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THE BIGGEST INDEPENDENT PICTURES EVER MADE

Industrial Reflexivity Today

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Last of the Independents

Upon receiving his Lifetime Achievement Award from the Independent Feature Project (IFP) in September 2002, Ang Lee was looking forward to his next picture, *Hulk*, which was due to open the following summer: “I guarantee you it’s the biggest independent film ever made” (Traister 2003). He had reason to be nervous. His longtime partner, the producer and writer of *Hulk*, James Schamus, had just sold his own company, Good Machine, to Universal and had agreed to head the studio’s new independent arm, Focus Features. Anthony Kaufman of the *Village Voice* was apocalyptic: “The death of American independent film has been prophesied more than once over the last few years, but finally we have a date on which to pin our grief” (Kaufman 2002). If Lee also seemed slightly embarrassed, some of that feeling was a hangover from Schamus’s rather infamous IFP keynote address in 2000. Schamus had argued, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that the IFP should be shut down and started anew. It should be shut because, simply, the indies had won. “The IFP has already, and fabulously, achieved its goals” (Schamus 2000). The indie market had grown exponentially alongside the expansion of the media conglomerates, while at the same time those major players were making more and more films with an “independent’ feel.” “The successful integration of the independent film movement into the structures of global media and finance has wrought untold benefits to American filmmakers.” He was, many felt, far more gracious than necessary when he argued that

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There is no logical reason why the towering artistic achievements of films like *Boys Don't Cry* and *Election*, brought to us by the News Corporations and Viacom of this world, should not be celebrated, and we ought to be genuinely grateful that caring and savvy people who work for those corporations have cleared a path in the marketplace for these kinds of films. (Schamus 2000)

In place of the de rigueur defense of independent film, Schamus contended that the IFP should defend independent expression more generally – fighting the extension of the conglomerates, supporting local distribution networks around the world, working to repeal parts of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. If this speech was the theory, the integration of Good Machine into Universal and the launching of *Hulk* were the practice.

Six years after Lee's guarantee and eight years after Schamus's rant, Mark Gill, speaking at the Los Angeles Film Festival, announced that "Yes, the sky really is falling" (2008). Surveying the landscape of studio-based indie labels and real indies, he noted the implosion of various production companies (Warner Independent and Picturehouse, New Line and ThinkFilm), the evaporation of Wall Street financing (this even before the credit panics later that summer), skyrocketing production and marketing costs, and the generally bleak competition for leisure time and dollars. It was clear from his title that an epoch had passed, and in what followed he offered ways to navigate through what would remain of the indie sector.

Paradoxically, the notion of independence was more prominent than ever. Gill noted that "for the first time in the roughly 20 years I've been looking at this data, more than 10% of the audience now is telling pollsters they prefer independent films" (2008). What he did not specify (because the poll did not ask it) was whether those "independent films" came from a studio or a true indie. (Indeed, the response to "Would you prefer to see a film from Fox Searchlight or ThinkFilm?" is most likely "Wha?") And yet the survival of the term and the notion of the independent film among producers who produce nothing of the kind suggests that the invocation of independence does not in these cases refer to a mode of production or distribution but rather to a relationship of responsibility and of authorship and an aspiration to quality of a particular kind. Independence is nearly identical with an ideology of art; it is, after all, a spirit.

Director Andrew Stanton described *WALL•E* in just these terms:

I almost feel like it's an obligation to not further the status quo if you become somebody with influence and exposure. I don't want to paint the same painting again. I don't want to make the same sculpture again. Why shouldn't a big movie studio be able to make those small independent kinds of pictures? Why not change it up? (Onstad 2008)

The notion of *WALL•E* as a "small" picture is ludicrous, of course. It cost \$180 million and it opened in nearly 4,000 theaters in the US. It earned \$224 million

domestically and \$283 million abroad, making it the eighth highest grossing film of 2008.¹ But is Stanton's recourse to a discourse of "independence" any less ludicrous? How does it play out in *WALL•E*? And what alternatives to this self-contradictory aesthetic are available today? To put it more pointedly: If studios are "changing it up" when they make their "indie" films, what are they doing when they practice what we might call "normal" studio filmmaking?²

