

# Movies as Art

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# newstatusofmoviesasanartform" class="subtitle">New Status of Movies as an Art Form

Motion pictures have advanced, in three-quarters of a century, from the nickelodeon to Lincoln Center—from inexpensive entertainment for the masses to “the central art of our time.”<sup>1</sup> Most of the people who go to the movies are young, intelligent and, to an extent not fully appreciated, film-educated. A recent survey, commissioned by the Motion Picture Association of America, found that around 50 per cent of the contemporary film audience is under age 24 and that 75 per cent of the audience is under age 40. Today's average high school student spends 11,000 hours in the classroom before graduation. By contrast, the same student has watched television for 15,000 hours and has seen 500 feature motion pictures by the time he is graduated. Around 75 per cent of the TV viewing time, moreover, has been taken up by filmed programs.<sup>2</sup>

Small wonder, then, that young people consider film “their” medium. Courses on production and appreciation of motion pictures are proliferating in the country's colleges and even in high schools. The fourth National Student Film Festival was held recently at Lincoln Center in New York City. Some of the most sought-after directors now in Hollywood are relative newcomers to the motion picture industry—Mike Nichols (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Graduate*), Francis Ford Coppola (*You're a Big Boy Now*, *Finian's Rainbow*), Noel Black (*Pretty Poison*), John Cassavetes (*Shadows*, *Faces*).

Youth-oriented movies have scored both critical and financial success. The most notable recent example is *The Graduate*, a 1968 picture that in its first year of theater release became the fourth biggest box-office hit in the history of the movies.<sup>3</sup> Of the top 10 films, ranked according to rentals received by American and Canadian distributors, no fewer than seven were released in the past six years and four of the seven had special appeal for young people.<sup>4</sup>

## Rising Stature of Movie Critics and Criticism

Because movies are taken more seriously than heretofore by persons who regularly see them, film criticism has become more serious also. Movies were dismissed as trivial for years, even by many of those who worked in them; the great director David Wark Griffith initially was “ashamed at being reduced to this low form of occupation.”<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, film criticism tended to be hackwork. A conspicuous exception to this general rule was the criticism of the late novelist James Agee, who considered motion pictures an art form and treated them as such in his reviews for *Time* and *The Nation* in the 1940s.

Today, some of the country's leading critics are engaged in reviewing and analysis of films. They include, among others, Pauline Kael (*The New Yorker*), Stanley Kauffmann (*The New Republic*), and Judith Crist (*New York*). Charles Champlin, principal film critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, has written: “The revolution of rising interest in films and film-makers . . . sweeps along the film critic as well. He probably has more readers these days, and certainly more discerning readers. A plot synopsis and a ‘Gee Whiz’ won't suffice, if they ever did.”<sup>6</sup>

More esoteric criticism may be found in the French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* and the American quarterly *Film Culture*. The guiding principle of the criticism published in both magazines is the *auteur* theory—the notion that every film has an “author,” who almost always turns out to be the director. In other words, the collected films of a distinguished director can be expected to form a body of work with a distinctive, unifying vision. Opponents of the *auteur* school contend that it produces dogmatic criticism. A minor film by a highly esteemed *auteur* director like Alfred Hitchcock is apt to be overpraised, while a major picture by a lightly regarded director like John Huston is likely to be underrated.

## Recognition of Cultural Value of Some Films

Certain recent movies have become almost news events, as was the case with *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone With the Wind* in earlier years. *Bonnie and Clyde*, a 1967 release that recounted the criminal careers of the bank robbers Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow in the 1930s, was dismissed initially as a routinely sensational film of the gangster genre. But soon several critics had second thoughts. *Bonnie and Clyde*, according to the emerging consensus, was a perceptive study of ambivalent American attitudes toward violence. In the end the film was nominated for several Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awards, and one of its stars, Estelle Parsons, won the 1968 best-supporting-actress award.

*The Graduate*, released a year after *Bonnie and Clyde*, was a critical and box-office hit from the beginning. Jacob Brackman, in a long article about it in the *New Yorker*, said: *The Graduate* “seems to have become something of a cultural phenomenon—a nearly mandatory movie experience, which can be discussed in gatherings that cross the boundaries of age and class. It also seems to be one of those propitious works of art which support the theory that we are no longer necessarily two publics—the undiscerning and the demanding—for whom separate kinds of entertainment must be provided. Its sensational profits suggest that Hollywood can have both its cake and its art. . . . *The Graduate* seems to be telling us that the public has been underrated.”<sup>7</sup>

Much of the appeal of *The Graduate* derives from its irreverent, even contemptuous attitude toward middle-class mores. Young people today often condemn America as a “plastic society.” Thus, at a party scene occurring near the beginning of *The Graduate*, a middle-aged man draws aside the young hero of the film, Benjamin, and whispers to him the secret of success: “Plastics.” Young people, it is said, readily identify themselves with the naive Benjamin, while middle-aged people are able to enjoy the film because they do *not* identify themselves with Benjamin's mother and father, Mrs. Robinson, and the other parents portrayed in *The Graduate*.

