The title of Glenn Man’s recent contribution to American film history and criticism should immediately signal its dissent from the now orthodox view that the emergence of a New Hollywood in the 1960s and 70s did not represent a radical break with Classical Hollywood. As such, Man’s book serves as a useful rejoinder to such texts as Robert Ray’s *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, which does indeed argue for the continuing hold of the Classical paradigm on New Hollywood.

*Radical Visions* is the ideal companion piece to Robert Phillip Kolker’s superb *The Cinema of Loneliness*. Although similar in subject matter, the two books are remarkably dissimilar in treatment: whereas Kolker’s study is auteurist in structure and strategy, Man’s is generic and historical. Instead of a chapter-by-chapter examination of the work of certain key directors, *Radical Visions* is a chronicle of the historical devolution of certain key genres. For example, one particularly good chapter is devoted to the Western, while another deals with “Gangsters and Private Eyes.” Though seemingly discrete, the chapters are nevertheless organized into an overall structure which is narrative in nature: the book begins with the birth of New Hollywood and ends with its death. Two chapters—“The Wonder Year, Part I” and “The Wonder Year, Part II”—chronicle the birth, while one chapter—“The Apocalypse”—details the death.

The chapters are governed internally by the same logic which organizes the book as a whole: each concludes with an analysis of a single film which, in the opinion of Man, marks the terminus of its genre’s devolution. For example, one of the book’s most insightful chapters deals with counterculture films; it ends with a section on Bob Fosse’s *Lenny* (1974) which Man subtitled “*Lenny*: Culmination and Dead End.”

In the case of the counterculture films, Man makes the important point that many were not really about about the counterculture at all. Rather, Man argues that the challenge to traditional myths emerges from the internal drama of character and character relationships and not from the external imposition of counterculture themes by the discourse.¹

By contrast, *Lenny* is clearly about the counterculture. What is more, Lenny Bruce is the film’s spokesman for countercultural themes and ideas. Indeed, he becomes so obsessed with speaking for these themes and ideas that he ceases to do anything but: his one-man crusade ends in self-annihilation. What is significant about *Lenny*, Man notes, is that this self-annihilation is reproduced on a formal level: just as Lenny eventually self-destructs, so too does the film. The film’s obsessive reflexivity not only mirrors Lenny’s increasingly self-obsessive routines but eventually reaches such a level that it overwhelms everything else. Indeed, one could almost read this as the film’s message: self-reflexivity equals self-consumption. In this way, the film’s form is actually its content and its subject (the death of the counterculture) is.

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¹ The quote is from *Radical Visions*, p. 84.
actually reproduced in its form.

Insightful as this analysis is, it highlights a fundamental flaw in the narrative nature of Man’s enterprise: because he describes the evolution of film genres in terms of birth and death, he tends to select films which self-consciously perceived themselves in such terms. *Lenny* is a film which is obviously about the death of the counterculture and its icons and aesthetic; does this necessarily mean that it marks the terminus of its genre? The film may have seen itself in this way, but does that mean we have to? Inevitably, this method will privilege films which are self-consciously terminal.

For many, the narrative nature of Man’s enterprise will be seen as flawed in essence. Personally, I do not find it problematic in essence so much as in application. For example, I cannot concur with Man’s periodization of the birth of New Hollywood. He pinpoints it to the release of three films in late 1967 and early 1968: *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967), *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), and 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968). He writes that

> their effect and influence recall the impact that *Breathless, Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *The 400 Blows* had on the French cinema in 1959. As their French counterparts ushered in the New Wave, the American trio announced a renaissance in the Hollywood commercial cinema and set a standard by which contemporaneous films were measured.  

While the importance of these three films is inarguable, it’s debatable whether they really mark the break with Classical Hollywood. Some would argue—implausibly to my mind—that they, too, are predominantly classical, while others would mark the break earlier. A whole host of non-classical films were made prior to the date which Man pinpoints, including such visible films as *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956), *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958), *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), *The Manchurian Candidate* (John Frankenheimer, 1962), *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963), and *Dr. Strangelove* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964). Well aware that he is vulnerable on this point, Man dismisses *The Searchers, Psycho*, and *Dr. Strangelove* as

> isolated instances of auteurist transformations of transitional styles and genres in a Hollywood environment which didn’t allow them to generate a new school or period.  

This seems to me to be a somewhat tenuous argument given the fact that *Psycho* revolutionized the horror film and *Dr. Strangelove* legitimized black comedy for mainstream audiences. The latter development is particularly important, as it is black comedy which emerged as the (sub)genre most attuned to the decade’s radicalized sensibilities. As for *The Searchers*, I find it odd that Man would dismiss the importance of a film which not only invites the subsequent demolition of its genre but which also inspired the very generation of filmmakers about whom Man is writing.

One of my main criticisms of *Radical Visions* would be that Man tends to get bogged down in tangled and prolix descriptions of scenes and their camera set-ups. This is particularly annoying as it detracts from Man’s otherwise readable prose. Man’s discussion of *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* is extremely illuminating; but in order to get through it, one has to dodge such sentences as the following:

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**Spectator**
An extreme bird's-eye-view longshot of the town is followed by a stunning sudden zoom-in longshot of the three gunmen in the street from the same angle; cut to a medium shot of McCabe in bed, then a close-up of him rising.\textsuperscript{4}

While this may not be a particularly glaring example, it does illustrate the hurdles which Man asks his reader to regularly jump.

Overall, however, reading Man's book is a rich and rewarding experience. Among its high points are Man's discussions of Bonnie and Clyde, 2001, and McCabe and Mrs. Miller. Take for instance the following insight regarding McCabe and Mrs. Miller. Man argues that the film doesn't simply demythologize the genre of the Western but that it transposes the Fordian opposition between fact and legend into a question of reality versus illusion. In this way, the myth of the West is scrutinized not so much for its historical inaccuracy as for its psychological hazards. Indeed, McCabe's belief in his own mythic stature is figured by the film as a kind of pitiable madness, a less tragic than risible delusional state. Man writes:

The internalization of the demythologization theme within the figure of McCabe does not even allow an existential victory, one that would allow McCabe to transcend the discrepancy between self and the world. The process of demythologization is not one of disillusionment within McCabe, not a gradual realization of the world's resistance to ideals or principles beyond its own materialistic discourse. Instead, the process takes the form of an exposure.... Given this scenario, McCabe's actions at the end cannot be considered a cry of individual integrity and identity in the face of an unaccomodating world, because his mythic stature is a posture and not authentic.\textsuperscript{5}

Instead of dying for an ideal, it would therefore be more accurate to say that McCabe dies for a ego ideal, a delusion which only he believes in. What is more, his death doesn't even rank as fact, let alone as legend: no one notices it. Just as his lifeless body gradually disappears beneath a sheet of snow, his name, too, will inevitably disappear beneath blankets of historical oblivion. Forgotten by his own neighbors, John McCabe is unlikely to be remembered by history. For me, Man's reading revivifies a film whose merits I had recently begun to doubt. And in the end, what more can you ask of a work such as this, except that it should be able take a film and—almost as if restoring the print itself—make us see it with all the boldness and unfamiliarity with which it was originally perceived?

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\item[2] 7.
\item[3] 7.
\item[4] 91.
\item[5] 89.
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