**Video Script**

**Lecture 8 – Making Hollywood**

**Fall 2020**

**Introduction**

Last week, we thought about transitional film.

Just to refresh your memories, the “transition” in “transitional film” is *from* cinema’s earliest experiments *to* the robust movie industry that took root on the West Coast in the 1920s.

**Early vs. Transitional (1)**

Remember **[ANIMATION]** early film often looked like *Boxing Cats*,

or something else shot mostly to dazzle your eyes.

Transitional film **[ANIMATION]** used different shot types and visual storytelling in service of a narrative.

Here, you see D.W. Griffith’s famed close-up.

**Early vs. Transitional (2)**

Early cinema **[ANIMATION]** was something you might watch in a kinetoscope,

Or as part of a live vaudeville show, or some sort of other special presentation.

Transitional cinema **[ANIMATION]** was the era of the nickelodeon,

our earliest store-front movie theaters.

**Laughing Gas**

You watched a handful of transitional one-reel films that demonstrated narrative integration

(by which I mean that they were using all of film’s possibilities to tell a story).

**Griffith**

And we also talked about *Birth of a Nation*,

a hateful epic produced during the last gasps of the transitional period which

illuminated the business possibilities of longer feature films.

**Key Concepts**

Today we’re finally going to talk about how we got from making films in Ft. Lee to Hollywoodland.

Here are your key concepts for today. Some of these are repeats from earlier lectures,

But we’re going to talk about them again so I figured I’d list them.

**Edison Trust**

And, in fact, we’re going to begin with an organization you now know well:

the MPPC, or the Edison Trust

**[ANIMATION]** The MPPC started buying, suing, and bullying its competitors out of business in 1902.

And as it consumes these other businesses—including studios with names you know, like Star Films—

it operates as part of an *an oligopoly*. An oligopoly, if you’ve never heard that term before,

means that just a handful of businesses control a given field.

When its final competitor, Biograph, joined the Trust in 1908: bingo, you’ve got a monopoly.

**[ANIMATION]** The MPPC included nine major production companies, a film distributor,

and the company that produced film stock (Eastman Kodak).

They effectively controlled all aspects of filmmaking in the U.S., from cameras to projectors in theaters.

**[ANIMATION]** The MPPC controlled the industry by patenting technology and then

ruthlessly enforcing those patents, sometimes through legal means and sometimes through less legal ones.

And by less legal, I mean smashing stuff with clubs.

**[ANIMATION]** The MPPC succeeds in standardizing a lot of aspects of filmmaking.

One of those aspects is that film under the Trust is measured by the reel (1000 feet, 12-14 minutes).

Each of the Trust’s studios was required to produce one one-reel film per week.

**[ANIMATION]** In hindsight, we might look some of the Trust’s choices with a raised eyebrow.

Smashing things, controlling a whole industry—certainly questionable behaviors.

But one of the most interesting to look back on now, knowing how the film industry developed,

is that actors in MPPC pictures were not credited by name.

Actors in Edison Trust pictures were just freelancers, and the Trust sort of saw them like Lego people—

interchangeable, there to get moved around the set and tell a story, but not individually significant.

This will become important, and we’ll spend the rest of the week thinking about stardom.

But according to the MPPC, there are no movie stars.

**[ANIMATION]** But also, according to the U.S. government, there’s no MPPC as of 1915 either!

They were declared a monopoly and broken up according to anti-trust law.

**Laemmle Film Service**

Now, remember last week when we were talking about film exchanges,

and I told you to remember **[ANIMATION]** the man who owned this one, Carl Laemmle?

Well, here’s where Carl becomes a pivotal figure in motion picture history.

**Laemmle w/crown**

One of the weirdest things I’ve found while researching Laemmle is that

nearly every source written about him finds it necessary to comment on his height.

So yes, Carl Laemmle was **[ANIMATION]** a short king—he was 5’2—

and in this class we stan a short king.

But there are lots of other, more interesting things about him, I swear!

