

public opinion—or at least what then would appear to be the public's opinion—on particular subjects. The studio moguls greatly advanced this new idea by employing staffs of publicists to help organize, if not wholly create, the public's perception of their movie stars. These operations, as has been discussed earlier, involved inventing fictional biographies for their stars and scripting interviews and speeches for them in keeping with those biographies. Public relations, as practiced by the studios, thus became a euphemism for public deception. By the time sound was added to films in the late 1920s, every studio had a well-organized publicity department to systematically carry out this function.

The studios' newly created publicity departments had three formidable assets at their disposal. First, the studios produced their own newsreels, seen by weekly audiences of as many as 80 million people, into which they could insert flattering clips of the stars whose images they wanted to burnish in the public mind. The studios also owned or controlled major fan magazines, in which they could place well-vetted stories about their stars. By the 1950s, these magazines were reaching tens of millions of moviegoers. Finally, the publicists had symbiotic relationships with the leading columnists, such as Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons, through whose columns they were able to maintain a constant flow of items that advanced the image of their stars.

For their part, the stars fully accepted the fictionalization of their lives, on and off the screen—and that fictionalization could be dramatic. For example, the Jewish-American vaudeville actress Theodosia Goodman, from Cincinnati, was transformed into Theda Bara, the Egyptian-born daughter of an Arab princess and a French artist. This license to lie about their lives for the good of the show was cleverly portrayed in one of the classic movies about Hollywood: Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen's *Singin' in the Rain*. This film begins in Hollywood in 1927 at the height of the silent-film era, with Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly), the reigning film idol, telling a newspaper reporter the story of his rise to stardom and his romance with his costar Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen). His story, however, is a legend fabricated by the studio's publicity machine. While Lockwood gives the official version, the film itself shows his true story.

While the disparity between real and fictive lives may be less dramatic off the screen, the license to insert false data in their biographies to make their images more credible has not been revoked. For example,

The Culture of Deception

INTERVIEWER: *What attracted you to the Jaws project?*

SPELBERG: *I can tell the truth?*

INTERVIEWER: *Go ahead, tell the truth.*

SPELBERG: *I could get in trouble if I tell the truth.*

—Steven Spielberg interviewed by David Helpern

The principal product that Hollywood depends on—and has almost since its inception—is the celebrated star. To transform their stars into celebrities, the early studio owners took advantage of the emerging concept of public relations. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the publicity business was generally limited to the relatively modest objective of getting newspapers to mention products that already existed. To this end, freelance press agents, paid by the number of “mentions,” would provide editors of local newspapers with items to fill their pages or, in a few extreme cases, such as the ballyhoo of P. T. Barnum, would stage pseudoevents to attract reporters to products.

In the early twentieth century, however, public relations began to assume the far more ambitious aim of shaping a newly defined product:

Raymond Burr, who was unmarried, invented two dead wives and a dead child, according to *The Encyclopedia of Gay Culture*, claiming that his first wife had died in a plane crash and his second wife and his (imaginary) son had died of cancer.

As the public-relations system was perfected over the decades, and the studios achieved near-dominion over the entertainment-media outlets, stars' reputations became an increasingly valuable currency for the stars as well as the studios. Today the lives and experiences of stars—real or scripted—can be packaged, sold, licensed, and promoted, to a dizzying extent. Even the paparazzi rights to the events in their private lives can be sold for substantial sums. Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones, for example, sold the rights to photograph their November 2000 wedding for \$1.55 million to *OK!* magazine (and successfully sued a rival magazine who took unauthorized photographs of the ceremony).

Since they derive much of their fortune, fame, and emotional connection from their public personas, stars have an obvious interest in sustaining them. So do the agents, actors, directors, producers, writers, gurus, studio executives, and other community members who benefit from the star's aura. Indeed, maintaining the star's public-relations inventions, and the values they project, is now—and always has been—one of the ways Hollywood controls the outside world's view of it.

The Value of Pseudoheroes

Stars become far more valuable if their audience perceives them not just as actors in movies but as heroes who transcend their movies. The studios began to realize the value of stars assuming the mantle of real-life heroes during World War II when many stars joined the armed forces, with some, such as Jimmy Stewart, volunteering for dangerous combat missions. The government's Office of War Information, by putting the picture of stars in uniform on posters, literally made them poster boys for patriotism. Not only did stars in the war years rise, as Leo Rosten writes, “to the apogee” of their glory, but studios encouraged the blurring of the lines between on-screen and offscreen heroism by giving acting contracts to war heroes, such as Audie Murphy, the most decorated soldier in World War II (who starred in more than twenty movies between 1948 and 1960).

Today, with the vast expansion of licensing rights, the public perception of stars as real-life heroes is, if anything, even more important. When stars achieve such heroic status, their value as a licensable product can be maintained even if their movies fail to draw large audiences. Arnold Schwarzenegger is a case in point. Despite three consecutive box-office disappointments—*End of Days* (1999), *The Sixth Day* (2000), and *Collateral Damage* (2002)—he remained an action hero in the public's mind and consequently could not only command huge fees in 2003—\$29.25 million for *Terminator 3*—but be elected governor of California. Even after he had assumed political office, his holding company protected his image rights by suing a small toy maker selling a Schwarzenegger-like bobblehead doll on the grounds that “Schwarzenegger is an instantly recognizable global celebrity whose name and likeness are worth millions of dollars and are solely his property.”

The establishment of such a heroic image for an action star requires some offscreen blurring of the line between fiction and reality. These stars must publicly present themselves as more than mere movie actors who memorize their lines, wear extensive makeup, and follow the instructions of directors. They must suggest through their words and demeanor that they possess extraordinary virtues in their own right. They must appear not only in control of their lives but undaunted by the concerns of ordinary people. On television, for example, Tom Cruise describes his leaping from a mountaintop, crashing a motorcycle, and coolly walking through blazing fire during the filming of *Mission: Impossible II*. With such colorful accounts of their physical powers, they “stay in character” offscreen as heroes.

They must also avoid any discussion on these television programs of the realities of moviemaking that would jeopardize their heroic auras. Action stars could hardly maintain the illusion of control and fearlessness if they told how stunt doubles, disguised as them or even wearing digital masks on which the stars' faces are later superimposed, stood in for them in many action scenes. Nor can they talk about how insurance companies actually prohibit them from performing scenes that entail any risk of injury, how many of the action scenes in which their characters appear are shot by second units when they are elsewhere, and how computer-graphic companies insert, in postproduction, the fires and hazards their characters are supposedly passing through. (Meanwhile, they can rely on stuntpeo-

ple, insurers, and other professional colleagues not to demystify these illusions because, aside from their contractual restrictions on disclosures, they generally accept that such offscreen fictionalizing serves the industry.)

Male stars may even deny wearing makeup out of the concern that it is not consistent with their macho image. George Clooney, for example, claimed that he had achieved his grimy look in the Coen brothers' film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* naturally. "I would just take dirt, Mississippi dirt, and rub it on my face before we'd go and do the scene. Makeup chairs make me crazy and I don't really like them, plus you wanna just look dirty anyway." He claimed he also avoided makeup in *Three Kings*, explaining, "I'd just pick up dust and rub it in my face and just go [in front of the camera]... I get to roll around in the dirt and it's pretty fun not having to grow up so you don't have to spend time in the makeup chair." While Clooney may indeed have rubbed dirt on himself, that would not obviate the need for professional makeup, which is essential to facilitate the lighting and photographing of scenes and to provide consistency to scenes that are shot out of continuity. To that end (and not to accommodate the vanity of the stars), *Three Kings* employed fifteen makeup technicians, and the lower-budget *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* employed eight—including Waldo Sanchez, who had worked on that and eight other films as Clooney's personal hairstylist.

A star may also be imputed to possess the real-life skills of a character he plays, even if the claim has no basis in reality. Consider, for example, the pretense in the publicity for the 2002 film *I Spy* that its star, Eddie Murphy, who plays a boxer in the film, was also a boxer in real life. Asked whether Murphy was an "experienced boxer?" the director, Betty Thomas, replied: "Yes. Eddie grew up with a father who was a boxer. He learned to box when he was a kid." This realistic touch required considerable license, since in fact Murphy's father, who died when Murphy was a toddler, was a New York City policeman, not a boxer, and his stepfather and brothers worked in an ice-cream plant. In any case, a stuntman, Austin Priester, doubled for Murphy in the boxing scenes.

For the most part, stars do not exercise this license out of personal dishonesty, vanity, or egotism. The subterfuge is part of the system by which studios, talent agencies, music publishers, licensees, and others create, maintain, and profitably exploit the stars' public personalities.

