



fifth edition

Introduction to

# FILM

## Studies

edited by Jill Nelmes



## Introduction to Film Studies, 5th edition

*Introduction to Film Studies* is a comprehensive textbook for students of cinema.

This completely revised and updated fifth edition guides students through the key issues and concepts in film studies, traces the historical development of film and introduces some of the world's key national cinemas. A range of theories and theorists are presented from Formalism to Feminism, from Eisenstein to Deleuze. Each chapter is written by a subject specialist, including two new authors for the fifth edition. A wide range of films are analysed and discussed. It is lavishly illustrated with **150** film stills and production shots, in full colour throughout. Reviewed widely by teachers in the field and with a foreword by Bill Nichols, it will be essential reading for any introductory student of film and media studies or the visual arts worldwide.

Key features of the fifth edition are:

- updated coverage of a wide range of concepts, theories and issues in film studies
- in-depth discussion of the contemporary film industry and technological changes
- new chapters on Film and Technology and Latin American Cinema
- new case studies on films such as *District 9*, *Grizzly Man*, *Amores Perros*, *Avatar*, *Made in Dagenham* and many others
- marginal key terms, notes, cross-referencing
- suggestions for further reading, further viewing and a comprehensive glossary and bibliography
- a new, improved **companion website** including popular case studies and chapters from previous editions (including chapters on German Cinema and the French New Wave), links to supporting sites, clips, questions and useful resources. Go to [www.routledge.com/cw/nelmes](http://www.routledge.com/cw/nelmes) for more details

**Individual chapters include:** The industrial contexts of film production    Contemporary film technology    Before getting to the bigger picture    Film form and narrative    Spectator, audience and response    Cinematic authorship and the film auteur    Star studies: text, pleasure, identity    Approaches to film genre    The documentary form    The language of animation    Gender and film    Lesbian and gay cinema    Spectacle, stereotypes and films of the African diaspora    British cinema    Indian cinema    Latin American cinema    Soviet montage cinema of the 1920s

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# **Introduction to Film Studies**

Fifth edition

Edited by Jill Nelmes

Foreword by Bill Nichols

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## Foreword

Bill Nichols

How to tell the story of a discipline and a medium? This question stands as the challenge that *Introduction to Film Studies* confronts and solves through a series of individually authored but conceptually integrated essays. Each essay reminds us of the power and fascination of the movies as a medium through detailed analyses that are offered of a wide range of film, old and new, local and global, widely popular and sometimes unknown. Each essay also introduces us to the conceptual tools and critical questions that film scholars have asked and are now asking about the nature, function and value of film. Both film studies as a discipline and filmmaking as a practice possess a history that represents diverse attempts to create and understand a range of imaginative worlds that could not exist in any other form in quite the same way as they do in film. Attention to form is necessary so that the distinctiveness of cinematic expression may be fully appreciated, but attention to content is also needed if this distinctiveness is to be understood in the wider historical context to which it contributes. *Introduction to Film Studies* marries the two in a seamless blend of astute critical essays that survey the breadth and depth of film as an object of study today.

Apart from a common object, what do the essays in this volume have in common? A commonsensical answer to this question might be that the book provides a map to the most important theoretical tools and critical methodologies currently in use within film studies, and that it surveys the films and types of films, old and new, that loom as works of seminal importance. *Introduction to Film Studies* does offer this sort of answer, but it does so obliquely. Rather than explaining a standardised critical methodology, this book introduces a range of critical approaches and conceptual tools that become more or less valuable as the specific topic of inquiry shifts, and rather than simply pointing out what some of the greatest films have been, this book also introduces a much wider range of films that challenge, complicate and broaden our understanding of what film is and can be. There is a refreshingly broad, complementary array of approaches and commentaries offered here, facilitating for the reader an engagement with the cinema that is distinctive and rewarding in its particularities.

This diversity of critical approaches and rich range of cinematic examples does not prevent a certain sense of commonality from emerge in the essays all the same. Rather than a dominant theory, method or canon of films, this commonality, it would seem, resides in the ways in which each essay undercuts a commonsensical understanding of the cinema. Common-sense ideas are the most typical and unreflective ideas. Not necessarily wrong, they are, most often, limited to the knowledge needed to handle the most common situations. Common sense tells us that most movies are entertaining and disposable but the form of judgement brought to bear in this book tells us that this may well be true in many cases but that memorable works also exist that may support or confound our customary ideas of entertainment and disposability.

These essays go beyond common-sense understandings of movies to help readers see film with an expanded sense of the possible. They help us to see cinema anew, with fresh eyes and refreshing questions that move beyond the impressions and judgements

that common sense would have us believe mark the limits of subjective, affective or critical engagement. Common sense tells us that 'Hollywood' is a monolith of immense power that sets the terms and conditions for filmmaking and reception worldwide. True, to an extent, several essays here complicate this truism by examining how British cinema, or documentary film, for example, not only exist but sometimes thrive in the context of a dominant Hollywood model. Other essays question the monolithic quality of Hollywood cinema itself. Film critics have long appreciated the subtle distinctions different directors bring to similar subject matter, especially in genre films. Hollywood films can be understood within the context of individual creativity as well as within an historical frame that must account for massive changes in how dominant, mainstream films have been produced and marketed for well over half a century.

Similarly, common sense tells us that important films for film history must have also been important films for their original audiences. This is not necessarily so, as the essay on 'The Soviet montage cinema of the 1920s' makes clear: the most popular films were the least innovative films and the most innovative films, such as those by Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov or Alexander Dovzhenko, were seldom popular. This disparity has also been true of the vast majority of documentary and avant-garde films despite their enormous significance to an understanding of the formal and social importance of film. It is also true of the Italian neo-realist films that did not win popular acceptance despite the global impact of the neo-realist style, and also true of the French New Wave, despite its enormous influence on other filmmakers and the continuing productivity of many of its most important figures.

Common sense tells us that movement and waves have their moment; they come and go. The essays assembled here suggest otherwise: important works may or may not find popular acceptance, at first or later, but their impact ripples outward in discernible patterns that can be traced and understood. So, too, the 'settled', common-sense idea that 'of course' a national cinema is a separate and distinct entity can be complicated to understand; how a national cinema often begs the question of a national identity and displays, in its complex weave of stories and styles, influences that are anything but purely national in origin. The monolithic idea of the audience that responds in a uniform way to a film, measured by box office receipts, for example, is also shown to be a common-sensical understanding that neglects to account for the divergent responses of different subcultures, ethnicities and, more obviously still, men and women. Hollywood cinema has historically presented itself as a cinema for all, but as the chapter on 'Spectacle, stereotypes and films of the African diaspora' argues, this commonsense impression has excluded recognition of a long history of filmmaking by and for African-American audiences. Not only did African American performers provide a, usually, stereotypical form of 'entertainment' in front of the Hollywood camera, they also contributed to a parallel stream of largely lost, forgotten or suppressed alternative films whose re-examination broadens our sense of the cinematically possible and of the actual history of film itself.

These are significant achievements, and the *Introduction to Film Studies* deftly guides the reader through the advances in understanding that characterise film studies today. What questions will vex the discipline in the future? These essays suggest some of the directions in which this question might lead, but it will also be the readers of this book who will give the most comprehensive and decisive answer to this question through the patient pursuit of their own desire to know more and understand better.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the team at Routledge who have been involved in producing this edition, particularly Natalie Foster, Ruth Moody and Andrew Watts. This book would have been impossible without the generosity and hard work of the authors whose chapters make such interesting and thought-provoking reading. My thanks also go to Robert Murphy, my colleagues at UEL for their patience and understanding, and all those who have been part of the journey of the fifth edition of the book.

## Introduction to the fifth edition

Jill Nelmes

*Introduction to Film Studies* is more than a guide to studying film, it is a celebration of the medium and our desire to understand this complex form. How film is interpreted and perceived and, indeed, how films are constructed are aspects which many find fascinating.

The revised and updated fifth edition is testament to the continued interest in the study of film. *Introduction to Film Studies* was first published in 1996, when it was apparent to many lecturers and students that there was a shortage of film studies texts which explained the subject in a straightforward and approachable way, while still offering a degree of complex analysis. It was not then especially surprising that the first edition was extremely popular with students at FE and HE level and became recommended reading on many film and media courses in the UK. Perhaps more surprising was its burgeoning popularity in various parts of the globe, from the US to countries with very different cultures and very different film industries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and India. The study of film has become such an integral part of higher education teaching in so many countries that *Introduction to Film* has now been translated into Chinese. The study of film clearly has no national boundaries, as long as there is somewhere to show a film or read a book.

Cinema has now spanned three centuries and, despite new and competing media technologies, the cinema experience is still an extremely popular one. Cinema audiences are at their highest since the 1970s, and DVD sales have encouraged film attendance, propping up the sales of less successful films at the box office. Access to films via the internet is increasing rapidly and the success of YouTube, even though still limited to short film and clips, is unstoppable, with many millions watching the most popular examples. The popularity of film shorts has increased as technology makes it easy to download and view clips on YouTube. Hopefully new media, as was the case with video, will become aids in promoting film and an additional means of viewing the medium. The rise of the internet, pocket-sized computers and mobile phones means that films can be viewed anywhere, on a bus or train or in the park, yet surrendering oneself to the pleasures of the big screen, while watching a film narrative unfold, is still an unmatched experience.

Each edition of *Introduction to Film Studies* has reflected changing theoretical viewpoints and new concerns regarding the study of film, while continuing to engage with the key concepts that have emerged in the last century. The new edition includes revised and updated chapters, with additional case studies and two new chapters titled 'Contemporary film and technology' and 'Latin American cinema', providing perspectives that are particularly useful for the student of film.

The number of colleges and universities offering film studies at undergraduate and post-graduate level is still growing internationally: film is not just an integral part of Western society but also of many other cultures such as India and China. What is it about this medium, invented over a century ago, that fascinates us? Why do we enjoy watching films so much? Why indeed should we study film? *Introduction to Film Studies* aims to at

least partly answer these questions, not only discussing how films are constructed and how they affect us, but also what they tell us about a society, how this differs from nation to nation and how film can challenge our understanding of the world around us.

Film theory has been influenced by many different philosophies, political theorists, cultural theorists and, indeed, film theorists. For film studies to remain 'alive' it must respond to new ways of thinking and react to films which are produced both inside and outside the mainstream and by other cultures. Film theory has, to some extent, moved away from the 'grand theory' that so influenced psychology, literature and philosophy in the 1970s and which focused on the overarching psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan, the political theories of Marx and Althusser and the semiotic theories of Saussure. That is not to say that these theories have no value but they have been re-evaluated rather than completely discarded. Postmodernism has encouraged a critiquing of the grand narrative approach; affect theory, for instance, discussed by Patrick Phillips in Chapter 5 is a less political and more reactive way of analysing our response to film.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

*Introduction to Film Studies* is designed as a resource which can be used either as part of a course or for general interest. It is hoped that the reader will be inspired to read further and extensive cross-referencing to other chapters and the website suggests where to look for related topics and concepts.

### Useful features

- Coverage of a wide range of concepts, theories and opinions about film studies. The authors, from both the US and the UK, are subject specialists in their field.
- Detailed discussion of the film industry in Hollywood and Britain, with reference to other cinemas, such as India, and their conditions of production.
- Reference to a wide range of films from different periods and different countries.
- Case studies which include discussion of classical and contemporary film.
- Generous use of film stills.
- Self-contained chapters which introduce the subject area.

### New features of the fifth edition

- All chapters have been revised and updated, most including new case studies. The chapters on 'Cinematic authorship and the film auteur' and 'Star studies', both written by Paul Watson, have been substantially modified and extended while Patrick Phillips's chapter 'Before getting to the bigger picture' is a completely revised version of 'Rediscovering film studies' from the previous edition.
- Two new chapters have been included in the fifth edition: 'Contemporary film technology' by William Whittington and 'Latin American cinema' by Linda Craig.
- The chapter 'The French New Wave' written by Chris Darke is now available on the website.
- Many case studies from the 4th edition have been added to the website.
- Linking and cross-referencing to the website.
- An updated foreword by Bill Nicholls, one of the most prominent and respected film theorists in the US.

