of which such models are 'active', with special and particular instances like parody and pastiche. In addition, he tends to imply that the activation of a generic model necessarily entails conformity or participation. But a model may be invoked in order to be reworked or rejected altogether, as is arguably the case with some of the 'revisionist' films of the late 1960s and early 1970s – films like *Chinatown*, *The Long Goodbye* (1973) and *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (1976) – which rework or reject existing models of the detective film and the western, and as is certainly the case with *Un Chien Andalou*, which both invokes and decisively rejects the model of the contemporary narrative film. For all these reasons, the proposed term 'genre film' tends to evoke traditional definitions, thereby potentially reducing the multiplicity and scope of the phenomenon of genre itself. In order to avoid some of these problems, and in order to take some account of speech-act-oriented thinking, terms like 'generically marked film' and 'generically modelled film' might be preferable. The former would indicate films which rely on generic identification by an audience – and hence specific forms of audience knowledge – in order to make sense. (This would include parody, pastiche and other forms of self-consciousness. But it would also include less specialized instances as well.) The latter would indicate films which draw on and conform to existing generic traditions, conventions and formulae. In practice, of course, the two often overlap. But the former refers more to the moment of reception, and may include instances of generic reworking and generic rejection as well as instances of generic conformity. The latter refers to the moment of production, and by definition excludes generic rejection. Both remain distinct from genre as a category, and genre as a group or corpus of films.

What emerges from this overview is that genre as a term has been used in different ways in different fields, and that many of its uses have been governed by the history of the term within these fields – and by the cultural factors at play within them – rather than by logic or conceptual consistency. The questions raised by Ryall, Tudor and Williams are important ones, as are the questions raised by speech-act theory and pragmatics. The answers to these questions require thinking of genres as ubiquitous, multifaceted phenomena rather than as one-dimensional entities to be found only within the realms of Hollywood cinema or of commercial popular culture. Only then can some of the pitfalls identified by Ryall, by Tudor, by Williams and by others be avoided. And only then can the nature, the functions, and the general topic of genre in Hollywood itself be examined in more detail.

1 On the Indian mythological, see Barnouw and Krishnaswarmy (1980: 11–23), and on the Hong Kong swordplay film, see Mo-ling (1981). On the documentary, see Barnouw (1974), Corner (1996), Guynn (1990), Nichols (1991), Renov (1993), and Winston (1995). On art cinema and art films, see Bordwell (1979, 1985), Neale (1981a) and Siska (1976).

2 See, for instance, Hall and Whannel (1964). On some of the reasons for a more positive response in Britain at this time to American popular culture in general and to Hollywood films in particular, see Bennett (1981), Nowell-Smith (1987b) and Strinati (1993).

3 On the growth and forms of industrial mass culture in the West in the ninteenth century, see among others, Allen (1981), Altick (1957), Barth (1980), Bianchi (1986), Birch (1987), Bold (1987, 1991), Denning (1987), Fullerton (1979), Gedin (1977), Hart (1963), McConachie and Freedman (1988), Mates (1985), Noel (1954), Pryluck (1986), Purcell (1977), Radway (1984), Reynolds (1955), Snyder (1970), Somers (1971), Sterne (1980), Toll (1976) and Wilson (1973).

4 On pragmatics and speech-act theory, see Blakemore (1992), Davis (1991), Leech (1983), Levinson (1983), Lyons (1981) and Mey (1993).

Science fiction

There are numerous definitions of science fiction. Some are normative and exclusive, designed to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' science fiction or to promote a particular form or trend. This is especially true of those who commentate on written science fiction, and of those concerned to distinguish between its 'pulp' and its 'literary' forms on the one hand, and its written and filmic forms on the other. Some, like Richard Hodgens', are more descriptive and all embracing. 'Science fiction', he writes, 'involves extrapolated or fictitious science, or fictitious use of scientific possibilities, or it may be simply fiction that takes place in the future or introduces some radical assumption about the present or the past' (1959: 30). (This passage is cited during the course of a chapter on definitions of science fiction by Sobchack [1980] 1988: 17–63. See also Hardy [1984] 1995c: ix–xv; Kuhn 1990b; Tarnowski 1977.) What this means, among other things, is that in science fiction, science, fictional or otherwise, always functions as motivation for the nature of the fictional world, its inhabitants, and the events that happen within it, whether or not science itself is a topic or theme.

