

## THE HOLLYWOOD SYSTEM

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Soon after the invention of the cinematograph in 1895, films began to circulate the globe, fascinating audiences with their magical ability to bring images to life. Many players from diverse lands contributed to the film production and exhibition landscape in those early years. However, it would not be long before the players from one land in particular would begin to dominate, transforming a novel amusement into a major integrated industry with mass appeal and global reach. More than a century later the Hollywood film industry continues to dominate the global film landscape. In 2006, Hollywood films took a massive 85.9% of the Australian box office, while local productions received a mere 4.6%.<sup>i</sup> For the majority of our students, therefore 'going to the movies on a Saturday night' means going to see a film that originated in Hollywood.

This familiarity with Hollywood presents Film Studies teachers with a range of possibilities and challenges. On the one hand, many students come armed with a lexicon of genres, aesthetic styles and narrative techniques to draw upon during their studies. As teachers, this enables us to find common reference points that may function as points of departure for a more complex examination of the economic, industrial and political systems and structures that lie beneath the glossy surface of the end product. For example, in our first year course 'Introduction to Film', students are introduced to the political economy of film industries via a screening of *Toy Story* (John Lasseter, 1995). By reading Janet Wasko's account of the Disney Corporation's business practices, students develop a critical understanding of the fierce industrial and market practices at work behind these cute animated characters.<sup>ii</sup> On the other hand, students who habitually consume Hollywood film as entertainment are sometimes resistant to the defamiliarisation that occurs when challenged to approach such films analytically. In addition, although they may have some familiarity of the product, this is not generally supported by knowledge of the historical contexts that shaped the industry. Throughout the course, therefore, much emphasis is placed on helping students develop knowledge of these contexts.

'The Hollywood System' is a broad ranging second level course taught in the School of English, Media and Performing Arts at the University of New South Wales, Sydney as part of the Film Studies major within the Bachelor of Arts degree. It is designed to extend skills taught in first year Film Studies courses and closely complement other second level courses such as 'Movie World: National Cinemas.' 'The Hollywood System' is usually

team-taught by between 2 and 4 staff. I first contributed to this course in 2005 and again in 2006 when it was convened by Professor James Donald. The following discussion is based on my own reflections on teaching, together with formal and informal student feedback, and discussions with Professor Donald.

‘The Hollywood System’ focuses on the industrial, economic and political forces at work within the world’s most dominant film industry. The course provides a historical and conceptual map of the Hollywood film industry from the silent era to the present day with an emphasis on cinema as a business and a social force within the United States and internationally. We study how the main dimensions of the industry—production, distribution and exhibition—have been organised at various historical junctures and we examine some of the key political dramas, moments of crisis and technological changes that helped shape the industry. In addition, students practice their film analysis skills while developing an awareness of the technological, industrial and political determinants of film style. The course is multidisciplinary in nature, drawing on a range of methods used in film studies including historical, cultural and industrial approaches.

‘The Hollywood System’ is a 14-week course and students attend a one-hour lecture followed by a screening and a one-hour tutorial each week. There is also a set of compulsory weekly readings presented in the form of a printed booklet.

The course attracts between 90 and 120 enrolments each year and makes up one of four options in second year for students completing a BA (Film). The course also attracts a range of students from outside the Film Studies major, including students majoring in Media, Theatre, Music, English, History and Fine Arts as well as the occasional Science, Economics, Business, Architecture, Law and Engineering student. We also have a number of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly from Hong Kong, China and Singapore, but also the UK, Europe, Scandinavia and the USA. This diversity, while typical of our student body generally, is particularly advantageous in this course, as local students are able to compare their responses to globally pervasive Hollywood films with those of others from around the world. Invariably, while they discover similarity, students also realise that reception does differ depending on cultural background and national context, even highlighting issues facing our own struggling film industry in Australia. American students generally appreciate the new perspectives on their national cinema enabled by the culturally diverse classroom and are challenged to think through Hollywood’s role in shaping concerns about American cultural imperialism.