The Value of Pseudorealism

Hollywood places great value on stories that go beyond fictive entertainment and appear to reveal the truth about important people and events. Directors sometimes achieve this illusion by making parts of their movies look like documentaries. Steven Spielberg spliced in actual newsreel footage in *Saving Private Ryan*; Warren Beatty inserted interviews with actual participants in the Russian Revolution in *Reds*; and Constantin Costa-Gavras used jerky camera motion, grainy film, and other cinema-vérité techniques in *Missing*. Through such techniques and choices, directors can achieve a high degree of verisimilitude, or the appearance of being real, with the result that the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is purposely blurred for audiences. Audiences are sometimes even duped into believing that fictional works depict true events. In his first film, *Citizen Kane* (1941), Orson Welles so effectively used a newsreel style to render the biography of the fictional press lord Charles Foster Kane that part of the audience was misled into accepting it as the actual biography of the press lord William Randolph Hearst.

In present-day Hollywood, directors sometimes go to great lengths to achieve the appearance of realism. Consider, for example, David O. Russell, who aspired, with his movie *Three Kings*, not just to provide an entertaining story about the 1991 war with Iraq but to provide his audience with an insight into, as he put it on his DVD commentary, "what really happened." He sought verisimilitude by having his film meticulously duplicate actual television footage and still photographs of the war. He then bleached some of the footage he shot to create the visual effect of a desert and used Iraqi refugees as extras on location in Casa Grande, Arizona. Even though the story itself was entirely a work of fiction, Russell succeeded in creating a realistic-looking film that when he screened it in the White House in 1999, President Bill Clinton told him, according to Russell, that the movie had "confirmed" Pentagon reports about Iraq. If so, art had informed a president.

Russell further advanced the perceived realism of his film through media interviews, telling *Newsweek*, for example, that a close-up that graphically showed a bullet pass through the organs of a body was really

done on a dead extra. “We filmed a bullet through a cadaver,” he said to the reporter, adding, “The studio was concerned.” After *Newsweek* published the “news” that a real corpse had been shot by Russell, Casa Grande police became concerned that Arizona laws had been violated. At this point, Russell admitted that the story he had given *Newsweek* was nothing more than false PR meant to bolster the realism of the film. In fact, a constructed dummy had been used for the special effect.

Oliver Stone also puts a high premium on achieving realism in his films. In *JFK*, Stone blended together the footage of his actors with actual shots of the Kennedy assassination in Dallas taken by amateur photographers and a pseudodocumentary he shot in a cinema-vérité style with look-alikes (Steve Reed doubled for John F. Kennedy). To further reinforce the film’s verisimilitude, Stone dramatically announced, at a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., that the mystery man, “Mr. X” (played by Donald Sutherland), who in the film reveals the inner workings of the plot to kill President Kennedy to New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison (Kevin Costner) at a mysterious meeting at the Washington Mall, was not only a real person but was actually present in the room. He then proceeded to identify Mr. X as Fletcher Prouty, who he said had been a liaison between the Pentagon and the CIA at the time of the assassination. In fact, the character of Mr. X had been a fictional invention in the script, and Prouty had not in real life made any such disclosure to Garrison; Prouty had been retained—and paid—by Stone as a technical advisor. “Oliver considered this to be acceptable dramatic license to get his point across in the film,” one of his executives explained.

Realism is also valued in a movie even if it is taken from a work of fiction. In his film *The Bourne Identity*, for example, director Doug Liman wove into the fictional plot about a U.S. assassination bureau that murders an African leader a “back story” about a rogue U.S. intelligence operation, including scenes in Washington, D.C., that he claimed in the publicity for the film was based on revelations made to him by his deceased father, Arthur Liman, who had served as counsel to the Senate Iran-Contra hearings. So, even though the novel *The Bourne Identity* makes no pretense of representing a historical event, the movie, through its director, finds it necessary to add this claim of realism.

The Value of Pseudoyouth

In Hollywood, as writer-actor Ben Stein puts it, “the only real value is youth, the only meaningful coin of life.” Hollywood is, he suggests, “high school with money.” The preoccupation with youth emerges in almost every Hollywood movie about Hollywood. Consider Alan Cumming and Jennifer Jason Leigh’s *The Anniversary Party*, a film that concerns the ambitions of a group of aging actors to find roles for themselves in a youth-dominated community. Joe Thierian (Cumming), a writer-director, is about to make a romantic movie based on his own novel about his celebrated actress-wife, Sally Nash (Leigh), but, since Sally is forty years old, he casts Skye Davidson (Gwyneth Paltrow), a twenty-seven-year-old actress, to play her character. After Skye tells Sally, “You are my icon. I have been watching your movies since I was a little girl,” Sally bursts into tears. “You have no idea how humiliating it is for me,” she tells her husband. “I am an actress.” To this he replies, “I have never considered you for the part because you are too old—and if you think any differently, you are out of touch with reality. Even if somehow we could strip ten years off your face, there is still no way I could have got this film made.”

The “reality” referred to in the fictional *Anniversary Party* proceeds from a perception shared by producers, executives, agents, and actors that in Hollywood, youthful appearance counts above almost everything else. Even in the early days of Hollywood, it was a business with young faces: Darryl F. Zanuck was Warner’s head producer at twenty-six, Irving Thalberg became MGM’s head of production when he was twenty-eight, David O. Selznick was RKO’s vice president in charge of production at twenty-nine, and Hal B. Wallis became Warner’s studio head at twenty-nine. Even as the moguls got older, they recognized the value of having their studios led by men with the appearance, and energy, of youth; by 1940, most studio producers were still under forty-five.

By the 1990s, when their financial health, if not their absolute survival, became dependent on licensing products to people under twenty-five, the studios had even more reason to be concerned with making movies that appealed to youth. Their ability to reach a young audience was the basis on which merchandisers predicated their lucrative tie-in

deals, multiplex theaters provided the choice holiday play dates, video chairs placed massive advance orders for videos and DVDs, and toy and game manufacturers licensed their characters. To maintain this connection, studios now concentrate over 80 percent of their cable and broadcast-network advertisements on programs watched primarily by people under twenty-five. They are careful to incorporate in their soundtracks hip-hop, rap, and other music that is bought mainly by teenagers, and whenever possible, they cast youthful-looking stars (including children) as principal characters in the movies.

For their part, adult actors and others in the community often seek to conceal visible signs of their increasing age. Not only do they commonly wear youthful clothing in their publicity engagements, but they disguise their true age with hair dyes, hair transplants, wigs, Botox and collagen injections, and face-lifts. The constant effort to maintain the illusion of youth requires a veritable army of specialists, such as colorists, facialists, personal trainers, plastic surgeons, and others.

The Value of Pseudacting

In Hollywood, it is no coincidence that a distinction is made between "legitimate" acting as performed in the theater, and movie acting. Indeed, such a high value is placed on acting in the legitimate theater that movie actors sometimes forego multimillion-dollar fees to do it. In 2000, for example, Patrick Stewart interrupted his lucrative film career as Captain Jean-Luc Picard in the *Star Trek* movies to act in Arthur Miller's play *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* on Broadway for a token fee (which did not cover his rent and living expenses in New York). Stewart, his Hollywood success notwithstanding, described himself as first and foremost a stage actor and explained that he is willing to sacrifice the material benefits of movie opportunities for the "personal satisfaction that comes from acting in front of a live audience."

Acting in movies is, as François Truffaut demonstrates in his film *Day for Night*, a frustrating process, involving the eventual amalgamation of many "bits and pieces" filmed at different times, in different places and circumstances. Each "bit" in the mosaic may only be a few minutes long, with dialogue, background sounds, and visual effects added later. Further, when these brief performances are filmed out of order—as they usually

are—the actor must continually alter his appearance and character to maintain the illusion of continuity. Unlike stage actors who stay in character as the play unfolds, film actors must closely follow the instructions of the director and the continuity person to "get in character" anew for each shot. Such out-of-order shooting can be frustrating, unsatisfying, and exhausting. They have to deal with interruptions from camera, lighting, sound, and makeup technicians to remedy conditions they have no control over—such as noise on the set—and do numerous retakes from different angles merely to provide "coverage" for the future editing of the film. The delays and repetitious "takes" tend to further distance a film actor from the spontaneity a stage actor might experience. Yet no matter how ungratifying the work may be, actors, in their videotaped interviews, publicity appearances, and acceptance speeches at award ceremonies, are expected to portray their acting as a form of spontaneous art.

