

ART DIRECTION AND PRODUCTION DESIGN

Edited by Lucy Fischer

 **RUTGERS**
UNIVERSITY PRESS
New Brunswick, New Jersey

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Art direction and production design / edited by Lucy Fischer.

pages cm — (Behind the silver screen series ; 9)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8135-6436-4 (hardback) — ISBN 978-0-8135-6435-7 (pbk.) —

ISBN 978-0-8135-6437-1 (e-book)

1. Motion pictures—Art direction. 2. Motion pictures—Setting and scenery.

I. Fischer, Lucy, editor

PN1995.9.A74A78 2015

791.4302'5—dc23

2014017490

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Manufactured in the United States of America

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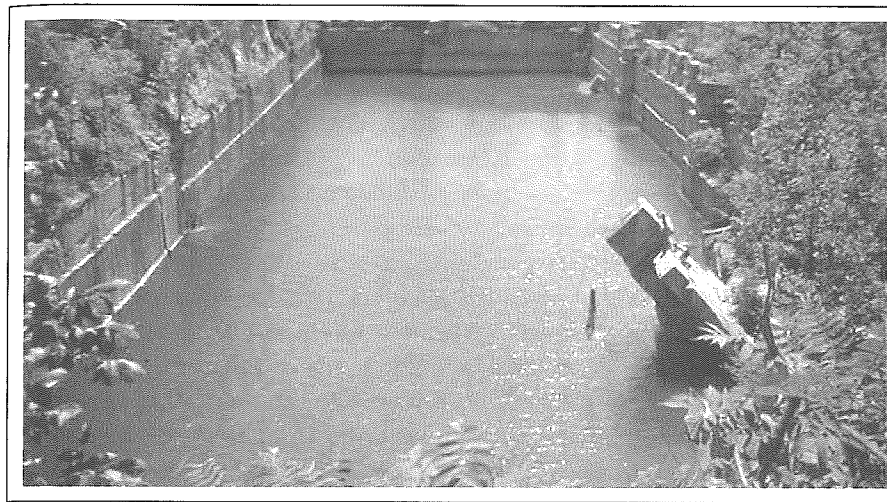


FIGURE 27: The “Roman bath” of the sandblasted quarry in *Breaking Away* (Peter Yates, 1979, art dir. Patrizia von Brandenstein, Twentieth Century-Fox).

been left behind by American deindustrialization, debarred from the usual routes of class advancement—higher education—by cultural and economic forces as ironic as they are irrefutable. As Dave’s dad Ray (Paul Dooley) explains to him on a night walk through the university campus, “I cut the stone for this building. . . . I was damn proud of my work. And the buildings went up. When they were finished, the damnedest thing happened. It was like the buildings was too good for us. Nobody told us that, just—just felt uncomfortable, that’s all. Even now I’d like to be able to stroll through the campus and look at the limestone, but I just feel out of place.” He asks whether Dave and his friends still swim in the quarries, and muses, “So the only thing you got to show for my twenty years of work is the holes we left behind.” With the quarry walls cleaned up, the “hole” now matches the pristine walls of the campus buildings, and the kids’ furtive attempts at self-assertion through graffiti give way to a classical purity. For former star quarterback Mike (Dennis Quaid), the blankness of the quarry walls allows him to wallow in a particularly athletic nostalgia. The quarry is a Roman bath, a ruin generations in the making.

The contrasts between Mike’s professional failure and von Brandenstein’s success capture and condense a much longer transformation in American labor. The film suggests that football—here, the midcentury industrial sport—gives way to cycling—a more individualist team sport, one coded as European, less masculine, and corporate-sponsored—just as industrial labor has given way to the sort of cultural facility possessed by Dave Stoller (Dennis Christopher) and von Brandenstein. At the same time, the film also makes clear just how much labor is still involved in these new, neoliberal forms. Dave pushes himself to the limit training and he encounters resistance at home (his father), while von Brandenstein struggled for years against the union gatekeepers who prevented her

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THE NEW HOLLYWOOD, 1981–1999 J. D. Connor

By 1979, it seemed eminently possible that Hollywood could produce grittiness without grit—that the image and its profilmic origin could be clean yet still deeply marked by class differences. Patrizia von Brandenstein explained that when she made the “big jump” to designing *Breaking Away* (Peter Yates, 1979, Twentieth Century-Fox), she chose particularly monochrome interiors for budgetary and narrative reasons: “Close-valued colors are not as expensive to produce. Everything was washed and bleached. It kept the values close; it made the family less prosperous.” Yet as she would discover, once the clean image was given any scale, it tended toward the monumental and the classical. For the famous quarry swimming scenes, she decided to have the walls sandblasted to remove the moss and layers of graffiti that generations of locals had left behind. The results were stunning (figure 27). “The image of a Roman bath, that pristine quality, was something we brought to it by sandblasting the whole quarry, which was quite an undertaking. We used pontoon boats and we sandblasted the walls of the quarry. We heaped up tremendous boulders, stacked them up, and cleaned everything so it was as clear as possible. The sand acted like a filter: as it settled to the bottom of the quarry, it cleaned the water so it had that sparkling blue quality.”¹

Breaking Away is deeply embedded in the landscape and institutions of Bloomington, Indiana. In this university town, a group of aimless townies have

from making the transition to art director.² Once she had made her “big jump,” she was nominated for an Academy Award as part of the *Ragtime* (Milos Forman, 1981, Dino De Laurentiis/Paramount) team two years later and won for *Amadeus* (Milos Forman, 1984, Saul Zaentz/Orion). That her work was so immediately recognizable as among the best in the industry, and was so immediately recognized, demonstrates the profession’s structuring imbalance as the eighties began. The residual barriers to entry for new talents created the possibility for dramatic breakthroughs. Gone were the stable art departments and regular ladders to success they seemed to offer. In their place were new paths for individual achievement and new pressures and contingencies along those routes.

The new contours of the profession were shaped by the overarching economic and political forces of the moment. The art department might be organized according to older industrial models, but the processes, technologies, and contexts had changed decisively. Designers, individually and as a group, took note of these pressures and discussed them widely in trade publications and other sites of professional discourse. But if everyone in the biz knew that things had changed, did those changes show up on screen? Measuring the effects of the world of work in the designs themselves poses real difficulties. A host of other factors impinges on any transmission of economics to design. Crucially, there is the project’s overall budget, which would seem to be so overwhelmingly the proximate cause of a film’s look as to occlude any representation of some industry-wide trend. There are also genre demands (the rise of the action movie), culture-wide aesthetic swings (the preppy resurgence), technological demands (the rise of video and the need to “shoot for the box”), and individual hallmarks belonging to directors or other creative personnel.

How would one even begin to judge design? Here, the work of Charles and Mirella Jona Affron is essential. In *Sets in Motion*, the Affrons propose a hierarchy of design intensities that cuts across period and style. This hierarchy includes sets that perform the most basic function—denoting a space—as well as designs that amount to a form of narration in themselves—those sets that dominate the story world of a film. Their typology possesses a singular advantage for our purposes. On their account, the function of a given design depends on its intensity, which in turn depends on a proleptic reading of the script. From the beginning, the art director searches for what they call the film’s “narrative imperatives.” Assuming that “the reading of the décor is intended to be inseparable from the reading of the narrative,” then those readings of the narrative that are “conventional” will require a conventional degree of design intensity; “unconventional” readings require higher intensity designs, and so on. This is almost a linear relationship. “The weight of the art direction in that reading [of the script] will vary . . . primarily in accord with the degree of design intensity applied to the décor.”³ We can judge designs based on the obtrusiveness they bring to the film’s “narrative imperatives.”

One difficulty with this model is that it presumes a rather overweening primacy of narrative, or at least the script. In practice such a privilege might be less problematic since it accords with typical Hollywood processes, where production designers read scripts as part of an initial budget breakdown and suggest location shifts and other cost-containment strategies. Yet if the Affrons’ “set theory” assumes that design functions are narratively determined, narrative demands might not be the only pressures designers face. Hence the Affrons’ turn in the final chapter of *Sets in Motion* to “Judgment and Prize.” There they continue to press the narrative argument by contending that judgments by reviewers and critics are “most persuasive . . . when they integrate narrative and decorative functions”; and that the judgments of industry peers embodied in the Academy Awards celebrate “the nexus of art direction and narrative.”⁴ Yet the integrative reading the Affrons prize, following the collapse of the classical studios and during the period of studio reascension, is under sustained assault. There is no doubt that production designers in the eighties and nineties were valued for their ability to support film narratives through designs of the properly calibrated intensity, but they were also required to support what we might call the “career narratives” of their creative workers and the “franchise narratives” that might extend beyond a particular filmic incarnation. Budgetary efficiency, narrative sufficiency, and artistry were values that existed alongside recognizability and extendibility. Every set—like every script, performance, cut, or close-up—bears a potentially split address. It finds its role within the production it serves, the career it constitutes, and intellectual property it extends.

