

# Introduction

## 1967: Searching for El Dorado

**H**OWARD HAWKS'S AUTUMNAL Western *El Dorado* debuted in 1967 and provides an apt metaphor for the American cinema of this period. The film's narrative recycles story elements and dialogue from other films by Hawks—in particular his previous Western, *Rio Bravo* (1959)—yet adds new elements such as a focus on aging and infirmity, and helped introduce a new actor, James Caan, who would become a major star at the end of the period in Coppola's maverick classic *The Godfather*. The coexistence of remnants of earlier times and synchronically relevant contemporary qualities is noticeable and a hallmark of traditionalist productions (and perhaps the “dirty secret” of the maverick canon). The search for El Dorado undertaken by Hawks and the Hollywood of 1967 was hardly the mystical quest of Edgar Allan Poe's famous poem, but simply involved hewing to the principles of the industry's golden age while incorporating current elements in hopes of box-office treasure. *El Dorado* performed well and was the year's twelfth-highest-grossing film (McCarthy 625). Hollywood would be less fortunate during the next five years.

### Setting the Scene

In 1967, the Hollywood studios were still searching for El Dorado via the industrial and aesthetic practices of the classical era and by copying costly super-productions (and less expensive generic fare). In contrast, younger audiences were courted through increasingly relevant content and formal innovations.

Historical accounts typically invoke a series of disastrous events culminating with the motion picture companies' near-bankruptcy in the late 1960s (Schatz, *Boom or Bust*; Lev, Monaco, passim). Concomitant with the 1948 *United States v. Paramount* decision, which forced the five largest studios (RKO, MGM, 20th Century Fox, Warner Brothers, and Paramount) to sell their profitable theater chains, movies began a steady decline in popularity. This increased industrial frugality, resulting in eliminating the notorious long-term contracts for creative personnel, and selling off property that occupied valuable real estate. Simultaneously, Hollywood was beleaguered by competing leisure industries. The postwar era was marked by the baby boom and relocation of families to newly developed suburbs. The standard argument states that moviegoers were increasingly diverted by the amenities of suburban living, which seemed preferable to attending deteriorating picture palaces in declining inner-city neighborhoods. Better yet, one could stay home and watch television, which, after the initial high purchase cost, was essentially free.

Scholars then stress how studios responded by using their technological superiority to differentiate their product from television by making films in widescreen, color, and (occasionally) 3D. Similarly, content shifted as spectacles were released involving large crowd scenes and huge sets that the other medium could hardly approximate, such as *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1956) and *Ben-Hur* (William Wyler, 1959). Simultaneously, increasingly risqué films such as *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955) and other Otto Preminger productions, Elia Kazan and Tennessee Williams's infamous *Baby Doll* (1956), and Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's scandalous novel *Lolita* (1962) distinguished motion pictures from the networks' offerings. Furthermore, as it was easier to join than fight, the studios began making television programs and, beginning with RKO in 1956, selling their film libraries to broadcasters. Both strategies proved lucrative (Lev 135–39).

By the mid-1960s, political, cultural, and aesthetic developments began to noticeably influence filmmakers and result in surprisingly popular, zeitgeist-capturing movies. To use Peter Biskind's subhead, "The Sex-Drugs-and-Rock 'n' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood." In contrast, old-fashioned, often costly productions failed at the box-office. Per the dominant conceptualization, the studios groaned into 1967 ready to take a chance on new talent.

### Periodizing 1967–1972

On the one hand, I am choosing to demarcate 1967 to 1972 as a historical period in line with standard characterizations of this interval. Put

briefly, the studios neared bankruptcy and began to make more socially relevant films by younger talent, movies that manifested a newfound representational freedom. These five years also culminated with Hollywood retrenching and profitably releasing a new form of the blockbuster that synthesized the industry's innovative and traditional valences. On the other hand, this period is also unique as a moment of fraught coexistence, not radical transition, an epoch marked by newer, innovative developments yet also one where traditionalist films incorporated progressive content and aesthetic qualities into seemingly conservative, generic formulas.