## PART ONE: CINEMA AS INSTITUTION - TECHNOLOGY, INDUSTRY AND AUDIENCE

This part explores the relationship between cinema as a cultural product and as a complex and ever-changing industry, dependent on technology, with its own rules and



institutional methods of working. In Chapter 1, 'The industrial contexts of film production', Searle Kochberg first outlines the development of the Hollywood studio system which dominated film style and production in the twentieth century, then discusses the film industry in the UK which has so often been eclipsed by Hollywood. The author explains how the film industry has had to respond to competition, initially from television, then video and most recently the internet, while the power of the Hollywood studios has been dissipated by the rise of the multimedia empires and conglomerates. New case studies are included on *Avatar*, *Paranormal Activity* and *Slumdog Millionaire*. Chapter 2, 'Contemporary film technology', a new chapter written by William Whittington, discusses the role of technology in film, explaining theories of technology and how technology has changed from early cinema to the computer-generated images we see in contemporary film. The chapter includes case studies of *District 9*, *Star Trek* and *Avatar*.

## PART TWO: APPROACHES TO STUDYING FILM - FORM AND TEXT

This part addresses methods of interpreting and analysing film, examining the different ways a text may be understood. Patrick Phillips's revised and newly titled Chapter 3, 'Getting to the bigger picture', looks at the development of film as a form, the effect of digital media on how we perceive film and how new media such as YouTube can aid our experience of film and our understanding of film history. The author includes a new case study of a short film made in 1944, *Springtime in an English Village*. Chapter 4, written by Suzanne Speidel, 'Film form and narrative', discusses not only how film is constructed, shaped and formed but also how films tell stories. The chapter refers to a wide range of films, from the classical narrative to the experimental, using examples from films such as *Gladiator*, *Run Lola Run* and *Wild Strawberries*; a new case study is also included: *Loves of a Blonde*, directed by Milos Forman. Chapter 5, 'Spectator, audience and response', authored by Patrick Phillips, explores how the audience makes sense of film and studies the relationship between the film and the audience. The chapter also discusses the spectator in early and contemporary cinema and asks why the cinematic experience is so pleasurable. Chapter 6, 'Cinematic authorship and the film auteur' by Paul Watson, focuses on Hollywood cinema, discussing the role of the director, who has often been viewed as the sole creator and artist of a film, though more recently used as a commodity and marketing tool for promotion. The revised chapter includes a case study of Quentin Tarantino discussing his contribution to film as a postmodern director. The following Chapter 7, 'Star studies: text, pleasure, identity', also written by Paul Watson, examines the notion of the star and how our understanding of the term has changed since the fall of the studio system. A new case study on Tom Cruise is included which discusses the star as celebrity and Cruise's portrayal by the media.

## PART THREE: STUDYING GENRE

This part examines genre theory and genre as a form, firstly looking at genre in Hollywood. Chapter 8, 'Approaches to film genre', discusses the legacy left by the studio system and explains that genre works by both difference and repetition. The author argues that genre can still be challenging and surprising and uses *Moulin Rouge* as an example of a postmodern, intertextual film. The following two chapters examine very different genres, the documentary and animation forms, both of which have enjoyed something of a resurgence in popularity in the last decade. A number of documentaries have gained cinema release and surprisingly good box-office takings. Paul Ward's Chapter 9, 'The documentary form', traces the history of the documentary, asking what we mean by the term and how the form can be defined, discussing the boundaries

of documentary and docu-drama. Case studies include a discussion of the films of Mitchell and Kenyon, produced in the early twentieth century and *Grizzly Man*, Werner Herzog's exploration of the time Timothy Treadwell spent with grizzly bears before he was killed by them. Chapter 10, 'The language of animation', written by Paul Wells, also gives a historical perspective to the animation form, examining experimental as well as mainstream animation, which has been revitalised by the use of computer software that has allowed the making of films such as *Avatar* and *The Incredibles*. A new case study is included of *Breakfast in the Grass* by Estonian animator Priit Pärn, whose work is much darker than most conventional Western animation.

## PART FOUR: CINEMA, IDENTITY AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

This part discusses how the different identities of sexuality, gender and ethnicity are represented in film. Chapter 11, 'Gender and film', by Jill Nelmes, looks at representations of masculinity and femininity and how these representations may be interpreted by the audience. The author discusses feminist film theory and how theories about masculinity in film grew out of this. A new case study is included on the US independent writer and director, Nicole Holofcener, one of the few women directors to make films that have attracted critical acclaim. In Chapter 12, 'Lesbian and gay cinema', Chris Jones explains the notion of the homosexual 'look' in film and 'queer theory'. The author also discusses the stereotypes used in films which depict homosexual characters and the change from negative stereotypes, in the past, to more recent positive representations. Chapter 12, by Terri Francis, 'Spectacle, stereotypes and films of the African diaspora', explores the history of African American film from 1900 to blaxploitation films of the 1960s to an extended case study of the films of Spike Lee. The author discusses stereotyping and racism in cinema and films of the African diaspora, pointing out that this is a broad field, covering Europe, Africa and the Americas.

## PART FIVE: CINEMA, NATION AND IDENTITY

In Western society we tend to think of Hollywood as the dominant form of cinema, yet other national cinemas, past and present, have made their presence felt for a variety of reasons, ranging from their productivity and popularity, as in the case of Bollywood cinema, to their aesthetic or social value. This part focuses on four very different types of cinema; the chapters on British cinema and Indian cinema offer an overview from a historical perspective while the chapter on Soviet montage cinema discusses a particular period in Russian history and the new chapter on Latin American film focuses on the rise of cinema in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico.

Chapter 14, 'British cinema', by Lawrence Napper, asks how we can define a British film. The author discusses how the British film industry has developed, referring to a wide range of films from early British silent film to the present day, looking at films produced in particular periods such as the Second World War and the British New Wave of the 1960s. A new case study is included of *Made in Dagenham*, a film about a group of women factory workers who went on strike for equal pay in the 1960s. Chapter 15, 'Indian cinema', written by Lalitha Gopalan, studies the development of film in India, exploring narrative and genre in popular Indian film, referring to song and dance sequences, the gangster film and the woman's film. Chapter 16, entitled 'Latin American cinema', by Linda Craig, is a welcome addition to the fifth edition. The chapter provides a history of the development of film in Latin America, discussing the influence of neo-colonialism on cinema, first from Europe and then, when the First World War ended film production, from the United States. The arrival in the 1950s of the 'New Latin American Cinema' is discussed and the influence of the French New wave and political

filmmaking movements is explained. Case studies in this chapter include *Lucia*, *Madame Satã* and *Amores Perros*. Soviet montage cinema emerged out of the Russian Revolution in 1917; Mark Joyce in Chapter 17 argues that this cinema has had a lasting effect and the theories developed in the period by filmmakers such as Eisenstein and Pudovkin are still influential today. The chapter includes detailed case studies of films by key directors of that period.



## The industrial contexts of film production

Searle Kochberg

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## ■ The industrial contexts of film production

### INTRODUCTION

Films do not exist in a vacuum. Marxist theory of history postulates that the material, economic and social relations of society are the true basis of society, and that to a great degree they determine the way a society thinks. We can apply this theory on a micro-level to film and say that it is the socio-economic organisation of the film industry – its labour relations, its apparatuses, its resources – that largely determines the films that are made, their values, and their aesthetics.

The chapter that follows is a journey through the mainstream institutional frameworks of US and UK film. The American film industry has dominated all others for the last 100 years and for this reason the section largely centres around it. I do not claim the itinerary to be definitive, but I have sought to cite some key issues in the socio-economic infrastructure of American and British film.

The origins and consolidation of the American industry are traced from 1895 to 1930, a period which saw a fledgling industry harness new industrial practices and quickly grow into an important popular medium, organised into highly defined exhibition, production and distribution components.

The Hollywood studio era (1930 to 1949) is the next stop on the tour. Monopolistic practice and the finely tuned industrial organisation of the Hollywood 'factories' are discussed at some length. This section looks specifically at Warner Brothers as an example of a vertically integrated film company during the studio era.

There then follows an exploration of the contemporary institutional framework of US (global) and UK commercial film, starting with a review of the position of the 'Majors' in the light of multi-media empires, new media technologies and (mainstream) independent production. *Avatar* (2009) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007) are reviewed in the light of new media technologies appropriated by the Majors to make money. At the end of this section the production/distribution histories of *Gladiator* (2000) and *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) are taken as case studies.

The chapter ends with a review of building audiences for film – the context of viewing – from the 1940s onwards. *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) is taken as a case study.

*For discussion of Gladiator and classical cinema see pp. 102–4.*

### THE ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN FILM INDUSTRY (1900 TO 1915)

The American film industry has been in existence as long as there has been American film. This section looks at how the film industry organised itself into three main divisions in the early years of this century, divisions that exist to this day – **exhibition**, **distribution** and **production**.

*For an account of the invention of film see Chapter 2.*

#### **exhibition**

Division of the film industry concentrating on the public screening of film.

#### **distribution**

Division concentrating on the marketing of film, connecting the producer with the exhibitor by leasing films from the former and renting them to the latter.

#### **production**

Division concentrating on the making of film.

#### **Exhibition until 1907**

By 1894, the exhibition of moving pictures had been established in New York City with the introduction of the box-like kinetoscope. This allowed an individual customer to watch a 50-foot strip of film through a slit at the top of the machine. In 1895, a projector called the Pantopticon was demonstrated, again in NYC, and for the first time more than one person could watch the same moving images simultaneously.

Once projectors were available, single-reel films started to be shown in vaudeville theatres as novelties. Exhibition outlets began to multiply and by the first years of the last century small high street stores and restaurants were being converted into small-scale cinemas or nickelodeons. As the name suggests, the cost of entry to these cinemas was 5 cents – an amount affordable to the (predominantly) working-class audiences of



• **Plate 1.1**

A nickelodeon (5 cents entry fee) in New York City in the first decade of the twentieth century. Converted high street stores like this one were typical of the first cinemas



nickelodeons. By the end of 1905 there were an estimated 1,000 of these theatres in America and by 1908 there were 6,000.

### Distribution until 1907

As the film industry expanded, exhibitors had a growing commercial need for an unbroken supply of films to show. To meet this need, the first film exchange was in operation by 1902 and acted as a go-between for the producers and exhibitors (Balio 1976: 14). The exchanges purchased (later leased) films from producers and distributed films to exhibitors by renting to them. By 1907 there were between 125 and 150 film exchanges covering the whole of the USA.

### Production until 1907

Until 1900 the average length of films was around 50 feet. Three major companies dominated production in the US: Edison, Biograph and Vitagraph. Although filming on location was very common at this stage, as early as 1893 the world's first 'kinetographic theatre' or film studio was in operation. This was built by the Edison Company and called the 'Black Maria'.

After 1900, films started to get longer, and by 1903, films of 300 to 600 feet were fairly common. The Edison Company's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) was over 1,000 feet long (ibid.: 7–9) and is an example of early cinema utilising increased running time and primitive continuity editing to tell, for then, a fairly ambitious story. By this time there were several major film producers in the USA, including (as well as the companies mentioned above) Selig, Kalem, Essanay and Lubin. These companies ensured their dominant position in the industry by holding patents in camera and projection equipment.

The industrial organisation of film production until 1907 has been referred to as the 'cameraman' system of production (Bordwell *et al.* 1985: 116–17). As the name suggests, films were largely the creation of one individual, the cameraman, who would be respon-

#### kinetograph

Edison's first movie camera



sible for planning, writing, filming and editing. Edwin Porter, working for the Edison Company, is a good example of such a craftsman.

Thus, by 1907, the American film industry was already organised into three main divisions: exhibition, distribution and production. The creation of these separate commercial divisions demonstrates pragmatic, commercial streamlining by a very young industry, which was designed to maximise profits in an expanding market.

### The Motion Picture Patents Company and industry monopolies (1908 to 1915)

In 1908, the Edison and Biograph companies attempted to control the fledgling film industry through the key patents they held in camera and projection technology. They set up the Motion Picture Patents Company, a **patent pool**, which issued licences for a fee to companies on a discretionary basis. Only licensed firms could legally utilise technology patented by or contracted to the MPPC without fear of litigation. The MPPC was soon collecting royalties from all sectors of the industry, including manufacturers of equipment, film producers and exhibitors. The MPPC's ultimate ambition was to monopolise the film industry in the US. Its goal was a situation in which films would be shot on patented cameras, distributed through its General Film Company and screened on its patented projectors.