By reconfiguring design intensity as the product of a reading, the Affrons suggest that every set might be seen as a choice, but such readings need not be limited to the script. Each production, each set, might emerge as “legible” in ways beyond those privileged by the Affrons, and each set might be the result of a multivalent negotiation over the value of a set’s obtrusiveness. In what follows, I want to isolate several contexts for the emergence of alternate legibilities. My assumption is that the sum of those eruptions of design will constitute both an outline of the situation of design in general and a map for further attempts to isolate its importance to the revived Hollywood of the era.⁵

The Way It Is Now: Location Shopping and Self-Advertisement

On *Reds* (Warren Beatty, 1981, Paramount), Richard Sylbert retained much of the executive authority that had made him a plausible studio head in the mid-1970s. He was notoriously prickly to his crew, as Sylvia Townsend documents. Most notoriously, Sylbert sought and received sole credit for the design of the production’s 144 sets. He did not submit art director Simon Holland’s name for the Academy Award. Holland was incredulous. “I said, ‘Dick, do you really have

to do this?' and he said, 'It's the way it is now, kid.'⁶ Holland may have been slighted, but others who did not anticipate credit beyond their job title found a way to cater to Sylbert's need for control. Set decorator Michael Seirton (who *was* nominated) noted that if he showed excitement over a particular item, Sylbert "would discount it. But if Seirton ignored or played down the treasure, Sylbert, crediting himself for the great find, would appreciate it."⁷ The flipside of this complex managerial dance was Sylbert's mastery of his relation with Beatty. The two of them joined forces in a campaign against what they regarded as excessive craft insistence. Beatty told Sylvia Townsend that he and Sylbert "coined the phrase, 'I'm here, too-ism'" to describe "a director or a production designer or a costume designer who wanted to be present on the screen and would do something either with a camera angle or use of a particular hat, or something that would distract from the theme or the story to this element."⁸

The anecdotes about Sylbert suggest that the upwelling of professional pressures ("the way it is now, kid") had reached a point where the management of those pressures on screen ("I'm here, too-ism") had become a principal task of key creative personnel. Aesthetically, only a sustained insistence on story values could hope to contain the overwhelming need for occupational validation on the part of the independent contractors assembled for the show.

As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno had contended in 1944, "Today every close-up of a star is an advertisement for her name, and every hit song a plug for its tune. Advertising and the culture industry merge technically as well as economically."⁹ By the 1980s, the danger was that every knick-knack would be an advertisement for the set decorator. Sylbert's on-set unpleasantness and his ability to ingratiate himself with directors such as Beatty, John Frankenheimer (*The Manchurian Candidate*, 1962, United Artists), and Brian De Palma (*The Bonfire of the Vanities*, 1990, Warner Bros.) should be seen less as a personal quirk and more as the embodiment of a particular strategy for aesthetic management.

Those baked-in conflicts were more likely because the department Sylbert was running was composed of British locals. When department heads are parachuted in to run productions outside Hollywood, there is invariably friction through culture clash, personality clash, or both. But in the cases of *Reds*, *Yentl* (Streisand, 1983, prod. des. Roy Walker, United Artists), and *Amadeus* we encounter a particularly consistent New Hollywood form: these historical dramas are shot in well-preserved locations well outside the usual industrial settings. The industry could then recognize them not only for their designs as such but also for their frisson of historical authenticity and organizational difficulty. Location scouting in search of lands time forgot had been essential to the Auteur Renaissance's Great Depression fascination in films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967, art dir. Dean Tavoularis, Warner Bros.), *Paper Moon* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1973, prod. des. Polly Platt, Paramount), and *Boxcar Bertha* (Martin Scorsese, 1972, art dir. David Nichols, AIP). As Michael Atkinson explained in *Sight and*

Sound, "The idyllic vision of the Depression captured in the 1970s had everything to do with economics. . . . In the Nixon years there were huge portions of the southern and midwestern US that hadn't changed appreciably in 40 years, having been left out of the post-war development loop by virtue of sheer poverty and neglect. Conveniently, if not coincidentally, these were the same states and regions that many of the gangster-era crooks used to prowl, giving film-makers ready-made locations that were both authentic and inexpensive."¹⁰

But where directors in that previous era were eager to put distance between themselves and studio oversight, in the eighties, the search for historically preserved locations gathered momentum with the gradual opening of Soviet bloc countries to outside filmmakers. The first efforts were fitful. For *Reds*, Beatty, Sylbert, and cinematographer Vittorio Storaro hoped to shoot in the USSR, but the Soviet authorities would not grant permission without script approval. For a figure who chafed under studio authority, political preclearance was intolerable, so the production shot exteriors in Finland (for St. Petersburg exteriors) and in Spain (the agitprop train), used interiors at Lancaster House (for the Winter Palace), and did studio work at Twickenham, in England. *Yentl* was shot in Prague and New York, *Amadeus* entirely in Czechoslovakia.

Late Soviet-era and emerging post-communist nations possessed an ideal combination of below-the-line talent (hung over from the state film industries), "fresh" locations, and a crying need for foreign exchange. As Forman put it, "Prague was absolutely ideal because thanks to Communist inefficiency, you know, the 18th century was untouched."¹¹ As liberalized markets took hold across Eastern Europe, legacy cultural institutions of all sorts became potential streams of income for states in various stages of traumatic privatization.¹²

For New Hollywood filmmakers, the prospect of authentic and inexpensive locations once again proved impossible to resist. At the same time, though, the novelty of these locations—of designing into "new" places—could become part of the film's marketing, to popular audiences and industrial colleagues alike. Finally, the prospect of making "something different" appealed to production designers who needed to create a recognizable career. So von Brandenstein was "honored" to work on *Amadeus* after the contemporary, working-class drama of *Silkwood* (Mike Nichols, 1983, Twentieth Century-Fox) because "I wanted to do something violently different." And she followed *Amadeus* with *Beat Street* (Stan Lathan, 1984, Orion), another contemporary film set in the hip-hop-and-graffiti-art world of New York, because "I wanted something to get me out of [*Amadeus*] so I wouldn't be stuck in the eighteenth century for the rest of my life."¹³

Von Brandenstein's trilogy of artist movies—*Amadeus*, *Beat Street*, and *A Chorus Line* (Richard Attenborough, 1985, Embassy/Polygram/Columbia)—are hardly the titles that come to mind when one thinks of the decade's "high concept" mainstream. But they do exemplify the porous relationship between narrative and style that, to the film scholar Justin Wyatt, seemed paradigmatic.

“In some cases the style of the productions seems to seep through onto the narrative; issues of style or image become crucial to the functioning of the characters and the development of the narrative. Consider, for example, the importance of style in performance to *Flashdance* [Adrian Lyne, 1983, prod. des. Charles Rosen, Paramount], style in aviation to *Top Gun* [Tony Scott, 1986, prod. des. John F. DeCuir Jr., Paramount], or personal style to *American Gigolo* [Paul Schrader, 1980, art dir. Ed Richardson, Paramount]. . . . Furthermore, the reliance on bold images in the films reinforces the extraction of these images from the film for the film’s marketing and merchandising.”¹⁴ One might add to this list the marketing and merchandising of film’s design professionals. In this, high concept and the heritage film share a commitment to intensity.

Wyatt’s sense that these high-concept narratives are “more” about marketing and design than narrative has been criticized by David Bordwell, who contends that such films are still governed by classical canons of linear, causal storytelling. Here, our revised understanding of the Affrons’ intensity scale is useful again. For if there is a cycle of films that, as Bordwell admits, “display bold music and slick visuals” and possess a “fashion-layout gloss,” then we ought to recognize them as a trans-generic layer of design. And if the box office results of those films are not guaranteed—Bordwell highlights the relative success of “stylistically unprepossessing” films such as *9 to 5* (Colin Higgins, 1980, prod. des. Dean Mitzner, Twentieth Century–Fox) and *Terms of Endearment* (James L. Brooks, 1983, prod. des. Polly Platt, Paramount)—then we ought to be looking for other dimensions of success beyond box office. Wyatt, following critic Howard Kessel, sees the new emphasis on smooth surfaces and backlighting as a triumph of visual control: “Tony Scott’s *The Hunger* [1983, MGM] is supposed to be about such themes as death, immortality, violence and love, but it’s really about art direction.”¹⁵ Neither Kessel nor Wyatt credits production designer Brian Morris or art director Clinton Cavers, but that is likely because they assumed that Scott, like his brother Ridley or fellow Brit Adrian Lyne, was the prime mover behind his films’ look. This was the first generation of advertising-trained, MTV-ified directors, and their art departments received less critical attention even when they were being recognized for their prepossessing “I’m here, too-ism.”