In the first tutorial, I always conduct a short getting to know you session in which I ask them why they have chosen this course. Responses range from the model response 'I want to deepen my knowledge of the Hollywood film industry' to 'it sounded like fun', 'I love watching movies' or 'it was the only course that sounded interesting that would fit into my timetable'. Some students bring with them the assumption that Hollywood films are entertaining and therefore the course should also be entertaining, with the suggestion that it might be easier than other university courses. As the semester proceeds, however, the majority of students are challenged by the material presented and begin to see that there is much more to Hollywood than the movies!

Assessment is made up of three components: tutorial participation (30%), two in-class tests (30%) and a 2,500-word research essay (40%). The participation component is divided into three parts. 1) Collaborative analysis of a film sequence. 2) Submission of weekly reading notes. 3) Participation in tutorial discussions. The sequence analysis was added in 2006 in response to student feedback that they wanted to further develop their skills in film analysis. For this exercise students form into groups of 2-3 and elect a week to present their analysis, and the group selects a short sequence from a relevant film. The analysis must take into consideration not only matters of film style and technique, but should demonstrate an understanding of the historical, political, economic and technological factors informing film style. The requirement for weekly reading notes was added to the course assessment in 2006 to combat the problem of students not completing their readings, which in the past had severely limited deep discussion in tutorials. In feedback a significant number of students complained that this was too much work for only 10% of their entire course assessment. They also wanted more feedback on this part of their assessment. These issues will certainly be addressed when I revise the course for 2007.

The two in-class tests held in weeks six and fourteen are perhaps the most controversial element of assessment from the student's perspective. These are short answer tests designed to examine students on their ability to prioritise and retain information, ideas and concepts provided in lectures and readings. In the past students have complained that they should not have to remember information they can easily look up on the internet, however, it is useful for them to be able to describe in their own words the roles of some of the key institutions, business practices and socio-economic factors affecting the Hollywood studio system. Many also commented that they were not provided with enough information on what would be expected of them in the tests. From my perspective, one of the negative aspects of the tests is that they cut into valuable lecture time and I am therefore currently investigating the viability of delivering these as online assessments and will

certainly try to provide more specific information on the format and content of the tests. The final piece of assessment is a research essay. The essay questions are based around the major themes of the course including: the aesthetic and commercial logic of Hollywood during various periods; questions of technological change; the star system; political controversy; global Hollywood. The questions are designed to allow students to draw on and expand what they have learnt in the course while engaging in a self-directed research project. Students must choose relevant film examples to support their argument and are encouraged to take a creative and original approach to these topics. I have received wonderful essays on such topics as Hollywood stardom, European émigré filmmakers, technological change, political controversy and new media technologies.

### **The Course**

#### **Week 1: Why study Hollywood?**

##### **Screening:**

*Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen/Gene Kelly, MGM, 1952).

In the first lecture students are presented with an overview of the course structure and content and we pose the question 'why study Hollywood?' While this may seem a rather trivial question, it provides the opportunity to introduce students to the variety of dimensions of Hollywood cinema that will be covered: historical, industrial, economic, technological, sociological, political and aesthetic. Following the lecture we screen *Singin' in the Rain*. This is a great example of how Hollywood takes part in its own mythologisation, letting the viewer in on some of its 'tricks,' while generating a highly fictionalised and humorous account of the introduction of sound. Students are encouraged to read Peter Wollen's short monograph on the film where he describes it as an example of self-reflexive cinema.<sup>iii</sup> Due to the entertaining and memorable nature of this film, and its reflections on certain elements of the Hollywood studio system, students frequently use it as a reference point for discussions throughout the semester. It serves as a great talking point through which to break down some of the myths that Hollywood creates.

#### **Week 2: A pre-history of Hollywood**

##### **Readings**

Tom Gunning, 'A Cinema of Attractions,' in Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker (eds.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, London: BFI, 1990, 56-62.