A number of recent pictures have made news because of their frank approach to sex. *I Am Curious (Yellow)*, a Swedish film that includes several scenes of sexual intercourse, has been playing to capacity audiences wherever it has been shown. *The Killing of Sister George*, based on a play about lesbianism, contains a scene depicting a sexual act between two women. Director Edward Dmytryk said last January that he had been ordered to insert a homosexual rape scene in the forthcoming *Act of Anger*.<sup>8</sup> Scenes of nudity have become commonplace in both American and European films.

## Revision of Code Handling of Sex and Violence

These developments have led to demands that movies be censored. State police in Connecticut ordered theater managers to delete the sex scene in *Sister George*, and the managers complied.<sup>9</sup> They did so despite the fact that the Supreme Court, in a series of rulings, has held prior censorship of motion pictures unconstitutional and has severely limited the powers of state and local censors.<sup>10</sup> Freed from such outside restraints, the American motion picture industry has instituted a system of self-regulation which in effect delegates to parents the decision of whether their children should see a given movie.

The Motion Picture Code and Rating Program, drawn up by the Motion Picture Association of America and put into effect Nov. 1, 1968, established a Code and Rating Administration which assigns to every film exhibited in the United States one of the following four ratings: G—suggested for general audiences; M—suggested for mature audiences (adults and mature young people); R—persons under 16 years of age not admitted unless accompanied by parent or adult guardian; X—persons under 16 not admitted. Among current releases, *Oliver!* is rated G; *The Lion in Winter*, M; *Goodbye, Columbus*, R; and *Sister George*, X.<sup>11</sup>

In determining what rating a picture should be given, the Code Administrator is expected to take into account the following standards laid down by the M.P.A.A.:

The basic dignity and value of human life shall be respected and upheld. Restraint shall be exercised in portraying the taking of life.

Evil, sin, crime and wrongdoing shall not be justified.

Special restraint shall be exercised in portraying criminal or anti-social activities in which minors participate or are involved.

Detailed and protracted acts of brutality, cruelty, physical violence, torture and abuse shall not be presented.

Indecent or undue exposure of the human body shall not be presented.

Illicit sex relationships shall not be justified. Intimate sex scenes violating common standards of decency shall not be portrayed.

Restraint and care shall be exercised in presentations dealing with sex aberrations.

Obscene speech, gestures or movements shall not be presented. Undue profanity shall not be permitted.

Religion shall not be demeaned.

Words or symbols contemptuous of racial, religious or national groups shall not be used so as to incite bigotry or hatred.

Excessive cruelty to animals shall not be portrayed and animals shall not be treated inhumanely.<sup>12</sup>

The foregoing standards roughly parallel those contained in the old Motion Picture Production Code, which was drawn up in 1930 after widespread protest against licentiousness and crime on the screen. The old code, however, was considerably more detailed than the new one, and many of its taboos seem quaint or incomprehensible today. Prohibited words and expressions included "fanny," "tomcat," "nerts" and "hold on to your hat." Even after revision in 1956, the old code banned utterance of such words as "chippie," "pansy," and "S.O.B."<sup>13</sup>

### Fate of Old Films; Effort to Build Up Archives

Such matters are of only passing interest to film scholars. Their primary concern at present is the preservation of motion pictures in film archives. Numerous films of the past, masterpieces as well as potboilers, may be irretrievably lost. The American Film Institute, after surveying the field, found that one-half of all films ever made in the United States no longer were accessible.

Thousands were never copyrighted and could not be located. Thousands more, printed on fragile nitrate stock, had turned to dust and been discarded. Countless others were scattered in depositories and private collections all over the world.