A look at the Academy Awards for Art Direction/Set Decoration over the decade suggests an explanation. Between 1980, when Pierre Guffroy and Jack Stephens won for *Tess* (Roman Polanski, Columbia), and 1988, when Stuart Craig and Gerard James won for *Driving Miss Daisy* (Bruce Beresford, Warner Bros.), every winner was a historical costume drama. Thirty-six of the decade’s fifty nominees were period films (or featured extensive period sequences), with the remainder divided between science fiction films and a handful of contemporary dramas (including Polly Platt’s characteristically precise work on the “unprepossessing” *Terms of Endearment*). The run was broken only by Anton Furst’s victory for *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989, Warner Bros.). For the decade, then, industrial

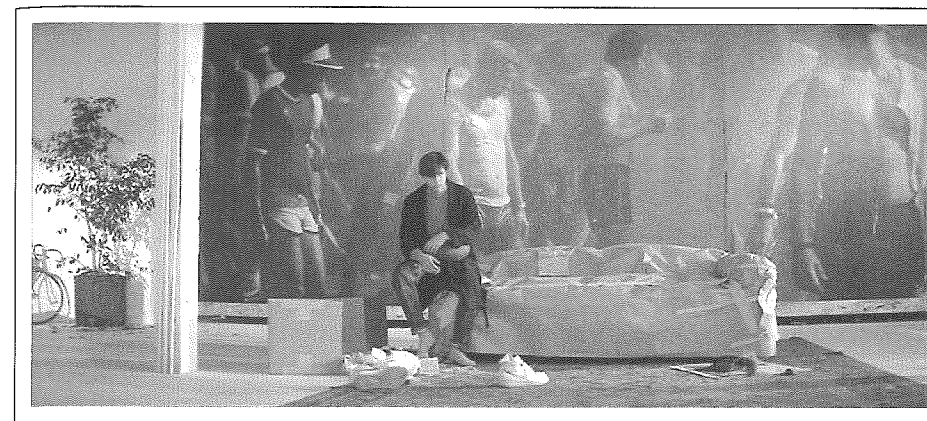


FIGURE 28: Judd Nelson’s Alec Newbary is the loneliest yuppie in the world, lost between his new Nikes and his giant Nike billboard in *St. Elmo’s Fire* (Joel Schumacher, 1985, art dir. William Sandell, Columbia).

recognition all but required narratively justified, high-intensity design work in the context of a prestige picture. The only genre work that found any recognition at all was of similar intensity, yet the broad membership of the Academy apparently found it difficult to take seriously.

The exemplary case might be William Sandell, who designed or art-directed such crucial films as *St. Elmo’s Fire* (Joel Schumacher, 1985, Columbia), *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987, Orion), and *Total Recall* (Verhoeven, 1990, Carolco), but had to wait until 2003 to be nominated for an Academy Award, for *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (Peter Weir, Twentieth Century–Fox). What the Brat Pack film shares with the two sci-fi movies is its commitment to intense branding. Take the giant Nike billboard that fills Judd Nelson and Ally Sheedy’s loft (figure 28). At one level, the branded backdrop seems to be of a piece with the overarching use of larger-than-life images—a similarly scaled Billy Idol image in Demi Moore’s apartment; a Coca-Cola machine that seems bigger than its customers. At another level, though, the population of the ad and the population of the film seem interchangeable. Producer Lauren Schuler described the assembly of the Brat Pack as a matter of design: “When we were casting the film, we looked for people that would ‘go together,’ so it looked as though they were friends.”¹⁶ So these Nike runners “go with” these yuppies. Their class origins might be stipulated in the script, but like the quarries of *Breaking Away*, they have been visually sandblasted. The results, though, are a peculiar sort of theatricality, in which a viewer is able to shift his attention from the character to the set without missing a beat—at least, director Joel Schumacher was:

But it is always amazing that we get angriest at the people that we’re supposed to be in love with. And I’m not wise enough to figure that one out. That’s a great Nike billboard in the background. That was a great photograph of runners having come from a marathon in the rain. It was

a particularly arresting image. And you know, photography is art. It's certainly not a hard sell for the product. I like the idea of a young couple not being able to afford art maybe getting a billboard from a junk heap or even tearing one down in the middle of the night, and using it as art in their loft.¹⁷

It would be difficult to find a more encapsulating registration of high concept's effects: the image is ready to be valued as art, or turned into narration, or used to sell something outside the film. Similarly outsized ads appear in Sandell's other films, usually with a cheekier affect attached to them, but nonetheless just as "legible" as the future worlds they populate.

Sandell was forced to wait for decades, but the trend toward "excessive" or intense contemporary settings was rewarded just a few years later. The stark distinctions between characters and set that were encouraged by backlighting and industrial settings and that encouraged extracinematic consumption were finally able to break through residual standards of design decorum when that constellation could be narratively and generically motivated by comic book source material. The grit-free, "immaculate" imagery of high concept inspired a new graphism, a tendency that only became more pronounced as the dramatic changes brought on by digital revolutions in production and post-production gathered force. *Batman*, which won the Oscar in 1989, is set in a contemporary Gotham, but it is a city that remains enveloped by Art Deco skyscrapers and clothes while it is crisscrossed by the Joker's boxy mid-sixties cars and toggle-switch gadgetry.¹⁸ The resulting asynchronies add up to a world where major characters carry private temporalities with them. In contrast, Richard Sylbert's *Dick Tracy* (Warren Beatty, Touchstone), which won in 1990, gives us a version of cartoon deco that has swallowed up every character and spit them out in the limited color-palette of the Sunday funnies.

Sylbert had inherited the palette when he took over the role from Dean Tavoularis; he fought for his usual khaki backdrops; and he uncharacteristically asked his designer brother Paul for help. When the dust settled, though, Sylbert was able to take credit for the look he had resisted. And while Townsend paints Sylbert's success as ironic, a look at the film shows that irony was essential to that success.¹⁹ The colors were severely restricted and announced their artificiality at every turn, yet Sylbert and Rick Simpson managed to populate the world with seemingly authentic objects—radios, crockery, furniture, cars—that did *not* seem arbitrary, that seemed to have been drawn from the world's largest warehouses of candy-colored commodities. At the same time, those commodities were rigorously de-branded. "A café was called 'Café' and a newspaper was the 'Daily Paper.'" Even the car grilles were redesigned: "The worst thing for a scene in *Dick Tracy* is for somebody to say, 'God, isn't that a beautiful Ford.'"²⁰ That mix of willful limitation and almost magical availability found its exterior equivalent in the

exteriors on the Universal lot. Townsend notes that Sylbert considered the lot "the McDonald's of the motion picture business" and that the buildings on its New York and brownstone streets appealed to him because they were "totally generic. . . . Those buildings are not buildings; they're icons of certain kinds of architecture" (color plate 9).²¹ They came, in other words, pre-interpreted: for Sylbert to use them was to acquiesce to very particular, willful limits, and yet however degenerate the buildings might be, they were available, almost magically. They carried a kind of ironic prolepsis with them, the mark of ready exploitability. That irony extended to *Dick Tracy's* tie-ins as well. Like other Disney blockbusters of the era, the film was cross-promoted at McDonald's that summer. The red-and-yellow "*Dick Tracy*" logo fit all too well with McDonald's house colors. What the film managed to do was combine the raw appeal to the mass market—Disney, McDonald's, Madonna—with enough arty credibility to put it over with Academy voters—Sylbert, Storaro, and composer Stephen Sondheim.

For such pop-slumming to be effective, though, creative workers had to maintain their reputations across several motion pictures. So it is particularly striking but not surprising that the designers most identified with the cartoon deco at the end of the eighties paired their work on those nostalgia fests with films of a similarly intense, contemporary, financialized urban realism. (Furst, who died in 1991, is an exception.) Sylbert paired *Dick Tracy* with *Bonfire of the Vanities*; von Brandenstein swerved from *The Untouchables* (De Palma, 1987, Paramount) to *Working Girl* (Mike Nichols, 1988, Twentieth Century-Fox). Both *Bonfire* and *Working Girl* showed their designers bridging New York's class gulfs, following their protagonists down, or up, the economic ladder. Both of them relished the high-style domestic spaces that accompanied *Wall Street* (Oliver Stone, 1987, prod. des. Stephen Hendrickson, Twentieth Century-Fox) and the era's deal making. In the protagonist's apartment in *Bonfire*, for example, Sylbert's work aimed to "ignite the flames of greed and covetousness under people all over New York," as author Tom Wolfe put it. Julie Salamon, in her account of the making of the film, detailed the \$350,000 spent furnishing this single set: "Richard Sylbert was amused by the studio's constant nattering about money. In his mind, the entire point was excess. . . . The walls were lacquered (four layers thick to achieve the right glow), the vases were Chinese, the chairs were Chippendale, the floors were parquet, and the couches were covered with flowery Mark Hampton prints. Sylbert had loaded chintz upon chintz, detail on detail. . . 'Anglophilia,' he said. 'It's a recipe, like a cookbook.'"²² To pull it off, Sylbert had to be the authentic stylist, the one who knew Mark Hampton, Colefax & Fowler, and Aubusson carpets. When the elites mingled with hoi polloi, the display of marked class differences was not, in any of these cases, a *Breaking Away*-style exploration of the actualities of lives lived below the 1 percent. Instead, the realism (or fantasy) of the working-class spaces served to legitimize the protagonists' desire for escape. Yet however motivated these contemporary films might have been and however

rigorously these designers managed their careers, they went industrially unrewarded: *Untouchables* was nominated, not *Working Girl*; *Dick Tracy*, not *Bonfire*. Stephen Hendrickson, who designed *Wall Street*, had to wait, like Sandell, until he was nominated by the Art Directors Guild and the Television Academy for his work on the Depression-set *Annie* miniseries (Rob Marshall, 1999, Disney).