Allen J. Scott, 'Origins and Early Growth of the Hollywood Motion Picture Industry,' *On Hollywood: The Place, the Industry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 11-34.

**Screening:**

*The Cheat* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1915)

The second lecture looks at the period between 1897 and 1917 during which time the film medium becomes established as a viable and popular form of entertainment. Through the lecture and readings, students become familiar with important developments taking place during this period including: new technologies that made cinema possible; corporate battles to control the emerging industry; emergence of new patterns of distribution and exhibition; changing demographics of early film audiences; development of narrative film style. We screen *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903), *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (D.W. Griffith, 1912), excerpts from *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915) and *The Cheat*. In tutorials students, many of whom have never watched a silent film, registered their surprise at the sophistication of *The Cheat*'s narrative structure and style, and remarked upon the film's treatment of sexuality and race. Discussion revolves around the key factors involved in the relocation of the industry from New York to Southern California during these early years. We also use a sequence from *The Cheat* to model the sequence analysis exercise that students conduct as part of their assessment.

**Week 3: Establishing the Hollywood System Nationally**

**Readings:**

Halsey, Stuart and Co., 'The Motion Picture Industry as a Basis for Bond Financing' (1927), in Tino Balio (ed.), *The American Film Industry*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, 195-21.

Douglas Gomery, 'The Rise of National Theatre Chains,' in *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, London: BFI, 1992, 34-56.

**Screening:**

*The Big Parade* (MGM, King Vidor, 1925)

Following this brief introduction to the pre-history and emergence of Hollywood we move on to consider how the studio system began to take shape from the late 1910s to the early 1920s, transforming a cottage industry into a national industry dominated by a small number of firms,

employing scientific and industrial management and production strategies. Students are introduced to the concept of vertical integration and to the role played by the MPPC (Motion Picture Patents Company) in excluding foreign competition and securing a national audience. We read a fascinating document from 1927 written by a New York firm of stockbrokers, which presents a financial account of the industry and offers a range of predictions for the future in the area of sound and film export. Douglas Gomery's essay introduces them to the history of film exhibition and measures that were taken to entice audiences to theatres. In tutorials this reading prompted comparisons between the grand picture palaces of the 1920s and today's suburban multiplexes, which students felt reflect differing patterns of production and consumption. For this tutorial I also devised a group role-play activity to help students understand the value of vertical integration for the studios. I divide the class into four groups representing the heads of various corporations in the film industry. 1) A production only studio. 2) A studio with a distribution arm. 3) An exhibitor. 4) A vertically integrated studio. The year is 1925; MGM has just released its latest hit *The Big Parade*. The success of the film is fuelled by great production values, an all-star cast and highly effective promotion, distribution and screenings in the biggest and best movie theatres in the country. Each of their corporations wants a piece of the action! The groups are asked to use information in this week's readings to devise a business plan to enable their organisation to become major players in the market. Students were generally very enthusiastic about this activity and in some cases came up with highly creative business plans, which even included negotiating with the other corporations. Most felt that it helped them understand and remember how vertical integration worked in the Hollywood studio system.

#### **Week 4: Establishing the Hollywood System Globally**

Kristin Thompson, 'Cashing in on Europe's War, 1916-18', in *Exporting Entertainment*, London: BFI, 1985, 61-99.

Ian Jarvie, 'The MPPDA and the Beginnings of Organization, 1920-1922', in *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign: The North Atlantic Movie Trade*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 275-301.