As a term, 'science fiction' was first used in the nineteenth century, but only became fully established in the late 1920s in and around American pulp magazines like *Amazing Stories*, and in particular *Science Wonder Stories* (James 1994: 7–11). It thus largely post-dated the vogue for 'invention stories', for 'tales of science', for 'tales of the future' and for the 'voyages imaginaires' which were associated in particular with Jules Verne, and which characterized the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth (ibid.: 12–30). This vogue coincided both with a second industrial revolution, a new machine age, and a cult of and for scientific invention, and with an acceleration of the processes of colonial expansion and imperial rivalry that had already fuelled a tradition of exploration stories, adventure stories, and stories of territorial conquest. It also coincided with the invention of film, itself seen, of course, as a new scientific and technical marvel.

The earliest generic vehicles for this vogue were 'trick films' like *The X-Ray Mirror* (1899) and Méliès' 'voyages imaginaires', both of which helped establish the bond between science fiction, special effects technology and set design that has remained a feature of the genre ever since (Barnouw 1981; Brosnan 1974; Finch 1984; Hammond 1974: 114–25, 1981; Hutchison 1987). In 1910, the first filmed version of *Frankenstein* helped establish a link between science fiction and horror in the cinema, a link that was to be reforged in gothic mode in the 1930s, in apocalyptic mode in the 1950s, and in body horror mode since the late 1960s. A little later, series and serials like *The Exploits of Elaine* (1914), *The Flaming Disc* (1920) and *Terror Island* (1920) helped cement a similar link between science fiction, action and adventure. This link was maintained in the 1930s and 1940s by low-budget serials like *Flash Gordon* (1936), *Batman* (1943) and *Superman* (1948) and revived in the

form of the contemporary blockbuster by George Lucas and others in the late 1970s. Finally, a tradition of large-scale speculations on the future of modern society – and allegories in science fictional form about its current condition – was established in Europe by films like *Metropolis* (1926), *La Fin du Monde* (1930) and *Things to Come* (1936). It was revived in America, usually on a more modest industrial scale, during the course of the boom in science fiction in the 1950s, then again in the late 1960s and early 1970s with films like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *On the Beach* (1959), *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and *Soylent Green* (1973). Since then it has tended to merge into the horror and action-adventure traditions, and to become ever more distopian in outlook (Franklin [1985] 1990; Glass 1989, 1990). These are the principal forms of science fiction in the cinema. They thus incorporate most but not all of the categories or 'templates' into which science fiction as a whole is divided in Pringle [1996] 1997: 21–37. These templates are listed as 'space operas', 'planetary romances', 'future cities', 'disasters', 'alternative histories', 'prehistorical romances', 'time travels', 'alien intrusions', 'mental powers' and 'comic infernos').

Although there are several books which detail the history of these trends (notably Baxter 1970; Hardy [1984] 1995c; Brosnan 1978), science fiction in the cinema has tended to lack a tradition of critical theory. There is a great deal of writing about individual films, periods and topics, but very little about science fiction as a genre. The major exceptions here are Vivian Sobchack's (1988) *Screening Space* (a reworking of her earlier book, *The Limits of Infinity*), the section on science fiction in Schatz's *Old Hollywood/New Hollywood, Ritual, Art, and Industry* (1983), and J. P. Telotte's *Replications* (1995).

Screening Space begins with a chapter on definitions, and moves on to consider iconography, and the genre's use of language and sound. She concludes on the one hand that 'Although it lacks an informative iconography, encompasses the widest possible range of time and place, and constantly fluctuates in its visual representation of objects, the SF film still has a science fiction "look" and "feel" to its visual surfaces' ([1980] 1988: 87). This 'visual connection' between SF films

> lies in the consistent and repetitious use not of *specific* images, but of *types* of images which function in the same way from film to film to create an imaginatively realized world which is always removed from the world we know or know of. The visual surface of all SF film [*sic*] presents us with a confrontation between a mixture of those images to which we respond as 'alien' and those we know to be familiar.
>
> (Sobchack [1980] 1988: 87; emphasis in original)

Thus '[t]he major visual impulse of all SF films is to pictorialize the unfamiliar, the nonexistent, the strange and totally alien – and to do so with a verisimilitude which is, at times, documentary in flavor and style' (ibid.: 88).

This relationship between the strange and the familiar is, she argues, as pertinent to the soundtrack as it is to the image. Vocabulary and language are often highlighted as issues in science fiction. In *2001 – A Space Odyssey* (1968), for example, 'we are constantly made aware of how language – and, therefore, our emotions and thought patterns – have [*sic*] not kept up with either our technology or our experience' ([1980] 1988: 177). And sound itself, the sound of machinery, the sound of natural forces, and 'the sound of the alien' (ibid.: 218), functions in films like *Five* (1951) and *The Thing* (1951) both as a generic marker, and as one of the points at which the strange and familiar meet.