The Value of Pseudopraise

Flattery, already the coin of the realm, is further institutionalized in Hollywood in the interviews that are conducted with actors, directors, producers, and writers during every major production for inclusion in the "The Making of" featurettes that are furnished to the media. In these interviews, participants are not expected to divulge their actual evaluations of the performances of their coworkers. "Everyone in the cast understands that their job in these interviews is to lavish unqualified praise on whoever they are asked about," a producer of these featurettes explained. "There is usually a publicity person around, and if he finds the praise lacking in any way, he orders another take." An actress who worked on *Titanic* recalled, "The last thing publicists want is any sort of accurate descriptions of behind-the-scenes events. They asked for congratulatory praise." It is therefore common in these interviews for the stars, producer, director, and writer to describe one another, over and over again, as a "brilliant" performer, "consummately talented," and "a genius."

Many of the superlatives employed in these interviews also find their way into the media through the electronic press kits, or EPKs, which are edited by publicists into virtual praise-fests. "EPKs provide stars with their templates for their interview shows," a studio marketing head explained.

Nor are the songs of praise last heard in the scripted interviews and press kits. They continue to be sung at the many award ceremonies and festivals around the world, notably the annual Academy Awards presentations, when stars and other community members celebrate their colleagues.

This systematic praise—aside from pleasing the actors, directors, producers, and other recipients—reinforces the idea that the enterprise of the Hollywood community is based on unique and extraordinary talent.

The Value of Pseudocredits

Community members have always valued the public credit they receive for films. Up until the 1950s, however, relatively few individuals, aside from the actors, were actually listed in the film's credits. In 1948 the typical major production listed about twenty-four people in addition to the actors. With the end of the studio system, the demand for credits increased to the point that, by 2002, the typical major production listed several hundred people in addition to actors. Instead of a single producer, as there had been in the studio system, movies commonly had a half dozen or more. As one top producer observed, "Nobody regulates the producers' credit, so therefore it can go to anyone."

The credits for writing Hollywood movies also do not necessarily identify the film's true authorship. The assignment of such labels as "Written by," "Story by," "Screenplay by," and "Adaptation by" is usually made by the Writers Guild of America (WGA), often as the result of a contentious arbitration. The stakes are not merely recognition and reputation, but often a six-figure "credit bonus" for those who prevail in the arbitration. After the studio submits a "proposed credit" to the WGA, every writer with a claim to it has a chance to challenge the credit, and if that credit includes a director or producer, arbitration is mandatory. Because scripts may pass through many stages of development and rewriting over the years and then be rewritten again by script doctors and directors in production, the claims of authorship often require the arbitration panel appointed by the WGA to evaluate statements submitted by claimants, which can run forty pages with all the various drafts of the scripts and treatments. Even the seemingly small matter of whether members of a writing team are joined in the credit by "&" or "and" turns

out to be significant in the community (since "&" means they wrote as a team and "and" that they individually wrote separate drafts). No matter how dissatisfied claimants are with the results, they must accept them, since the arbitration is binding.

Directors, it will be recalled, often preempt the authorship issue by taking for themselves the credit "A Film by." Even in the face of a threatened writers' strike in 2001, directors insisted on maintaining their right to this credit of authorship, arguing that writers' objections were, as one representative of the Directors Guild of America put it, "an unwanted invasion on [directors'] creative turf."

Conversely, directors who decide that the films they directed do not meet their standards or will detract from their standing in the community are allowed by their contract and the Directors Guild to remove their own name from the film and substitute the false name Alan Smithee. As a result, since 1955, "Alan Smithee" has received credit for movies made by more than forty directors, including Dennis Hopper, Arthur Hiller, Don Siegel, and John Frankenheimer.

Studio executives also value credit, even if it is unofficial, because it adds to the legend of their accomplishments. Robert Evans, for example, when he was head of production at Paramount in 1971, claimed credit for the idea for (and even the editing of) *The Godfather*, even though it was based on a bestselling book by Mario Puzo, who also cowrote the screenplay with Francis Ford Coppola, and it was directed by Coppola. For more than a decade Coppola elected to remain silent about this credit appropriation (as did Puzo). Then, in 1985, he finally telegraphed Evans: "I've been a real gentleman regarding your claims of involvement on *The Godfather*... but continually your stupid blabbing about cutting *The Godfather* comes back to me and angers me for its ridiculous pomposity. You did nothing on *The Godfather* other than annoy me and slow it down."

As to his claim that the idea behind the movie was his, Evans maintains that he had a meeting with Mario Puzo in 1968, when the book was not yet completed, and, after charming him with expensive wine and cigars, optioned the book and had its title changed from *The Mafia to The Godfather*. According to Puzo, such a meeting never took place. He recalled that he had his agent, William Morris, sell the option to Paramount without any personal participation on his part, and he then selected the title himself, without any help from Evans.

Frank Yablans, who was the president of Paramount when *The Godfather* was made, had this to say about Evans: “He had everybody believing Coppola had nothing to do with the movie. He created a myth that he produced *The Godfather*.... That is a total figment of his imagination.” Nevertheless, Evans’s ability to maintain mythic credit for *The Godfather* over a decade is a testimony to his standing (and power) in Hollywood.

Even if credits do not correspond to reality, they are highly valued by the community, since they serve to establish, as one producer put it, the “who’s who” of Hollywood. The Internet database known as IMDb, which is now widely consulted for credits of record by the community, acts as the official scorekeeper.

The Value of Pseudonyms

The culture of deception thrives in Hollywood because not only do participants find it in their interest to obscure the distinction between fictional films and the envelope of publicity in which they are delivered, but they can count on not being exposed by the entertainment media. In many cases, the studio’s publicity department works in complicitous partnership with them. For example, before major stars appear on a television program, there is almost always a “preinterview” conference between the star’s publicist and the show segment’s producer and writer (who are often the same person). “The invariable rule,” a producer of CBS Late Night Television explains, “is the segment producer works with the publicist and then interviews the scheduled guest. The publicist makes it clear what he or she wants out of the whole thing. If stars do not do preinterviews, the segment producer scripts the interview on his conversations with the publicist and possibly clips from magazine articles. The segment producer then gives an outline of the interview to the publicist or guest. When the guest arrives, the segment producer goes over it again. The host has the structure of the interview outlined on a blue index card. Guests are never sandbagged.”

The “talking points” publicists suggest are designed to burnish possible weak points in a star’s image. “If a publicist wants to add to the guest’s status as a global force,” the CBS producer continued, “he suggests an early question about the guest’s encounters with some international personage like the queen of England. No one ever checks with the queen.”

The entertainment media’s cooperation in the enhancement of stars’ images also helps the reporters. It gives their interviews more presumptive import and helps maintain their access to the publicists, who can supply them with other celebrity stories.

The shared interest in promoting a star’s favored image may also require diverting attention from sensitive data such as stars’ ages, divorces, cult affiliations, and whatever else might undermine the illusions from which both the community and the entertainment media benefit. This tacit relationship between the Hollywood community and the entertainment media was dramatized by Joe Roth, the head of Revolution Studios, in the 1999 comedy *America’s Sweethearts*. The hero of the farce is publicist Lee Phillips (Billy Crystal), whose job is to fabricate a romantic relationship between the film-within-the-film’s costars, Eddie Thomas (John Cusack) and Gwen Harrison (Catherine Zeta-Jones). To get the cooperation of entertainment reporters, he bribes them with free trips, hotel rooms, gift bags, and interviews with the stars, as well as leaking to them fake footage of the stars’ activities.

Hollywood’s real-life relationship with the media, while at times approaching the farce of *America’s Sweethearts*, proceeds from a serious commonality of interests, and as Tad Friend notes in *The New Yorker*, one of the interests all the players have is in not revealing that commonality: “It is in everyone’s interest (except, perhaps, the reader’s) to pretend that PR consultants are not involved in stories,” Friend writes. “It behooves the journalist, because it suggests that he has penetrated a rarefied realm; it behooves the star, because he looks fearless and unattended by handlers; and it behooves the publicist, because it always behooves the publicist if the star is behooved.”

In some cases, the cooperation between the celebrity’s handlers and reporters may involve more material benefits. According to a profile of him in *The New Yorker* by Ken Auletta, Harvey Weinstein went so far as to make offers of writing assignments to journalists, even, at one point, getting “Richard Johnson, the editor of the *Post’s* Page Six [gossip column], to write a script for a movie, *Jet Set*.” These efforts are not always successful. But they do measure the enormous value that the studios place on controlling the image of their stars—and themselves.

Nor is it surprising that the culture of deception is so deeply entrenched in Hollywood. The industry, after all, derives much of its wealth

and power from its ability to create convincing illusions in the form of movies and television programs—even so-called reality shows—that entertain audiences worldwide. Furthermore, to realize their full profitability, these illusions must be sustained in other products—such as videos, games, theme-park rides, and toys—for years, if not decades. As far as the Hollywood community is concerned, keeping the stars—and other elements—in character offscreen as well as on-screen is now seen as just part of that extended process.