Many American classics—films such as *Scarface*, with Paul Muni; Theda Bara's *Cleopatra*; *Stagecoach*, John Ford's great Western; *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* with Lon Chaney Sr.—no longer could be found in complete 35mm safety prints. Of the approximately 200,000 motion pictures released in the United States since 1894, less than one-tenth were stored in major film archives on safety stock.<sup>14</sup>

The perishability of film stock complicates the task of preservation, even when negatives or prints are available. Until 1952, motion pictures intended for theater release were photographed on film with a nitro-cellulose base (nitrate film). The chief advantages of nitrate film were flexibility and wearability. But it has one fatal flaw: the nitrogen compounds of which it is composed are highly unstable. "Nitrate film begins to decompose from the moment its production is completed."<sup>15</sup>

Disintegration of nitrate film usually is slow but always is irreversible. In the course of decomposition, the film releases noxious gases, shrinks, and becomes even more highly inflammable than it is ordinarily. The film emulsion—on which the photographic images are recorded—undergoes progressive discoloration and fading. Finally, the entire film congeals into a solid mass and then disintegrates into a brownish powder.

Fortunately, a more reliable kind of film stock is now available. Its raw material also is cellulose, but it is treated not with nitric acid but with acetic acid, so as to form acetyl cellulose. This acetate film is more stable and much less inflammable than nitrate film. In good storage conditions, it may be expected to have a life of 200–300 years.

Film archivists are constantly searching for rare nitrate negatives and prints with the object of reproducing them on acetate stock before they are lost to decomposition. The resulting copies inevitably are of lower image quality than the films from which they were made; the latter, in turn, usually are several prints removed from the original camera negative.

One of the principal goals of the American Film Institute, a nonprofit corporation founded on June 5, 1967, is "to preserve, catalogue and provide for the increased accessibility of outstanding American films." On Dec. 11, 1967, the A.F.I. board of trustees approved allocation of \$1.2 million, nearly one-fourth of the institute's initial budget, for the conservation of America's film heritage. The intended repository of this heritage is the National Film Collection housed in the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Although the Library of Congress is America's largest film archive, with around 25,000 titles,<sup>16</sup> it had, until recently, a serious gap. The gap resulted from the fact that only 30 feature films were deposited as evidence of copyright between 1912 and 1942. To dramatize the situation, the A.F.I. and a panel of film historians drew up an initial rescue list of 250 important American films believed to be lost or in danger of being lost because good 35mm copies of them were not known to exist in any archive. Seventy-five per cent of those films now have been located.

Long-unavailable and presumably lost films sometimes turn up in private collections or in foreign film archives. For example, Gosfilmfond (State Film Archives of the Soviet Union) recently donated to the Museum of Modern Art two D. W. Griffith features released in 1919—*A Romance of Happy Valley* and *Scarlet Days*—in return for some early Russian newsreels. But discovery sometimes comes too late. One of the classics of the silent screen was Erich von Stroheim's 1923 movie of the Frank Norris novel *McTeague*. Meticulously faithful to the book, Stroheim's film ran to 50 reels—more than eight hours—and was trimmed by him to 24 reels. When the director refused to cut it further, Irving Thalberg, the new production chief of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, reduced it to 10 reels and released it under the title *Greed*.

Film historians have long wondered if an uncut version of *Greed* existed. It transpired that, until about 1960, the M-G-M vaults contained a print of the film about six reels longer than that which was put into theater release. But the longer version was filed under the working title of *McTeague*, not *Greed*, and by the time it was discovered in the vaults, the film had disintegrated.

## landmarks in development of movies"

# class="subtitle">Landmarks in Development of Movies

The film industry observes this year, somewhat arbitrarily, its 75th anniversary. Thomas Edison, who invented the phonograph in 1876, began shortly thereafter to contrive its visual equivalent. By 1889 he and George Eastman had perfected the frame-lined celluloid strip which set pictures in motion. A few years later, "moving pictures" could be seen "in places originally called penny arcades or peep shows, which soon became known as Kinetoscope Parlors."<sup>17</sup>

The year 1969 was selected as the diamond jubilee of movies in America because, on April 14, 1894, the first kinetoscope parlor opened at 1155 Broadway in New York City. Five brief film episodes could be viewed for 25 cents. Now a shoe store, the original kinetoscope parlor was declared a movie shrine by Mayor John V. Lindsay on April 10, 1969.

### Nickelodeon Era; D. W. Griffith and Early Stars

The earliest motion pictures projected on a screen were exhibited mostly in vaudeville theaters. In general, they consisted of "topical views"—tidbits of nature study, brief comic interludes, and nearly as brief scenes from stage successes (Joseph Jefferson as Rip Van Winkle, Sarah Bernhardt enacting the duel scene from *Hamlet*). The first two American films to tell a story in cinematic terms were *The Life of an American Fireman* and *The Great Train Robbery*, both made by Edwin S. Porter in 1903.

*The Great Train Robbery* proved a bonanza to nickelodeons—theaters where, as their name suggests, patrons could see motion pictures for five cents. In big cities, the nickelodeons often afforded the only entertainment available to the poor. They also performed an educational function for immigrants, who learned about American life from the one-reel dramas and acquired some knowledge of English as they related the subtitles to the action.