#### patent pool

An association of companies, operating collectively in the marketplace by pooling the patents held by each individual company.

### Exhibition and audience during the MPPC era

An important contribution to the profits of the MPPC was from the licensing of projection equipment to exhibitors. In 1908 the most important exhibition outlet was the nickelodeon.

The year 1910 marked the peak of the nickelodeon theatre, with an estimated 26,000,000 people attending the 10,000 'nickels' in the continental US every week (Balio 1976: 63). The meteoric rise of the nickel theatres was remarkable and reflected the general expansion of popular entertainment during America's prosperous start to the twentieth century. Enormous expansion in film exhibition occurred throughout the USA and inner-city locations were particularly important due to their concentrated populations. The growth of the nickelodeon in large American cities has been well documented and may in part be attributable to mass working-class immigration to the US at the time (Allen and Gomery 1985: 202–5).

The exhibition industry understood that its successful future lay in securing a wide audience-base. It appears to have accomplished this even in its nickelodeon years, by successfully positioning nickels in middle-class as well as working-class districts. Exhibitors realised, however, that even greater profit lay in larger theatres and more ambitious narratives. As early as 1909, large movie theatres were being constructed. Film producers were also being encouraged by exhibitors to provide films that would appeal to middle- as well as working-class audiences, including 'women's' stories and one-reel adaptations of literary classics. This process continued to gather momentum in the final years of the MPPC era, when large luxurious theatres began to supplant the nickels in movie exhibition, and audiences reached 49,000,000 per week (Balio 1976: 75). Feature-length films at an average length of four to six reels also became established.

#### vertical integration

Where a company is organised so that it oversees a product from the planning/development stage, through production, through market distribution, through to the end-user – the retail consumer. In the case of the film industry, this translates to a company controlling production, marketing and exhibition of its films.

### Distribution in the MPPC era

Soon after its inception, the MPPC turned its attention to film distribution and licensed 70 per cent of the film exchanges operating in the US. By 1910, the MPPC had set up its own distribution company – the General Film Company – which soon had nationwide cover through the purchase of forty-eight key exchanges in the US (Elsaesser 1990: 192–3). By 1911, the MPPC had constructed the first effective example of **vertical integration** in the film industry through a combination of takeovers and patent rights.

**trust**

A group of companies operating together to control the market for a commodity. This is illegal practice in the USA.

Changing conditions were soon to challenge the MPPC's supreme position in the industry. First, independent distributors, exhibitors and producers quickly and successfully organised themselves in response to the MPPC's attempted monopoly.<sup>1</sup> Then, a charge of anti-trust violation was filed against the MPPC by the Department of Justice in 1912. The outcome of the case (announced in 1915) was that the MPPC was ordered to break up. Ironically, by this time, other vertically integrated companies were being organised within the industry (see next section).

### Production during the MPPC era

The years 1908 to 1915 were not only marked by the rise and fall of the industrial giant – the Motion Picture Patents Company – but also by the rise of the multi-reel feature film and the relative demise of the single-reel film. Greater length and greater narrative complexity coincided with the application of scientific management principles to the industrial organisation of film production.

By 1908, the 'cameraman' system of production had already been discarded and replaced by the 'director system' (1907–1909) (Bordwell et al. 1985: 113–20). For the first time a director was responsible for overseeing a group of operative workers, including the cameraman. The director was central to the planning, filming and editing stages of filmmaking. Production was centralised in a studio/factory, permitting greater control of production, thus keeping costs down. Around 1909, this system was in turn discarded in favour of the 'director-unit' system (ibid.: 121–7). Directors were now in charge of autonomous production units within companies, each with a separate group of workers. Companies were subdivided into various departments, for ever greater productivity and efficiency, informed no doubt by the then current 'scientific management' model of labour and workshop organisation popularised by F.W. Taylor.

By the end of the MPPC era, the 'central producer' system (ibid.: 128–41) had been introduced, which was to dominate as a model in production management until the start of the studio era around 1930. This was a fully structured hierarchical system, with a strict 'scientific' division of labour. Production-line filmmaking was now the order of the day, all under the central control of a producer who used very detailed shooting scripts to plan budgets before giving the go-ahead to studio projects.

### Summary

During the first twenty years of its life, the film industry increased in scale from a cottage-scale enterprise to an established mass popular medium. Its rapid and enormous growth was largely driven by the explosion in exhibition, which in turn triggered a streamlining in distribution methods and the industrialisation of production. The predominant position of exhibition within the industry was also to be a hallmark of the studio era of American film.

### Question

What do you see as the disadvantages to early 'independent' film makers of the MPPC's vertical integration?

## THE STUDIO ERA OF AMERICAN FILM (1930 TO 1949)

This section looks at the studio era of film production. By 1930 the film industry in America was dominated by five companies – all vertically integrated – known as the 'Majors' or the 'Big Five': Warner Brothers, Loew's–MGM, Fox, Paramount and Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO). Three smaller companies, the 'Little Three', were also part of

the **oligopoly**: Columbia, Universal (both with production and distribution facilities) and United Artists (a distribution company for independent producers).

#### **oligopoly**

Where a state of limited competition exists between a small group of producers or sellers.

### **The origins of the studio-era oligopoly (1914–1930)**

Vertical integration made sense to the power brokers of the film industry: companies with the financial resources to organise themselves in this way stood to dominate the marketplace through their all-pervasive influence and their ability to block out competition.

Despite the alarm bells of the MPPC anti-trust case in 1915, film companies continued to seek out legal ways to construct vertically integrated companies through mergers and acquisitions. In December 1916 an industry merger occurred which became the cornerstone of the future Hollywood studio era. This involved the Famous Players and Jesse L. Lasky production companies and Paramount, a distribution company. By 1920 Famous Players–Lasky (as the new company was called) had established a pre-eminent position in the American film industry with the purchase of theatre chains throughout the US and Canada (Gomery 1986: 26–8).

The trend set by Famous Players–Lasky was soon copied elsewhere in the industry. In 1922 the distribution–exhibition giant First National became vertically integrated with the construction of a large production facility in Burbank, California (Balio 1976: 114).<sup>2</sup> By 1924 Loew's Incorporated, the major exhibition firm, had acquired both Metro Pictures (producer–distributor) and Goldwyn Pictures (producer–exhibitor). Henceforth, Loew's production subsidiary would be known as Metro–Goldwyn–Mayer (MGM).

### **Exhibition during the studio era**

Exhibition continued to be the most powerful and influential branch of the American film industry during the studio era. The reason for this was simple: it was where the money was made. Reflecting this, the Majors channelled most of their investment into exhibition, which accounted for 90 per cent of the Majors' total asset value during the years 1930 to 1949.

In spite of the fact that the Majors owned only 15 per cent of the movie theatres in the US, they collected approximately 75 per cent of exhibition revenues in the US during the studio era. This was possible because the Big Five film companies owned 70 per cent of the **first-run** movie houses in the US during this period. Their numbers were relatively small, but the first-run theatres accounted for most of the exhibition revenue because of their very large seating capacity (on average over 1,200 seats), prime locations (in key urban sites) and higher price of admission. The Majors further strengthened their grip on exhibition by 'encouraging' the (30 per cent) independent first-run theatres to book their films, sight unseen, to the exclusion of competitors (see below). By bowing to the wishes of the Majors, the independents safeguarded their access to the Majors' popular films. All in all, it was the Majors' control of cinemas during the years of vertical integration that ensured their profits.

#### **first-run**

Important movie theatres would show films immediately upon their theatrical release (or their 'first-run'). Smaller, local theatres would show films on subsequent runs, hence the terms second-run, third-run, etc.

### **The successful theatre chains**

By the 1920s, American innovations in national wholesaling and chain-store retailing had been absorbed into cinema exhibition methods. The introduction of scientific management methods and economies of scale led to the building up of chains of theatres, lower per-unit costs and faster, more efficient operations.

By far the most financially successful and innovative of the exhibition companies in the lead-up to the studio era was Balaban and Katz, with corporate headquarters in Chicago (until taken over by Paramount in 1925). Its success influenced the whole exhibition industry, especially at the top end of the market. Key innovations of Balaban and Katz included locating cinemas in outlying business and residential areas as well as downtown, building large, ornate, air-conditioned movie palaces (trips to which were

'events' in themselves for movie-goers), and accompanying screen presentations with quality vaudeville acts (Gomery 1992: 40–56).

The 1930s and 1940s saw a continuation of the scientific management practices inaugurated by innovators like Balaban and Katz. Changes were made in exhibition during the studio era, some a direct result of the fall in attendance brought about by the Great Depression which followed the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Vaudeville acts were eliminated in all but the grandest of movie houses and replaced by talkie shorts, new movie theatres were less elaborate, double bills were introduced, air-conditioning was more universally adopted, and food and drink stands – in the form of popcorn (pre-Second World War onwards) and Coke/Pepsi (post-Second World War) – were introduced into foyers. These concession stands became, and were to remain, major profit earners for exhibitors right up until the present day.

The war years (1941 to 1945) and the immediate postwar period were to mark the heyday of studio-era exhibition in the US; 1946 was the year of greatest profits for the Big Five.

### Distribution during the studio era

The distribution of films in America was effectively controlled by the Big Five during the studio era, even though the Little Three were also heavily engaged in the distribution business. The reason for this lay in the Majors' complete domination of exhibition. To ensure access for their films to the nationwide cinema network controlled by the Majors, the Little Three went along with the distribution system of the Big Five. Areas were zoned by the Majors, and theatres designated first-run, second-run and so on. The average period between runs, or clearance, was thirty days or more.

When booking films into their own theatres, each of the Majors ensured that precedence was given to their own product, followed by films of the other Majors. Any exhibition slots still available would be allocated to the Little Three. Finally, in distributing films to independent theatres, the Big Five and Little Three utilised a system of advance block-booking (films booked en masse and in advance).<sup>3</sup> Under this system, independent exhibitors were forced to book a full year's feature-film output of an individual film company, sight unseen, in order to secure likely box-office hits (Gomery 1992: 67–9).

It is worth noting that genre films and star vehicles of the studio era owed their popularity with distributors and exhibitors to the fact that they were useful marketing tools for distributors – providing marketing 'hooks' on which to hang a campaign – and at the same time helped provide box-office insurance for exhibitors, providing product recognition and differentiation for audiences.

### Production during the studio era

By the onset of the studio era, the major movie factories were each producing an average of fifty features per year to satisfy the voracious demands of the highly profitable exhibition end of the business. As in other areas of the film industry, production management was 'scientific': film studios were organised as assembly-line plants with strict divisions of labour and hierarchies of authority.

As early as 1931, Hollywood Majors had begun to move away from the central-producer system which had dominated production since 1915. Columbia Pictures was the first company to announce the adoption of a producer-unit system in October 1931. Under the new organisational framework, the company appointed a head of production to oversee the running of the studio. Several producers were then appointed under the head, and each had the job of supervising the production of a group of films and of delivering the films on completion to the head of production (Bordwell et al. 1985: 321).

*For further discussion  
of genre, stars and  
marketing, see  
Chapter 7.*

Those firms that adopted the new system (not all did)<sup>4</sup> were convinced that it was an advance in scientific management for several reasons. First, it was felt that the system saved money, since it allowed each producer to keep a closer control of individual budgets (overseeing far fewer films than a central producer). Second, the system was felt to foster 'better quality' films, and encourage specialisms in individual units, by investing in the creativity of the delegated producers.

Certain production units were associated with particular genres: Jerry Wald's unit at Warner Brothers specialised in noir-melodrama, e.g. *Mildred Pierce* (1945); Arthur Freed's unit at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer specialised in the integrated musical, e.g. *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944).

### Contracts and unions

It was standard studio practice during the 1930s and 1940s to employ personnel on long-term or permanent contracts. Workers' unions had firmly established themselves in American film production by the early years of the Roosevelt administration (in the mid-1930s) under the auspices of the **National Recovery Administration (NRA)** and the Wagner Act. Ironically, by defining and enforcing rigidly delineated areas of responsibility for specific jobs to protect their members' jobs, the unions were directly instrumental in reinforcing the hierarchical structure of film production practice.

### NRA

National Recovery Administration) programme – 1930s' government programme designed to rescue the American economy from the Great Depression (commonly known as the 'New Deal').