The Pictures in Our Heads

The people here in the White House think they have power. That's wrong. The people who make these [pictures] have power.... They can get inside your head. They can completely take control of everything you see and do, change the way you feel, everything that happens to you, and that's power.

—Ben Stein, *Her Only Sin*

Politics, in its broadest sense, involves a great deal more than winning elections, appointing officials, or influencing legislation. In Harold Lasswell's classic definition, it involves “who gets what, when and how.” The “what” is both material goods, which create wealth, and favorable images, which create honor. In this sense of politics, motion pictures, which have the ability to establish honorific or pejorative images for whole classes of people, represent political power.

In his 1922 study of public opinion, Walter Lippmann described such defining images as “stereotypes,” coining the term from the static molds then used by printers to set type. “We define the world around us according to preexisting stereotypes” or “pictures inside our head,” he wrote, even if “they do not automatically correspond with the world outside.”

Motion pictures, when they came on the scene, proved the most powerful carrier of such mental pictures to date, since they provided a far more convincing illusion of reality than the static representations of photographs and paintings that had preceded them. By transcending the bounds of literacy, and being much more accessible than books, they gave filmmakers an unprecedented power to shape people's perceptions of the world around them.

In the 1890s, before the feature film had been devised or Hollywood incorporated, early filmmakers were creating their own versions of reality, called "actalities." They began by "re-creating" past events—such as the assassination of President William McKinley—and quickly moved on to staging current events. In 1894 a film producer paid boxers James Corbett and Peter Courtney to stage a prizefight in which each of the rounds would last precisely ninety seconds (the duration of the film in the camera), culminating in a final round in which Corbett would knock out Courtney. Filmed prizefights proved so appealing to audiences that a single one in 1897 earned \$750,000 (the equivalent of \$25 million in 2003).

Once they realized that they did not have to limit their illusions to reconstructed events (or staged contemporary ones), producers rapidly began expanding the medium to fictional subjects, such as the twelve-minute-long *Great Train Robbery*, produced in 1903. By 1915, producers were churning out more than four hundred feature-length films a year.

These early movies, often relying on crude stereotypes, depicted different groups of people at work and play and in doing so informed a large part of the population, especially the new arrivals in cities, about accepted social conventions, behavior, and fashion. Some also provided graphic interpretation of events that had shaped the nation. For example, D. W. Griffith, who directed more than four hundred films, created an epic reconstruction of the Civil War, *The Birth of a Nation*, that served to define both Afro-Americans (played by white actors in black makeup) and the white Southerners (shown in Klu Klux Klan robes). After the 190-minute film was screened for President Woodrow Wilson (the first White House screening of a movie), Wilson was apparently so impressed with the fictional imagery that he said, "It is like writing history in lightning, my only regret is that it is all so terribly true."

The political issue now became a matter of deciding who would con-

trol a medium that could produce images so powerful that they could make fiction appear to be truth. Even before the film colony of Hollywood had established itself, government bodies were seeking to control the new medium. As early as 1907, Chicago passed a law allowing censorship of movies. In 1915 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the issue and upheld the right of local government to censor movies, specifically excluding them, as "entertainment," from First Amendment protection.

The federal government asserted its interest in the control of filmed images at the start of World War I, when President Wilson made an arrangement with Hollywood studios for their movies to promulgate pro-American views. Movies were subsequently required, if they were exported abroad, to contain such views—called euphemistically "educational material"—and they had to be approved by Wilson's Committee on Public Information. George Creel, who headed the new censorship body, explained: "What we wanted to get into foreign countries were pictures that presented the wholesome life in America, giving fair ideas of our people and institutions." Since at that point all major movies were made for export as well as domestic consumption, this gave the government immense power over the pictures of America received by people at home as well as abroad.

During the Second World War, Roosevelt set up the Motion Picture Bureau of the Office of War Information (OWI) to both censor and use movies to mobilize American public opinion in support of the war effort. Made up of State Department diplomats, White House officials, and military officers, and headed by former journalist Elmer Davis, the OWI went to great lengths to make sure that Hollywood's images vilified the nation's declared enemies—Germans and Japanese. As Davis candidly explained, "The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go through a medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized." To this end, his staff reviewed all scripts in advance and proposed changes in dialogue, characterizations, and plots that would demonize the German and Japanese enemies. In the case of a Tarzan film, for example, they insisted that the wild animals react violently whenever the Germans appeared.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) shifted the political focus from a concern with the values of the images to a concern with the values of the people who made

them, launching what amounted in Hollywood to a full-scale cultural inquisition. The congressional inquisitors gave writers, directors, and actors accused of subversion the choice of demonstrating repentance by naming others who had engaged in subversive activity. If they refused to name names, they were threatened with criminal contempt charges and possible imprisonment. As noted earlier, the studios, far from taking this opportunity to support their creative workforce, greatly amplified the power of the inquisitors by declaring that anyone who refused to cooperate, even by invoking their constitutional right against self-incrimination, would be fired. To spare themselves public embarrassment, studios also hired ex-FBI agents to weed out those with suspected ties to the Communist Party or even the groups that were suspected of having connections to it. As a result, many writers and directors were blacklisted or otherwise prevented from contributing to American movies (at least under their own names). Although these investigations produced little, if any, evidence that writers, directors, and actors had actually inserted identifiable Communist positions or propaganda in Hollywood's movies, the fear they engendered led the studios to vet scripts well into the 1950s to make sure that they did not contain elements that could be construed by these political investigators as subversive to the American way of life.

Nor was the federal government, with its war-and-peace-time concerns over the political power of celluloid images, the only party that had vied for control over Hollywood's content. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, local politicians, religious organizations, and self-styled custodians of public morality—such as the Catholic League of Decency, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers—all claimed a right to censor movies.

For their part, the studio moguls of the time were not yet secure enough in their new position to fully resist such pressures. Part of this insecurity proceeded from their rapid rise, in less than a generation, from immigrant outsiders to captains of industry—and from their pursuit of the social status that accompanied such a rise. As Neal Gabler writes in *An Empire of Their Own*, “While the Hollywood Jews were being assailed by know-nothings for conspiring against traditional American values and the power structure that maintained them, they were desperately embracing those values, and working to enter the power structure.” They also had to take into account their economic vulnerability. Most of the

major studios—Paramount, MG-M-Loews, Warner Bros., Fox, and RKO—made most of their profits, it will be recalled, not from producing movies or licensing their rights but from the box-office receipts of their own first-run theaters. And these theaters, the fount of their profits, were especially vulnerable to local laws and selective boycotts.

To ensure that their products met the accepted standards of decency, the moguls collectively decided to give up much of their individual power to select what stereotypes and other images of American society appeared in their movies. In 1924 they agreed to acquiesce to a common censor, William Hays, a former postmaster general. Hays was given the job of negotiating with all the relevant civic, religious, and government authorities to arrive at an acceptable formula, or “production code,” that the studios would then impose on all the movies that would be shown in American theaters. The result, it will be recalled, was the Hays Office, which worked under the auspices of the studios’ trade association, the MPAA. This in-house censorship went further than merely banning nudity, profanity, and graphic violence. It proscribed certain entire subjects (such as interracial marriage) and limited the way that particular types of characters (such as policemen) could be portrayed. It even required plots on controversial subjects to have approved endings.

By 1927, the code governed every aspect of production and editing and was circulated among studio executives in the form of a list of “don’ts and be carefuls.” The initial proscribed list included “disrespect for military forces, vilification of the clergy, misuse of the flag, sedition, licentiousness, suggestive nudity, cruelty to children or animals, illegal drug traffic, prostitution, sexual perversion, profanity, rape, miscegenation, man and woman in bed, sex hygiene, childbirth, institution of marriage, sympathy with criminals, and excessive kissing.”

When sound replaced silent pictures a few years later, censorship became more complex. The addition of synchronized sound made it far more difficult to alter movies after they were completed by simply deleting offensive images or written words. So the Hays Office began censoring not just films but proposed scripts, a move that required a larger and more intrusive organization. At the height of its power, this censorship office mandated that every story about law enforcement be one in which lawbreakers never escaped justice and that every picture of marital relations be one in which any form of divorce led ineluctably to tragedy.

When in the 1930s the Hays Office looked askance at movies that focused on social problems such as poverty, studios responded accordingly with lighter fare, such as screwball comedies. The pressure on directors to avoid seriously treating the problems arising from the Depression is the subject of Preston Sturges's 1941 comedy *Sullivan's Travels*, which tells the story of a successful Hollywood director, John Sullivan (Joel McCrea), who rejects his studio's demands that he direct another money-making slapstick comedy. Instead, he decides to make pictures on a political issue: abject poverty in America. Sullivan's attempt at substituting a social-content film for a comedy meets with disaster: not only does his film, entitled *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, not get made, but he ends up in prison (for a murder he did not commit), where he discovers that poor people do not, in fact, want to see movies about poverty; they want to laugh at slapstick comedies. So, on getting his metaphorical freedom, Sullivan returns to making what the studio wants: noncontroversial comedies. Like the fictional Sullivan, most mainstream filmmakers in Hollywood accepted, if not rationalized, the political limitations within which they were working.