Paratexts: The Making of Production Design

As unanchored individuals, designers were required to manage their careers along those axes that could be recognized industrially. But as members of creative collaborations in the new conglomerate era, they were also subject to forces that offered an opportunity for the reassembly of the social context of production. The Hollywood mode of production had shifted to what we might call collective “I’m here, too-ism.” The manic, deal-driven, package-unit system of assembly threatened to undermine the overall coherence of every project. Each craft might take aim against those centrifugal forces, attempting to reassert Hollywood’s more traditional values of coherence and causality.

Yet it would fall to design to offer a theory that might integrate story and style within the film, and that might bind a particular project to its downstream or synergistic incarnations. We can register that grand effort in two genres of design paratext: the making-of monograph (or DVD extra) and the theme park attraction. Both of these reach a peak in Rick Carter’s work on *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993, Universal).

Mid-century roadshow audiences were often given elaborate pressbook-style souvenirs that touted the films’ “surge and splendor,” to use Vivian Sobchack’s phrase.²³ These served as models for later, more complete “art-of-the-film” monographs, and they routinely made space for discussions of the elaborate settings and historical accuracy of the epics. By the late seventies, book-length treatments became increasingly common—in addition to *The Art of Star Wars* and *Superman*, there were books on *Heavy Metal*, *The Dark Crystal*, and *Tron*.²⁴ Such paratexts offered ample space for concept art, storyboards, and construction photos, introducing readers to the workings of the art department, and allowing them to see how a film made the transition from script to screen. As popular literature, such books nearly always gave the impression that the pathway was smooth, and that the below-the-line workers were laboring in service to the auteur’s vision. However sanitized the vision of collaboration they offered, though, such books also publicized the work of increasingly independent production designers, art directors, and set decorators to the industry.

In *Production Culture*, John Thornton Caldwell had detailed the relentlessness with which contemporary craft workers self-market.²⁵ The forms that marketing takes are the products of the particular convergence of the overall

industrial configuration and technologies of display. Today’s designer websites with their digital sizzle reels are the evolved versions of eighties videotapes. The technologies of professional self-marketing, their extension and intensification, run in parallel with transformations in the modes of motion picture distribution. When videotapes were priced inexpensively for consumers in the mid-eighties, home video libraries became possible.²⁶ At the same time, the major studios acquired publishing companies and the U.S. bookselling industry saw the dramatic expansion of Barnes & Noble/B. Dalton and Borders/Waldenbooks.²⁷ The overall effect was an explosion of book titles to serve an audience more expert than ever.²⁸ Every superstore featured a row of oversized *art of* books along the top shelf of its Film & Media Studies section.

Despite the changes in media, however, the core of the production designer’s self-presentation for both professional and popular audiences has remained what we might call the triptych of incarnation: first, there is the presentation of a particular draft version of an image—an elevation, a piece of concept art; then there is a scene of construction; finally, there is an image from the completed film—ideally a particularly striking moment—that demonstrates the deep interplay of setting and story, proving to the reader/audience/potential employer that the work of the designer has been essential to what seemed merely to be “the movie.” On the page, the triptych usually spans the gutter; on a DVD extra, the editor makes liberal use of the fade. Both discourage the consideration of the design artifact as an independent expression (figure 29).

In the case of *Jurassic Park*, perhaps the most confidently self-conscious of its generation of blockbusters, the *Making of* book appears in the film itself, on

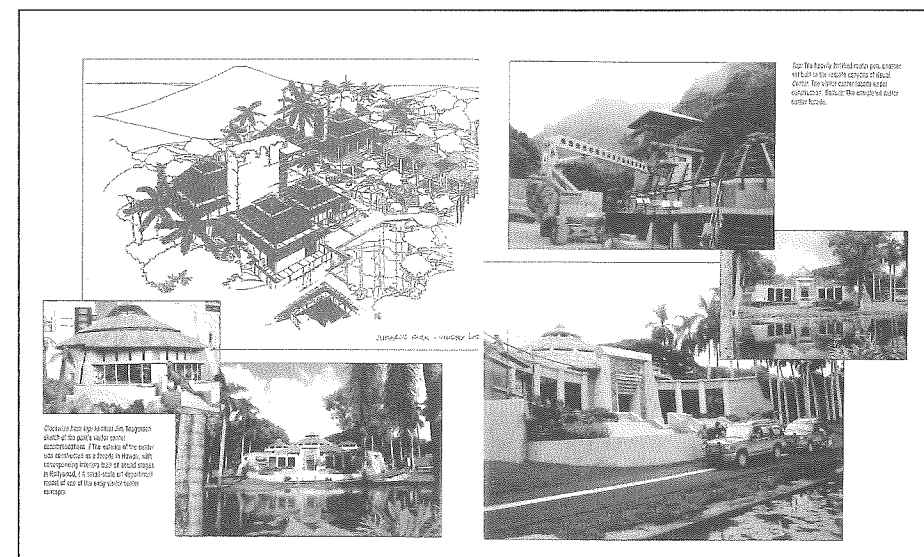


FIGURE 29: The development of the *Jurassic Park* visitors' center in Don Shay and Jody Duncan's book *The Making of Jurassic Park* (1993).

a shelf in the visitor's center dino-store. Surrounded by T-shirts and inflatables, the book seems to be a behind-the-scenes account of the making of the park, but its authors, Don Shay and Jody Duncan, are the real authors of the making of the film. Hollywood had long been able to acknowledge its own backstory on screen—consider Cary Grant's joke in *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks, 1940, art dir. Lionel Banks, Columbia) about Ralph Bellamy looking like “What's his name? Ralph Bellamy.” The difference here is that the *Making of* book is part of a projective scenario of desire: it is buyable in a way that makes the audience want to buy it. This new mode of consumption forecasting eroded the paramountcy of the script as the anchor for a film's future and supplemented it with the transmedial timeline of a franchise.

The movie announces itself as a ride just as proleptically. Carter would work with Universal on the Jurassic Park ride even before the film was released; Spielberg had a legendary deal that gave him 2 percent of the park's gross.²⁹ It was a cliché that action movies had become rides. The cliché had several aspects: It referred to visceral mechanics of the plots, the regularity of the narrative arc, the attenuation of character, the lack of an anchor in contemporary reality, and so on. But at the peak of the neoclassical Hollywood era, the interchangeability of the film with its ride was an opportunity for further exploitation, not a sign of structural weakness. Rides must maintain the design integrity of the underlying property, but they usually do so without the resources of the cinematographer and editor, and in the context of a radically reduced narrative.

The revelation of design work in behind-the-scenes accounts and the extension of that work into rides show how paratexts form a professional surround to the core work of the production designer. But such instances required more sustained theorization than the winking self-acknowledgments in *Jurassic Park* could provide. To work through the new configuration, one might bear down more insistently on the nature of virtuality within the film. Many of *Jurassic Park*'s defining images do just that: the “Objects in mirror are closer than they appear” shot of the T. Rex, the projection of the letters in a DNA sequence onto the (virtual) head of a velociraptor, and the reflections of the velociraptors in the polished steel of the industrial kitchen. All of these images foreground the film's behind-the-scenes obsession with the perceptual reality of the new CGI characters.

Jurassic Park might put its reflections on franchise extension and the new digital modes of production at the center of its narrative and design, but only when the movies in general but not movies in particular became the center of the mediascape would there be a stable way of dealing with the era's pluralization of modes of attention. If making-of books, coverage on infotainment television programs, and extra features on videodiscs and DVDs provided new ways of focusing on design, the new media conglomerates required design extensions into other realms. In the classical era, art directors might move between theater, film, and television, but very few worked directly in consumer venues and

products (the Disney team was the significant exception).³⁰ In the newly ramified entertainment industry of the nineties, design became a paradigm of synergy.

That self-reflection took two forms. In the first, new studio-based theme parks could convey the durability of movie properties as rides within a framework that made “the movies” the star. Disney opened Disney-MGM Studios in 1989; TimeWarner bought half its licensee Six Flags in 1990; Universal launched Universal Studios Orlando that same year; and Paramount bought a chain of parks in 1993 and rebranded them. The second major expression of the new blockbuster-centered entertainment universe was the restaurant chain Planet Hollywood. Writing in *Esquire*, Tad Friend captured the way “I'm here, too-ism” became marketing: “It sounds like one amazing project: you've got Arnold *Terminator* Schwarzenegger and Bruce *Die Hard* Willis, plus director John *Home Alone* Hughes, producer Keith *Sophie's Choice* Barish, designer Anton *Batman Furst*, and publicist Bobby *Dances with Wolves* Zarem. . . . If it walks like a movie, and quacks like a movie, it's usually a movie . . . but in this case it's a bunch of cool movie guys opening a restaurant where you can eat turkeyburgers and feel like cool movie guys.”³¹ The aim was, according to Furst, “a fun place for the jeans brigade, not upmarket or smart,” but nevertheless an atmosphere where they could experience what Friend called “instant artifacts.”³² For such synthetic nostalgia to work, customers needed to do more than “remember where you were when you first saw *City Slickers*.”³³ They needed to know that the creation of *City Slickers* (Ron Underwood, 1991, prod. des. Lawrence G. Paull, Castle Rock/Columbia) required the deployment of just the sorts of artifacts that now adorned the walls. It was their ability to attend to and extract elements of the profilmic world that would anchor their desire to consume in the atmosphere of Furst's art direction. With Planet Hollywood, the odd theatricality that made movies product placements for themselves reached its peak.