### Stars

Long before the 1930s, a whole subsidiary industry of fan magazines and gossip columns in popular newspapers had grown up, promoting the Hollywood 'dream factory', its films

*For further discussion of the star see Chapter 7.*



#### • Plate 1.2

An aerial view of Paramount's production facility in Hollywood in the 1930s. This studio was one of the most modern talking-picture production plants in the world. It covered an area of 26 acres, had fourteen sound stages on the grounds, and had a working population of 2,000 people

and its stars. This continued throughout the studio era, fuelled by the publicity machines of the film companies themselves.

Long-term contracts (normally seven years in duration) secured the ongoing services of stars for the film companies. This was key to the financial security of the corporations since the acting ability and the personality of the stars provided added value to the films in which they appeared. Why? Because stars helped differentiate films that otherwise were very standard in content and format. Their popularity reinforced consumer brand loyalty for the films of individual film companies, and provided the Majors with the necessary 'carrot' with which to entice independent exhibitors into booking blocks of films sight unseen (or 'blind').

### Summary

During the Hollywood studio era, a small group of manufacturers-cum-distributors-cum-retailers controlled the film market between them. Smaller US producers were forced to make do with subsequent-run cinemas in which to show their films or to arrange distribution deals with the Big Five and Little Three. Likewise, foreign films could not get a foothold in the US unless they too had arrangements with one of the eight US film companies comprising the oligopoly. Examples of UK production companies that had US distribution through the studio era were London Films (distributing through UA), Imperator Films (distributing through RKO) and the Rank Organisation (distributing through Universal).

It wasn't until after 1948 that the Majors were forced to divest themselves of their cinema chains, as a result of the Supreme Court's decision in the Paramount anti-trust case (see next section).

### □ CASE STUDY 1: WARNER BROTHERS

From its origins as a small production company in the mid-1920s, Warner Brothers rose to become one of the five major vertically integrated film companies by the end of the decade. This was largely achieved through debt-financing – expansion financed through loans. Key to Warner's exponential growth were the following financial deals: its takeover of Vitagraph Corporation (with distribution and production facilities) in 1925, its exclusive licensing of Western Electric sound equipment for 'talking pictures' in 1926, and its purchase of the Stanley Company cinema chain with its associated film company First National in 1928.

Warner Brothers was the first of the Majors to establish the commercial viability of sound in film, and until the onset of the Depression (late 1929) its huge corporate debt (due to corporate expansion) was more than held in check by the enormous profits generated by its first 'talkies'. Starting in 1926, its corporate subsidiary for sound productions, Vitaphone Corporation, premiered Vitaphone 'shorts' and the first Hollywood 'feature' with recorded musical accompaniment, *Don Juan*. This was followed in 1927 by the release of Warner's first feature-length part-talkie, *The Jazz Singer*, and in 1928 by the release of its first all-talkie feature, *The Lights of New York*.

The Great Depression seriously weakened Warner's financial base. While big profits were being generated at the box office, the company could carry its enormous debt-load. However, after 1930 box-office takings fell off so sharply that the company began to lose money and had difficulty meeting its loan commitments. Warner was not to show a profit again until 1935.

Its response to the financial crisis was to sell off assets (e.g. cinemas), introduce production units (to help control film budgets) and to make feature films as cheaply as possible.<sup>5</sup> Its series of studio-bound, fast-paced, topical films in the early 1930s were the direct result of this corporate policy.

By 1935, the fortunes of the company had improved sufficiently for it to return to profit again. As profits increased, so did film budgets. Studio genres changed too, with



the entrenchment of the melodrama, biopic, Merrie England and film noir genres in the late 1930s and early 1940s. As with the other Majors, profits reached record levels for Warner during and immediately after the Second World War.

### Warner as auteur during the studio era (its authorial style)

As discussed already, film production during the studio era was all about standardised assembly-line manufacturing practice. This is why there is such impressive consistency in the physical make-up of the classic Hollywood film of the period. However, individual film companies also needed to differentiate their products if they were to develop brand loyalty in their customers. Differentiation was partly a reflection of financial profiles of individual companies and partly a reflection of corporate worldview/ideology.

Throughout the studio era, Warner established and consolidated a house style based on casting, subject, treatment and technical standards: all evident across the work of different (contract) directors and across genres. Senior management control was very strong. Staff workers were assigned projects by management, they did not choose them. Indeed, management retained ultimate authority on all matters concerning productions, including control over the final cut, much to the chagrin of directors and stars.

Yet despite the authoritarian management style, ironically Warner's films of the studio era articulate a populist, liberal ethos. Several productions of the early 1930s were hard-hitting social critiques of the then Republican administration. The tone changes, however, from 1933 onwards, as Warner discards its anti-government position in favour of support for the new Roosevelt (Democratic) administration and its NRA programme (popularly known as the 'New Deal'). The ultimate endorsement of the NRA and Roosevelt must be *Footlight Parade* (1933), with its 'Shanghai Lil' dance routine incorporating images of the



• Plate 1.3

Still from *Footlight Parade* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933). James Cagney's character at the helm in this NRA-inspired musical



• Plate 1.4

Still from *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945). This shot typifies the studio-bound cinematographic style and art direction of Warner during the studio era. The scene, photographed by Ernest Haller, is shot with low-key lighting; the art direction by Anton Grot conveys an impression of a quayside through its use of space, shadow, silhouette and perspective.



NRA eagle and Roosevelt, and its leading protagonist (played by James Cagney) apparently inspired by Roosevelt himself!<sup>6</sup>

From the mid-1930s onwards, the radical streak in Warner's films is somewhat muted, no doubt reflective of the ideological change in America, changing from a climate of confrontation in the early to mid-1930s, to one of conciliation by the end of the decade. And profits were up again: the company was back 'in the black' by 1935, leading perhaps to greater conservatism in the boardroom, less risk-taking, and a desire for middle-brow respectability. Certainly the shift to costume drama (in the mid- to late 1930s) would suggest this. Whatever, Warner's liberal voice did continue throughout the 1930s and into the War Years (1941 to 1945), its support of the Roosevelt administration unabated. Seen today, the company's films of the studio era retain an 'edge' not really apparent in the films of any of the other Majors, except perhaps RKO in the 1940s.

Warner Brothers (like most of the major film companies of the studio era) specialised in particular genres. Up till the mid-1930s, the company concentrated on low-budget contemporary urban genres such as the gangster cycle, the social conscience film and the fast-talking comedy/drama. The one costly genre that Warner specialised in during this period was the musical. Later, from the mid-1930s onwards, new genres began to dominate: the swashbuckler cycle, the biopic, the melodrama and (later still) the film noir.

As one might expect, Warner's roster of players during the studio era reflected to a large extent the studio's reputation for straightforwardness and toughness. It is worth noting that Warner's stars tended to be very genre-specific; e.g. Bette Davis = melodrama, James Cagney = gangster film/musical, Humphrey Bogart = gangster film/film noir.

Costume design at Warner was to a large degree in keeping with the contemporary stories of many of its films. The studio's principal designers, Orry-Kelly for instance, designed modern clothes for ordinary people, in keeping with Warner's edgy urban image.

The factory-like regimentation of Warner's production methods meant that its studio style inevitably overwhelmed the individual creative talents of its contract directors. Pressure of work and division of labour meant that there was little active collaboration on projects between director and editor, or director and writer (Campbell 1971: 2). Directors were assigned projects and as soon as their task was done (sometimes directing only part of a film) they were moved on to others. It is thus rather

problematic to assign to Warner's contract directors such as Michael Curtiz, William Keighley, Mervyn Le Roy and Raoul Walsh<sup>7</sup> individual authorship of their films.

Warner's films were known for their 'fast' editing style, particularly evident in the early to mid-1930s. Narratives were developed in a rapid succession of scenes, with extensive use of classic Hollywood montage sequences. The overall effect was one of dynamism and compression of time (a good example of this can be seen in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939)).

Warner's art direction again reflected a low-cost policy: location work was avoided, films were designed around a studio-bound look and sets were regularly reused. The work of Anton Grot, a major art director at Warner during the studio era, typifies the studio style. His sets were designed to convey a mood. To this end his storyboards suggested camera and lighting strategies. The sets were not literal reproductions of life, but instead used shadow, silhouette and angular perspective.<sup>8</sup> He is quoted as saying, 'I for one do not like extremely realistic sets. I am for simplicity and beauty and you can achieve that only by creating an impression' (Deschner 1975: 22). The end result was art direction that was both economic and atmospheric, and in total sympathy with the studio's cinematography. Here, studio cameramen such as Tony Gaudio (see e.g. *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938)), Sol Polito (see e.g. *Now Voyager* (1942)), and Ernest Haller (see e.g. *Mildred Pierce* (1945)) reinforced the art direction of people like Grot, utilising a visual style based on low-key lighting, with a propensity for night scenes. Necessity is the mother of invention, and this corporate strategy for economic but effective mise-en-scène soon set the standard for generic conventions across the industry (particularly in film noir, the gangster film and in the swashbuckler).

Finally, most people could recognise Warner's films even with their eyes shut! If in other areas of production the byword was economy, here grandeur was the order of the day. Warner's composers of incidental music were among the most celebrated of the studio era. From the mid-1930s to the end of the studio era, studio composers Max Steiner (*Now Voyager* (1942) and *Mildred Pierce* (1945)) and Erich Wolfgang Korngold (*The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) and *King's Row* (1942)) created many scores in the Middle-European tradition of romantic composition, using Wagner-like leitmotifs (recurring melodic phrases used to suggest characters or ideas) throughout.

In summary, Warner's style of the 1930s and 1940s can thus be identified as a composite one, the product of its creative personnel working under the control and direction of corporate management. The various signifying elements that made up this style were reinforced film after film, year after year, producing what one now identifies as the studio-era Warner Brothers film.

### Question

How and why did the Warner Brothers film company differentiate its films from the other 'Majors' during the studio era?

## THE CONTEMPORARY FILM INDUSTRY (1949 ONWARDS)

The early twenty-first-century film industry is a very different affair from the system in operation during the studio era. This section looks at the contemporary institutional framework of film, first by examining the specifics within the film industry itself, and then by looking at the wider media context within which film exists today.

**trust**

A group of companies operating together to control the market for a commodity. This is illegal practice in the US.

**consent decree**

A court order made with the consent of both parties – the defendant and the plaintiff – which puts to rest the lawsuit brought against the former by the latter.

**1949 to the present: a brief review**

The Majors were finally forced to divest themselves of their theatres at the end of the 1940s as a result of the 'Paramount' anti-trust suit filed against them by the Justice Department of the US government.

The suit had been in the pipeline since the late 1930s, only the War had intervened. Paramount and RKO were the first of the Majors to agree with the US government as to the terms of their **consent decrees** in 1949 (Balio 1976: 317), putting to rest the government's charge against them of monopolistic practice in exhibition. The terms agreed were the divorcement of cinemas from the parent corporations. This effectively marked the end of the studio era.

The next few years saw a retrenchment of the Majors. Shorn of their cinemas, they no longer had a guaranteed market for their films and had to compete with independent producers for exhibition slots. Under the circumstances, they found their old studio infrastructure too expensive in the face of new market competition from the independents.

Meanwhile, for independents, things had never been better, with the Majors only too willing to rent them studio space and distribute their (better) films, and exhibitors eager to show them. The 1950s was to see an enormous explosion in independent production in the US. By 1957, 58 per cent of the films distributed by the erstwhile Big Five and Little Three were independent productions that they financed and/or distributed (ibid.: 353). United Artists led the industry in the distribution of independent films. With no studios to restructure and no long-term contract players, UA was able to respond very quickly to the post-1949 reality. In the year 1957, only Columbia Pictures distributed more films than UA.<sup>9</sup>

**• Plate 1.5**

Early 1950s advertisement for the (then) new Twentieth Century Fox widescreen Cinemascope system. The ad is intended to give consumers an idea of how the Cinemascope image (married with stereophonic sound) vastly improves the experience of cinema-going



Another shock to the film industry around the early 1950s was the postwar focus on the home and on consumer durables, evidenced in the exponential growth of television. People simply didn't go to the cinema in the same numbers any more (see next section). Between 1947 and 1950, the number of TV sets in the US rose from 14,000 to 4 million (see section below on film audiences). The film industry's response was twofold: differentiation from and collaboration with TV.