#### **Screening**

*Trouble in Paradise* (MGM, Ernst Lubitsch, 1932)

This week we shift our focus from Hollywood as a national industry to Hollywood as a global industry. We pinpoint key moments, events and decisions that enabled Hollywood to establish global domination. The

lecture briefly introduces students to the concept of globalisation, taking them through economic, political and cultural definitions, and argues that Hollywood's global outlook may be considered to prefigure this more recently theorised dynamic. This is followed by an historical account of the international trade of films from the late 1900s through to the 1920s. We also discuss Hollywood as a cosmopolitan industry and the stylistic influence of the first wave of European émigrés. We screen *Trouble in Paradise* and ask students to pay attention to the use of cinematic space and *mise en scène*. In preparation for tutorials students read Kristin Thompson's 'Cashing in on Europe's war, 1916-18', which focuses on the impact of World War I on the established European film industries and discusses the various strategies used by Hollywood to take advantage of the European market. The Ian Jarvie reading provides them with a detailed discussion of how the MPPDA lobbied government and promoted the interests of Hollywood internationally.

**Week 5: You ain't heard nothin' yet: Technological change and cultural insecurity**

**Readings:**

Donald Crafton, 'Enticing the Audience: Warner Bros. and Vitaphone' and 'Buying Broadway: *The Jazz Singer's* Reception', in *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931*, New York: Scribner's, 1997, 101-126, 516-531, 568-570, 600-601.

Ruth Vasey, 'Sound Effects: Technology and Adaptation', ch. 3 in *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, 63-99.

Steven Alan Carr, 'Religion, Race and Morality in the Hollywood Question', in *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 60-93.

**Screening:**

*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Rouben Mamoulian, Paramount, 1931)

Topics covered this week include: the industrial and economic factors surrounding the introduction of synchronised sound in the late 1920s, growing pressures for industry regulation and censorship; questions of race and ethnicity both on and off the screen and the effect of anti-Semitism on community attitudes toward Hollywood. The lecture includes a screening of excerpts from *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), the short film *Black and Tan* (Dudley Murphy, 1929) and a clip from *Hallelujah* (King Vidor, 1929). These films not only show the emergence of the musical genre, but

also draw attention to themes of race, ethnicity and ideas about American identity. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* enables students to observe some of the stylistic changes brought about by the introduction of sound. This is an incredibly dense week where I feel we attempt to cover far too many topics. Feedback from students indicates that they find it particularly difficult and it will certainly be revised in 2007.

### **Week 6: Hollywood Genres: Screwball Comedy**

#### **Assessment**

Class Test

#### **Readings:**

David R. Shumway, 'Screwball Comedies: Constructing Romance, Mystifying Marriage', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 30 no. 4 (Summer 1991), 7-23.

Marilyn Fabre, 'The Conversion to Sound and the Classical Hollywood Film: Howard Hawks's *His Girl Friday*', ch. 4 in *Closely Watched Films: An Introduction to the Art of Narrative Film Technique*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, 59-77.

#### **Screening:**

*The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor, MGM, 1940)

In part, the condensed nature of week five is the result of making room for a study of Hollywood genres, which was added in 2006 in response to student feedback. Here we focus on the industrial, formal and ideological functions of genre in the Hollywood studio system and the many facets of film genre studies. This is something students may take up in more detail in the course 'Film Genres' in third year and builds on their introduction to genre in first year. Through the screening, we introduce the sub-genre of screwball comedy, one of the most popular genres of classical Hollywood cinema. The compulsory readings take different theoretical approaches to screwball comedy and provide good examples of detailed film analysis. Tutorial discussion tends to focus on comparisons between contemporary romantic comedies and classical screwball, however students are also particularly engaged by the fast-paced 'verbal ping-pong' between Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant and enjoy discussing the film in terms of a battle of the sexes. I always turn the discussion toward the issues of class raised by the screening, however such issues tend to be far removed from students' contemporary lives.

**Week 7: Stars and Stripes: Hollywood at War****Readings:**

Michael Pokorny and John Sedgwick, 'Stardom and the Profitability of Film Making: Warner Bros. in the 1930s', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, vol. 25 no. 3 (August 2001), 157-184.

Clayton R. Koppes & Gregory D. Black, 'Hollywood Turns Interventionist', in *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1987, 17-47.

Dana Polan, 'Casablanca', in Jeffrey Geiger and R.L. Rutsky (eds.), *Film Analysis*, New York: Norton, 2005, 362-379.