“I Settled for Reality”: Digital Drop-ins

Friend's sniping about Planet Hollywood assumes that the public's desire for faux authenticity is a bubble. The implied contrast, naturally enough, is the classical Hollywood star: “Like tulipomania and the South Sea Company, Planet Hollywood's success rides on a bubble of promotion. Bobby Zarem, the . . . publicist, is sitting surrounded by old Veronica Lake movie posters in his magpie's nest of an office.” But here Friend is underestimating the New Hollywood's ability to rewrite the terms of its audiences' desires. For in the nineties, the office of the classical star was the production of desire that she could only fulfill through surrogates. Most of the way through *L.A. Confidential* (Curtis Hanson, 1997, art dir. Jeannine Oppewall, Warner Bros.), Detective Ed Exley (Guy Pearce) is still trying to figure out his partner, Bud White (Russell Crowe). He is particularly

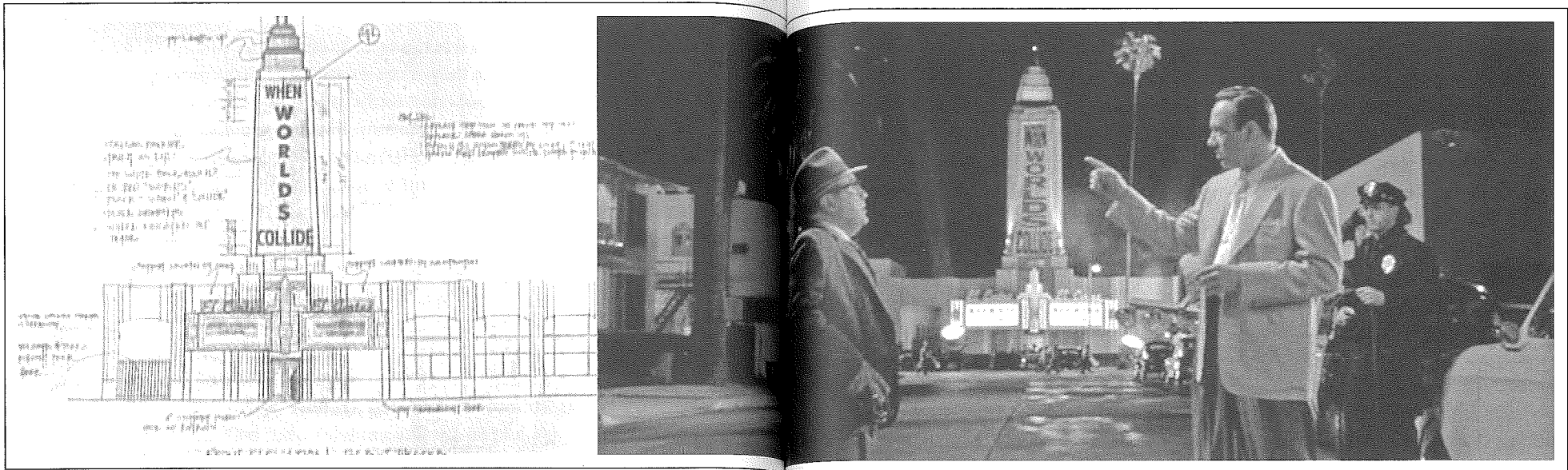


FIGURE 30: Sets in *L.A. Confidential* (Curtis Hanson, 1998, prod. des. Jeannine Oppewall, Warner Bros.) are part of the film's semiotic whirl. A DVD feature shows how the elevation for a movie theater set will form the set-like backdrop to the characters' discussion of blocking and photography.

confused by Bud's relationship with Lynn Bracken (Kim Basinger). Like a host of other women in the film, Lynn is a prostitute who has been made over to resemble a movie star—in her case, Veronica Lake—and boost her value in the sex trade. The others have been “cut” to order in a grimly embodied version of Hollywood's essential fakery, but Lynn has escaped the worst of it and come to terms with her status as ersatz star. As she puts it in the screenplay, “I came out here with a dream. That's gone, but I settled for reality.” And the reality is that while she looks like Veronica Lake, she makes her living selling the false promise of sex with Veronica Lake. “Some reality,” says Exley.

Given that whoever was to be cast in the film could not be surgically altered to more closely resemble Lake, the Lake effect would have to be carried by other aspects of the movie—by a film playing in the background, a glamor shot on the wall, and a production design in perfect sync with this laconic swirl of semiosis (figure 30). Sets in the movie look like sets, because they often are, because they are being used as part of complicated double-crosses. The Victory Motel is a too-perfectly noirish motor lodge. The TV-show-within-the-film, *Badge of Honor*, is less realistic than *Dragnet*, but between the faux-show and the prowling surveillance of *Hush-Hush* magazine, every location in Los Angeles is on the verge of becoming a set. Even the most functional location in the film, the Police Department offices, is not immune to this flat-ersatz affect, since the department is forever giving birth to new stars.

In keeping with the elevated position of design in the new industrial synergy, Hanson pitched the film to Warner Bros. by touting its look. He didn't play

up its film noir heritage, the sordid romanticism of James Ellroy's novel, or the complicated plotting. Instead, he flipped through a deck of period postcards and images, selling the studio on the desirability of *L.A. Confidential's* look. In the Affrons' account, productions are designed to provide a backstop for narratives that precede them. But for *L.A. Confidential*, the narrative is a narrative of design and imposture that is unthinkable outside the design of its realization. And it would be the studio's desire to possess that look that would encourage them to settle for the reality of *L.A. Confidential*.

Lynn Bracken looks like Veronica Lake—that's her new reality—but that perceptual duplication makes her one of a host of mid-nineties “drop-in” characters. She joins the title character in *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994, prod. des. Rick Carter, Paramount), Buddy Holly (*Pulp Fiction* [Quentin Tarantino, 1994, prod. des. David Wasco, Miramax]), the kids in *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross, 1998, prod. des. Jeannine Oppewall, New Line), and, perhaps, *Jurassic Park's* T. Rex. The convergence of professional, industrial, and cultural factors resulted in the design of sets that could serve as backing for these drop-in characters. The extractability of filmic elements and the heightened attention to design provided the formal principles that would underlie the profession as it came to terms with the technological changes of the early CGI era. Only in an era where the tenuousness of the real had become a real problem again could “settling for reality” carry the utopian romanticism it possesses in *L.A. Confidential*.

Here Carter's career is illustrative. He had been a mainstream, blockbuster production designer in the eighties. His involvement with computer-generated design begins with work on *Amazing Stories* (Spielberg, 1985-86, Amblin/

Universal) and carries over to *Jurassic Park*, a film where CGI characters came to the fore. That pathway continues through *Forrest Gump*, in which historical settings and historical footage were combined through digital compositing; to *The Polar Express* (Zemeckis, 2004, Castle Rock/Warner Bros.), in which motion capture allowed for the inversion of the usual temporal relationship between set design and performance; and eventually to *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009, Twentieth Century–Fox) and *Sucker Punch* (Zack Snyder, 2011, Warner Bros.).

What Carter's career illustrates is precisely the importance of career in the industry's management of technological change. When a new technology is being brought to bear for the first time, the combination of industrial risk aversion, open contracting, and actor-networks reduces the scope of the novelty, and that, in turn, allows the particular film to constitute a display of technological novelty and not a wholesale renovation in the mode of production. This may seem to be merely a fancy way of saying, "When there are millions of dollars at stake, hire people you know you can trust," but the point of my formulation is to foreground the changes that were necessary to make such conventional wisdom conventional. Production designers are hired both because they are known to directors who exercise a degree of creative control and because they are known to be good at "this sort" of film, where "this sort" can mean a genre, or a scale, or the level of realism or insistence that the project entails. The greater reliance on digital technologies in both production and post-production threatened to undermine many of the accepted hierarchies and timelines of design. At each step along that way, production designers were evaluated according to the new calculus, and were chosen based on their ability to "fit" the new arrangements.

But Carter's career path is not simply guided by his own comfort with shifting technological and labor arrangements and his reliability as the manager of very large budgets. There is, even within this set of professional constraints, ample room for, and unrelenting demand for, a personal style. As a disciple of Richard Sylbert, Carter designs sets that are replete, if generally less ironically so. Yet where Sylbert's individuals—Bennett Marco, John Reed, Dick Tracy—exist in spaces that seem to have been projected by the characters, Carter's heroes exist in spaces those characters have bought, inherited, or somehow put together, largely off the rack. The grand visitors hall in *Jurassic Park* is a "temple for dinosaurs" that looks like the Dome of the Rock, but it also, and crucially, looks like a visitors hall.³⁴ The great doors to the *Jurassic Park* ride in the film look like the doors to Kong Island—Jeff Goldblum's character will ask, "What have they got in there, King Kong?"—but they also look like the doors-to-a-theme-park-that-wants-to-look-like-Kong-Island. Part of why this easy referentiality matters is that it tracks a particular aesthetic commitment, or a difference of belief. When Marco reads a book, that is Marco's book—he just happened to have to buy it. But in Carter's world, that commodity status never rubs off. His privileged position designing for

Spielberg and Bob Zemeckis meant that Carter was not required to do product placement work, but the essentially commoditized spaces of these films exist in a world where design has been intensified so that the buyability of the object has come to the fore. Drop-in products and drop-in characters are equally at home.