Nineteen sixty-seven, seen as the “watershed” year by Paul Monaco, serves as a nexus for varied industrial and aesthetic developments and marks this period's beginning (Monaco 182). I am aware that privileging this year and using this phrase may seem to fall into the trap of other accounts that see it as a threshold that dramatically broke with the past. Again, this description is not wrong so much as incomplete because it only focuses on innovation. This results in only discussing maverick films and, at best, painting traditionalist movies as irrelevant and uninteresting rather than themselves responsive to the era's upheavals.

First, 1967 saw the release of *Bonnie and Clyde*, a maverick film in many respects, certainly in terms of critical views of its various innovative qualities and expression of new aesthetic trends. Originally marketed by Warner Brothers—as an undistinguished, exploitative gangster movie—and panned by many critics, *Bonnie and Clyde* struck a chord with youthful audiences and was subsequently re-reviewed, and praised as innovative and relevant. Charles Marowitz in the *Village Voice* summarized the general discourse by stating “It has transcended art to become a ‘psychic convenience.’” A time of unrest had seemingly found its cinematic representation as, per Marowitz, “audiences related to the rootless alienation of the film's milieu” (Monaco 184–86). Alexander Walker called it “a film from which we shall date reputations and innovation in the American cinema” (Halliwell 103). Ultimately, *Bonnie and Clyde* received multiple Academy Award nominations—including Best Picture, Best Actor (Warren Beatty), Best Actress (Faye Dunaway), and Best Original Screenplay (Robert Benton and David Newman)—and won Oscars for Best Cinematography (Burnett Guffey) and Best Supporting Actress (Estelle Parsons) (Monaco 184–86).

*Bonnie and Clyde* exemplified the newfound, almost instantaneous representational freedom subsequent to the Production Code's demise. Furthermore, the film revealed the growing influence of both the American exploitation movie and European art cinema paradigms, and featured newer actors and performance styles. Each of these factors requires individual consideration as influences coalescing during 1967 and in *Bonnie and Clyde*. Again, noting the film's innovations does not reify the maverick

work of Penn and others, but reflects the critical consensus that has helped periodize the Hollywood Renaissance.

By 1967, films were basically free of the long-standing Production Code enforced by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). These self-censoring strictures had certainly been relaxed in their last decade of enforcement from the universally applied moral philosophy of the 1930s and 1940s. Nevertheless, profanity, all nudity, and graphic violence were still proscribed for Hollywood filmmakers. Movies instead resorted to double-entendre, suggestion, and euphemism. Beginning, in 1962, though, selected titles circumvented the code by forbidding admission to children below a minimum age. This practice began with Stanley Kubrick's less-than-explicit *Lolita*. Furthermore, English and European productions such as the United Artists–released James Bond films (*Dr. No*, Terence Young, 1962), *From Russia with Love* (Young, 1963), *Goldfinger* (Guy Hamilton, 1964), or Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960) were relatively frank about sexuality and achieved some of their American success based on their alleged prurience. The real watershed in removing the Code was *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Mike Nichols), which broke new ground in 1966 through strong language and frank discussion of sexuality. Andy Klein writes "Edward Albee's play had a powerful literary pedigree; and there was no way the material could be substantially softened without turning it into an embarrassing travesty . . . *Virginia Woolf* was released with the caution: 'No One Under 18 Admitted Without Parents.' What had been blatant censorship had become an impromptu advisory ratings system" (Klein 13).

The Production Code did not officially die in 1966, but this was the last year serious modification of content influenced American films, whereas European productions, including Antonioni's *Blow-Up* with its infamous glimpse of female pubic hair, were already being released uncensored without code seals through the major studios' distribution subsidiaries (Monaco 61–62; Harris 265). A new, more-lenient code lasted from 1966 to 1968 and considered a film's overall context or quality. The classification "Suggested for Mature Audiences" was formally introduced (Harris 235–36). The current ratings system began in 1968 and jettisoned any vestiges of the Production Code. This arrangement categorized films as G (General audiences, i.e., family fare); M (Mature audiences; slightly objectionable, soon GP—General Patronage and then PG—Parental Guidance); R (Restricted to those over sixteen unless accompanied by a guardian; films with profanity, nudity, or graphic violence); and X (forbidden to those under seventeen; ultimately synonymous with pornography) (Leff and Simmons 271–73). Jack Valenti, a political associate of President Lyndon Johnson, was hired to enforce the new ratings.