Focusing almost exclusively on the 1950s, Schatz argues that 'The milieu of the science fiction is one of contested space, in which the generic oppositions are determined by certain aspects of the cultural community and by the contest itself' (1983: 86). The contest here is the contest between 'the human community' and some kind of 'alien or monstrous force' (ibid.). The milieu, whose attributes are usually 'a direct extension of America's technological capabilities' may be a small town, a city, or even the world as a whole (ibid.). However, the distinction between the human community and the alien force is by no means always straightforward. In films like *It Came from Outer Space* (1953) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), the distinction is blurred: 'the members of the community so utterly assimilate the group values that they are turned into automatons' (ibid.: 87). It becomes hard to tell alien and human apart. In this way, within a constellation of generic concerns that includes nature, science, technology, social and communal organization and that which is alien or other, the idea of the human, upon which the dramatization of these concerns centrally depends, is broached as an issue.

For Telotte (who here echoes Malmgren 1980 and Jancovich 1992b) the issue of humanness lies at the heart of science fiction, and it is focused in particular by the figure of the robot and by its most recent avatar, the cyborg. He traces the function and the meaning of these figures in films from *Metropolis* on, placing them within both their cyclic and cultural contexts. He thus sees such 1930s films as *Mad Love* (1935), *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and *Island of Lost Souls* (1933) as depicting in the then current gothic horror mode 'violent efforts to redefine the human body as some sort of raw material' for scientific artifice and experiment (1995: 86), and hence as expressing contemporary concerns about the subjection of the human to the powers of technology and science. He sees the serials of the 1930s and 1940s as revealing 'a growing fascination with the technological and its potential for reshaping the human' (ibid.: 18), while at the same time drawing a line between the two through stories which 'repeatedly celebrate a *human* might and *human* feelings, particularly a human determination to say something other than a subject, serialized thing' (ibid.: 100; emphasis in original). He sees such 1950s films as *Forbidden Planet* (1956) as marking a 'newly

recognized ability to duplicate anything, including the human body' (ibid.: 19), and such 1970s films as *Westworld* (1973), *Futureworld* (1976) and *Demon Seed* (1977) as expressing 'growing anxieties' both about 'our place' in a world in which that capacity has been enhanced by artificial intelligence (ibid.) and about the ensuing loss of 'all distinction between the private and the public' (ibid.: 146). And finally, in the 1980s and 1990s, as 'science fiction . . . returned to the level of popularity it enjoyed in the 1950s' (ibid.: 148), he sees films such as *Blade Runner* (1982), *Cherry 2000* (1986), *Total Recall* and *Terminator 2* repeatedly depicting the body 'as an *image* that is constantly being reconfigured and presented for display' (ibid.: 149; emphasis in original), and repeatedly using the robotic to interrogate, to blur and often to reverse the polarities between the artificial and the human. While the trend in the 1980s was 'toward showing the human as ever more artifical', the trend in the 1990s has been 'toward rendering the artificial as ever more human' (ibid.: 22).

As Telotte is well aware, the boundaries of the human and the issues of difference they raise are rendered more complex by the fact that they necessarily include issues of sexuality, ethnicity and gender. Following Haraway (1985), such issues have been explored by Berg (1989), Byers (1989), Penley ([1986] 1989) and Neale (1989), and in a number of essays edited by Kuhn (1990a) and by Penley *et al.* (1991). Nearly all these essays refer at least in passing to *Alien* and *Blade Runner*, films which have become canonic touchstones not just for discussions of difference but also for those engaged in debates about 'postmodernism' and the nature of 'postmodern' aesthetics and representation.

Aside from Bruno's essay on *Blade Runner*, an essay which touches on time, space, memory, history, simulacra, pastiche and the definitive absence of authenticity ([1987] 1990), the concluding chapter in Sobchack's book is probably the most sustained attempt to engage with some of these issues. Sobchack here argues that since the 1960s, science fiction in the US has undergone a number of fundamental changes. These changes

> go much further than a simple transformation of the nature and manner of the genre's special effects or of its representation of visible technology. Whether 'mainstream' and big-budget or 'marginal' and low-budget, the existential attitude of the contemporary SF films is different – even if its basic material remained the same. Cinematic space travel of the 1950s had an aggressive and three-dimensional thrust – whether it was narrativized as optimistic, colonial, and phallic penetration and conquest or as pessimistic and paranoid earthly and bodily invasion. Space in these films was semantically inscribed as 'deep' and time as accelerating and 'urgent.' In the SF films released between 1968 and 1977 . . . space became semantically inscribed as inescapably domestic and crowded. Time lost its urgency – statically

> stretching foward toward an impoverished and unwelcome future worse than a bad present.
>
> (Sobchack [1980] 1988: 225–6)