**Screening:**

*Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, Warner Brothers, 1942).

Here we combine a discussion of the Hollywood star system with a consideration of the effects of the Second World War on film production and Hollywood's involvement in the war. We start by covering the industrial, ideological and theoretical approaches to stardom and the star system. In addition, it is argued that stars were an integral part of Hollywood's engagement in the debates around isolation and intervention with *Casablanca* serving as a good example of this dual perspective. We also discuss the role of the Office of War Information (OWI), which regulated most film production during WWII and show them an excerpt from Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* (1943-44) series produced for the OWI. By way of contrast, we also show a clip from Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940). Their two main readings provide students with a deeper insight into the economic imperatives of stardom, Hollywood's growing support for intervention and a supplementary reading on *Casablanca* by Dana Polan provides a good example of detailed and contextualised film analysis. Interestingly, the majority of students have never seen *Casablanca*, but some are nevertheless familiar with some images (Humphrey Bogart) and dialogue from the film. Not only does this reveal something of the nature of the recycling of popular culture, but the fragmented familiarity and romantic legacy of the film tends to guide their analysis toward the romantic love story, rather than the film's subtle argument for intervention. Some are simply disappointed and wonder what all the hype was about!

**Week 8: Hollywood and the Cold War****Readings:**

Richard Maltby, 'Made for Each Other: The Melodrama of Hollywood and

the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1947', in Philip Davies and Brian Neve (eds.), *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981, 76-96.

Peter Lev, 'Genres and Production Trends, 1950-1954', ch. 2 in *Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959*, New York: Scribner, 2003, 33-63.

**Screening:**

*Pickup on South Street* (C20th Fox, Sam Fuller, 1953)

This week we move on to examine another great political drama that took its toll on Hollywood in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Along with the Cold War came an unprecedented politicisation of Hollywood films in terms of both content and regulation. This week's lecture focuses on the House Committee on Un-American Activities' (HUAC) investigation of the American film industry and examines the consequences of McCarthy's drive to root out any vestige of Communism from the industry and the subsequent blacklisting of writers, stars, directors and other film personnel. Excerpts from television footage of the hearings is shown as well as a clip from *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954). In contrast to this overtly political film, we screen the rather a-political *Pickup on South Street* (Sam Fuller, 1953), which shows how genres such as the gangster film were adapted to include Cold War themes of spies, corruption and paranoia. The release of *Good Night and Good Luck* (George Clooney) in 2005 also helped to establish the ongoing relevance of this topic for a generation who have grown up in the post-Cold War era. The face of George Clooney helps to make the unfamiliar familiar and bring the past into *their* present, thereby warranting further study. They also saw it as another example of Hollywood contemplating its own history. In tutorials, discussion invariably turned to consider how current concerns about global terrorism might affect or influence contemporary Hollywood films. Citing films such as *Fahrenheit 9-11* (Michael Moore, 2004) students discuss the question of whether filmmakers have more freedom to raise political issues today. Of course we have not yet covered the breakdown of the studio system and de-regulation of the industry, so they are not yet fully equipped to place this discussion into its relevant context. Many find the Richard Maltby article particularly challenging, as he draws an analogy between Hollywood melodramas and HUAC, which is difficult for them to grasp.

**Week 9: Decline & Adaptation: The 1950s and '60s**

**Reading:**

Tino Balio, Introduction to Part 1, *Hollywood in the Age of Television*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1990, 3-40.

Michael Conant, 'The Paramount Decrees Reconsidered', in Thomas Schatz (ed.), *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies. Vol. III Social Dimensions: Technology, Regulation and the Audience*, London: Routledge, 2003, 279-311.