Still, in the nineties, the mastery of design in the context of new technologies was not enough to persuade Academy voters—Jeannine Oppewall and Jay Hart were nominated for *Pleasantville* but lost to *Shakespeare in Love*; Dennis Gassner and Richard L. Johnson were not even nominated for *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998, Paramount). Like Sylbert before him, Dennis Gassner would win an Academy Award for his work with Warren Beatty, in this case on *Bugsy* (Beatty, 1991, TriStar). And like Sylbert, he paired his historical work (*Barton Fink* [Joel Coen, 1991, Working Title/Twentieth Century–Fox], *Road to Perdition* [Sam Mendes, 2002, DreamWorks/Twentieth Century–Fox]) with contemporary designs for films such as *The Grifters* (Stephen Frears, 1990, Miramax) and *Hero* (Frears, 1992, Columbia). Still, his most intensive designs in this period were for *The Truman Show*.

In *The Truman Show*, the digital revolution that began with characters and effects began to spill over into the design process. On *Dick Tracy*, Sylbert and Harold Michelson sketched fifty-seven mattes to be painted on glass, a technique not much altered from Michelson's work with Hitchcock in the 1960s.³⁵ But on *Truman*, Gassner designed several buildings using CAD (figure 31). As Craig Barron of Matte World explained, Gassner could then "decide what should be built as a set, so then he would give plans to the construction people to build, say, the first story of the buildings and then we [computer animators] had those

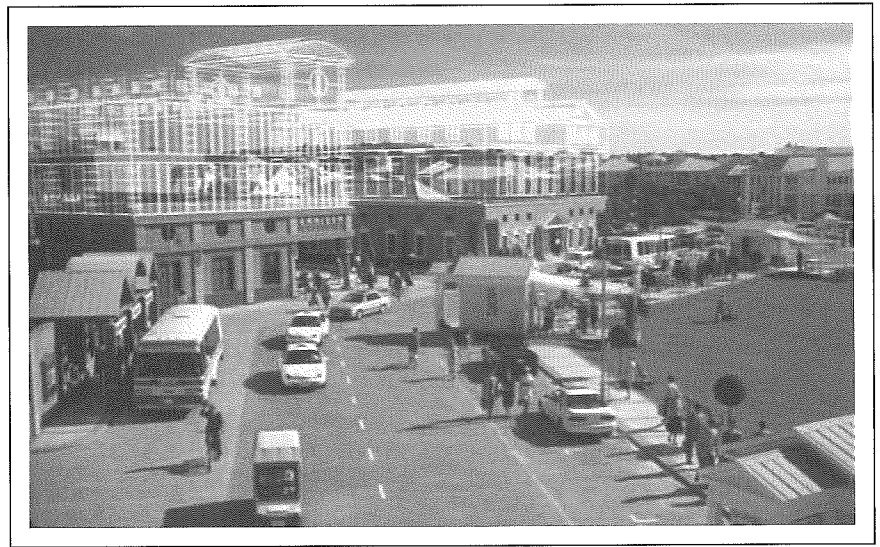


FIGURE 31: The "tradigital" world of downtown Seahaven Island in *The Truman Show* combined practical construction with CGI upper floors. Both relied on the same set of architectural plans developed in CAD (Peter Weir, 1998, prod. des. Dennis Gassner, Paramount).

same plans and we would bring into our computer and start to texture and add more detail to the computer graphics solution.”³⁶ There were still large-scale paintings, such as the sky-and-cloud cyclorama that Truman’s boat punctures at the film’s conclusion. But single-story office buildings were extended via digital mattes, and the gargantuan dome that encased Sea Haven was an entirely digital creation. Because the initial plans were digital, they became the logically prior design document, and, as a consequence, the authority of the production designer could be maintained.

In the 1980s, depictions of class ascendancy and high finance were the logical career complement to historical work. A decade later, a cycle of quasi-contemporary films insisted upon their artificiality. Instead of a concern with class—however theatricalized—these new films were drawn to questions of their own ontological status. Such explicit interrogations were cued by both the sets themselves—like *Dick Tracy*, *Pleasantville* shot important exteriors on a lot; *The Truman Show* repurposed a planned community as a mammoth practical set—and by characters’ recognition of the artificiality of the sets within the narrative (color plate 10). At those moments, the stranger-in-a-strange-land became a figure for the audience coming face-to-face with a newly legible design. The drop-in character allowed a film to explore the digital turn through narrative, whether that was the narrative of an older form, like the network sitcom in *Pleasantville*, or an emergent, and implicitly digital form, like the 24/7 reality television of *The Truman Show*. Whatever form the film world took, the drop-in character had to stand out from it, and that extraction required a world of sufficient design intensity that it could be reacted to. The professionally precarious production designer required the same.

Coda: We’re Here, Too-ism: The Art Directors Guild

The Affrons established the usefulness of awards as a metric for industrial recognition, and I have attempted to carry that analysis forward into the New Hollywood era. As they demonstrate, in the studio era, there was a marked concentration of awards in particular genres—historical dramas—and a paucity of awards in some of the “lower” genres such as horror or the gangster film. And while MGM and Twentieth Century-Fox received a disproportionate share of nominations, so did prestige independents such as United Artists and Samuel Goldwyn. In the 1980s and 1990s, that genre concentration was, if anything, more pronounced: only one contemporary film won, and that was *Batman* in 1989. The Academy overwhelmingly nominated and awarded period films of one form or another. Only 21 of the 105 nominees might be classified as contemporary films and, of those, most centered on worlds of extreme stylization (*William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*,

Addams Family Values, *Batman*, *The Birdcage*, *Babe*, *Hook*, *Men in Black*, *What Dreams May Come*, *Toys*) or were substantially set in the past (*Interview with the Vampire*, *Terms of Endearment*, *Titanic*, *Forrest Gump*).³⁷ The studio/indie balance was also comparable: twelve winners were distributed by major studios, nine by indies. Similarly, the consistencies across nominations and the concentration of winners are comparable to those the Affrons found: 45 of the 105 Art Direction nominees were nominated for Best Cinematography; 43 were nominated for Best Picture; 36 were nominated for Best Director. Two-thirds or more of the winners in each category were nominated in Art Direction. Half the time the Art Direction winner won one of the other three; a third of the time it swept them all.³⁸

Individual production designers might be able to balance their work in an effort to maintain their status as valued below-the-line employees, but, as I have shown, no level of aesthetic achievement could bust through the impregnable wall of industry judgment. In response, the Society of Motion Picture and Television Art Directors (IATSE Local 876) launched its own awards in 1996. The new awards coincided with a thoroughgoing change in guild leadership and an intensification of self-promotion. As Jack Da Govia reported in the inaugural issue of guild publication *Trace*: “Shock and strong feelings greeted the results of the recent officers election of Local 876: an indication of its importance. The membership sent a powerful message to the leadership, as real and undeniable as a cow in church.”³⁹ Alongside the awards, the guild launched a website and a lively journal, planned a film series and gallery exhibits, considered purchasing a building, and debated the relative merits of simplifying their unwieldy name. The drive for “prestige and respect” was on.⁴⁰ Scott Roth, hired as executive director in 1997, pursued a twofold strategy. On the one hand, he vigorously defended the art director’s power. Mired in a budgeting fracas with Local 44, he was adamant: “Jurisdiction is the lifeblood of any labor union. Surrender even one part of it, and the whole of the union may be lost. Eternal vigilance in such matters is essential.” On the other hand, he wanted to model the art directors’ campaign for respect on the success of the American Society of Cinematographers. “There are seminars, conferences, and conventions at which the cinematographers and other creative guilds have a presence: we should always be there too. . . . We need something like *Visions of Light*, the documentary the cinematographers made, and a journal of production design like the *American Cinematographer*.”⁴¹ Eventually, the rechristened Art Directors Guild would have all these things.

Yet despite these efforts, the field of recognized films did not markedly expand.⁴² Given that the Academy nominees originate with the design branch members, it is not surprising that seventeen of the twenty-five ADG nominees were also nominated by the Academy or that three of the five ADG winners won Oscars (all period films). The exceptions were *What Dreams May Come*, the

Guild's one contemporary/fantasy winner, and *Gladiator*, which lost to another historical epic, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. The only contemporary movie nominated by the Guild and overlooked by the Academy was *American Beauty*, a film that won five other Oscars. Finally, of the Guild nominees, no winners and only four nominees were women. The Academy, in contrast, nominated eighteen women over the same stretch, five of whom served as production designer, the other thirteen as set decorators. (For organizational reasons the ADG did not recognize set decorators until 2008.)