With the release of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), a further transformation occurred: 'technological wonder had become synonymous with domestic hope; space and time seemed to expand again' (ibid.: 226). Finally, during the course of the 1980s, postmodern norms take hold:

> most of today's SF films (mainstream or marginal) construct a generic field in which space is semantically described as a surface for play and dispersal, a surface across which existence and objects kinetically displace and dis-play their materiality. As well, the urgent or hopeless temporality of the earlier films has given way to a new and erotic leisureliness – even in 'action-packed' films. Time has decelerated, but it is not represented as static. It is filled with curious things and dynamized by a series of concatenated events rather than linearly pressured to stream forward by the teleology of the plot.
>
> (Sobchack [1980] 1988: 227–8)

Sobchack cites films like *Liquid Sky* (1983), *Strange Invaders* (1983) and *Night of the Comet* (1984) as examples of what she means. Whether her argument applies to films like *Aliens* and *Terminator 2* remains, perhaps, open to question.

Musicals

The Hollywood musical is a product of the advent of sound, of the industry's commitment to an ethos and to forms of entertainment represented, among other things, by the theatrical musical, by Broadway, and by Tin Pan Alley, of its stake in the music publishing, recording and radio industries (acquired during the conversion to sound in the late 1920s: see Hilmes 1990: 26–77; Jewell 1984; Millard 1995: 158–62; Sanjek [1988] 1996: 147–58; Shepherd 1982: 82–6), and of developments in and on the musical stage in America and elsewhere during the previous eighty to ninety years. Film versions of stage musicals like *The Merry Widow* and *The Student Prince*, and of operas like *Carmen* and *La Bohème*, had been produced during the silent era. So, too, had filmed records of dancers and dances (Hungerford 1951: 102–8). As Collins points out, these and nearly all other films were usually accompanied by live music, and were often shown in contexts and venues which included musical performances of one kind or another (1988: 269–70). As he goes on to argue, it was the presence and popularity of these musical acts that helped prompt the first experiments with sound in the mid-1920s, and that helped function as a model for the preludes and shorts produced by Warners and others at this

time. And as he goes on to suggest, the ensuing 'tension between live musical acts and film presentation', between 'the increasing technological sophistication of the medium . . . and the sense of nostalgia for a direct relationship with the audience' has marked the musical ever since, providing the focus for such studies as those by Feuer ([1982] 1993) and Altman (1987), and the motivation for his own concentration on the 'ever-shifting relationship between performance, spectacle, and audience.' (Collins 1988: 270). In the meantime, as Wolfe (1990) has pointed out, the established nature and shape of the musical short helped govern the use of musical sequences in *The Jazz Singer* (1927), the film usually cited as the first feature-length musical. During the course of the next three years, over 200 musical films of one kind or another were made, and despite a decline in the number of musicals produced and released in the early 1930s, the musical had re-established itself as a routine component in Hollywood's output by 1934 (Altman 1996b: 294–7; Balio 1993: 211–18; Barrios 1995).

The musical has always been a mongrel genre. In varying measures and combinations, music, song and dance have been its only essential ingredients. In consequence its history, both on stage and on screen, has been marked by numerous traditions, forms and styles. These in turn have been marked by numerous terms – 'operetta', 'revue', 'musical comedy', 'musical drama', 'the backstage musical', 'the rock musical', 'the integrated musical', and so on. As we shall see, historians, critics and theorists of the musical sometimes disagree about the meaning of some of these terms. As we shall also see, some invent their own. Nevertheless, it is possible to provide some basic definitions, to indicate areas of debate and disagreement, and in the process to highlight the extent to which the musical has always been, despite its accessible and effortless image, multifaceted, hybrid, and complex (Collins 1988: 269).

Revue, to begin with, is usually and uncontentiously defined as a series of comic and musical performances lacking a narrative framework (lacking what in the theatre is called a 'book'), and unified, if at all, only by a consistent style, design or theme, a common set of comic targets, or a single producer, director or venue (Baral [1962] 1970; Bordman 1985; Kislan 1980: 78–92). Pure revue in the cinema is rare, though there was a vogue for revue in the late 1920s and early 1930s when as Balio, citing Walker (1979: 184), points out, it 'was used by producers to showcase stars and contract players and to offer "proof positive that everone could now talk, sing and dance at least passably well"' (1993: 211). And as Delameter points out, the influence of revue is evident in the backstage musical, where the show in preparation is usually a revue of one kind or another (1974: 122).

One of the distinguishing marks of operetta, by contrast, is the presence of a book. Important too, though, is the nature of the book, the nature of the setting, and the nature and importance of the music. (*Variety* argues that 'In operetta the score is the primary consideration . . . The book, dancing (if any), comedy (if any), production and acting (if any) are all secondary to the