In other words, movies were no longer de facto censored, and *Bonnie and Clyde* itself sailed by the interim Production Code (Monaco 62). Filmmakers could “realistically” represent the formerly forbidden. Blood could spatter, naked bodies appear, and characters use profane expressions familiar to many viewers. The graphic representation of violence in *Bonnie and Clyde*, complete with blood squibs and visible entrance wounds, was unprecedented in American motion pictures. Similarly, the film portrays an unmarried couple who live together (probably the least of their sins) and overtly represents the pair’s unsatisfactory sex life. In fact, Clyde’s impotence is dealt with fairly directly (“I ain’t much of a lover boy”) while Bonnie is, to Murray Pomerance, “perhaps the blatantly sexually hungry female in American film” (Pomerance 180).

The focus on youthful characters, criminality, violence, and sexuality in *Bonnie and Clyde* was reminiscent of drive-in movies. Arthur Penn’s background was in theater and major Hollywood productions, but exploitation films (and producer Roger Corman) allowed young talent such as Coppola, Scorsese, and Bogdanovich to learn their trade and, more



Figure I.1. The aftermath of Bonnie Parker’s (Faye Dunaway) shockingly gory death in *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967).

relevantly, create formally innovative, even arty, yet still low-budget films marketed toward younger viewers by highlighting sex and violence.

By 1967, European art cinema had already influenced Hollywood. Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* (1965) borrowed from Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), while Arthur Penn's *Mickey One* (1965) was indebted to Fellini's *8 1/2* (1963). Simultaneously, a new generation of moviegoers and directors appeared who attended "art" and "repertory" cinemas or had studied film in college. Successful and sexually frank European movies such as Claude Lelouch's *Un Homme et Une Femme* (1966) and *Blow-Up* were released in America around this time to critical and box-office acclaim. Therefore, it seems fitting that Francois Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard were considered as directors for *Bonnie and Clyde*. Penn self-consciously employs formal innovations typical of European art cinema (which violate the feigned invisibility of classical Hollywood practice) such as low and distorted camera angles, gauze over the lens, fast editing, slow motion, conspicuous pulling of rack focus, and even quotes from the Odessa steps sequence in Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) when one of Clyde's victims is shot in the face.

Finally, the "method" acting pioneered at the New York Actors Studio and exemplified by Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Montgomery Clift was influencing a new generation of earthier, rawer, less obviously manufactured performers such as Warren Beatty himself, Robert Redford, Dustin Hoffman, and Jack Nicholson. Similarly, Barbra Streisand, who would at best have been an anomaly in the classical era, became a huge box-office draw despite her unconventional looks and strong ethnic identity. The mostly method-trained cast of *Bonnie and Clyde* were unknown to audiences except the relative veteran Warren Beatty. Only he and Faye Dunaway, albeit in the largest roles, are attractive in a classical movie-star manner.

Second, beyond the presence of *Bonnie and Clyde*, 1967 is the first year in which a significant corpus exists of films considered to be maverick titles and thus used by previous accounts to periodize the Hollywood Renaissance era. In 1965, three such domestic movies appeared—*Mickey One* (Arthur Penn), *The Pawnbroker*, and *The Loved One* (Tony Richardson). The first of these is a New Wave-inspired American art film that employs a kitchen sink of disorienting stylistic and narrative tricks, such as jagged cutting that breaks rules of continuity editing and fragments time and space, an impulsively moving camera that uses the new zoom lens technology, and surrealist, Felliniesque imagery. *The Pawnbroker*, as noted above, contains temporal jumps and rapid cutting inspired by Resnais and also had a groundbreaking moment (for a Hollywood production) of female nudity—a topless prostitute—yet still received a

Code seal. *The Loved One* is adapted from an English novel by Evelyn Waugh, and directed by British New Wave figure Tony Richardson, but is a literal condemnation of American culture and Hollywood itself—it was even shot in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s front offices. The Production Code–challenging *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and *Seconds* (John Frankenheimer) debuted in 1966 and *Blow-Up* opened domestically that December and played successfully throughout the United States the following year despite lacking a seal. *Seconds* initially contained full frontal female nudity (excised for its initial release but available on the Criterion DVD) and is marked by the extreme wide-angle lenses and other camera tricks employed by veteran cinematographer James Wong Howe. The film’s portrait of American bourgeois society is unsparingly grim.