The campaign to diversify the films that might come to the Academy's attention had not succeeded. From the beginning there had been important voices in the Guild advocating multiple award categories. Tom T. Taylor wrote, "It seems counter-productive to have an elaborate and expensive awards process which recognizes only one example of excellence in Film and one in Television. Not only does that greatly limit our effort to win greater recognition and visibility in our industry, but I believe it is unfair to be so narrow." Instead, Taylor argued for splitting the award three ways in each medium. "Let's create an attitude of abundance rather than of lack."⁴³ In 2001, the ADG split its award in two, with "period or fantasy" on one side and "contemporary" on the other. According to Michael Baugh, the second award chair for the Guild and the editor of *Perspective*, the successor to *Trace* and the Guild's answer to *American Cinematographer*, "Contemporary films were separated out from Period/Fantasy based on the realization that a contemporary film would never, ever have a chance to win."⁴⁴ Baugh credits Guild publicist Murray Weissman for being "eager to involve more and more films and studios in the process," a process that continued when the Guild split "Period or Fantasy" into separate categories in 2006, arriving at Taylor's tripartite solution a decade after. The end of the New Hollywood era saw greater craft consciousness on the part of the Art Directors Guild, culminating in its move into new headquarters on Ventura Boulevard, a building they would later buy. The Guild's continuing efforts on behalf of its membership are an attempt to expand the visibility of the creative labor of design; whether such an expansion will benefit more than a select group of individuals remains an open question.

6

HOLLYWOOD'S DIGITAL BACKLOT, 2000-PRESENT

Stephen Prince

For the director Ben Affleck, the set designs in *Argo* (2012) had to be carefully articulated in ways that encouraged audiences to become immersed into the period of the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979. The film, which depicts the seizure of hostages from the U.S. embassy by Iran's Revolutionary Guards, has three main settings—Iran, Hollywood, and Washington, D.C. Each of these is rendered in persuasive period detail. Brief glimpses in the film of Iranians in the revolutionary Khomeini period munching Kentucky Fried Chicken at one of that chain's fast food outlets, for example, or the historical artifact of pneumatic tubing present in the offices of the State Department and CIA, were based significantly in period research and documentation.

Affleck regarded production design as a subliminal factor, affecting viewers' reception of a film in ways that are significant but go beyond what an audience consciously notices.

I believe that audiences care about set decorating . . . they just don't know it. That's how you sink an audience into the reality of something, you know. That's why I photograph it really closely. That's why I incorporate

4 The Auteur Renaissance, 1968-1980

- 1 See François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency in the French Cinema," in vol. 1 of *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 224-237.
- 2 Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 527-541.
- 3 "Sarris does some pretty fast shuffling with Huston and Bergman; why doesn't he just come out and admit that writer-directors are disqualified by his third premise? They can't arrive at that 'interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema' because a writer-director has no tension between his personality and his material." Pauline Kael, "Circles and Squares," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Mast and Cohen, 550.
- 4 As far as I know, there is no written policy statement from any of the major film programs that would support this assertion, but I can testify to personal experience of it at UCLA in the late seventies and early eighties.
- 5 David Thomson, "The Art of the Art Director: Designing the Film," *American Film* (February 1977): 12-21.
- 6 See also Mary Corliss and Carlos Clarens, "Designed for Film," *Film Comment* (May-June 1978): 25-58, for a brief overview of the role of the art director in the classical era.
- 7 Axel Madsen, *The New Hollywood: American Movies in the '70s* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1975), 74.
- 8 "Dialogue on Film: Harry Horner," *American Film* (February 1977): 33-48.
- 9 For an elaborated discussion of the need to convince that a film object or space could exist in reality, see Charles Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), particularly chapter 1.
- 10 Jonathan Kirshner, *Hollywood's Last Golden Age: Politics, Society and the Seventies Film in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 21.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 21-22.
- 12 Léon Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions: A History of Film Design*, rev. and ed. by Elliott Stein (New York: New American Library, 1970, 1976), 56.
- 13 For a discussion about Kubrick and *Barry Lyndon*, see Michel Ciment, *Kubrick* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 166-179. See also Vincent Dowd, "Kubrick Recalled by Influential Set Designer Sir Ken Adam," *BBC News*, 15 August 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-23698181>, accessed 16 August 2013.
- 14 See "Ready or Not, Here Comes Gatsby," *Time*, 18 March 1974, 82-91.
- 15 Peter Lev, *American Films of the 70s: Conflicting Visions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 59.
- 16 Beverly Heisner, *Production Design in the Contemporary American Film: A Critical Study of 23 Movies and Their Designers* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997), 148.
- 17 Kirshner, *Hollywood's Last Golden Age*, 41.
- 18 Heisner, *Production Design*, 149.
- 19 Pauline Kael, "Alchemy," in *Deeper into Movies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), 421.
- 20 Quoted in Cathy Whitlock and the Art Directors Guild, *Designs on Film: A Century of Hollywood Art Direction* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 192. Originally from Maria Katsounaki, "The Magician of Hollywood to Show Paintings in Greece," *Kathimerini* (English ed.) (7 November 2005), http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_civ_1_07/11/2005_62741.
- 21 Kael, "Alchemy," 424-425.

- 22 Quoted in Whitlock, *Designs on Film*, 190. Originally from Harlan Lebo, *The Godfather Legacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 68.
- 23 See "Show Business: Playing the End Game," *Time*, 30 July 1979, 55-57.

5 The New Hollywood, 1981-1999

- 1 Patrizia von Brandenstein, in Vincent LoBrutto, *By Design: Interviews with Film Production Designers* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 179-191, 181.
- 2 Deborah Nadoolman Landis and Pat Kirkham, "Designing Hollywood: Women Costume and Production Designers," in *Women Designers in the USA 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference*, ed. Pat Kirkham (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 247-267, 263-264.
- 3 Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron, *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 36.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 184, 194.
- 5 One solution that I do not pursue here would be to attempt for production design what David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson sought to do for classical Hollywood—generate a large, but neutral, sample of films to serve as the basis for statistical experiment (controlled in any number of ways). The aim here would be to approximate the design unconscious of the period—to find those baseline procedures accepted unknowingly by practitioners. My sense is that the Affrons' typology is not rigorous enough to support such distinctions.
- 6 Richard Sylbert and Sylvia Townsend, with Sharmagne Leland-St. John-Sylbert, *Designing Movies: Portrait of a Hollywood Artist* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 148. Townsend took up the project after Sylbert's death in 2002; the chapters I am principally concerned with are less memoir and more historical than his contributions.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 149.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 153.
- 9 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 133 (slightly modified).
- 10 Michael Atkinson, "Thunder Roads," *Sight & Sound* (August 2009): 32-34, 34.
- 11 *Amadeus: Director's Cut* (DVD), "The Making of Amadeus."
- 12 Every national experience was, of course, different. Collections of case studies include Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska, and Elena Gapova, eds., *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures through an East-West Gaze* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Peter Gross and Karol Jakubowicz, eds., *Media Transformations in the Post-Communist World: Eastern Europe's Tortured Path to Change* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013); Lars Kristensen, ed., *Postcommunist Film—Russia, Eastern Europe and World Culture: Moving Images of Postcommunism* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
- 13 LoBrutto, *By Design*, 186, 187.
- 14 Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 17. I have more to say about marketing extraction below.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 16 *St. Elmo's Fire*, DVD Commentary.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 By this I mean that it won the award for films from 1989; the ceremony, as usual, was held the next year.
- 19 Townsend, *Designing Movies*, 179.

- 20 Ibid., 183.
- 21 Sylbert, quoted in *ibid.*, 177.
- 22 Julie Salamon, *The Devil's Candy: "The Bonfire of the Vanities" Goes to Hollywood* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 298.
- 23 Vivian Sobchack, "'Surge and Splendor': A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic," *Representations* 29 (Winter 1990): 24-49.
- 24 Carol Titelman, ed., *The Art of "Star Wars"* (New York: Ballantine, 1979); David Michael Petrou, *The Making of "Superman, the Movie"* (New York: Warner Books, 1978); Carl Macek, *The Art of "Heavy Metal," the Movie: Animation for the Eighties* (New York: Zoetrope, 1981); Brian Froud, *The World of "The Dark Crystal"* (New York: Knopf, 1982); Michael Bonifer, *The Art of "Tron"* (New York: Little Simon, 1982). (The last is a children's book, but its illustrations are in keeping with the "Art of" practice.)
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- 29 James Bates, "Steven Spielberg Enjoys Rich Deal with Universal," *Orlando Sentinel*, 24 June 2003, http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2003-06-24/news/0306240172_1_steven-spielberg-theme-park-universal-studios.
- 30 See Eisner, *Work in Progress*. Additionally, Disney produced the landmark entry into the "Art of" industry with Robert D. Field, *The Art of Walt Disney* (New York: Macmillan, 1942).
- 31 Tad Friend, "Waiter, There's a Bankable Star in My Soup," *Esquire*, September 1991, 152-162, 152.
- 32 Ibid., 152, 161.
- 33 Ibid., 161.
- 34 Rick Carter, *Filmscapes: A Journey with Steven Spielberg and Bob Zemeckis* (n.p., 2007), 41, 43.
- 35 Townsend, *Designing Movies*, 180.
- 36 *The Truman Show* (DVD), "Faux Finishing."
- 37 In the 1970s alone there were twenty contemporary nominees and three winners (*All the President's Men* [Alan Pakula, 1976, art dir. George Jenkins, Warner Bros.], *Heaven Can Wait* [Warren Beatty, Buck Henry, 1978, art dirs. Paul Sylbert, Edwin O'Donovan, Paramount], and *All That Jazz* [Bob Fosse, 1979, art dirs. Philip Rosenberg, Tony Walton, Columbia/Twentieth Century-Fox]). Information for the films in the list above that have not yet been mentioned: *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (Baz Luhrmann, 1996, art dir. Catherine Martin, Twentieth Century-Fox), *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (Ron Howard, 2000, art dir. Michael Corenblith, Universal), *The Birdcage* (Mike Nichols, 1996, art dir. Bo Welch, MGM/United Artists), *Babe* (Chris Noonan, 1995, art dir. Roger Ford, Universal), *Hook* (Spielberg, 1991, art dir. Norman Garwood, TriStar), *Men in Black* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997, art dir. Bo Welch, Columbia), *What Dreams May Come* (Vincent Ward, 1998, art dir. Eugenio Zanetti, PolyGram), *Toys* (Barry Levinson, 1992, art dir. Ferdinando Scarfiotti, Twentieth Century-Fox),