After the studio system ended, the Hays Office and official forms of censorship gradually faded away. (The government had also by this time disbanded the Office of War Information.) Yet politicians, interest groups, and other parties concerned with influencing public opinion have not entirely abandoned their efforts to shape the pictures in people's heads. And the studios, although free of formal censorship restrictions (at least in the U.S.), are ever mindful of the power the government wields, if not over them directly, over the far-flung interests of their corporate parents.

28

The Rules of the Game

Hollywood cannot escape its political orbit. Indeed, the new studio system is itself a product of three government interventions. The first came in 1948, when the Justice Department offered the studios a deal they could not refuse: either give up their control over major retail outlets or face the consequences of a criminal antitrust investigation. The studios, one by one, signed the Justice Department's consent decree and, by doing so, relinquished their lucrative system of manufacturing filmed products for captive theaters. This left them little choice but to move into the riskier business of creating content that could be licensed and sold in competitive arenas. Their profits, which were now problematic at best, depended not on box-office sales at theaters they controlled but on their long-term exploitation of intellectual properties in different markets.

The second government intervention came in 1970. By the early 1960s, the television audience had grown to nearly ten times the size of the movie audience and, as Walt Disney—and then Lew Wasserman—had demonstrated, production companies could make enormous profits by making game shows, series, and other programs for the three networks and then syndicating them to local stations. By the time the major studios

realized that they needed access to this market, they faced a significant barrier: the networks. CBS, NBC, and ABC effectively controlled access to the prime-time viewing audience, owned most of the major stations in the most important markets, decided which programs got aired, and owned subsidiaries that produced their programs. As long as the television networks could produce, air, and syndicate their own shows, the movie studios' opportunities were limited.

But unlike the movie business, television broadcasting is regulated by the government. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), whose seven members are appointed by the president, grants six-year licenses for stations to broadcast over the public airwaves and issues the rules that they have to follow to get them renewed. In 1970, after much lobbying in Washington by MCA's Lew Wasserman and other studio heads, the government intervened on the studios' behalf and the FCC passed the previously discussed fin-syn rule, which gave Hollywood studios such an insurmountable advantage over the networks in this business that they took most of it over. The six major studios—which already had underused soundstages, large staffs of technicians, and substantial lines of credit at banks—further gained dominance in television by acquiring the libraries and production facilities of the leading independent television producers, such as Aaron Spelling Productions, Norman Lear-Tandem Productions, Desilu, Lorimar, and Merv Griffin Productions. As a result, the studios' cash cow became television, not movies. Columbia TriStar Pictures, for example, came to depend on the syndication rights of just three series—*Who's the Boss?*, *Married with Children*, and *Designing Women*—to yield over a half billion dollars in licensing income in the 1990s.

The third government intervention paved the way for the studios to merge with the television networks. The FCC weakened the fin-syn rule in the early 1990s and in 1995 abolished it altogether. This move allowed the studios and networks to become part of vertically integrated conglomerates that now control production, distribution, stations, networks, cables, satellites, and other means by which not only the American public but a large part of the world sees television.

Equally important, if less visible, are governmental decisions not to intervene in cartel-like arrangements. In the case of the DVD Consortium, for example, the U.S. Department of Justice not only permitted the

arrangement between American studios and Japanese and European manufacturers, it tacitly encouraged it. It will be recalled that in 1994 Time Warner and its Japanese partner, Toshiba, approached Sony and Philips, who jointly controlled the patents for the digital encoding of sound, and, concerned that Sony and Philips might use these patents to gain an advantage in the codevelopment arrangement, asked the Justice Department to issue guidelines concerning "the misuse and abuse of a dominant patent portfolio to restrict competition." Relayed to them by Time Warner, the guidelines were taken by Sony and Philips officials as a clear warning that the American government expected them to cooperate with Time Warner, and on December 12, 1995, along with Time Warner, Toshiba, and Matsushita (which then owned both Panasonic and Universal Pictures), Sony and Philips pooled their patents into a single DVD Consortium. The patent agreement that emerged from this cartel effectively gave the Hollywood studios crucial control over where and when their movies were shown on DVD.

Because their principal profit centers were now located in areas that either were directly regulated by government, such as the ownership of television stations, or benefited from governmental assistance, such as their control over the DVD, the studios' corporate parents had to concern themselves with not offending the governments that set the ground rules. For one thing, the studios had to take into account the government's views of what benefited the public interest. For example, in the early 1970s, in the wake of the beneficial fin-syn rule, the Nixon administration convened a series of White House conferences with television producers and studio executives aimed at reshaping the image the public was getting of the drug issue in America. According to Egil Krogh, who then served as a Nixon strategist on domestic issues, Nixon and his attorney general, John Mitchell, believed that the administrator's "war" on drugs would be helped if drug users were portrayed in movies and television not as mere "victims of addiction" but as "an integral part of the urban crime problem." Instead of portraying drug abusers as merely self-destructive—as they appeared to be, for example, in Otto Preminger's *Man with the Golden Arm* (1955)—the studios were asked by officials in the Nixon administration to portray them as menaces to the entire society. To this end, Krogh helped organize for the top producers and studio executives "dog and pony" shows in which law-enforcement officials

demonstrated how drug dealers, acting as modern-day versions of evil vampires, infect their clients with an insatiable need to commit robberies and murders to get their ration of drugs and, in doing so, create a nationwide crime wave.

The production executives for these shows got the message. As one Warner Bros. vice president who attended the White House conference in 1971 explained: "These White House people made it clear that they wanted to see a lot more narco-villains, and that was okay with us." Numerous memos were dutifully written by these executives to writers, advising them of ways in which they could use drug addicts as the villains in series. As a result, perpetrators of crime—ranging from robbery and rape to bank embezzlement—were now commonly depicted as addicts.

Two decades later, the government provided a more direct financial incentive to television stations to deliver its antidrug messages. In 1997 Congress passed a law allowing networks effectively to get paid, through a complicated formula, for integrating in the plots of television series antidrug messages that were approved by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. To qualify, television executives often had to negotiate plot points in scripts with officials from this agency. As one Warner Bros. television executive explained, "The White House did view scripts. They did sign off on them." Of course, even if it were not for such financial payments, television and studio executives have ample reason not to offend the government regulators.

The studios' deepening dependence on television requires that they take into account not only the desires of government officials but the influence that various interest groups have on Congress, the White House, and the FCC. After all, the local stations that show the programs, movies, and other material they produce are required to serve the "public interest" of their particular community. In theory, at least, stations could be denied licenses if the FCC found that their programming was a disservice to their community.

In practice, television stations have rarely, if ever, failed to have their licenses renewed, but the FCC requisite has opened the door to challenges from organizations claiming to represent offended community interests. One of the earliest challenges came from the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization with whom the studios had already dealt. In 1942 the NAACP had successfully

persuaded Disney to modify racial images of blacks used in its animated movie *Song of the South* and then established a "Hollywood Bureau" to liaise with top studio executives—including David O. Selznick, Darryl Zanuck, and Louis B. Mayer—about avoiding derogatory stereotypes of blacks in movies. This apparent victory notwithstanding, the NAACP's influence with the studios was limited, because it rarely had the opportunity to review scripts before movies were made—and afterward it was too late. So the organization decided to focus its efforts on television.

As it happened, the television networks were ripe to respond to the NAACP's concerns. After the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders concluded, in 1968, that America was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal," due in some part to the misrepresentation of Afro-American life in the media, the networks were especially sensitive to charges that their programs contained stereotypes that contributed to the racial divide. In response to pressure from the NAACP and other concerned groups, each network, as well as the studios producing the programming, began using unofficial "gatekeepers" to negotiate script problems with the NAACP and other minority representatives. As a result of this effort, the formulaic stereotypes of blacks gradually faded from television and most movies. Instead of black actors being cast as servants, athletes, entertainers, and petty criminals, as they had been in the past, they were now being cast as scientists, judges, presidents, and CIA directors. Conversely, and ironically, producers now found themselves typecasting a new stereotype: white petty criminals. When asked by Ben Stein why virtually all criminals in television series in the 1970s were white, David Begelman, who had been president of Columbia during this period, explained that it was the direct result of pressure from lobbyists to exclude blacks from these roles.