American films of 1967 generally considered maverick were more numerous and included, most notably, *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate*. *Cool Hand Luke* (Stuart Rosenberg), with its famous line about “failure to communicate,” features an antisocial antihero martyred by a brutal penal system and captured the rebellious mood of some viewers. *In Cold Blood* (Richard Brooks) featured highly subjective fantasies and flashbacks and overtly flashy cinematography, and makes a pointed critique of capital punishment, an institution viewed uncritically in almost every classical-era Western. *Point Blank* (John Boorman) continues the art-cinema-inflected trend with highly stylized mise-en-scène evoking Antonioni’s



Figure I.2. Extreme wide-angle cinematography by James Wong Howe along with nonrealist set design in *Seconds* (John Frankenheimer, 1966).

use of architecture to visualize alienation, time-fragmenting editing, and ambiguous narrative events. It could be read as an extended dream or reverie on the moment of the protagonist's death. *The President's Analyst* (Theodore J. Flicker) is a treasure-trove of hipster and druggie comedy, Pynchonesque paranoia, highly flamboyant cinematography by William Fraker, and an almost nonsensical and absurd series of narrative events. *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (John Huston) is well summarized by Murray Pomerance as "a symphony of perversity, vituperation, retaliation, nude horseback riding at night through the woods, effeminacy, adultery, nipple-slashing and more." The film used an experimental desaturated color processing in line with what Pomerance describes as a general aesthetic trend in 1967 toward stylistic rebellion partly through "innovative excesses of cinematography" (Pomerance 172–73). Finally, Sergio Leone's influential "Dollars" trilogy—*A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), and *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* (1966)—was released in America and shocked many through their cynical, often amoral presentation of violence in a West no longer viewed as the site for Christian or American values to tame the wilderness. Instead, savagery seemed victorious in Leone's idiosyncratic vision.

In contrast, 1967 began a five-year financial (not production) drought for the blockbuster traditionalist film. Thomas Schatz's essay "The New Hollywood" describes 1965 to 1975 as a unified period characterized by the industry's failed attempts to recapture the success of *The Sound of Music* and *Dr. Zhivago*. He sees *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg), not *The Godfather*, as christening a new, lucrative blockbuster era (Schatz, "The New Hollywood," 13–25). My conceptualization recognizes that *The Sound of Music* (released in March 1965 and still returning money through early 1967) made some money (about \$10 million) and *Dr. Zhivago* (which opened on December 31, 1965) made most of its revenue in 1966 ("Big Rental Pictures of 1965," "Big Rental Pictures of 1966," "All-Time Boxoffice Champs"). From 1967 until very late in 1972, no epic films succeeded on this level. Instead, Schatz notes "relatively inexpensive offbeat films" such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *M\*A\*S\*H* performed well, as did low-budget efforts like *Easy Rider* (Schatz, "The New Hollywood," 14–15). From the last box-office tricklings of *The Sound of Music* to the first flow of money from *The Godfather*, 1967 to 1972 are unique in postwar American film history for their dearth of blockbuster hits and the prevalence of costly flops.

Third, significant sociopolitical changes were occurring in the United States. The year 1967 famously signifies the American counterculture's plateau when "be-ins" occurred in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park during the "Summer of Love," while The Beatles released *Sgt.*



*Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—the quintessential musical document of the burgeoning youth movement. In terms of the political, Hollywood may have only started to release progressive films, but the civil rights struggle, which defined the decade's minority empowerment efforts, had already climaxed, while other movements, such as feminism, Chicano activism, and gay rights, were coalescing. Roughly, 1967 was also the dividing line between peaceful civil disobedience and increasingly violent and radical action. The civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements were poised between protest and revolt. The following year would be marked by political assassination and bloody demonstrations.