**Screening:**

*Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, Paramount, 1950)

By week nine the sun is beginning to set on the Hollywood studio system of the classical era and *Sunset Boulevard* is screened to herald its decline. The lecture focuses on the range of political, legislative, socio-economic and technological factors facing the studios and the corresponding adaptations to changing circumstances. In particular we focus on the consequences of the anti-trust law suit — the so-called 'Paramount case' — which led to divorcement and the end of block-booking distribution practices. We also discuss the rise of the suburbs, the increase in the variety of leisure-time activities and the introduction of television as a mass entertainment form. We examine the introduction of new film formats, the turn to genres such as biblical epics and other technological innovations. The tutorial activity is a role-play exercise similar to that described in week three. In groups students work through the various threats that Hollywood executives might have perceived to the studio system in the early 1950s and try to identify responses and opportunities. *Sunset Boulevard* also makes for lively discussion; particularly around the figure of the ageing star and the struggling writer.

**Week 10 & 11: A new Hollywood? The 1960s and '70s**

**Reading:**

Peter Biskind, 'The Man Who Would Be King', in *Easy Riders and Raging Bulls: How the Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood*, London, Bloomsbury, 1999, 141-168.

Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins, 'Hollywood for the 21st Century: Global Competition for Critical Mass in Image Markets', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 16, 1992, 1-22.

**Screenings**

*Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, Warner Bros., 1967)

*The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972)

From the late 1960s to the early 1970s a new generation of filmmakers emerged in Hollywood, reviving the industry and producing films that often

resonated with the political and social concerns of the times: the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, the war in Vietnam, civil rights, second wave feminism, and Watergate. The demise of the studio system saw the revision of the old Production Code into a new ratings system. The 1970s also witnessed major changes in techniques of distribution, marketing and exhibition. In week ten we screen *Bonnie and Clyde*, one of the great financial successes of the 1960s, despite initially being a critical failure. Students read a journalistic account of this period written by Peter Biskind and are asked to compare this style of writing with the other more academic approaches studied so far in the course. Tutorials this week are devoted to discussion of essay outlines. In addition to the tutor giving general advice to the class, students are divided into small groups and asked to provide feedback to each other on their essay proposals. The Biskind article also provides an opportunity to look at different styles of writing and determine various approaches that may be taken in their essays. In week eleven we screen *The Godfather* and due to the long duration of the film there is no lecture. Tutorials are again devoted to discussing essay outlines.

### **Week 12: Reconfiguring the System: The 1980s and '90s**

#### **Readings**

Richard Maltby, “‘Nobody Knows Everything’: Post-classical Historiographies and Consolidated Entertainment’, in Steve Neale and Murray Smith (eds.), *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, London: Routledge, 1998, 21-44.

Warren Buckland, ‘Classical/Post-classical Narrative (*Die Hard*)’, in Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland, *Studying Contemporary American Films: A Guide to Movie Analysis*, London: Edward Arnold, 2002, 26-79.

#### **Screening**

*Die Hard* (Fox, John McTiernan, 1988)

Here emphasis is placed on Hollywood’s rapid and proactive responses to economic, technological and market forces. We look not only at the emerging new political economy of cinema, but also at new modes of narration and new styles of film historiography. The lecture focuses on the enduring power of the MPAA and its international branch the MPA (Motion Picture Association) under the long-term leadership of Jack Valenti (1966-2004). For tutorials students read Maltby on questions of historical method and the various ways of narrating Hollywood’s history. This provides them with a valuable tool through which to reflect on their own research and writing. The second reading for this week, by Warren Buckland, not only provides a working definition of a ‘post-classical’ style of filmmaking that

emerges with the rise of the late twentieth century blockbuster, but explores this through a close analysis and reading of the film *Die Hard*. In tutorials we explore and practice this type of film analysis, although a number of students tended to disagree with Buckland's interpretation. I was very pleased to see students developing and practicing this critical ability.

### **Week 13: Global Hollywood**

#### **Readings**

Allen J. Scott, 'A New Map of Hollywood: The Production and Distribution of American Motion Pictures', *Regional Studies*, vol. 36 no. 9, (2002), 957-975.