Other interest groups have also attempted to alter the messages conveyed in movies and television on subjects ranging from homosexual relations to seat-belt use in cars. In many cases, the studios assign a producer or writer to review scripts and characters with representatives from these groups, evaluate their complaints, and attempt to resolve any disagreements. DreamWorks, for example, has an "outreach" office that contacts relevant advocacy groups even while films are in preproduction to determine if scripts might offend their members.

The Pentagon, even if not a conventional interest group, has a clear

interest in shaping the American public perception of its activities—if only to help it recruit soldiers. When it comes to movie companies using its facilities—planes, ships, bases, weapons, and personnel—it lays down strict ground rules enforced by its Film Liaison Office. Studios can, of course, reject this free access and rent their own military; as, for example, Coppola did at great cost for the making of *Apocalypse Now*, but if they accept it, as they usually do, they must also give this Pentagon office some control over the resulting images. “If you want to use the military’s toys,” a consultant on such military films explained, “you’ve got to play by their rules.” This accommodation can be seen at work in the terms Disney agreed to in exchange for the warships, planes, and other military assistance for the film *Pearl Harbor*. Not only did the producers have to submit the script to the Pentagon, but they made changes proposed by the Pentagon’s designated historical advisor, Jack Greene. Such changes included replacing the depiction of American pilots as sassy, disdainful, and rebellious toward their superior officers with one that showed them as polite, respectful, and submissive to orders.

Recently, the CIA, following the Pentagon’s lead, created its own liaison office with Hollywood. By supplying films—including *The Recruit*, *The Sun of All Fears*, *Enemy of the State*, and *Bad Company*—with technical consultants, briefings, and even guided tours of its headquarters in Langley, Virginia, the CIA attempts to shape a more “realistic,” and presumably favorable, image of itself.

Similarly, foreign governments also often insist that movies filmed in their country—and that benefit from its locations, facilities, and, in some cases, subsidies—depict their country, culture, and, most important, leadership in a favorable light. To ensure this cooperation, they often require filmmakers to submit the script for approval. To be sure, some filmmakers are not willing to accept these conditions and find less politically sensitive countries to “double” for their subjects. For example, films about China and Vietnam, both of which require script approval, can be shot in Thailand or the Philippines (though usually at a much higher price). But if filmmakers require the authenticity (or budget savings) of shooting in a politically sensitive country, they have to play by its rules. In addition, when it comes to showing a film, the studios must respect the censorship regime that exists in many countries—including France, Germany, China, Japan, Italy, Mexico, Korea, and Brazil. Depending on the country,

restrictions can apply regarding the portrayal of political, cultural, or religious movements. Even the depiction of particular kinds of violence can be proscribed—Britain, for example, has banned head butts in fight scenes. If they want to sell their movies, videos, DVDs, and television programs in these markets—and in some cases, such as *Terminator 3*, foreign markets are presold to help finance the production—studios have to accommodate the government either by changing the script prior to filming it or by making an alternate version of it for foreign release.

Finally, even if there are no foreign censors, the studios—or their corporate parents—may impose their own ground rules on filmmakers to maintain good relations with the host government. Sony, the only corporate parent that does not—and is not allowed to—own a television network in the United States, hews closely to the political ground rules of Japan (where it does have television interests as well as insurance, banking, and other regulated businesses). Or consider the remarkable range of considerations that must come into play for News Corporation, whose chairman, Rupert Murdoch, in 2002–2005 was lobbying the Chinese government to expand the reach of his Star TV’s satellite service; the Italian government to facilitate his acquisition of the Telepiù, which pioneered pay television in Italy; and Sky Italia, his satellite service for Italy; the U.S. government to formally approve his company’s acquisition of DirecTV, the largest satellite company in America, as well as to loosen FCC restrictions on ownership of television stations; the Russian government to sell the satellite service of NTV, one of Russia’s largest television networks; the German government to waive restrictions blocking him from buying part of bankrupt Kirch Media; and the British government to reduce support for the BBC’s News 24, which directly competed with his Sky News. To pursue their worldwide objectives, the corporate parents often are in need of allies abroad—a political consideration their studios must at least be aware of in producing movies or television programs that might embarrass or offend officials whose goodwill is critical.

The ground rules for filmmakers are not always uniformly enforced. Nor are they set in stone. They are essentially opportunistic, changing with political developments, legal decisions, cultural climates, and other circumstances. Nevertheless, they are an indispensable, if not always visible, part of the force field that shapes the logic of Hollywood.

The six major studios need the acquiescence of those who can change

the laws to accommodate their interests. Their corporate parents need the U.S. government's permission to complete their acquisition of all the television networks, cable networks, satellite broadcasters, pay-television channels, and stations in major cities to dominate the portals to their home-entertainment audience. They need laws mandating encryption devices on television sets to control consumer home use of their content. They need laws, such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 2000, to prevent video pirates and other poachers from providing their content without their authorization, or altering their regional restrictions on DVDs. They need a censorship regime to guard against competitors fragmenting their market by offering more explicit material. They need exemption from antitrust laws and other regulations so that they can reach agreement with one another on the standards, formats, and market protection for their content. A singular reality confronts the six corporate giants: they need the support of governments in key countries to protect and expand their entertainment domains. Even if the strategies for fulfilling these political requisites are confined to only the top echelons of the sexopolly, carrying them out affects decisions made at every level of the creative process.

29

The World According to Hollywood

Taken together, the selection of images from Hollywood, both in movies and on television, creates a vision of how the world works. When David Putnam took over the management of the Columbia Studio in 1986, he wrote in a memo to the chairman of Coca-Cola, which then owned the studio: "Movies are powerful. Good or bad, they tinker around inside your brain. They steal up on you in the darkness of the cinema to inform or confirm social attitudes." Even if it is an ephemeral worldview, it reflects the values of the people who create those images; the studios that back them, and the community of peers that reinforces and gratifies them.

Directors

Unlike the fictive Sullivan working under the studio system, today's directors are free to insert their own vision of society in their films without penalty. And many do. For example, Oliver Stone portrayed police as sadists and murderers in *Natural Born Killers* (including footage taken from the now famous video of the police beating of Rodney King in Los

Angelenos); American soldiers as sadists and murderers in *Heaven and Earth, Platoon*, and *Salvador*; and government leaders as murderers and conspirators in *JFK* and *Nixon*. Kathryn Bigelow portrayed the Los Angeles police officers as racist murderers in *Strange Days*. And Francis Ford Coppola portrayed the cardinals of the Vatican as the Mafia's partners in assassination in *The Godfather: Part III*.

At least part of a director's determination to render such powerful pictures of society proceeds from his or her own politics. John Wayne, for example, undertook to produce, direct, and star in *The Green Berets* because he wanted to establish a positive, humanitarian image of American soldiers in the Vietnam War. To this end, he personally wrote President Lyndon Baines Johnson in December 1965 that he intended to make "the kind of picture that will help our cause throughout the world. . . . We want to do it in a manner that will inspire a patriotic attitude on the part of fellow Americans." After the White House endorsed the idea, Wayne bought Robin Moore's bestseller *The Green Berets*—a novel that showed the American forces humanely saving the people of Vietnam from the atrocities of the Communists—and made it into a movie in 1968. Although the film barely earned back its \$7 million budget, it achieved Wayne's political objective.

Coppola used this power to present a very different picture of the Vietnam War in *Apocalypse Now*. Since it focused on American atrocities against the people of Vietnam and the bizarre behavior of the American military—a depiction of the war as, in his words, "essentially a Los Angeles export, like acid rock"—Coppola concluded the project was "something no one [else] dared touch." To get the financing, he had to risk financial ruin by personally guaranteeing to pay the budget overruns himself. As it turned out, the budget deficit amounted to more than \$20 million, which *Apocalypse Now* barely earned back.

Tim Robbins forewent almost all of his compensation to direct *Cradle Will Rock*. He was willing to risk a possible monetary loss because, as he explained it, he wanted to show a vision of the ruthlessness of capitalism that included Nelson Rockefeller's minions using sledgehammers to destroy Diego Rivera's mural in Rockefeller Center. For him, such a "cinematic metaphor" represented "capitalism corrupting art."

Barry Levinson also deferred most of his fee to make the 1997 movie *Wag the Dog*. He explained that the topic of manipulation of the media

by politicians "fascinated" him. With the help of playwright David Mamet, he changed a script loosely based on the novel *American Hero*, about the 1991 Gulf War, into a satiric story in which a president, faced with a sex scandal, employs a Washington spin doctor (Robert De Niro) and a Hollywood producer (Dustin Hoffman) to fabricate a nuclear threat by Muslim extremists to divert attention from his domestic problems. The film succeeded so well in establishing a picture of White House manipulation that when, following the attack on American embassies in Africa in 1998, President Clinton ordered reprisal bombings of al-Qaeda facilities in Sudan, many journalistic enterprises—including *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and CNN—characterized the actions as "wag-the-dog" manipulations.

