Movies and the Impact of Images

Chapter 7
“Watching *Avatar*, I felt sort of the same as when I saw *Star Wars* in 1977. That was another movie I walked into with uncertain expectations…. *Avatar* is not simply a sensational entertainment, although it is that. It’s a technical breakthrough.”

—Roger Ebert
The Development of Film

- **Milestones**
  - Muybridge was the first to project moving pictures.
  - Eastman developed the first roll film, which was improved by Goodwin, who used celluloid.
  - Kinetograph, kinetoscope, and vitascope developed under Edison.
  - Lumièrè brothers invented the cinematograph.
The Introduction of Narrative

- Narrative films tell stories.
- Early narrative filmmakers
  - Georges Méliès
    - *The Vanishing Lady*
    - *Cinderella*
    - *A Trip to the Moon*
  - Edwin S. Porter
    - *The Life of an American Fireman*
    - *The Great Train Robbery*
The Arrival of Nickelodeons

- **Nickelodeons**
  - Form of movie theater
  - Name combines the admission price with the Greek word for “theater.”
  - Often converted storefronts
  - Piano players added live music.
  - Transcended language barriers
  - Peaked by 1910
The Rise of the Hollywood Studio System

- Edison’s Trust: Cartel of major U.S. and French producers
  - Exclusive deal with Eastman
- Independent productions moved to Hollywood to escape the Trust.
- Zukor’s early companies figured out ways to bypass the Trust.
- Suit by Fox led to the breakup of the Trust.
The Rise of the Hollywood Studio System (cont.)

- Entrepreneurs like Zukor developed other tactics for controlling the industry.
  - Vertical integration of all three levels of the movie business
    - Production
    - Distribution
    - Exhibition
  - Turned the film industry into an oligopoly.
Production

- **Actors**
  - Originally anonymous
  - Industry eventually understood the value of creating stars such as Mary Pickford.
    - Pickford helped elevate the financial status of actors.
    - Left Zukor to form United Artists

- **Studio system** controlled creative talent in the industry.
Distribution

- **Film exchange system**
  - In exchange for providing short films, movie companies received a percentage of ticket-gate receipts.

- **Block booking distribution**
  - Exhibitors had to rent marginal films in order to get films with big stars.

- **Marketing of American films in Europe**
Exhibition

- Controlling exhibition
  - Edison’s Trust
    - Required theaters to purchase licenses or be locked out
  - Zukor bought up theaters and later built movie palaces.
  - Mid-city movie theaters
- The Big Five and the Little Three formed a powerful oligopoly.
Hollywood Narrative and the Silent Era

- D.W. Griffith
  - Single most important director in Hollywood’s early days
  - *The Birth of a Nation*
    - First feature-length film
    - First blockbuster
- Popular silent era films
  - *Napoleon*, *Ben-Hur*, and *The Ten Commandments*
The Introduction of Sound

- Early attempts at talkies failed.
- *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *The Singing Fool* (1928) were the first successful talkies.

- Movietone newsreels
  - Premiered sound film five months before *The Jazz Singer*
  - First film footage with sound
    - Lindbergh’s takeoff and return
The Development of Hollywood Style

- **Hollywood narratives**
  - Two basic components
    - Story
    - Discourse

- **Hollywood genres**
  - Grouping by genre achieves two goals
    - Product standardization
    - Product differentiation
The Development of Hollywood Style

- Three ingredients give Hollywood movies their distinctive flavor: narrative, genre, and author (or director).

1. Hollywood Narratives. The two basic components of the narrative are the story (what happens to whom) and the discourse (how the story is told).

2. Hollywood Genres. By making films that fall into popular genres, the movie industry provides familiar models that can be imitated. Two related economic goals are product standardization and product differentiation.

3. Hollywood “Authors.” Although hundreds of people contribute to a film’s production, the director serves as the main “author.”
The Development of Hollywood Style (cont.)

- Popular genres
  - Action/adventure
  - Mystery/suspense
  - Fantasy/science fiction
  - Musical
  - Western

- Comedy
- Drama
- Romance
- Horror
- Gangster
- Film noir
The Development of Hollywood Style (cont.)