D. W. Griffith, the first great figure in motion pictures, began his film career in the nickelodeon era. After playing the leading role in Porter's *Rescued From an Eagle's Nest* in 1907, Griffith joined the Biograph Company the following year as an actor and writer. He was soon assigned to direct his first film, *The Adventures of Dolly*, with the assistance of G. W. "Billy" Bitzer, the studio's head cameraman. The two men were destined to form "the most famous creative partnership in film history."

Griffith is credited today with originating the basic "grammar" of film. He changed a camera in mid-scene; used cross-cutting; introduced the flashback, the long shot, the close-up, the fade-in, the fade-out; accelerated editing; and made the first American film of four reels, *Judith of Bethulia* (1913). The film for which Griffith is best remembered, *The Birth of a Nation*, created a sensation on its release in 1915. At 12 reels and three hours, the Civil War epic was the longest American film produced up to that time, and it still stands as one of the most profitable ever released.<sup>18</sup>

Griffith was responsible for launching the careers of many stars of the silent-film era. He realized early that stage training was not important to a movie actor and could often prove a handicap. Accordingly, he set out to find and train young film actors and actresses amenable to his direction. Some of his earliest finds included Mary Pickford, Blanche Sweet, and Mabel Normand. Griffith's *Intolerance*, made one year after *The Birth of a Nation*, featured a multitude of established or future stars in leading or supporting roles—Mae Marsh, Monte Blue, Erich von Stroheim, Bessie Love, Constance Talmadge, Elmo Lincoln, Lillian Gish, Wallace Reid, Carol Dempster, Douglas Fairbanks, Donald Crisp, and others.

### Growth of the Big-Studio System in Hollywood

*The Birth of a Nation* established beyond question the artistic and financial potentialities of motion pictures. From 1916, production increased steadily in volume and quality and many new companies entered the field. One of the first movie pioneers was Carl Laemmle, founder of Universal Pictures. In 1914, Laemmle bought 230 acres of land in the San Fernando Valley of California, where he built the Universal City studio. Early arrivals in Hollywood included Louis B. Mayer (the Mayer Company), Samuel Goldwyn (Goldwyn Pictures), William Fox (Fox Film Corporation) and the Warner brothers, Harry, Jack, Sam and Albert.<sup>19</sup>

Consolidation of the industry began early in the 1920s. Independent producers were gathered into a few giant companies which could maintain big studios and control large chains of theaters. A prime example was the merger, April 17, 1924, of the Metro, Goldwyn, and Mayer companies.<sup>20</sup> With Louis B. Mayer as general manager and Irving Thalberg as production supervisor, M-G-M became within a few years the most prestigious film company in Hollywood.

Thalberg in particular is credited with perfecting the big-studio system that dominated Hollywood in its most prosperous years, the 1930s and 1940s. The director and the star took second billing to the studio. One of Thalberg's first tests at M-G-M was his battle with Erich von Stroheim, who had directed the highly successful *Blind Husbands* and *Foolish Wives* for Universal while Thalberg was still employed by that company. After Thalberg fired him from *Merry-Go-Round* at Universal, Stroheim moved to the Goldwyn Company to film *McTeague*. Stroheim had just finished work on the film when the M-G-M merger was consummated. Thalberg, as noted, ordered *McTeague* cut to one-fourth its original length. Stroheim made one more film for M-G-M, *The Merry Widow*, and then left the studio.

As M-G-M production supervisor, Thalberg expected his directors to put a story on film in a straightforward manner. “And Thalberg did most of the important cutting himself—first, in the script, and then in the final editing before and after previews. As a result, most of the M-G-M directors were highly accomplished journeymen, but seldom more than that.”<sup>21</sup>

The star system also underwent change because of Thalberg. Three of the greatest stars of the World War I era—Mary Pickford, Charles Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks—formed the United Artists Corporation (with D. W. Griffith) in 1919. One reason why they did so was that their services commanded so high a price that their pictures, though immensely popular, returned a relatively small profit to the studio. They had thus priced themselves out of the contract-player market. Thalberg found and developed his own stars and tied them to the studio. He signed so many actors and actresses to exclusive M-G-M contracts that the company boasted of “more stars than there are in the heavens.”

By the early 1930s, according to Thalberg's biographer, “No other studio could match M-G-M's collection of contract players.” In 1932, the M-G-M star stable included Ethel, John, and Lionel Barrymore; Wallace Beery, Joan Crawford, Marie Dressier, Clark Gable and Norma Shearer (Mrs. Irving Thalberg). The studio's “featured players” included a host of stars-to-be, such as Jean Harlow, Myrna Loy, and Franchot Tone.