**Laemmle @ typewriter**

**[ANIMATION]** Laemmle was born in Germany in the 19th century but immigrated to the US when he was 17 or so, and like many other immigrants he held a few different jobs at first.

**[ANIMATION]** Eventually he found himself the bookkeeper at a clothing company in Oshkosh, WI

where he moonlighted as their advertising copywriter. This is the skill that turns out to be so important to his later businesses and the movie industry as a whole, so again,

it just goes to show that you never know where a less-than-perfect job might take you.

**[ANIMATION]** Laemmle goes on to open a few theaters around Chicago

and a successful exchange business.

His connection to the exhibition and distribution side of the movie business keeps him in touch with

what the public actually wants, and he knows Edison’s films don’t always fit the bill.

He’s importing films from Europe, for example.

And he knows those Westerns shot in Jersey are kinda…meh.

So, with proof that Edison’s product is subpar in the form of *actual receipts*,

**[ANIMATION]** He becomes something of a thorn in Edison’s side.

**[ANIMATION]** First, he sues the MPPC under the Sherman anti-trust act.

Edison retaliates to the tune of approximately *three hundred lawsuits*.

But perhaps even more infuriatingly, he says hey Edison, go take a long walk off a short pier,

I’ll buy film and equipment from Europe and start making my own dang movies.

**[ANIMATION]** Thus, he starts his own film production company in 1909 called IMP,

or “Independent Moving Picture” Company, which eventually becomes Universal Pictures.

We’ll talk a little bit more about IMP in our next lecture.

**The Independents**

Now, Laemmle isn’t the only person trying to stand up to Edison.

But, given his marketing smarts, he does help organize a coalition of opposition against the Trust.

This coalition is comprised mostly of other theater owners who’d started or were starting studios

to produce better films.

**[ANIMATION]** This group is known as *The Independents*.

It includes names you might have heard of, like Fox, the Warner Brothers, Paramount, and MGM.

**Cartoons**

The clash between the MPPC and the Independents plays out in public—remember,

Advertising is one of Laemmle’s fortes.

Here, you see two political cartoons from the teens. On the left, a cartoon supporting the MPPC.

The MPPC is depicted as a cop shouting “Move on, get off this drive!” to the “independent junk wagon,” which is filled with garbage films and driven by a clown. This seems to be saying that the MPPC is protecting motion picture audiences from sub-par independent junk.

On the other hand, this cartoon by the Independents shows motion picture exhibitors

As these sort of poor, starving masses, saying “every week I bring thee two simoleons”

While the film trust—this amply proportioned fat cat—says “every little bit helps.”

Here, you can see that the Independents are trying to rally exhibitors to their side.

Why should they have to pay a $2.00 license fee to Edison every week just to use a projector?

He’s got plenty of money!

**Laemmle again**

**[ANIMATION]** So, the Independents need the freedom to make the films they know audiences want,

and one of their most effective strategies was moving west, away from Edison,

to establish studios that would do things differently—at least, at first.

**Laemmle**

Before we start talking about Los Angeles, I just wanted to say one more thing about Laemmle.

In this photograph, he’s posed with a German Jewish refugee named Margaret Weissman.

He died in 1939, but as Hitler came to power in his homeland, he spent the last years of his life dedicated to getting fellow Jews out of Germany and into the United States.

**[ANIMATION]** His efforts from 1932 to 1939 resulted in more

than 300 families relocating to California, more than 1000 people all told.

He gave the adults jobs at Universal Pictures to make sure they could stay in the country,

And even when the Depression was squeezing the business, he kept them on.

I’ll link you to an article all about his work with Jewish refugees in the module if you want to read more.

**Welcome to Los Angeles!**

So, the Independents pack up and head west!

**[ANIMATION]** There’s an awful of perks.

Great weather means that studios can film year-round. It’s much easier to make a convincing western

When you don’t have to film it in the snow-covered pine barrens of New Jersey.