In the 1950s, various film presentation strategies were introduced to emphasise the difference between the film-going experience and TV viewing in a bid to stave off the harmful competition from film's 'at home' rival. Widescreen, colour, 3-D and stereophonic sound were all introduced in the period 1952 to 1954. However, at the end of the day it proved expedient for the industry to collaborate with 'the enemy'. Film companies began to sell (and later lease) their films to TV,<sup>10</sup> to make films for TV,<sup>11</sup> and to merge with TV companies.<sup>12</sup> By the late 1960s, the futures of the two media industries were inextricably linked. The situation by the mid-1980s was more complicated. The two industries had become integrated into multi-media conglomerates where they represented just two of the many associated interests of their parent corporations.

### Cinema exhibition today

Throughout the studio era and before, the most powerful sector of the film industry was exhibition. In today's film economy, however, distribution is the dominant sector (see below). The centrality of marketing (i.e. distribution), allied with the growth of home entertainment, means that profit today is not just a matter of burns on seats. Nevertheless, the profits of Majors *still* depend on product recognition and visibility, and here cinemas continue to be fundamental to the financial well-being of the Industry as a whole.

Theatrical presentation is no longer dominated by large, select, first-run movie theatres as in the studio era. Individual theatres are now usually small mini-theatres (average seating capacity 200 to 300 seats), and mainstream commercial films distributed by the Majors generally open simultaneously at a large number of these 'screens'.<sup>13</sup> Several screens are commonly housed under one roof – in multiplex theatres – where economies of scale (several screens sharing overheads) allow for low per-unit costs. These cinemas are often purpose-built, located on key artery roads outside of town centres (where land is cheaper and more readily available), and associated with shopping-mall developments. Since the mid-1990s there has been a large investment in new screens in the US (and elsewhere): in 1996 there were 26,500 screens in the US sector, and by 2000 the figure was 38,000 screens.<sup>14</sup> As a consequence, cinema attendance has increased, but the construction boom has also led to over-capacity in the marketplace, to bankruptcies and mergers. Now the top five US chains are Regal Entertainment (6,777 screens), AMC Theaters (5,336 screens), Cinemark (3,825 screens), Carmike (2,268 screens) and Cineplex (1,347 screens).<sup>15</sup> If they account for only 52 per cent of the screens in the US sector, they still collect 80 per cent of the American box office revenues. Why? Because the myriad of small theatre owners that make up the rest of the sector cannot compete with them in terms of industry profile and location.

### A history of multiplex theatres

The first company to realise the potential of the purpose-built, multi-screen theatre was American Multi-Cinema (AMC) in the 1960s. Its success with the multi-screen formula was so great that by the 1980s AMC was one of the five largest cinema chains in the US. Based on the statements of AMC's senior management in 1983, exhibitor aspirations appear to be the same as those way back in the days of the nickelodeon theatres: 'we prefer to locate theatres in middle-class areas inhabited by college-educated families . . . . These groups are the backbone of the existing motion picture audience and of our future audience' (Squire 1986: 329–30).

Another company notable for its development of the multi-screen concept is the Canadian company Cineplex. It opened its eighteen-screen Cineplex in Toronto's Eaton Centre in 1979, followed by a complex in the Beverly Centre, Los Angeles in 1982. After its purchase of the Odeon chain in Canada in the mid-1980s, it began its US acquisitions in earnest, so that by 1988 it was the largest theatre-chain in North America (Jowett and Linton 1989: 47). Cineplex–Odeon's UK acquisitions began in May 1988 with the purchase of the ten-screen Maybox Theatre in Slough. Within a year its Gallery Cinema chain in the UK consisted of eleven multiplexes.<sup>16</sup>

From the mid-1980s, Cineplex–Odeon led the exhibition industry in its construction of several mini-picture palaces and the introduction of cafés and kiosks selling film-related materials. The company did find itself in a fragile financial position in 1989: its debt-financing left it over-extended in a major recession (much like Warner in 1931). But by then the company's style and innovation had set the tone for contemporary mainstream exhibition practice.

### E-cinema and implications for exhibition

By 2007, around 4,000 of the world's estimated 100,000 screens were equipped with digital projectors (Greenwald and Landry 2009: 119). By 2020 the transition will be complete according to many media analysts. The changeover offers many advantages to the industry: no more expensive prints to manufacture (currently 35mm prints for a feature are approximately US\$1,500); relative ease and flexibility of delivery to theatres (by DVD, IP networks, cable or satellite); and the chance to expand into theatrical pay-per-view non-film content (e.g. football, pop concerts, etc.). And for independent distributors and producers in particular, the move to digital should prove a boon in bringing down their costs. However, there are disadvantages as well, the leading one being the cost and shelf life of the digital projector (\$100,000 each, and lasting on average five years) as opposed to an analogue film projector (\$50,000, and lasting twenty-plus years). Exhibitors are keen to know who is going to pick up the tab for the conversion, and given the huge financial savings for financiers-cum-distributors, exhibitors are naturally seeking financial support from them. As I write, it appears that installation and conversion costs in mainstream cinemas are now being met largely by the Majors (ibid.: 119). Other challenges to overcome include the assurance that movies will arrive at theatres without being degraded, altered or stolen.

### Runs

It is worth noting that there are a variety of different types of cinema-run in operation today. A run can be **exclusive**, **multiple** or **saturation**. Combinations of runs are selected (largely at the discretion of distributors) on the basis of a film's likely performance. For instance, the exhibition of a word-of-mouth 'sleeper' – a small-budget film that does unexpectedly well at the box office – will usually begin with a semi-exclusive run, until it has built up enough of a reputation to warrant a wider run.

A typical example of a saturation run is the release pattern of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in 2001 (UK title *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*). It set a record in US exhibition history on Friday 16 November 2001, by opening 'superwide' in a record number of cinemas – 3,672 – and on around 8,000 screens (then approximately 21 per cent of the nation's total). In the UK the number was around 500 cinemas and 1,140 screens (then approximately 38 per cent of the nation's total). In both cases, openings were accompanied by huge marketing campaigns around the time of release (see the end of this section on AOL Time Warner synergy).

### The UK scenario

Britain is the third largest cinema market in the developed world, with 3,665 screens. As is the case elsewhere, digitalisation has 'coincided' with the international Majors divesting themselves of cinema chains. Why? Because they control exhibition/distribution money

#### exclusive run

Where a film is only screened in one cinema.

#### multiple run

Where a film is shown simultaneously at a number of cinemas. 'Platforming' a movie in a few cities, in up to 200 screens, can help build up word-of-mouth enthusiasm for 'off-centre' (mainstream but not blockbuster) films.

#### saturation run

Where a film opens 'wide' and is shown simultaneously at an enormous number of cinemas, accompanied by heavy media promotion. Increasingly, 'superwide' openings are becoming an entrenched strategy for 'event' films such as the big summer releases where a film can open in 3,000-plus US and Canadian screens simultaneously. 'Superwide' openings help ensure that big films reap big returns at the box office, particularly on the opening weekend, before the reviews come out.



deals anyway (see below), and big profits up until very recently have been made elsewhere, in the digital home-entertainment sector. In fact, Paramount remains the only Hollywood major to have a presence in UK exhibition (in the form of National Amusements, a shareholder of Viacom – owner of Paramount).

According to industry estimates, the UK's five largest exhibition companies account for 75 per cent of the UK screens and 80 per cent of the box-office returns. These companies are Odeon, Cineworld, Vue, National Amusements Showcase and Empire. Odeon is the biggest of the exhibitors with 840 'screens', followed by Cineworld (773 screens), Vue (655 screens), National Amusements (274 screens) and Empire (213 screens).<sup>17</sup>

Independent cinemas account for only 20 per cent of the box-office revenue in the UK. Under the label 'independent' are many different types of cinema organisation. Some independents are simply smaller chains showing mainstream fare. Others show a mixture of blockbuster, 'off-centre' (mainstream but not blockbuster) and 'art' films. Other cinemas specialise in the screening of minority interest/alternative films.

Schemes to offset the dominance of the blockbuster in UK cinemas include the Europa Cinemas scheme (administered by EU Media Programme) which makes available to UK exhibitors public monies to assist in the showing of European film. However, cinemas must meet a minimum target of 15 to 25 per cent non-national EU/Norway/Iceland/Liechtenstein/Switzerland/Bulgaria films to qualify.

Power and control are two hotly disputed areas in the film industry in the UK today. Some parties argue that despite the renaissance in cinema-going in the UK, structural domination by the Majors in distribution means that non-Hollywood product (including UK film) does not get a fair crack of the whip in UK cinemas. This is due to the Majors' influence over exhibitors, who will not endanger the main source of their revenue. Others dismiss the conspiracy theories and point out the obvious – that the Hollywood product has the advantage of high production costs, high marketing budgets and film stars, and that these are the films that the public want to see and exhibitors want to show.

Mindful of the problem, in the recent past the (soon to be disbanded) UK Film Council has nudged big cinema chains to widen their exhibition base and show a greater variety of fare. One of the ways it is doing so is through the 'Digital Screen Network', which was set up at the end of 2005. Exhibitors that qualify for the National Lottery-funded scheme have their projectors paid for by the Film Council. The bidding process requires that cinemas identify which screens will be given over to cultural/minority interest film. To date 240 screens have been fitted out digitally under this scheme, all part of a greater Industry programme to full digital conversion of UK cinemas. Currently there are an estimated 550 digital screens in the UK (15 per cent of total UK screens).

Whether considering large chains or small, most UK cinemas are multiscreens today. The turning point in UK exhibition is usually taken as November 1985 when the purpose-built multiplex, the Point, first opened its doors in Milton Keynes. However, it should be noted that the company Screen 4 had been building four-screens in the north since the mid-1960s, and ones that were effectively purpose-built. Nevertheless, the success of the Point and other early multiplexes, such as the Maybox in Slough, triggered a new investment in British exhibition and a resurgence in the cinema-going habit in the UK. A year prior to the opening of the Point, cinema attendance was down to 52 million admissions per year. By 1996, that figure had risen to 123.5 million admissions, by 2005 to 166 million and by 2009 to 173.5 million. The multiplex has played a crucial role in this renaissance of cinema-going by offering the punter a choice of viewing in a modern, comfortable environment. (See section on 'Film audiences' for more information on contemporary UK cinema-going.)

*For further discussion  
of British cinema see  
Chapter 14.*

## Distribution today

Since the late 1940s' consent decrees, the power base in the industry has shifted from exhibition to production finance and distribution, i.e. from the power base of the

pre-1949 Majors to the power base of the post-1949 Majors (Balio 1976: 458–67). This shift reflects the fact that film revenue is no longer purely a function of cinema receipts. With the financial dominance of other distribution ‘windows’ (especially DVD and VOD – see below) and merchandising spin-offs, access to a major’s worldwide distribution/marketing network has become the determining factor in a film’s financial success.

The names of the Majors are all very familiar from the studio era: Paramount, Warner Brothers, Sony Pictures, Universal, Disney and 20th Century Fox. Through their domination of marketing and promotion, the Majors ensure that it is their films that the public wants to see and that cinema owners want to secure for their cinemas. Witness the reaction of the public and the exhibitors to the beat of the distributors’ tom-tom with blockbuster releases such as *Jurassic Park* (Universal, summer 1993) and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (Warner Brothers, autumn 2001).

Today, a major financier–distributor stands between the producer (if not directly producing the film itself) and the exhibitor. It will largely dictate the business terms which shape a film’s finance and exploitation.

As noted by the ex-chairman of Cineplex-Odeon Garth Drabinsky in 1976:

If, but only if, a distributor . . . decides that the picture merits release and the kind of expenditures necessary to get it off the ground, the distributor will enter into a distribution agreement with the producer to govern their relationship.<sup>18</sup>

For the most part, the distributor dictates the terms of its deal with the exhibitor as well: the nature of the run, the length of the engagement, the advertising to be employed and the financial split of box-office receipts between the various parties. It has also been reported that it is common practice for distributors to exploit their upper hand with exhibitors and insist on blind-bidding and block-booking.

### Distribution windows

Up until the mid-1970s, apart from the theatrical release, the only distribution windows were network and syndicated TV. The new age of film distribution began in 1975 with the introduction of Time Inc.’s Home Box Office cable pay-TV (HBO) and Sony’s domestic Betamax videocassette recorder (VCR). The following year, Matsushita introduced the VHS format for domestic VCRs. This format soon overtook Betamax and became the industry standard.