Under the studio system, each company's film product had a more or less distinctive touch. M-G-M in the 1930s produced a number of all-star pictures like *Grand Hotel*, *Dinner at Eight*, and *The Women*. In general, the studio under Thalberg ran heavily to dramatic pictures adapted from literature—*Anna Christie*, *A Free Soul*, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Camille*, *The Good Earth*, and others. Warner Brothers in the 1930s was noted for biographical films of social significance—*The Story of Louis Pasteur*, *The Life of Entile Zola*, *Juarez*, *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet*, *A Dispatch From Reuters*.<sup>22</sup> Paramount's specialty in those years was comedies, many of them starring Mary Boland, W. C. Fields, Alison Skipworth, and Mae West.

### Studio's Decline; New Importance of Directors

The studio system remained essentially intact until the late 1940s. Then, in short order, the industry suffered two serious blows.

In 1950 came the [Supreme Court] “consent” decree, whereby those producing companies owning theater chains in the United States were ordered to divest themselves of their holdings. With that decree went the automatic availability of the theaters which had made distribution possible regardless of quality. Within the next two years the full impact of television hit America, and theater attendance dropped to 45 million a week [as opposed to 90 million a week in 1949] and distribution income dropped from \$1.7 billion to under \$1 billion. Some 6,000 theaters fell by the wayside. Three companies retired from the scene—Republic, Monogram, and RKO. Others retrenched by eliminating their contract players, directors, and writers, and by dropping aggregate motion picture production from 400 per year to fewer than 150 per year.<sup>23</sup>

As a result, independent producing companies formed by stars and highly regarded producers and directors stepped in to supply distributors with films on a quality rather than a quantity basis. The new companies made—and still make—pictures abroad to suit the tax convenience of stars, to obtain authentic locales, and to take advantage of cheaper labor costs. The major Hollywood studios produced fewer films themselves; instead, they financed the production and distribution of independently made pictures.

The decline of the Hollywood studio has worked to the advantage of directors, particularly younger ones. Alfred Hitchcock has long been known for his distinctive mixture of suspense and humor. Now a number of relatively new filmmakers are acquiring similar reputations. Prominent among them is Mike Nichols. In his current film, *Catch-22*, Nichols has complete creative control over his final product—including the contractual right of final cut and the option of not showing his rushes to studio executives. He is the first director since Orson Welles made *Citizen Kane* in 1941 to have such power.

In the current order of film-making, moreover, “The director has virtually replaced the star at the center of movie economics.”<sup>24</sup> The appearance of supposed stars in a mediocre film no longer is sufficient to rescue it at the box office, as several pictures starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton attest. By the same token, an outstanding or a controversial picture without stars can be a hit. A recent case in point is Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in which the two principal human roles were played by relatively unknown actors, Keir Dullea and Gary Lockwood. The star of the picture, in the estimation of many viewers, was a talking computer named HAL.

### Innovations to Meet Radio and Tv Competition

In their short history, motion pictures have proved remarkably adept at fending off challenges from competing mass media. The first such challenge came from radio in the late 1920s. Box-office receipts then were in decline, and introduction of vaudeville and novelty acts did not help. Then, in 1927, Warner Brothers persuaded the popular singer Al Jolson to make the first “talking” picture. *The Jazz Singer* actually was a silent film for the most part, but it contained three Jolson songs and a snatch of dialogue. The film was an instant success, and the “talkies,” though still to be perfected, were on the way to reviving and revolutionizing the industry.

The next—and more serious—challenge did not come until two decades later, with the arrival of network television. The home screen offered free entertainment, as had radio, and movie attendance slumped. This time the movie industry mounted a many-pronged counterattack. Many more films than formerly were made in color,<sup>25</sup> and wide-screen projection processes were developed. Three-dimensional movies, including use of special glasses, enjoyed a brief vogue in 1953–54.

The most important change, however, was that of subject matter. Television freed Hollywood “from its thrall to the 12- or 13-year-old mentality for which, in the past, the [movie] moguls cheerfully admitted they aimed.”<sup>26</sup> At first, the strictures of the Motion Picture Production Code prevented anything more than gingerly treatment of a host of controversial subjects. Then, in 1956, the code was revised to remove the total ban on portrayal of drug addiction, drinking and miscegenation. A further revision in October 1961 sanctioned films containing “references ...to ...sex aberrations, provided any references are treated with care, discretion and restraint.” The industry took full advantage of these new opportunities.