**[ANIMATION]** Los Angeles also offers a variety of landscapes in a small radius,

including beaches, mountains, and deserts. The terrain meant you could credibly shoot varied stories.

**[ANIMATION]** And finally, being so far from Edison’s hub on the East Coast meant you were far enough away that it wasn’t feasible for him to be sending detectives to smash your cameras all the time.

**The Independents**

Now, a few slides ago, I said that the Independents moved to Hollywood to make movies differently

…at first.

I qualified that because during the late teens and twenties, the rascally Independents **[ANIMATION]**

**The Studio System**

**[ANIMATION]** became the studio system.

And while the studio system didn’t replicate the structure of Edison’s MPPC,

You’ll see that they also had monopolistic business practices, and they also controlled the film industry.

**Paramount**

So what exactly do I mean by studio system?

Your reading today by Dr. Tom Schatz will help you get a feel for things, but let’s take a bird’s eye view.

**[ANIMATION]** The phrase “the studio system” refers to:

a group of businesses and their related practices during a specific era.

Before WWI, there was a robust film industry in Europe.

But the war effectively destroyed that business for some years. Around the same time,

you get the U.S. government breaking up the MPPC because it’s a monopoly.

This leaves a little bit of a power vacuum.

**[ANIMATION]** The Independents who trekked out to California in the 1910s then

*become* the major studios of the 1920s.

**[ANIMATION]** When we talk about the studio system, we’re mostly talking about what we call

“the big five,” which are Fox, RKO, Paramount, Warner Brothers, and Loews/MGM—

although Universal, Columbia, and United Artists are all major players too.

**[ANIMATION]** These vertically integrated studios totally control the U.S. moviemaking industry through factory-like production until the Paramount Decree of 1948—

a legal case we’ll look at in detail later in the semester.

But it’s also important to recognize that their influence after that was still enormous.

Many of these studios are still with us in one form or another!

**Vertical Integration**

I mentioned that the studios were vertically integrated.

What exactly does that mean?

**[ANIMATION]** It’s an economic term to describe a business that controls every aspect of production.

For the movie business, this means that the studios controlled talent, a.k.a actors, motion picture production, distribution, and theatrical exhibition.

**Vertical Integration 2**

This excerpt, which I won’t actually read in detail (but you can if you want to pause it) mentions

that Adolph Zukor was sort of the pioneer of the vertically integrated studio.

In 1916, he merged his distribution company with two production companies

(Famous Players in New York and the Lasky Corporation in LA).

Zukor became sort of the prototypical movie mogul, reigning over this huge operation:

Paramount Pictures.

**Vertical Integration 3**

Let’s zoom in and learn a little bit more about some of these steps

First, movie production.

**Studio System**

How did the studio system make moveis?

**[ANIMATION]** Well, they operated like movie factories.

They built giant, self-sufficient studios in Los Angeles.

Sets, wardrobe, makeup, costumes, props, etc.—everything was done in-house.

**[ANIMATION]** They also defined very specific roles and put them into a hierarchy, in which

the producer—not the director!—called the shots.

Actors were also signed to controlling, long-term contracts with one studio.

There wasn’t a lot of room for unbridled creativity within this system. That’s not to say:

A) that there wasn’t excellent, interesting work produced by people working for the studios and

B) that people working for studios today have free reign to make any movie that they want. But still!

The studios really had a lot of control over their employees and what kinds of movies got made.

Think of them like little self-sufficient movie autocracies, aided by the fact that

at that time there was a lot of open land around Los Angeles on which to build.

**Goldwyn Studio**

I was able to find some old aerial shots of the early studios so you can get a sense of their scale.

Here’s Goldwyn Studio circa 1919.

**Famous Players**

And here’s the Famous Players/Laskey studio around 1920.

**Clara Bow**

Now, genre and narrative are really a topic for a different class (RTF 317: Narrative Strategies)

But I did want to mention that the studio system tended to produce films with similar characteristics.