Roll on two decades, and the first commercial Digital Versatile Disc (DVD) players appeared in Japan in 1996. Early manufacturers were Toshiba, Pioneer and Matsushita. DVDs were designed to compete with VHS, which they have completely superseded. As early as 2001 the DVD market was growing at ten times the VHS market, with Blockbuster Video estimating that 30 per cent of its US rental business was DVD.<sup>19</sup>

The phenomenal success of DVD lay in the high quality of the image and sound, the increased storage capacity compared to video (up to eight hours of high-quality video, up to eight tracks of digital audio and interactive features) and DVD as a cross-platform. And just like the VHS/Betamax trade war of the 1970s, in 2005/6 manufacturers vied with each other for control of the marketplace. This time around, however, it was Sony who was declared the winner, with its ‘Blu-ray’ format. Five out of six Majors backed it, in preference to Toshiba’s HD DVD.<sup>20</sup> Clearly Sony had learned its lesson well since the Betamax debacle when it had no films to support the launch of the format. Now Sony’s holdings in film libraries alone were huge: it owned the rights to the movies/TV of Columbia/Sony Pictures and MGM (its library acquired as part of a consortium purchase in 2005 to add weight to the Blu-ray trade war – Sony owns 20 per cent of MGM). Overall, Sony’s pre-eminence in the film business as hardware/software provider made its success in the battle with Toshiba almost inevitable.

The economic importance of DVD has led to a closing of the gap between the cinema release and the DVD release dates. A typical distribution cycle for a Studio film in the US

For further discussion on multimedia empires, see end of this section (pp. 30–31).

For a discussion on DVDs and audiences, see Case study on *Gladiator* (pp. 23), and section on ‘Film audiences’, pp. 31.

will now be an initial theatrical release of around four months, followed by a DVD window (which remains open for an indefinite period). Usually there is a 30-day period from DVD release to online availability – video-on-demand (VOD) and pay-per-view. This is followed by a premium cable movie channel window (for approximately one year), a free-to-air television window plus other sources of income.

Yet despite the economic importance of DVD and other windows in recent years, the *theatrical window* remains the most important window in film distribution. Without it, the film is a far less valuable commodity. It garners no publicity and is perceived as having no ‘value’ by punters.

So what of the future? Recent sales of DVDs have fallen since the golden age between 1999 and 2004, seriously affecting Industry profits. Now the DVD is seen as old technology. Industry pundits predict that soon we’ll be back to two main windows: the theatrical window and an online, domestic, video-on-demand window, replacing the DVD completely. The home entertainment market will be transformed by a system of ‘time critical’ downloads whereby customers are charged different prices depending on how long the VOD download is good for on their computers – whether it is permanent or for just a few days.

A little indication of the importance of new media distribution is indicated by the success of web companies like ifilm and atomfilms, who more than five years ago revolutionised distribution of short films by releasing them on their websites. A notable early ‘short’ to be distributed this way was *405* (2000), put out on ifilm.com. Flash forward a few years, to 2006, and another multimedia company, 2929 Entertainment, announced a ‘universal release’ (simultaneously on video-on-demand and in cinemas) of their film *Bubble*, directed by Steven Soderbergh. So will the gap between theatrical and VOD eventually disappear altogether, as in this particular case? Not for the time being, but possibly in the future. Ultimately, pressure from consumers will likely decide the outcome (see below).

## Marketing

One of the key roles of a financier–distributor is to successfully orchestrate the marketing of a film. The three main types of advertising used in film marketing are: **free publicity**, **paid advertising** and **tie-ins/merchandising**.

### free publicity

Free coverage of subjects the media feel are newsworthy.

### paid advertising

Promotion on TV, radio, billboards, printed media and the internet (see ‘Multi-media empires’ below).

### tie-ins

Mutually beneficial promotional liaisons between films and other consumer products and/or personalities.

### merchandising

Where manufacturers pay a film company to use a film title or image on their products.

## □ CASE STUDY 2: MARKETING A BLOCKBUSTER IN THE PRE-INTERNET ERA: *JURASSIC PARK* (1993)

Below is a summary of Universal’s UK marketing campaign for *Jurassic Park* at the time of its cinema release in 1993:<sup>21</sup>

Free media publicity included reports on:

- Spielberg
- the making of the film and the special effects
- the premiere
- genetic engineering
- dinomania

Paid advertising included:

- TV, radio, billboards, newspapers, magazines (today this would foreground the internet)
- A TV blitz the week before and the week of the film’s opening

Tie-ins included:

- multi-million-dollar tie-ins with McDonald’s and selected hotels



Merchandising included:

*For a discussion of Jurassic Park (1993) and computer animation, see Chapter 10.*

- JP holographic watches
- JP vinyl model dinosaur kits
- JP pinball machines
- JP socks
- JP briefs
- JP Christmas cards!

### □ CASE STUDY 3: MARKETING IN THE INTERNET ERA. PARAMOUNT'S ONLINE MARKETING CAMPAIGN FOR *PARANORMAL ACTIVITY* (2007) PRIOR TO GENERAL RELEASE



• Plate 1.6  
Poster from *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007). In the age of the internet '[the web] spreads the word, it generates loyalty, and it pinpoints the fanbase...' (quoting Stuart Ford)

In the age of the internet, film marketing has been transformed. The story of 'no-budget' *Paranormal Activity* exemplifies the new powers of internet marketing.

In October 2007, there was a sneak preview of the film at 'Screamfest', the LA horror festival. A year later, in November 2008, the film had its first public screening in Santa Monica.

In 2009, Paramount started building a campaign online for this 'pick-up' (a film it distributed but didn't produce/finance). Punters could 'demand' that the movie be screened at a cinema local to them with a click on the computer. Enough clicks and the movie would play there. Quoting Stuart Ford, the film's sales agent, Paramount's cheeky campaign could be neatly summarised as, 'You like it so much? You want it? Then demand it! Tell us where you want it to play and we'll play it there!'<sup>22</sup>

The gambit paid off. Handsomely! On 25 September 2009 the film had a very limited release in the US on twelve screens in 'college towns' across the country (including Boston, Chicago and San Francisco). Only a few weeks later, on 16 October 2009, the film went on national release (763 screens) and straight to the top at the box office. By

23 October, the film was showing at 2,000 screens, and by 29 December 2009, the DVD had been released. The film went on to gross US\$194 million at the cinema, with DVD sales at US\$14 million.

Again quoting Stuart Ford, '[the web] spreads the word, it generate loyalty, and it pinpoints the fanbase ... It showed us that, for marketing, it can be so much more potent than traditional media.'<sup>23</sup>

*For a discussion on building an audience today, see next section on 'Film Audiences'.*

### The UK scenario

The international Majors dominate UK distribution, and each of them has a UK subsidiary to handle its distribution (namely UIP, Buena Vista International, Columbia/Tristar, Fox International and Warner Brothers International). However, there are also public mechanisms available to assist smaller, independent European distributors with the marketing and distribution of their films. The Media Programme, for instance, is an EU initiative whereby European distributors of films and DVD receive loans to help with distribution and promotion costs within European markets (70 per cent of the Programme's main budget is devoted to the distribution of new films).<sup>24</sup> As welcome as the Programme is, inevitably it is a 'drop in the ocean' when set against the power of the Majors. It is not surprising, then, that the future trends in UK distribution patterns are expected to mirror those in the US.

I have mentioned already the predicted shift to two distribution windows: cinema and VOD. This is because many in the industry see DVD as old technology. The UK market moved a little closer to this in March 2006 when Universal announced a deal with lovefilm.com – an online DVD rental firm – whereby costumers would be able to download the latest Universal releases on to their laptops, either for a few days or for keeps.

### Production today

Before examining the key players that dominate mainstream film production today – the Majors, independent producers, agents/management groups and stars (see below) – it is useful to review the current industrial organisation of film production.

The industrial system in operation today is called the 'package-unit' system (Bordwell et al. 1985: 330–7). Under this system, the self-contained studio and long-term contract studio employee of the studio era have been replaced by rented studio space and short-term contract employment.

The shift to the package-unit system from the mid-1950s onwards was a direct response to the combined effects of the 1949 consent decrees: in other words, the rise of independent production, cost-cutting and rationalisation at the Majors' studios, and the Majors leasing studio space to independent producers.

Today, individual producers are responsible for bringing together all the components of a film's production – finance, personnel, the 'property', equipment, studio space – on a short-term, film-by-film basis.

Budget has always been the principal preoccupation of the producer, but today, under the package-unit system, this is true more than ever. So called 'above-the-line' budget costs are those that are up-front (such as book rights, fees for producers, directors, stars), whereas 'below-the-line' costs refer to the day-to-day expenses incurred on a production (such as crew fees, post-production costs).

### Majors v. independents

Despite the growth of **independent** production after the consent decrees, the Majors had reclaimed their dominance in production by the early 1970s. Between the years 1970 and 1987, films directly produced by the Majors collected on average 84 per cent of the total US/Canadian box-office returns (Jowett and Linton 1989: 38).

#### independent

A highly problematic term, meaning different things in different situations. Here, the term simply implies a production realised outside one of the Majors. Here, the term does not imply a production context outside the mainstream institutional framework altogether, nor does it imply a film produced in an alternative aesthetic format to 'Classic Hollywood'.

Today the six Majors typically account for 90–95 per cent of the total box office revenue in the US/Canada sector. Why the increase in their share? Because since the 1980s there has been an increase in corporate consolidation across the media sector by parent companies who own the Majors (see ‘synergy’ below). These multimedia empires exert a stranglehold on the global marketplace through mergers and acquisitions, e.g. National Amusements (parent company and exhibitor) owns Paramount Pictures (distributor and production company).

### New media and production

Launched by Artisan Films at the 1999 Sundance Film Festival (a showcase for independent film), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) was perhaps the first big box-office film (albeit a ‘ sleeper ’ hit) to use extensive digital camera footage. Since then, the industry interest in digital video-making has skyrocketed, due partly to the flexibility of the technology, and to the lower costs of production. So much so that by 2001, more than 40 per cent of the projects submitted to the Sundance Festival were shot on digital formats.<sup>25</sup> In the intervening years Hollywood has also jumped on the digital bandwagon, so that hi-definition cameras on blockbuster productions are now the order of the day in films such as *Superman Returns* (2006), with a reported budget of \$225 million.<sup>26</sup>

### □ CASE STUDY 4: THE ASCENDANCY OF 3D ANIMATED DIGITAL PRODUCTION: AVATAR (2009)

2009 marked a watershed year for digital 3D technology in the film industry, with more than a dozen films released in the new format. In that year, the Industry stopped considering 3D merely as a (profitable) carrot, to enhance the appeal of animated features for young audiences. It was now also seen as a means of offering a new cinematic experience to adult filmgoers around the globe. The breakthrough film was *Avatar*. James Cameron’s film raised the bar for 3D cinema by blending seamlessly live action footage with computer-generated images through the use of new technologies. These included new generation motion-capture computer graphics (CG), a ‘virtual’ camera system (allowing the production team to see in real time how the CG characters would interact with their virtual worlds), and a specially developed ‘fusion’ 3D camera – a digital system with adjustable lenses functioning like two eyes connected to a single ‘brain’ (rather than the old 3D camera where the action was filmed by two separate, leaden cameras).

Production costs for *Avatar* were put at between US\$280 million and US\$310 million, with US\$150 million for marketing. To date the worldwide box office gross has been US\$2.75 billion, three-quarters of which has been outside the US/Canada sector.

### Agents, stars and Oscars

The ending of long-term studio contracts for creative personnel in the early 1950s (a consequence of the rationalisation of studios by the majors after the consent decrees) meant that important stars, directors, writers and other talent could now negotiate very lucrative freelance deals with film companies.<sup>27</sup> Their increased negotiating power also strengthened the hand of their agents who negotiated their deals with the film companies. The most powerful agency at the time was MCA, controlled by Jules Stein and Lew Wasserman.

So successful was MCA during the 1950s that it purchased Universal in 1959. (The agency’s dominance ended in 1962, when MCA closed down its talent agency to concentrate on film and TV production.)

Today there are four big talent agencies in Hollywood: Creative Artists Agency (CAA), William Morris Endeavor Entertainment, International Creative Management (ICM) and

United Talent Agency (UTA). Apart from these four, there are many smaller ‘boutique’ agencies who handle a select number of important clients.