In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the American film and television industries remained mutually hostile. Sylvester L. (Pat) Weaver Jr., president of the National Broadcasting Co., in 1953 extolled the presentation of live entertainment on television and condemned the use of “sterile kines.”<sup>27</sup> For their part, Hollywood studios declined to sell to television even the old feature films stored in their vaults.



A major breakthrough occurred in the autumn of 1961, when NBC began to show feature films in prime time on Saturday nights. The viewer response was so favorable that a prime-time movie was scheduled on one network or another seven nights a week in the 1968–69 season. Eight such programs are in the works for the 1969–70 season. Difficulties may arise, however, when some of the current crop of sexually outspoken films become available for television showing. The author of a letter printed in the *Washington Post*, April 16, 1969, complained that a censored version of *The Chapman Report* shown on a local channel had been “so distorted that at times it didn’t even make sense,” and that the censorship “caused the audience to assume that certain acts occurred which in fact did not occur in the original movie.”

Additional changes in film technology are in the offing. Cinerama, employing a curved screen of 140 degrees, may be supplanted by Dimension 150, which would employ a 150-degree screen. The average person’s range of vision is between 160 and 170 degrees. A 360-degree screen is feasible, and was demonstrated at Montreal’s Expo 67, but it does not lend itself readily to story-telling.

Dr. Richard Vetter, a former University of California professor who helped to develop Dimension 150, believes that holography, a 3-D process not requiring glasses, eventually will be adapted for theater films.

It will be three-dimensional, but not as we’ve known the process. You will see a total image, but if you wish a total perspective you can walk behind it and see it from the other side. It will need neither a screen nor, after a while, the circular-style dome most theaters will eventually become. Anywhere will do. The method of projection will be a laser beam and the viewer can watch from any perspective at all, just so he doesn’t obstruct the beam.

Vetter has no idea exactly how the process will work: “All we know is that it is possible and should become commercially feasible by the year 2000.”<sup>28</sup>

### Takeover of Movie Companies by Conglomerates

The current good health of the movie industry in general has made film companies one of the favorite targets of expanding conglomerate corporations. In recent years, Paramount has been acquired by Gulf & Western Industries Inc., whose basic business activities include metals, chemicals, and electronic products; United Artists has been merged with Transamerica Corp., a concern which deals primarily in real estate and insurance; Warner Brothers has become part of Canada’s Seven Arts Productions Ltd., a company engaged in leasing of theatrical films to television; Embassy Pictures has become a subsidiary of Avco Corp.; and Universal Pictures has been acquired by the Music Corporation of America.

Only four independent film studios remain: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Columbia, Walt Disney Productions, and 20th Century-Fox. Wall Street analysts believe Fox will be the next takeover target. The studio, anticipating this possibility, has recalled its convertible debentures in the hope of persuading shareholders to exchange them for common stock. Warner-7 Arts, already a merged company, was the object of a takeover bid by the National General Corp. When the deal fell through last January, Commonwealth United Corp. and Kinney National Service Inc. submitted rival bids to acquire the company.<sup>29</sup>

## filmstudyincollegesanduniversities" class="subtitle">Film Study in Colleges and Universities

The growing number of courses on subjects related to movie production offered by colleges and universities testifies to the general acceptance of film as an art form. “The incorporation of film study into the university structure, on both the graduate and undergraduate levels, has taken place with unprecedented speed when compared with the development of academic approaches to other art forms. Music, painting, theater, and dance were all practiced for centuries before their theory and history were ever studied. And vocational training in those arts, until this century, generally took place in academies or by apprenticeship, independent from the university.”<sup>30</sup>

One index of rising student interest in film is the increase of campus film societies. There were around 200 such societies in the early 1950s; now there are more than 4,000. Although the appearance of film courses in the curriculum has lagged well behind extracurricular film activities, academic study in the field has undergone considerable growth in recent years. According to a survey by the American Film Institute, 51 colleges and universities offer degrees in film study; 49 of them award bachelor’s degrees, 36 award master’s degrees, and 12 award doctorates. In addition, 168 colleges and universities offer courses (but not degrees) on film subjects. Altogether, the number of colleges giving such courses has grown by 84 per cent in the past five years. The A.F.I. survey found that 4,144 students were majoring in film on the undergraduate level and 1,191 on the graduate level in the 1968–69 academic year.