Filmmakers also work from the images that have been planted in their own heads, at least some of which are the recycled stereotypes from an earlier generation of directors, writers, and producers. Consider, for example, the stereotypical images of financiers as criminal conspirators that emerged from Hollywood in the 1990s. In his still-relevant study of the values that shaped television series in the 1970s, Ben Stein found that most of the producers and writers responsible for a large portion of those series shared the conspiratorial view that "businessmen are bad, evil persons and that big businessmen are the worst of all," since "they are often involved with the Mafia." As a result of this shared Hollywood belief, Stein observed, "the murderous, duplicitous, cynical businessman is about the only kind of businessman there is on TV adventure shows." On programs such as *Columbo*, *Baretta*, *Starsky and Hutch*, *Kojak*, *Harry-O*, *Ironside*, and *Hawzee Five-O*, a three-piece suit, or even a tie, became, Stein notes, "the inevitable badge of crime."

Since episodes from these 1970s series were syndicated for decades on local stations and cable television, they entered, as one producer put it, "the food chain of what future writers watched and consumed." So it is not surprising that the generation of filmmakers brought up on such television fare may have willy-nilly adopted the iconic well-dressed criminal businessman as part of their perceived reality. In any case, by the 1990s, the murderous businessman, whose killings were not figurative, became almost a staple of movies, such as (just to name a few) *A Perfect Murder*, *Enough*, *The Devil's Advocate*, *Blue Steel*, *Ghost*, *The Player*, *Hudsucker Proxy*, and *The China Syndrome*. Even if the businessman-murderer was

not originally scripted wearing an expensively cut suit, silk tie, and groomed hair, production designers commonly drew him in this emblematic style on storyboards that were in turn used by costumer designers and casting directors.

The image was then further recycled when studios sold the rights to use brief scenes from their films to television-news networks to illustrate their stories in the late 1990s. Warner Bros., for example, made such an arrangement with CNN (which was owned by their common corporate parent, Time Warner), with the result that the scene from Oliver Stone's movie *Wall Street* in which the immaculately dressed character Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas) intones "Greed is good" was repeatedly used by CNN to illustrate news reports of corporate corruption. Through this fluid boundary between movies and television news, fictional images come to stand for real events and, if repeated consistently enough, shape the pictures in the public's head.

Even the work of directors who eschew using films to make political statements and strive to entertain the widest possible audience may contain—and powerfully project—a particular worldview. Consider, for example, the 1977 film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, which was both written and directed by Steven Spielberg. The story, whose appeal to a vast audience worldwide made it one of the most commercially successful films in history, concerned the arrival in America of benevolent space aliens in circular spaceships. Part of Spielberg's premise is that the government systematically lies about disturbing phenomena to avoid panicking its citizenry. The culminating scene is one in which aliens exchange a dozen or so humans whom they had abducted to experiment on for a busload of American astronauts who volunteer to accompany them back to their galaxy. To hide its transactions with extraterrestrials, the government stages an elaborate deception, including a fake nerve-gas attack.

The same idea of using well-orchestrated cover-ups to hide alien activities appears in a number of other successful movies produced by Spielberg's personal production company, Amblin Entertainment, including *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, *Men in Black*, and *Men in Black II* (in which government agents employ a handheld device that erases the memory of any civilian who sees alien visitors). Such films promote a view of governments as paternalistic institutions that create elaborate il-

lusions to shield citizens from developments with which they cannot cope by—not unlike the strategies of filmmakers themselves—creating convincing illusions for them. Variations on this theme of governmental concealment are not only a commonplace of movies but provided Twentieth Century-Fox with one of its most successful television series, *The X-Files* (which also became a movie), and ABC with its hit series *Alias*.

Pictures from Organizations

As I point out in *News from Nowhere*, television networks perpetuate their values by hiring, promoting, and rewarding people who tend to identify with them. Movie studios similarly have—and advance—their own particular values. In the older era, when studio moguls showed little subtlety in impressing their values on underlings, each studio tended to make films with a distinctive narrative style that the audiences came to associate, like a branded product, with the logo of that studio. MGM was known for films that exuded the unrestrained lyrical optimism best exemplified by its musical fantasies, Warner Bros. for films that grimly depicted crime and punishment, Universal for its Gothic horror films, Twentieth Century-Fox for social realism, and Paramount for its biblical epics.

Today's studios also make films that reflect their underlying values—even if the distinction is not always obvious to moviegoers. Disney, for example, relies heavily on its wholesome family-entertainment image to attract parents to its theme parks, cruises, Disney Channel, and licensed products. "Ever since Walt Disney created the company, its image has been sacred," a Disney executive said. "Films and filmmakers are expendable, its children-friendly brand is not." To sustain this value, its executives routinely excise out of the films any scenes that might damage the reputation of the Disney brand. It even prohibits its subsidiary Miramax, though it has a separate brand, from distributing films—such as *Kids*, which depicted young teenage boys as sexual predators—that might damage its image. (In 1995 Miramax executives created a nominally independent distribution company, Shining Excelsior Pictures, to distribute *Kids*.) "Everyone here at Disney knows what the company's franchise is and always has been," a top executive at its distribution arm said. "It is the world of kids."

Universal has also defined a studio image for its executives. When Steven Spielberg was a new director at the studio in the seventies, Sidney Sheinberg, who was then running Universal for Lew Wasserman, told him, “We don’t make art films at Universal, we make films like *Jaws*.” Wasserman had already moved MCA into the theme-park business in Burbank, California, and would soon open an even larger park in Orlando, Florida. To serve them, Universal needed “event movies,” as one MCA executive put it—films that, in addition to bringing moviegoers to theaters, would spawn attractions at theme parks and launch a flotilla of toys, games, and other licensable products. Spielberg gave Universal the product it required not only in the case of *Jaws* but with *E.T.*, *The Extraterrestrial*, *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, and *Jurassic Park III*—event films that proved among the most successful licensing franchises and theme-park attractions in history.

Steve Ross, it will be recalled, had a similar formula in mind for Warner Communication. Since he had already put the conglomerate in the toy, game, and theme-park business, he directed the Warner Bros. studio to concentrate its resources on movies based on comic-book heroes from its DC Comics division, such as Batman and Superman, that could create a raft of products for these businesses.

Sony executives also knew the type of films they wanted its newly acquired studio to make when they recruited to run it the Warner Bros. executives Peter Guber and Jon Peters, who had developed the highly successful *Batman* franchise for Steve Ross, and then subsequently recruited the team of Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich to remake *Godzilla*. They wanted movies that featured “action figures,” as Devlin tells it, and particularly action figures that could lend themselves to electronic games played by teenagers.

Sumner Redstone, though he professed a “long-standing love” of the more adult movies of the past, recognized that Paramount needed to produce fare that resonated with the younger audience to which its Nickelodeon, MTV, and other cable channels had dedicated themselves. These films and television programs required, as one top Paramount executive explained, characters who require a minimum of explanation—“simple characters in exciting situations, like Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.”

News Corporation, for its part, needed event films with sufficiently

broad appeal to attract subscribers to its satellite services in Britain, Europe, Latin America, Australia, and Asia—“truly global films,” in the words of Rupert Murdoch. The Twentieth Century-Fox studio filled this requisite with eight of the ten most internationally successful films of the twentieth century in terms of box-office receipts, including *Titanic*, *Star Wars*, and *Independence Day*.

There are minor distinctions between these organizational products—Disney’s animation, for example, tends to be less realistic than that of Paramount—but they pale in comparison with the overriding value that they all place on a common requisite: characters who communicate principally not through words but through visually understood actions to a universal—and younger—audience. It is no accident that a movie like *Terminator 3* features as both its heroes and villains nearly mute robotic killers blasting one another to smithereens; these are truly global action figures understandable in any language or culture, able to provide the basis for an endless variation of toys, theme-park rides, and electronic games. Even in their less fantastic versions, the heroes tend to be characters who can dispatch adversaries without the intervention of police, officials, or any other legal authority.