**[ANIMATION]** These films are in the so-called Classical Hollywood Style. *Very briefly,* these films:

1. Have invisible editing, meaning editing for continuity that doesn’t call attention to itself
2. They draw you into the plot
3. …which usually revolves around a hero or a heroine
4. …moving through two narrative arcs: a goal and a love story.
5. Each scene moves you to the next, and
6. Time moves in a linear way (or through flashbacks).
7. These films also usually have a happy ending and/or a moral.

Again, RTF majors will take a whole ‘nother class on narratives, so I don’t want to dwell to long on this.

The most important takeaway is that *how* films are produced tend to influence *what* films are produced.

The studio system wanted to push out a lot of product that took advantage of their assets, including stars, and make sure those stories pleased a lot of people.

And they hit on a winning formula!

Doesn’t this structure look familiar to you? Is it *that* different from any major blockbuster today?

Is it…in fact…*literally every blockbuster today??*

**Vertical Integration 4**

Okay, now let’s briefly touch on theatrical exhibition during the studio era.

**Movie palace**

The Big Five studios also owned theaters, but they weren’t interested in owning little nickelodeons.

They began to build what are called movie palaces (or picture palaces) in big cities.

Independent developers followed suit—so some palaces were owned by theaters, others weren’t.

But either way, movie palaces were ornate, large movie theaters,

that drove nickelodeons and other small theaters out of business.

This is the interior of Graumann’s Egyptian Theater, built in 1922 in Hollywood.

**Egyptian theater**

Here’s an exterior shot.

This was the site of the first big movie premiere in 1922 for *Robin Hood*, starring Douglas Fairbanks.

You can see from this the pretty exoticized idea of what “Egyptian” looks like, and as a matter of fact, there was a craze for all things supposedly “Egyptian” in style during in the early 1920s

because of well-publicized archeological work going on there.

The Egyptian opened the same year King Tut’s tomb was opened, for example.

The Egyptian still stands, and in fact, Netflix purchased it a few years ago.

That’s an issue we’ll talk more about when we get to the Paramount Decree in a few weeks.

**Studios/Theaters**

Okay, so we know that studios own theaters, and clearly they put their own movies in their own theaters.

But **[ANIMATION]** how do studios interact with theaters they don’t own?

Well, they used two sort of tricky strategies that boosted their overall profits.

**[ANIMATION]** The first is called block booking. Studios packaged films together in a block and required independent theaters to program *all* films in the block.

So, they could package their big, A-list pictures with a bunch of not so hot ones.

That’s like Universal Pictures today saying okay, you want *Bond 25?*

Open up, suckers!

**Cats**

Here comes the airplane…and the airplane is full of *Cats*.

**Studios/Theater**

**[ANIMATION]** The other strategy was called blind-bidding, which is just a particularly egregious form of block booking, where theaters had nearly no information about the films they’d be taking in the block.

Maybe a title, a star, a line about the plot, or even less.

**[ANIMATION]** Why did the studios do this?

**[ANIMATION]** Because, ironically, it kept *new* independent movie producers

from being able to find theaters for their films.

And there’s really the rub. The Independents were sick of Edison’s hold on the industry, so they went to Hollywood, and ultimately created a system that iced out independent filmmakers for decades.

**Remasculinization**

Finally, I’ve asked you to watch a little portion of an L.A. PBS show about what happened to female filmmakers during this era. We already know from *Be Natural* that there was a time when there were lots of female directors, but somewhere along the way filmmaking became a rare thing for women to do.

We’re still trying to get more movies by women made, particularly by non-white women.

Well, the studio system was what pushed women out of movie-making.

They could act, of course, and sometimes work in wardrobe,

but as Hollywood took on more characteristics of traditional big business,

Women stopped being hired to direct, edit, and so forth.

We call this the “remasculinization of film.”

It parallels the path of other industries, like software development.

Early computer programmers were almost all women, but as it became a lucrative industry and that job held more prestige, it became a “male” occupation.

So, this isn’t something that was unique to film, but it’s a frustrating process whenever and wherever it plays out, and its legacy is something we’re still dealing with today.