David Bordwell, 'Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film', *Film Quarterly* vol. 55 n. 3 (2002), 16-28.

#### **Screening**

*Jerry Maguire* (Tristar, Cameron Crowe, 1996)

This week we return to the question of Hollywood's global reach, which was explored in week four, this time in the context of the current global era of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. We look at Hollywood as a 'copyright industry' and the range of new and emerging production, distribution and exhibition platforms and the intellectual property concerns this raises. In 2005 we focused on the Disney/Pixar marriage and computer-generated animation with a screening of *Finding Nemo* (Andrew Stanton & Lee Unkrich, 2003). However, with the introduction of a study of Disney in the first year course in 2005 it was decided to shift focus slightly in 2006 by screening *Jerry Maguire*. This film was presented as an example of what David Bordwell has argued may be seen as a trend toward 'intensified continuity' in recent Hollywood cinema. This involves not a rejection of traditional techniques of continuity, leading to 'post-classical' cinema<sup>iv</sup>, but an intensification of techniques such as rapid editing, exploitation of extremes of lens length, closer framings and a constantly moving free-ranging camera. These techniques are not lost on the students, who freely admit to their preference for more fast-paced narrative films. In tutorials, I also remember quite heated discussion around the issue of copyright and students expressed their opinions and practices with surprising candour. The discussion of new filmmaking and exhibition technologies was also a great talking point and I must admit I learnt a great deal about computer animation and editing from my students in tutorials this week.

## **Week 14: Hollywood Past, Present and Future**

### **Assessment**

Class Test

### **Screening**

*Mulholland Drive* (Canal Plus/Universal, David Lynch, 2001)

In the final week of classes, students complete their second test and finish with a screening of yet another film about Hollywood, one that may certainly disrupt, disturb and dispel any lingering myths students may have about the Hollywood system.

In summary, student responses to the course material tend to be filtered through their own consumption of contemporary Hollywood cinema. As teachers, this can certainly work to our advantage because as we present examples from earlier phases of Hollywood's history, students have a common reference point through which to recognise both changes and consistencies over time. Throughout the course, however, I continually remind them of their presentism and the need to assess the position from which they view and study the material and the various ways in which their cinematic imaginaries have been shaped by exposure to Hollywood films. The result tends to be a de-familiarisation of the over-familiar, enabling students to move beyond the mere entertainment value of particular films to gain a deeper understanding of the industrial, political, economic and stylistic factors that have helped to shape Hollywood into the great entertainment factory it is.

The overall feedback on the course is generally very positive, with students commenting upon the variety of screenings and the opportunity to really learn how Hollywood works as the most valuable aspects. Others observed that the broad scope of the course prohibits a deeper engagement with and analysis of the material. I agree that the course provides a rather condensed overview of the Hollywood system and that there are important omissions and oversights, however, this scope and approach is in line with the emphasis on progression in the design of the Film Studies major. Students move from general introductory courses at first level to more thematically and conceptually focused courses at second level to deeper, more analytical and theoretical work at third level. Finding a balance between scope and focus in the syllabus will prove a challenge in the coming years as UNSW moves from 14 to 12 week semesters in 2008, but this is only a minor challenge when compared with the pleasures of teaching and learning about one of America's most well-known and loved commercial and cultural exports.

**Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank Professor James Donald, Dr Darrel Davis and Dr Roger Dawkins for providing me with feedback on teaching in this course.

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<sup>i</sup> Australian Film Commission '2006 Box Office Backgrounder'

<[http://www.afc.gov.au/downloads/2006\\_bo\\_backgrounder\\_final.pdf](http://www.afc.gov.au/downloads/2006_bo_backgrounder_final.pdf)> 5 April 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> Janet Wasko, 'Corporate Disney in Action' in *Understanding Disney*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, 70-107.

<sup>iii</sup> Peter Wolen, *Singin' in the Rain*, London: BFI, 1992.

<sup>iv</sup> As discussed in the Buckland reading from last week.