If it is their clients’ faces that appear on magazine covers, it is the agencies that oil the Hollywood film machine. Agencies identify scripts, put them in the hands of their clients – directors, producers as well as actors – and strike the deals with the film companies. Occasionally the big agencies even offer groups of creative personnel (with possibly a literary property as well) as a joint package to a production company for a single film or TV production. A recent example of this was the ‘package’ UTA put together for the film *Dear John* (2009), utilising clients Lasse Hallström (director), Channing Tatum (actor) and Nicholas Sparks (writer).<sup>28</sup>

In the 2010 Oscar nominations, CAA clients secured thirty-five nominations, those of William Morris Endeavor fourteen nominations, those of UTA nine nominations and those of ICM eight nominations. Is it any wonder, that CAA – with the biggest roster of names (Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, Will Smith, George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, Oprah Winfrey), should have secured the most nominations? Not really: Oscars are awarded by Industry members of the (US) Academy of Arts and Sciences, and often reflect corporate standing and financial power in the Industry. In Hollywood, artistry, finance and power go hand in hand.

### Future trends

At present a star’s association with a film project clearly affects the ease with which the film can be financed and marketed, for a star’s presence in a film is held to be an important factor in a film’s box-office performance. These factors explain the huge salaries agents negotiate today. However, some statistics suggest that stars are less a factor in a film’s box-office success than was once the case.<sup>29</sup> And if, as Industry analysts are predicting, film moves away from an exclusive, front-loaded, marketing-led, theatrical window to a concurrent VOD window, then perhaps film companies will no longer be slaves to the ‘excessive’ demands of agents and their star clients, because marquee value isn’t as necessary with VOD.

The 2006 departure of Tom Cruise from Paramount is perhaps a note of warning to agents, and – pardon the pun – a ‘window’ into the future. In that year CAA’s deal for his services – in place for years with Paramount – of 20 per cent of the gross and US\$20 million up front, *plus* studio expenses for the Cruise team (estimated at US\$5 million per year), was abruptly cancelled by Paramount. Industry commentators made the obvious point that despite recent box-office hits like *Mission Impossible III* (2006) – with a theatrical gross of US\$400 million – Paramount was not making enough money, given the cost of Cruise and his entourage.<sup>30</sup>

*For further discussion of the star in film, see Chapter 7.*

## □ CASE STUDY 5: A US ‘BLOCKBUSTER’ PRODUCTION, *GLADIATOR* (2000)

### Script development and pre-production

In 1996 David Franzoni (producer-writer) approached Dreamworks SKG with a story about gladiators in ancient Rome. The story was then developed by him in collaboration with head of Dreamworks Pictures Walter Parkes and producer Douglas Wick.

The producers felt that their planned film needed a director who could manage the cinematic spectacle that would feature in it. Hence, they approached Ridley Scott who relished the prospect of recreating a detailed historical environment that would be realistic. The creation of detailed worlds that were believable on their own terms, irrespective of genre, had been a hallmark of earlier Scott productions such as *Alien* (1979), *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Someone to Watch Over Me* (1987). Once the great metteur-en-scène agreed to direct, script development began in earnest.

Franzoni produced the first draft of the screenplay, with John Logan and William Nicholson working as collaborators later on. In the process, the games in the Roman



• Plate 1.7

Still from *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000). Maximus (Russell Crowe) and his fellow gladiators – tensile, hard-muscled and armoured – salute the roaring crowds in the Colosseum as they and their Dreamworks/Universal picture enjoy the sweet smell of success

arena came to occupy the central focus of the narrative. And for many months before production began, Scott worked on sketches of the key scenes and on storyboards with Sylvain Despretz. This production was to reflect Scott's long-held notion that direction is akin to orchestration, with incident, sound, movement, colour, sets and computer graphics all knitted together under his watchful eye.<sup>31</sup>

The film would be jointly produced, financed and distributed by DreamWorks and Universal – the former having had a long-standing distribution arrangement with the latter.<sup>32</sup>

It was decided that location shooting would bring down the cost of the production, rather than trying to construct everything in Hollywood. However, filming on the site of historical monuments was impossible because of the likely damage incurred during filming, and because of the often poor condition of the sites to begin with. Therefore scouting commenced in Europe and North Africa for locations that could accommodate new sets. Such was the scale of the production that individual design departments were assigned to each of the major locations (UK, Morocco and Malta) by Arthur Max, the film's overall production designer. In each location, 'sets, props and costumes were custom-made for the film', or sets were added to existing buildings (Landau 2000: 66).

The biggest set, that of 'ancient Rome', was built at Port Mifisalfi, Malta, over nineteen weeks in the winter of 1998–99, just prior to filming. The set included a full-scale section of the Roman Colosseum (the rest would be filled in using computer graphics), as well as sets for the emperor's palace, the Forum and the Roman marketplace. This huge complex of sets was built on to disused nineteenth-century barracks on the site to add



an air of authenticity to the look of the production. This is a favoured technique of Scott's to add verisimilitude to the world he is creating, as per the sets of *Blade Runner* which were built on to old Warner Brothers' city sets to legitimise the film's noir mise-en-scène.

### Production and post-production

From the beginning, the shoot was a very complex affair. The scale of the production – with a mammoth budget of over US\$100 million, scenes involving thousands of extras and a four-month shoot in four countries – necessitated the use of four different crews.

Principal photography commenced at the beginning of February 1999 in Bourne Woods, Farnham, Surrey, after the construction of a Roman encampment, a stake barricade and a forest dwelling. The opening battle scene – set in Germania in the film – was a hugely involved affair incorporating replicas of Roman war machines and an army of 1,000 extras. Shooting was finally wrapped up in the UK on 24 February 1999<sup>33</sup> from where the production moved to Morocco.

Morocco was the setting in the movie for the gladiator school. In preparation for filming, the local production crew had been busy for nine weeks, since December, 1998.<sup>34</sup> In all, the shoot took three weeks here, after which the production moved to Malta for the 'Rome' scenes.

Again, preparation of the sets had begun long before shooting: because of the scale of the set, construction had begun nineteen weeks earlier. And despite bad storms damaging the set,<sup>35</sup> filming commenced around mid-March and was completed by the end of May 1999.<sup>36</sup> This part of the shoot involved the large-scale Colosseum scenes incorporating 2,000 extras.

Finally, there followed a two-day shoot in Tuscany, which was the chosen location for the home of Maximus in the film. This work – involving Ridley Scott, the main crew (which travelled from location to location), doubles and stunt doubles – marked the end of the long location schedule.<sup>37</sup>

The film was then completed at Shepperton studios, but not before the extraordinary computer visual effects work of Mill Film (London) was incorporated into the film to create the composite shots of the Colosseum. Computer-graphic imaging (CGI) was used to complete the circumference of the first tier of the stadium and to create the second and third tiers. CGI was also used to increase the number of spectators in the Colosseum from 2,000 to 35,000, and to extend other vistas on the Rome set.<sup>38</sup>

The film was edited by Ridley Scott and Pietro Scalia, and scored by Hans Zimmer (head of DreamWorks' film music division) and Lisa Gerrard. With the completion of post-production, Scott delivered the picture to DreamWorks on time and on budget (US\$106 million).<sup>39</sup>

### Distribution and exhibition

For the film's marketing poster, DreamWorks SKG (responsible for marketing the film in the US/Canada territory) and United International Pictures (Universal's marketing arm and responsible for international distribution) promoted a low-angled, medium-long shot of the film's star, Russell Crowe, in costume as Maximus. Here for all to see was the towering presence of a rectilinear, hard, tough male action star with classical adornments of armour and phallic sword. At his feet, literally, lay the Colosseum, across the base of the poster. The powerhouse epic, *Gladiator*, had been launched!

The movie's marketing campaign was the standard one for a blockbuster: saturation booking technique with simultaneous media promotion on a massive scale. The film opened superwide in the US/Canada market on 5 May 2000 in approximately 3,000 screens. With such a big opening, the film caught the imagination of the punters even before the reviews came out – which is of course the purpose of a big opening. But

the makers needn't have worried, for the reviews were very favourable. In its opening weekend the film grossed around US\$35 million and went straight to number one at the box office. This success was repeated the following weekend in the UK, where the film opened in around 400 screens and grossed approximately £3.5 million.<sup>40</sup>

Merchandising was kept to a minimum so as not to undermine the 'quality' message of the marketing campaign. Available to buy were the soundtrack, books on the film's production and the movie poster – which was soon becoming an iconic image. Tie-ins included Sega games and offers of holidays to Rome.

By the end of the film's box-office run, *Gladiator* had grossed around US\$452 million worldwide, with takings of \$188 million in the US market alone.<sup>41</sup> But the story didn't end there. On 21 November 2000, the DVD and video were released in the US/Canada market. The DVD two-disc set included the following extras: audio commentary by Ridley Scott, eleven deleted scenes from the movie, a behind-the-scenes documentary, a history of gladiatorial games and a theatre trailer, among others.

Evidently, large sales of the DVD were anticipated for the forthcoming holiday season because prior to the release date 2.6 million copies of the DVD were shipped to retail outlets. *Gladiator* sales more than met expectations, for it went on to become the biggest selling DVD in the US. Sales everywhere were remarkable: in the UK too it became the biggest selling DVD. Eventually, worldwide sales clocked in at around 4.5 million units – the biggest selling DVD up until that time.

And so, with the financial and critical momentum afforded the film, nothing could prevent it from being nominated for twelve Oscars or from winning five in March 2001: for best film, best actor (Russell Crowe), best costume design (Janty Yates), best sound and best visual effects.

The film was, of course, distributed to pay-per-view channels, and subsequently to premium cable/satellite movie channels. In the UK, the film debuted on Sky Premier movie channel in October 2001, and announcements were made in 2001 of a deal having been struck for its terrestrial TV debut in 2003. The keenly contested battle among UK broadcasters for the first-run terrestrial rights was further evidence – if indeed further evidence was necessary – of the global distribution phenomenon that *Gladiator* had become.

In summary, the UK distribution windows for *Gladiator* are to date as follows:



For further discussion of the funding and finance of British film see Chapter 14, pp. 395–96. For further reference to and analysis of contemporary British film see Chapter 14, pp. 380–96.

### The UK scenario

British feature films today are generally made on low to medium budgets, and are usually co-productions where film finance comes from a range of sources. Dominant players are UK and foreign terrestrial TV companies, film companies and cable/satellite companies.

By nature the UK industry is fiscally conservative, and therefore its producers are, by experience, usually short of money. 'Pack-of-cards' financing is usually the order of



the day, where each source of funding is dependent on the participation of the other co-producers.

For most low to medium budget productions, a typical sequence of events for developing and producing a feature film is as follows. Applications are first made by the creative team<sup>42</sup> for development money to produce a preliminary script and project budget. Funding sources include the commissioning groups themselves and the European Media programme (19 per cent of whose main budget is allocated for development money).

Having produced its preliminary script and budget, the creative team then seeks sources to fund the production proper. As each source of finance comes on board, the script is changed to fit in with the requirements of the specific investor. The backers are inevitably financiers-cum-distributors, and monies from the distribution deals made for each 'territory' – i.e. US, UK and the rest of the world – are used to fund the production. Once the budget is fixed, pre-production in earnest begins with the preparation of the final script and budget.