The most immediate casualty of this simplification is the revealing picture it paints of the legal process. It will be recalled that under the Hays Office’s rules, all Hollywood movies had an embedded value: the inviolability of the law. Those who violated the law, whether bank robbers in crime movies, lynch mobs in westerns, or corrupt politicians in social dramas, had to be punished for their transgression. In *Touch of Evil* (1958), the police officer, Captain Hank Quinlan (Orson Welles), plants evidence that will lead to the conviction of a terrorist bomber; nevertheless, in keeping with the code, he is a villain who must die by a bullet at the end. Today’s studio movies, in search of action heroes, often portray a different picture of justice. Legal processes are not only expendable, but they are often obstacles that heroes must overcome. With this value of the end justifying the means, police heroes need not bother with complicated forensic issues, they simply kill the villain—as do, for example, Detective Leland (Frank Sinatra) in *The Detective*, Inspector Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) in *Dirty Harry*, Sergeant Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson) in *Lethal Weapon*, Special Agent Eliot Ness (Kevin Costner) in *The Untouchables*, and Detective Keller (Al Pacino) in *Sea of Love*, all of

whom commit premeditated homicide and go unpunished. In Curtis Hanson's *L.A. Confidential*, which was nominated for no fewer than nine Oscars in 1998, the hero, Detective Lieutenant Ed Exley (Guy Pearce), initially believes in following the law; but once he sees that rule-abiding behavior will not bring his corrupt superior, Captain Smith (James Cromwell), to justice, he takes matters into his own hands and shoots the captain in the back. After he confesses to the district attorney, police chief, and other officials, the murder is duly covered up, and Exley emerges a hero and man of action.

The same value of direct justice also gave rise to the killer cop's mirror image: the private vigilante. Just as police are seen taking justice into their own hands, so are citizens. Some of these heroic civilians were drawn from comic books, such as *Batman*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Superman*, and *Spider-Man*. These heroes often were masked men, who had to cloak their true identity from the law (a useful feature for the studios, who were thus able to add sequences to the franchise with different actors—George Clooney, Michael Keaton, and Val Kilmer all played Batman, for example). Ordinary citizens, without special powers, were also regularly transformed by Hollywood into vigilantes who hunted down criminals to remedy the failure of the criminal system. For example, in the five *Death Wish* movies (1974–94), liberal New York architect Paul Kersey (Charles Bronson), after realizing that the police are incapable of catching the man who murdered his wife and raped his daughter, buys an arsenal of guns and operates outside the law. Over the next twenty years he murders dozens of rapists, muggers, mobsters, youth gang members, and drug dealers.

Similarly, women in the movies of the new era often turn to action rather than the courts to right the wrongs they have suffered. In *Lipstick*, Chris McCormick (Margaux Hemingway), a fashion model, is raped by a well-known music composer. Since the court acquits him, Chris must shoot him to death herself with a shotgun. In *Erinough*, Slim Hiller (Jennifer Lopez), finding no legal remedy for a rich, abusive husband, trains herself in martial arts and then, with careful planning, kills him. And in *Sleeping with the Enemy*, Laura Burney (Julia Roberts), unable to divorce herself from an abusive husband, fakes her own death by drowning and, when her husband discovers the deception, calls 911 to report a “burglar,” then shoots and kills him.

Lawyers are often depicted as being, if not merely unhelpful or incapable, downright corrupt. In *The Firm*, Mitch McDeere (Tom Cruise) discovers that his high-powered law firm is actually a criminal enterprise engaged in money laundering, extortion, and murder. In *Runaway Jury*, the law firm, which represents gun manufacturers, is engaged not in the practice of law but in jury fixing and bribery. And in *The Devil's Advocate*, the law firm is owned by Satan incarnate, John Milton (Al Pacino).

Intelligence services have also been redefined in movies. Up until the late 1950s, Hollywood depicted America's intelligence services as legitimate, if shadowy, parts of the national-security apparatus. In Hitchcock's 1959 classic *North by Northwest*, for example, after the CIA accidentally entangles Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) in a diversion, he joins forces with them to help prevent an enemy agent from stealing secrets and murdering a CIA counterespionage agent. By the 1960s, however, this picture gradually came more in line with the studio's need for action figures: the intelligence officer, like the hero policeman, became a law unto himself—an executioner. In the twenty James Bond movies, beginning with *Dr. No* (1962), the hero is not only an assassin but one licensed by the British government, which works in partnership with the American CIA, to kill. The CIA also frequently employs its own assassins—witness *The Assignment*, *Conspiracy Theory*, *The Pelican Brief*, *True Lies*, *Point of No Return*, *The Bourne Identity*, *Ronin*, *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, *The Reckoning*, and *Three Days of the Condor*. In *Apocalypse Now*, for example, the CIA assassin-hero, Captain Willard (Martin Sheen), is dispatched to kill American colonel Walter Kurtz (Marlon Brando). Nor is the CIA necessarily acting in America's interest any longer—a plot shift that may better conform to the studio's value of global interest. Indeed, in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, for example, CIA assassins are terrorists, planning to kill four thousand innocent people on Christmas Eve with a truck bomb and falsely blame it on Arab terrorists; in a scene that distances the CIA from America's welfare even further, the CIA officer in charge of this operation, Leland Perkins (Patrick Malahide), suggests that the CIA was similarly involved in organizing the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.

In creating more international villains—a function once served by cold-war enemies—the studios need to avoid gratuitously offending officials in countries whose markets they now rely on for a large share of

their profits. Among the candidates that neatly fit this bill are the greedy executives of multinational corporations who can be cast, in their expensive suits, as corporate terrorists. In *Mission: Impossible II*, the villain is Sean Ambrose (Dougray Scott), who controls the multinational Biocyte Corporation, creator of the Chimera virus, which can cause a horrifically disfiguring global plague. If the virus is released—which is just what Ambrose plans to do—the corporation will reap enormous profits from selling the antidote, which it also exclusively manufactures. Similarly, in the James Bond movie *Tomorrow Never Dies*, the owner of a global media conglomerate, Elliot Carver (Jonathan Pryce), plans to start a nuclear war between China and Britain to increase the circulation of his newspapers and secure valuable television rights in China. In *The Fifth Element*, Jean-Baptiste Zorg (Gary Oldman), head of an armament corporation, arranges for an alien to destroy civilization on earth so he can profit from the chaos. In *The Phantom*, Xander Drax (Treat Williams), the head of a huge industrial conglomerate, attempts to enslave the world. In *Rising Sun*, a Tokyo conglomerate corrupts American politicians and police to gain control of digital video technology. In *The Insider*, cigarette companies purposely conceal the findings that their products cause cancer. In *The Formula*, an oil cartel headed by Adam Steiffel (Marlon Brando) conspires, and murders, to raise global energy prices by suppressing a German formula that would make cheaper synthetic fuel abundant. In *Erin Brockovich*, a power company deliberately hides its pollution of the water supply to avoid paying insurance claims. In *Jolnny Mnemonic*, the Pharmakon drug company suppresses the cure for degenerative diseases so it can maintain its sales of medicines for them. Even in the increasingly rare case that a corporation does not intend evil consequences, it may cause them inadvertently—as it does in such films as *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* and *Deep Blue Sea*—through its greed.

Extraterrestrials, or at least nonhuman beings, also fill this villain bill by providing universally acceptable bad guys. In *The Matrix* series, the battle rages between humans and machines; in *Star Wars: Episode II—The Attack of the Clones*, it is humans and clones; in *Starship Troopers*, it is humans versus alien bugs. Alien villains are also important to the movie-based action-toy and electronic-game licensing business, which had \$16 billion in retail sales in 2005, since a large part of the appeal of

these toys and games to children is, as one toy analyst put it, “confrontation” between good and evil characters. The bestselling action toy derived from *Star Wars* was, for example, not the movie’s heroes but its antihero, Darth Vader. In citing the appeal its supernatural monsters would have for toy buyers, Universal described *Van Helsing* as being “totally about good and evil.”

The hero in these apocalyptic films is often a messiah figure: a single action figure who will save humankind. In George Lucas’s *Star Wars* sextet (1977–2005), a simple farm boy named Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) is the messiah who has to be found and made to realize his power. In David Lynch’s *Dune*, Paul Atreides (Kyle MacLachlan) is the messiah on whom the fate of the universe hinges. In the Wachowski brothers’ *Matrix* trilogy (1999–2003), Neo (Keanu Reeves) is the “one” capable of saving human civilization by believing in his own designation, suggested by an anagram of his name Neo, as the One. The narrative advantage of messiahs in films is that they require little, if any, political context other than faith in a mystical salvation.

To enhance their perceived gravity, event movies often depict imminent global destruction. In some cases, such as *The Matrix Reloaded* and *Terminator 3*, human civilization is totally annihilated (at least until their sequels, *The Matrix Revolution* and *Terminator 4*, redress the disaster). Usually, however—as in *Armageddon*, *Deep Impact*, *The Fifth Element*, and *The Abyss*—the disaster is narrowly averted by the intervention of the hero. The postapocalyptic world envisioned by Hollywood tends to be dark, violent, and totalitarian—as in *Escape from New York*, *Waterworld*, *Mad Max*, *Artificial Intelligence*, and *Twelve Monkeys*.

Whatever their relation to reality, these studio products powerfully represent the world—past, present, and future—according to Hollywood.