- Hollywood “authors”
  - Particular cinematic style or topic
    - Stemmed from Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* and George Lucas’s *American Graffiti*
  - New Wave of directors
    - Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, and Brian De Palma
  - Recognition rare for women and minorities
Outside the Hollywood System

- **Global cinema**
  - Other countries have a rich history of producing successful films.
  - Losing ground as they compete with independent American films.
Outside the Hollywood System

- The documentary tradition
  - Early forms of documentary
    - Interest films, newsreels, travelogues
Outside the Hollywood System

- Cinema verité
- (French: “truth cinema”)
- French film movement of the 1960s that showed people in everyday situations with authentic dialogue and naturalness..
The rise of independent films

- Known as indies
- Made on a shoestring budget and shown in small venues and film festivals
- Independent film festivals important for discovering new talent
  - Indies as a feeder system for major studios has declined
- New distribution routes for indies
The Hollywood Ten

- Hollywood Ten hearings
  - HUAC investigations of alleged subversive and communist ties
  - The Hollywood Ten were nine screenwriters and one producer.
    - Refused to identify communist sympathizers and were charged with contempt and imprisoned
    - Blacklisted by major studios upon their release
The Paramount Decision

- Paramount decision
  - Supreme Court forced the studios to gradually divest themselves of their theaters.
  - Meant to increase competition, but never really changed the oligopoly structure of the Hollywood film industry.
  - Created opportunities for exhibition
    - Art houses and drive-in theaters
Moving to the Suburbs

- Transformation from a wartime economy and a surge in consumer production had a significant impact on moviegoing.
  - Money spent on consumer products instead of movie tickets
  - People married younger, so fewer couples were dating.
  - Television explosion in the late 50s
Television Changes Hollywood

- TV became the primary family entertainment by the mid-1950s.
- Movie industry’s response
  - More serious subject matter that explored larger social problems
  - New technologies
    - Cinerama, CinemaScope, VistaVision
    - 3-D
    - Panavision
Hollywood Adapts to Home Entertainment

- Introduction of cable and videocassettes in 1970s changed movie exhibition.
  - Video market was a financial bonanza for movie industry.
- Traditional video rental market is declining.
- Future of video rental is in Internet distribution.
Production, Distribution, and Exhibition Today

Movie studios have six major sources of income.

- Box-office receipts
- DVD sales, rentals, and downloads
- Pay-per-view, premium cable, etc.
- Foreign markets
- Distributing indie films
- Licensing and product placement
Table 7.1: Top 10 All-Time Box Office Champions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Title/Date</th>
<th>Domestic Gross** ($ millions)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Avatar (2009)</td>
<td>$760.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Titanic (1997, 2012 3-D)</td>
<td>658.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Avengers (2012)</td>
<td>623.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Dark Knight (2008)</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace (1999, 2012 3-D)</td>
<td>474.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Star Wars (1977, 1997)</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Dark Knight Rises (2012)</td>
<td>447.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Shrek 2 (2004)</td>
<td>437.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest (2006)</td>
<td>423.3</td>
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Seven companies operate more than 50 percent of U.S. screens.

Development of megaplexes in the 1990s
- Addition of IMAX screens and digital projectors in the 2000s
- Also screen nonmovie events
  - Live sporting events, concerts, and classic TV show marathons
The Major Studio Players

- **Big Six**
  - Warner Brothers, Paramount, Twentieth Century Fox, Universal, Columbia Pictures, and Disney
  - Account for more than 90 percent of commercial film revenues

- **Began diversifying in the 1980s**
  - Heavy promotion and synergy
  - Flood of corporate mergers
Figure 7.2: Market Share of U.S. Film Studios and Distributors, 2011

- Summit (independent): $411.6 million, 4.0%
- All Other Independents: $823.4 million, 8.2%
- Lionsgate (independent): $184.0 million, 1.8%
- NBC/Universal (Universal, Focus, Rogue): $1,167.5 million, 11.4%
- News Corp. (Twentieth Century Fox, Fox Searchlight): $1,130.3 million, 11.1%
- Time Warner (Warner Bros., New Line, Warner Independent): $1,826.2 million, 17.9%
- Disney (Buena Vista, Miramax, Pixar): $1,240.7 million, 12.2%
- Sony (Columbia, Sony Pictures Classics, MGM/UA): $1,363.6 million, 13.4%
- Viacom (Paramount, Paramount Vantage, DreamWorks): $1,957.1 million, 19.2%
Convergence: Movies Adjust to the Digital Turn

- Movie industry has quickly embraced Internet distribution.
  - Services include Hulu, Netflix, Xfinity, YouTube, and CinemaNow.
  - Increasingly available on smartphones and tablets
  - 2012: first year digital outpaced physical DVDs
- Internet essential for marketing
Figure 7.3: Online Movie Market Share Ranking in 2011
Alternative Voices

- **Digital video**
  - Cheaper and more accessible than standard film equipment
  - Camera work can be seen instantly without film processing.
  - Adopted by major directors
  - Same format as DVDs and Internet video, so films can be distributed online easily
Popular Movies and Democracy

Movies function as consensus narratives that operate across different times and cultures.

Do U.S. films contribute to a global village in which people share a universal culture?

Or do U.S. films stifle local culture and diversity?