Interview with the Vampire (Neil Jordan, 1994, art dir. Dante Ferretti, Geffen/Warner Bros.), *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997, art dir. Peter Lamont, Twentieth Century-Fox/Paramount).

- 38 All Academy Awards data is taken from oscar.org.
- 39 Jack Da Govia, *Trace* 1, no. 1 (March 1997): 2. I would like to thank Rosemarie Knopka and the terrific staff of the ADG for their help during my visit.
- 40 Ann Champion, "The Night at the Round Table," *Trace* 1, no. 4 (June 1997): 4. "There was lively and constructive conversation about the sudden revitalization of our Society with its new leadership. The event's main topic was 'How do we go about restoring prestige and respect for our position on a production?'"
- 41 Jack Da Govia, interview with Scott Roth, *Trace* 1, no. 6 (September 1997): 4-5.
- 42 All ADG data is taken from adg.org.
- 43 Tom T. Taylor, *Trace* 1, no. 4 (June 1997): 4.
- 44 Personal communication, 9 September 2013.

6 Hollywood's Digital Backlot, 2000-Present

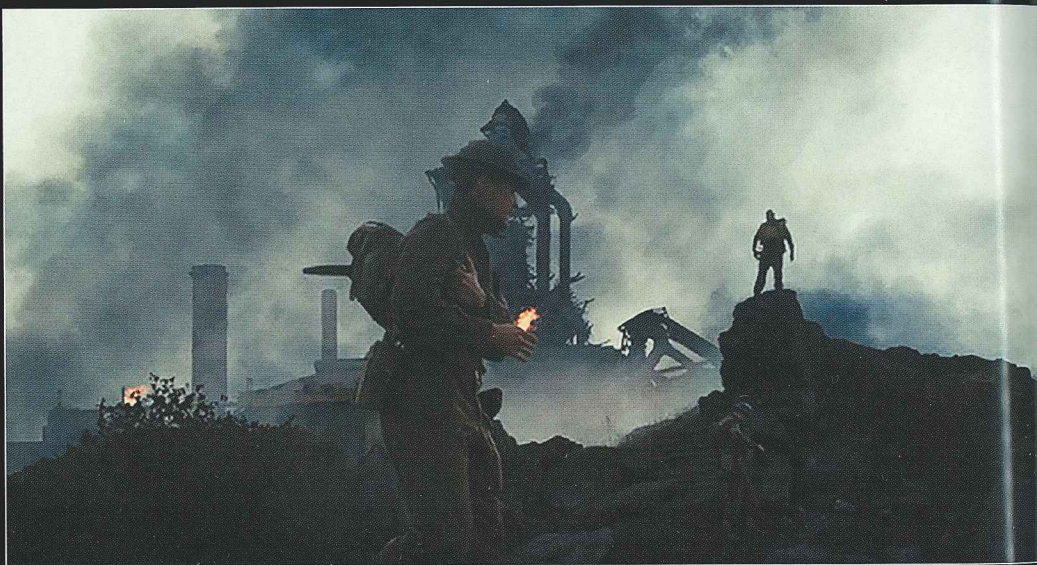
- 1 "Ben Affleck: *Argo*," Set Décor Online, http://www.setdecorators.org/incEngine/?art=directors_chair_features&SHOW=1052161310.
- 2 "Appaloosa: A Conversation with Actor/Director Ed Harris," *Set Décor* (Summer/Fall 2008): 34.
- 3 "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button: A Conversation with Director David Fincher," *Set Décor* (Summer/Fall 2008): 63.
- 4 "The Craft of Art Direction—Conversation with Sarah Horton," *Pushing Pixels*, <http://www.pushing-pixels.org/2011/08/16/the-craft-of-art-direction-conversation-with-sarah-horton.html>.
- 5 "The Art and Craft of Production Design—Conversation with Sarah Greenwood," *Pushing Pixels*, <http://www.pushing-pixels.org/2012/11/15/the-art-and-craft-of-production-design-conversation-with-sarah-greenwood.html>.
- 6 "Film Décor: *The Help*," Set Décor Online, http://www.setdecorators.org/incEngine/?content=admin&art=film_decor_features&article_id=1052160983&SHOW=1052161243.
- 7 "Film Décor: *Star Trek Into Darkness*," Set Décor Online, http://www.setdecorators.org/incEngine/?content=admin&art=film_decor_features&article_id=1052160983&SHOW=1052161331.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 "Sarah Greenwood," *Pushing Pixels*.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Kristen Whissel, "The Digital Multitude," *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 90-110.
- 12 "Sarah Horton," *Pushing Pixels*.
- 13 Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron, *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 24.
- 14 Barbara Robertson, "Painting the Town," *Computer Graphics World* 26, no. 9 (September 2003).
- 15 Jody Duncan, "Anonymous," *Cinefex* 127 (October 2011): 49.
- 16 Jody Duncan, "Rough around the Edges," *Cinefex* 134 (July 2013): 24.
- 17 See Jody Duncan, "Les Misérables," *Cinefex* 133 (April 2013): 12-27.



9: In *Dick Tracy*, Universal's generic back lot is saturated with funny pages red, yellow, green, and blue (Warren Beatty, 1990, prod. des. Richard Sylbert, Touchstone).



10: Black-and-white diner deco clashes with riotously colorful cubism in *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross, 1998, prod. des. Jeannine Oppewall, New Line).



11: A steel mill was digitally "ruined" by CGI for this shot from *Atonement* (Joe Wright, 2007, prod. des. Sarah Greenwood, art dir. Ian Baillie, set dec. Katie Spencer).

be credited to the designer. This situation results from a basic misunderstanding of the role of both technicians. While the responsibilities can overlap and vary considerably from one project to another, the distinction between the two professions can be grossly defined as the difference between the look of *what* is photographed (the designer's role) and *how* it is photographed (the cinematographer's responsibility). Just as the qualities of a still photograph or a painting result from the interaction between subject and artist, the look of a film's physical world arises from the collaboration among director, cinematographer, and designer.

This confusion between the roles of director, director of photography, and designer can be attributed at least in part to the realistic image, its central role in cinematic expression, and the medium's power to persuade viewers temporarily that the events unfolding in front of them are "really" occurring. Put another way, a confusion between cinematography and design occurs because of the reality of the physical world that both manipulate in the service of narrative illusion. In that manipulation, the cinematographer has a greater opportunity for abstract expression because the designer must first and foremost convince viewers that the world photographed exists physically, whereas the cinematographer is largely dealing with the ineffable qualities of light.⁹

To step outside the auteurist period for a moment, consider the example of film noir, and the recognized importance of lighting to that genre. It is a cliché of noir that lighting setups should be dark, that much of the set will be in shadow, and that a considerable part of the impact of the scene will result from blatant, exaggerated lighting schemes. When characters stand in the horizontal stripes cast by lights through Venetian blinds, it is correct to attribute the effect to the director of photography. What is taken for granted is the presence of the blinds that provide the excuse for the opulent lighting setups. In other words, it is the designer's responsibility to provide something from the physical world that, when photographed, must convince for itself (the blinds must look like real blinds) and for the expressive purpose to which they are put by the director of photography (with both answering to a director visually sophisticated enough to say, "I want Venetian blinds in this scene in order to cast horizontal stripes").

In short, the designer must always present an object world that at least seems physically possible and plausible in its context. It is then up to the cinematographer to bring out the qualities of that physical world that will enhance its appearance. To make this observation is not to suggest that design can only be capital R "Realistic." In fact, to the extent that viewers are aware of film design at all, it is likelier to be in relation to more stylized genres such as fantasy, musicals, and science fiction than in more realistic ones such as melodrama or the crime film. The point is that even in the most stylized environments, the designer must deal with basic physical laws that cannot be ignored completely without running the risk of arousing the viewer's skepticism or amusement. In order to succeed, the cinematic illusion must occur in a physically consistent universe. In most