### College Film Societies and Courses of Study

The two leading universities for film study, in number of courses offered, are the University of California at Los Angeles (45 courses) and the University of Southern California (71 courses), both of which are situated near Hollywood. At U.S.C., each master’s degree candidate is required to complete at least one course in each of four areas of concentration: camera, script-writing, sound recording, and editing. The candidate’s first production experience is acquired in a beginning workshop comprised of about 30 students, who are divided into crews of five or six apiece. Once shooting begins, a faculty adviser periodically checks the crews’ progress, but each group produces a film with a minimum of guidance.

While production is in progress, daily rushes from each crew are screened for everyone in the workshop. Mistakes are pointed out by the class, thereby anticipating future production and editing problems. The final critique at the end of the workshop affords the class an opportunity to meet in open discussion with industry producers, directors, and editors. If a student wishes further training as a director, he can enroll during the second semester in another production workshop where he may have a chance to write and direct his own film.

During his second year, the U.S.C. master’s candidate begins work on either a film thesis or a written thesis. There is also a program of independent study which permits work on a project without specific course responsibilities. It is during the student’s second year that he first confronts the financial problems associated with film-making. If he undertakes a film thesis, he must find his own support since the university allocates no money for graduate-student productions.

A difficulty confronting the holder of a degree in film studies is the limited number of openings for new talent in Hollywood. Opportunities are greatest for directors, writers, and producers, and least for cameramen, editors, art directors, sound technicians, and the like. According to Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, a total of 57 directors, 39 writers, and 35 producers have made feature film debuts in the past two years. They have been able to do so because of the relative ease of joining the guilds of directors, writers, or producers.

The film craft unions, on the other hand, have been described as “virtually impossible to crack.” The principal barrier facing the newcomer is the union “experience roster.” The unions require that all persons on the roster must be employed or offered employment before any non-roster personnel are hired. In hearings held in Los Angeles in March 1969, the U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission indicated that the roster system might be in violation of the Taft-Hartley Act because it in effect established a closed shop—one in which union membership is a requirement for hiring. Even if the roster system survives challenge, attrition promises to provide openings in the unions eventually. The average age of film union members is reported to be in the forties, and more than 3,800 union members will reach retirement age in the next five years.

### Financial Aid for Young Film Makers and Interns

The American Film Institute extends financial aid to young film-makers through a variety of programs. A \$500,000 fund has been established by A.F.I. to assist students and independent companies to produce short films. During 1968, 16 grants ranging from \$500 to \$2,500 were made to students for films to be produced as a part of their course work, and 22 grants of between \$1,000 and \$15,000 were made to independents.

Under the A.F.I. intern program, promising young filmmakers are given an opportunity to work with established directors and producers on a daily basis. Each internship carries a grant of \$2,500, which usually is sufficient to support the recipient through production of the film to which he is assigned. Eight interns have been selected to date, and the institute expects to name four each quarter or 16 a year. The most recent interns were assigned to the following directors and pictures: Arthur Hiller (*The Out-of-Towner*), Mike Nichols (*Catch-22*), Sam Peckinpah (*The Ballad of Cable Hogue*) and Peter Yates (*John and Mary*).

Opportunities for new film-makers to make feature films have always been few, due principally to the large amount of money required to produce a feature film and the consequent financial risks. In an effort to extend possibilities for new talent, A.F.I. has initiated a plan to enable the production of modestly budgeted feature films. Fourteen film companies are participating in the plan and the National Association of Theatre Owners has pledged its cooperation in assuring widespread exhibition of any new films which result.

As a basis for the plan, A.F.I. has set up subsistence grants of \$2,000 for the writing of screen plays. In 1968 five screen-writing grants were awarded. It is not expected that all of the resulting scripts will be produced by A.F.I., but in each case the writer is given an opportunity to bring a cinematic idea to the script stage where it can be considered for financing through A.F.I. or other sources.

Much of the fascination of film stems from the fact that, like opera, it is an amalgamation of various arts. Jerry Strawbridge, a U.S.C. graduate and winner of a 1967 National Student Film Festival award, has explained how he became interested in film-making: “Sometime during my junior year, ...I realized that film has much greater potential for affecting audiences, many more possibilities for communication [than other arts]. If you write poetry, for instance, you deal with words, and if you make a play you deal with words and actors; if you paint a picture you deal with forms and colors, that sort of thing. Well, when you make a film, you're dealing with all of these things: you're creating the words, forming the colors, putting together the music, and so on. You have, in effect, a multi-sensory bullet to fire at people.”<sup>31</sup>

## Footnotes

[1] Richard Schickel, “The Movies Are Now High Art,” *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 5, 1969, p. 44.

[2] Figures supplied by American Film Institute, Washington, D. C.

[3] Joseph E. Levine, through whose Embassy Pictures *The Graduate* was released, has predicted that it will eventually become the top money-maker of all time.