### TV money for UK film production

For twenty years Channel 4 was the British channel most actively engaged in film production. From its launch in 1982, it participated in well over 300 films including *My Beautiful Launderette* (1986), *The Crying Game* (1992), *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Trainspotting* (1996) and *Secrets & Lies* (1996). And like the BBC – its terrestrial rival in film production – it favoured co-productions. But in 2002 C4 announced a huge cutback in film finance, partly as a consequence of the failure of its big budget films at the box office: films such as *Charlotte Gray* (co-produced with Warners, 2001). In the last few years, its old rival, BBC Films, has enjoyed a moderate success, with films such as *Match Point* (2006), directed by Woody Allen. And the Corporation looks like 'upping the ante' with the announcement, in 2006, of a minimum investment of £150 million in domestic film production over ten years (up from £10 million/year). Many in the UK industry are banking on this, and in the words of BBC creative director, Alan Yentob, 'the relationship between TV and film [in the UK] is a very potent one'.<sup>43</sup>

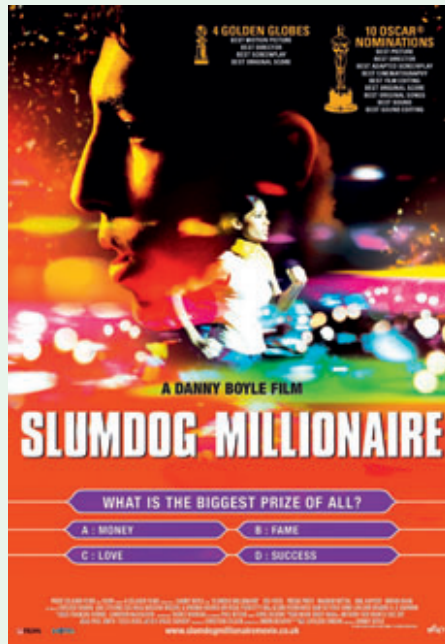
As I write, Film4 (C4's film production arm) has found itself in very financially strained circumstances, despite recent successes like *Slumdog Millionaire* ((2008) – see below). Wherever the future money comes from for UK production, many commentators agree that what is needed are more films like *Slumdog* – popular films that are also distinctive and personal. To these commentators, British filmmaking policy can often appear stuck in an entrenched position of pigeon-holing film as either 'cultural' or 'genre'. Sad as it is, the announcement by Jeremy Hunt, the Culture Secretary, in July 2010, of the abolition of the publicly funded UK Film Council might be reflective of the failure of such a position.

#### □ CASE STUDY 6: A MEDIUM-BUDGET UK PRODUCTION: SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE (2008)

*Slumdog Millionaire* is a 2008 British film directed by Danny Boyle. It is an adaptation of the novel *Q & A* (2005) by the Indian author Vikas Swarup, and has been chosen as a case study because it typifies the model of film finance most common in the UK today. TV co-productions, with perhaps smaller budgets than *Slumdog*, have dominated UK film production since the late 1980s.

The film was co-produced by Film4 (the movie division of C4 in the UK) and Celador Productions. In 2006, when the co-production deal was signed, Celador was a TV production company and owner of the rights to *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* (1998–present) – the most successful TV franchise in history, and a key part of the future film's storyline.

- **Plate 1.8**  
Poster from *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle, 2008). TV co-productions such as 'Slumdog' typify the model for film finance in the UK today.



### Script research and development

The project began life in 2005 when Head of Film and Drama at C4, Tessa Ross, optioned the book. Simon Beaufoy, the screenwriter of *The Full Monty* (1997) was hired very soon after, with Film4 funding the script development. In preparing the script, Beaufoy made three research trips to India, and interviewed street children.

In early 2006, a co-production deal was signed with Celador Productions, and in summer 2006, after reading Beaufoy's script, Danny Boyle agreed to direct the film.

### Distribution deal 1

At this point, the project was greenlit, but still needed extra funds to meet the US\$15 million budget. This was provided eventually in August 2007, when Warner Independent Pictures acquired the North American distribution rights to the film for US\$5 million. Monies from this deal were used to fund production costs (a standard arrangement).

### Pre-production

Casting was difficult and 'took forever' (quoting Boyle) because the three main characters in the film needed to age from seven to eighteen years. Three lots of actors were needed for each character, to play 7-, 13- and 18-year-olds respectively. Dev Patel, who plays the principal protagonist, Jamal (aged eighteen), was cast early on in London. He was an established young actor from the hit series *Skins* (2007–present), produced by E4 – a digital division of C4. The rest of the cast were Indian nationals. Much was made in the press later of the fact that two of the '7-year-olds' were local 'slumdogs'. Anil Kapoor, a big star in India, was also cast in the film as the nasty host of the (Indian) version of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*.

One of the Indian casting directors – Loveleen Tandan – penned the Hindi dialogue for the script, and stepped in as co-director just before shooting to help with the local cast.

The UK production team travelled to Mumbai in September 2007. A 'pre-shoot' strategy was put in place – filming around Mumbai in advance of the agreed start-up date – ostensibly to try out equipment, test the locations, etc. In the end some of this material appeared in the final film.

## Production

'Officially' shooting began on 5 November 2007. The cameraman, Anthony Dod Mantle, shot the film on small digital SI-2K cameras with gyro stabilisers, incorporating a lot of hand-held shots. Why? Because these small cameras made filming on location, in the tight, crowded areas of Mumbai (the slums, the Victoria Terminus) infinitely easier than the bigger film cameras typically used by Bollywood and Hollywood companies – who of course mainly shoot in studios. Also used in the production was the digital CanonCam stills camera, which can shoot at 12 frames per second. These images were imported into the film to give it a definite 'new media' look. The overall digital strategy resulted in a film with an immediacy, an energy, that simply couldn't have been matched with larger 'professional' film cameras.

## Distribution deal 2

In August 2008, Warner Brothers, doubting the commercial potential of the (by then) completed film, sold off half its interest in the film to Fox Searchlight (a division of 20th Century Fox), with Fox now handling US/Canada distribution. International distribution was to be handled by Pathe.

## Exhibition/distribution

The exhibition formula used to launch this film was a classic strategy for a no-star, moderate budget, 'off-centre' film. The film had its world premiere at the Telluride Film festival on 30 August 2008, where it was positively received, and in September 2008, it won the 'People's Choice' award at the Toronto International Film Festival. The decision to premiere this way was based on a need to build an audience for the film, and is a typical strategy for UK off-centre films being launched in the US (see the case study of *Crying Game* (1993) on the website).

The film opened commercially with a very limited run, in ten theatres in the US, on 12 November 2008. This was extended to thirty-two theatres the week after. The film went 'wide' on 25 December 2008, when it opened in 614 screens. The big lead-up to the Oscars had begun. By 23 January 2009, the film was on nationwide release.

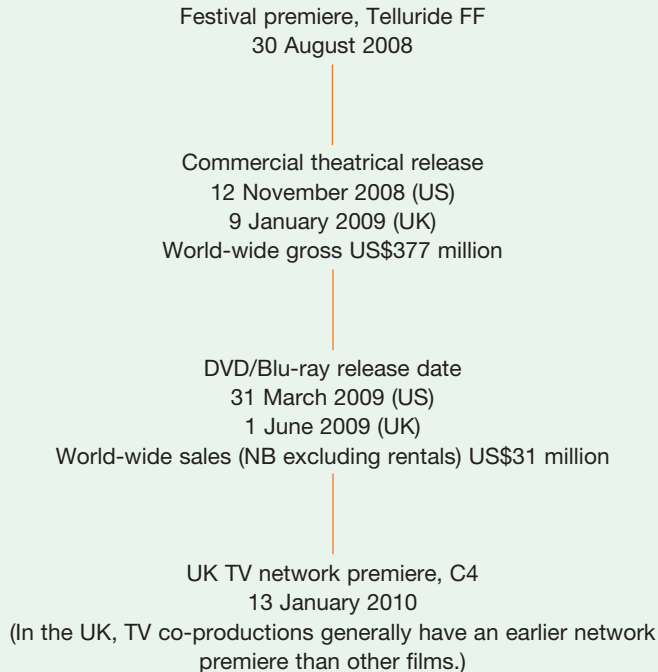
In the UK, the release of the film had been delayed, presumably to maximise the build-up of interest (and publicity) from the US. It opened 'wide' in the UK on 9 January 2009, going straight to number two at the UK box office. The film grossed £6.1 million in the first eleven days of its release in the UK, at the end of which it was number one at the UK box office.

In mid February 2009, *Slumdog Millionaire* was nominated for ten Oscars. In March 2009, it won in eight of the categories, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Cinematography. It also won seven UK BAFTAs into the bargain.

After the Oscars were announced, the film went 'super wide', showing on 3,000 screens. The box-office takings in the US/Canada sector increased correspondingly by 43 per cent. The film became the 'sleeper' of the year: quite a fairy tale, both on and off screen!

In summary, the distribution windows and figures for *Slumdog Millionaire* are to date as follows:

*For further discussion of building audiences, see the next section on 'Film audiences'.*



### Multi-media empires

Today, it is not adequate to consider the film industry in isolation, for it is only one part of a network of media, entertainment and communications industries controlled by vertically, **horizontally** and **laterally integrated** multimedia conglomerates.

Examples of such organisations are Time Warner, Viacom (owner of Paramount), Sony Corporation of Japan (owner of Columbia Pictures) and News Corporation (owner of 20th Century Fox).

The underlying philosophy behind corporate mergers and acquisitions is to work across the whole of the corporation's holdings to create new business opportunities/associations; in other words to affect a **synergy strategy**. A good example of this was the Time Warner 'marketing council' set up with AOL in 2001.

After its merger with AOL, Time Warner set up a 'marketing council' to optimise marketing opportunities across the whole corporation. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (US title, 2001) was the first substantive evidence of this new synergy strategy in operation. Marketing was planned carefully across all media to take into account the fact that a series of films was planned for 'Harry Potter' (anywhere from three to seven films in the series),<sup>44</sup> and the Corporation didn't want the series to suffer from overkill in the early stages.

As was noted in the *Financial Times* on the film's opening weekend (16–18 November, 2001),<sup>45</sup> the film was being promoted on the HBO and Warners networks in the USA, the music was being issued on Warner Music's Atlantic Records label, and a series of articles was appearing across the Corporation's print media empire. Of particular note, however, was the promotional activity of AOL itself. The online service was offering merchandising (with ninety licensing partners and 700 products), ticket promotions and giveaways tied in with subscriptions to AOL services.

In this instance, the coordinated activities of the marketing council paid off, for on the opening weekend the film took approximately \$90 million in the US territory and approximately £16 million in the UK.<sup>46</sup> Alas, in the long run the merger became known as the worst in corporate history. The central failure of the merger's business model seems

#### horizontal integration

Where a parent company acquires several businesses with the same business profile, e.g. the acquisition of several cinema circuits.

#### lateral integration

Where a parent company acquires a vast empire of different (in our case, media and entertainment) properties, the aim of which is to command a global production/marketing/sales/distribution system.

#### synergy strategy

Combined or related action by a group of individuals or corporations towards a common goal, the combined effect of which exceeds the sum of the individual efforts.

to have been a flawed AOL Time Warner cable package. By December 2009, AOL had been spun off as a separate company.

A happier, more successful synergy story is that of Sony Corporation of Japan. It purchased Columbia Pictures entertainment in 1989 (for \$5 billion)<sup>47</sup> to boost sales of its home electronics hardware and to achieve synergy between its software and hardware enterprises. Since Sony acquired the film company, it has used the studio to showcase its electronic high-definition technology such as high-definition TV, 'Blu-ray' DVDs and interactive multimedia video games. Its holdings in film libraries too are huge, comprising the movies/TV of Columbia/Sony Pictures and MGM (since 2005 Sony owns 20 per cent of MGM). Clearly focused strategic planning – rather than ill-thought-out mergers and acquisitions – lies at the heart of Sony's hardware/software corporate synergy.

### The UK scenario

Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation is the media conglomerate with the highest visibility in the UK. As an example of its synergy strategy we need only look at its UK Sky (satellite) digital service comprising hundreds of TV, CD quality radio and pay-per-view channels, interactive services, e-mail and so on. This service uses press media and film and TV production companies owned by News Corporation across Europe, Asia and America (such as the film company, 20th Century Fox and the US terrestrial TV Fox Network) to help promote it and provide programmes for it.

*For further discussion of new technology and film see Chapter 2.*

### Summary

The communications revolution is being orchestrated by only a handful of global players. Although in the recent past some of these multimedia conglomerates, such as AOL Time Warner, have decided to break themselves up, the fact remains that most of them have not. Unless these firms are properly regulated by the international community – an unlikely event given the corporate and political power behind global market liberalisation – they stand to enjoy an oligopolistic power not dreamed of in the far-off days of the MPPC and the studio era.

#### Question

Why does the distribution sector of the film industry dominate the contemporary film business?

#### Question

What are the fundamental differences in the marketing of a Hollywood 'block-buster' versus a 'sleeper'?

#### Question

In your opinion, which form of corporate integration is the most controlling of the marketplace: vertical, horizontal or lateral integration? Why?

## FILM AUDIENCES

Fundamental to the study of cinema as institution is a study of cinema audience. This section reviews the changes in cinema audience patterns/profiles from the end of the