Therefore, 1967 can certainly be constructed as a nexus point of converging factors that changed American culture *and* influenced Hollywood. Noting one exact year as the precise beginning of a period is something of a parlor game. More important is providing understanding of how an era is fundamentally distinguished while in constant relationship with prior and subsequent periods.

In Hollywood itself, two related economic developments—sinking profits and corporate takeovers—indicate a new phase in the industry's history. Meanwhile, black-and-white cinematography, an aesthetic choice, became obsolete when television converted to a full-color roster in 1967.

Box-office revenues shrank from \$1.692 billion in 1946 to \$1.298 billion in 1956 and \$1.082 billion in 1967, despite rising ticket prices (Balio 401; Conant 539). Yearly attendance dropped from 3.352 billion in 1948 to 1.011 billion in 1958 and 553 million in 1967 (Conant 539). Ninety million people a week attended films in 1946, forty million in 1960, and twenty million in 1970 (Monaco 40). By 1968, only Disney and Universal were showing a profit while others were losing between \$15 million and \$145 million annually, Fox and Columbia were close to receivership, and MGM abandoned distribution and reduced production (Balio 438).

Second, by the late 1960s many studios were no longer independently owned. Universal had been the first to fall when purchased by Lew Wasserman's MCA in 1959 (Monaco 32). In 1966, Gulf Western bought Paramount, in 1967 United Artists was folded into Transamerica Insurance, in 1969 Warner Brothers became part of Kinney Leisure, and Las Vegas developer Kirk Kerkorian acquired MGM (Balio 439). Only Disney, Fox, and Columbia remained "independent" companies.

The television industry's purchase of films was an economic god-send during the postwar economic slump. In 1967, ABC paid Fox \$20 million—and \$5 million just for *Cleopatra* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1963)—while CBS paid \$52 million to MGM for forty-five titles (Champlin 11). Concurrently, the networks were completely converting to color

programming after 1965 (Balio 427). Paul Monaco, discussing the decade's cinematography, notes how "Hollywood had to take the television market for feature films seriously" (Monaco 69). John Frankenheimer more directly stated that "television sales being much higher in color than in black and white" influenced the shift (Pratley 203). Meanwhile, Charles Champlin wrote, "One truth which Zanuck holds to be self-evident is that no studio can any longer afford to make a black-and-white film, since the networks want color, color, color" (Champlin 12–13).

In 1967, the Academy Award for Best Cinematography abandoned the separation into black-and-white and color categories, since the latter had achieved, per Monaco, "unchallenged dominance" (Monaco 67). The only major studio monochrome releases from 1967 were Richard Brooks's maverick *In Cold Blood* and the subway highjacking melodrama *The Incident*. No big-budget black-and-white films were attempted in Hollywood until 1971 when *The Last Picture Show* was seen as unique for using black-and-white (Monaco 67).

Furthermore, many significant figures that helped define classical Hollywood cinema were nearing the end of the road by 1967. John Ford directed his last film in 1966, Howard Hawks in 1970, and William Wyler in 1970. Biskind tells the story of nearly blind Norman Taurog, who made his first feature film in 1928, still directing musicals at MGM in 1966 despite needing a driver to ferry him around the back lot (Biskind 18–19). In terms of studio bosses, Jack Warner retired, Barney Balaban (Paramount) was replaced in 1966, Darryl Zanuck was deposed in 1969, and the other companies were no longer run by men associated with the classical era (Balio 443–46; Gustafson 576). In 1967 alone actors who died included Spencer Tracy, Vivien Leigh, Claude Rains, Nelson Eddy, Basil Rathbone, Jayne Mansfield, Ann Sheridan, Jane Darwell, Charles Bickford, Bert Lahr (the cowardly lion from *The Wizard of Oz*), and Paul Muni (Pomerance 173). Other performers' careers were winding down, including those of James Stewart, Robert Taylor, Katharine Hepburn, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, and Boris Karloff.

Hollywood would spend the next five years catching up with and reacting against the period's aesthetic, economic, sociopolitical, and cultural upheavals. The studios vacillated between jumping on the bandwagon and producing traditionalist genre films that both reflected and countered the era's tumult.