[4] *Variety* figures printed in the show-business newspaper's 63rd anniversary edition, Jan. 8, 1969. The top 10, with year of release and U. S.-Canadian rentals through 1968: *The Sound of Music* (1965, \$72 million); *Gone With the Wind* (1939, \$70.4 million); *The Ten Commandments* (1957, \$40 million); *The Graduate* (1968, \$39 million); *Ben Hur* (1959, \$38 million); *Doctor Zhivago* (1965, \$37.5 million); *Mary Poppins* (1964, \$31 million); *My Fair Lady* (1964, \$30 million); *Thunderball* (1965, \$27 million); *Cleopatra* (1963, \$26 million).

[5] Richard Griffith and Arthur Mayer, *The Movies* (1957), p. 24.

[6] Charles Champlin, “The Daily Film Critic,” *American Film Institute Newsletter*, December 1968, p. 3.

[7] Jacob Brackman, “The Graduate,” *The New Yorker*, July 27, 1968, p. 34.

[8] See “Homosexuality: Morals and Security,” *E.R.R.*, 1963 Vol. II, pp. 508–510.

[9] A Stamford, Conn., woman, angered by the deletion, told a theater employee: “I paid for filth and I want to see filth.”

[10] See “Changes in Moral Customs and Laws,” *E.R.R.*, 1965 Vol. II, pp. 518–521.

[11] Through May 26 the M.P.A.A. agency had reviewed 273 films and rated them as follows: G, 100 (36.6%); M, 98 (35.8%); R, 61 (22.5%); X, 14 (5.1%).

[12] The American Civil Liberties Union on April 11, 1969, criticized the rating program as “a prior restraint on the creative process” which “denies film-makers access to the free marketplace where the public, the ultimate arbiter of film fare, can make its judgment.”

[13] See “Censorship of Movies and TV,” *E.R.R.*, 1961 Vol. I, p. 263, and “Censorship of Motion Pictures,” *E.R.R.*, 1950 Vol. I, p. 255.

[14] Brochure setting forth goals of the American Film Institute.



- [15] Herbert Volkmann, *Film Preservation* (1965), p. 6. (Report of the preservation committee of International Federation of Film Archives.)
- [16] The two other principal film archives in the United States are the Museum of Modern Art (New York), with 4,000 titles, and George Eastman House, Rochester, N. Y., with 3,000 titles.
- [17] Richard Griffith and Arthur Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- [18] *Variety* reckons that *The Birth of a Nation* may have grossed as much as \$50 million. The paper omits the film from its list of top money-makers only "because it was handled on a states rights and, often, an outright cash sale basis, hence data are unreliable."
- [19] Most of the earliest motion pictures were made in the East. A bitter dispute over patent rights arose after companies holding essential patents formed the Motion Picture Patents Co. in 1909 in an effort to keep unlicensed companies out of production and distribution. The dispute led many independents to move their operations to the Los Angeles area, and Hollywood eventually became the movie capital.
- [20] Originally the merged company was known as Metro-Goldwyn. Mayer was not added to the corporate name until 1926.
- [21] Bob Thomas, *Thalberg* (1969), pp. 185–186.
- [22] In the mid-1930s, the Warner Bros. slogan was "Good films—good citizenship."
- [23] Gordon Stulberg, "Hollywood Transition," *Saturday Review*, Dec. 28, 1968, p. 20.
- [24] Hollis Alpert, "The Falling Stars," *Saturday Review*, Dec. 28, 1968, p. 16.
- [25] Numerous silent films had employed tinted film stock to produce special effects—night scenes sometimes were shot on bluish film, for example. In *Greed*, gold tinting was used in scenes showing various symbols of wealth.
- [26] Richard Schickel, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
- [27] "Kine" is short for kinescope, a filmed television show. Magnetic tape has since replaced the kinescope.
- [28] Quoted by Wayne Warga, *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 19, 1969.
- [29] Both Commonwealth and Kinney are conglomerates with interests in leisure-time fields. Commonwealth is involved in credit services, music publishing, record production, CATV operation, vending machines, hearing aids, musical instruments, and games. Half of Kinney's revenues are derived from sports licensing, an entertainment talent agency, magazines and paperback books, and Panavision, which leases lenses to motion-picture producers. Warner-7 Arts shareholders are expected to approve the Kinney offer at a meeting: early in June.
- [30] Molly Willcox, "Film Education: The National Picture," *Yale Alumni Magazine*, May 1968, p. 49.
- [31] Quoted in *Yale Alumni Magazine*, May 1968, p. 35.