Before answering these questions, though, we might account for their origins slightly differently. The speeches by the producers Schamus and Gill bookend a particular economic period in the history of indie filmmaking, but they are also highly staged instances of industrial reflexivity. These are public addresses; the speakers have been chosen for their ability to narrate compellingly. Structurally, these are self-conscious performances by producers who are simultaneously part of the system (Schamus at Good Machine/Focus, Gill at The Film Department) and called upon to render an opinion about the system as a whole. Even more, these controversial speeches required elaboration and response, comment and questions, rebuttals and denunciations, contextualization and renarrativization.³ They are nodes in the discourse of industrial reflection, a place where wisdom (conventional or not) finds explicit formulation and around which collective energy might gather. That is, in part, why it makes sense to point to them as landmarks and to build a story around them: from hubris to realism in the indie film community. Something similar is true of the remarks by Lee and Stanton, although in their cases the reflection tends *away* from the industrial no matter how cannily the directors understand the system. Instead, their professions of independence are compared with their actual situations. Because they are Hollywood directors, we more readily ask how (or, in the suspicious mode, whether) their films reflect their beliefs.

Questions about independence, then, appear within a broader context of reflexivity. That reflection is natural to cinematic creativity, necessary to professional identity-formation, endemic to professions of criticism, and assimilable to the qualifiedly public discourse of marketing, education, and appreciation that surrounds mass arts. In what follows, I want to bring more specificity to the current configuration of reflexivity so that we might see how its various aspects are brought to bear within and just outside particular films. Beyond the particular examples, we may begin to answer the larger question of how industrial reflexivity has changed within what we might think of as Hollywood's "order of composition."⁴

Realms of Reflexivity

Three ways of thinking about reflexivity bracket this discussion of the ideology of independence. The first, derived from Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed* (1979), is more philosophical and considers the relations between films that reflect on their own nature and our general capacity for reflection within and outside art. The

second, developed in the work of David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, is more immanent. In place of a general reflexivity, they concentrate on the proliferation of cinematic allusions. From this they conclude that contemporary Hollywood storytelling struggles against an overarching “belatedness.” Late to the party, today’s filmmakers must grapple with their precursors, one way or another. The third avenue for reflection, which follows from John Caldwell’s *Production Culture*, is more immanent still. Caldwell examines the myriad ways in which film production workers understand their positions within their crafts, the industry, and the culture at large. Where Cavell excavates “the thought of movies,” and Bordwell and Carroll the rise of “iconographic coding,” Caldwell takes up the “deep texts” of the film/television industry – brochures, demo reels, trade shows, producers’ script notes – in his effort to detail the anxiety-fueled current production culture (Cavell 1984; Bordwell 2006, 7; Carroll 1982; Caldwell 2008).

In what follows, I hope to show how contemporary Hollywood films have served as communicating channels – imperfect, to be sure – between the deep textual situations of workers and the marketing efforts of the executive corps; between the discourses of authorship and the ideals of viewership. More than a collection of instances, or a story of the filmmaking process, these readings provide an account of the degree of coherence of the system as a whole. In short, I read feature films as nodes in the ongoing process of industrial reflection. Yet these reflections have been under new pressures of late. To understand the ways those pressures have affected and been affected by filmmaking, to understand why we live in the era of the biggest independent pictures ever made, we need to read Cavell, Bordwell and Carroll, and Caldwell historically.

Writing at the dawn of the New Hollywood, but looking back to films like *Contempt* (1963), Stanley Cavell turned naturally enough to problems of reflexivity and what he called “the camera’s implication” (1979). While in some of its historical lineaments Cavell’s argument seems to accord with widely available notions of postmodernism, the conceptual consequences of each step he takes run counter to narratives in which postmodern referentiality comes between viewers and their “natural” appreciation of the cinema. On his account, in the classical era, implications of the camera and breaches in the fourth wall functioned as inside jokes. And these jokes “confirm[ed] for the insiders a strong sophistication in moviegoing, a proof that their increasing consciousness of movie-making routines [would] not jeopardize the film’s strength for us” (1979, 124). Now, circa 1970, baring the device no longer lightens or enlightens. “The world’s presence to me is no longer assured by my mechanical absence from it, for the screen no longer naturally holds a coherent world *from* which I am absent” (1979, 130). And this “loss of conviction in the film’s capacity to carry the world’s presence” has made it necessary to insist on the camera’s existence. Reflexivity amounts to candor. Hence “the shakings and turnings and zoomings and reinings and unkind cuts to which [the camera] has lately been impelled” (1979, 128).

Until this contemporary moment, then, the distance between the world viewed by the camera and the world we inhabit had been automatic. The camera needed

only to document the division between the world and the audience. But where once the world exhibited itself, now film has “tak[en] over the task of exhibition” (1979, 132). This last idea, that film “exhibits” itself, explains a final complication in Cavell’s account, namely, that he does not call this new aesthetic “postmodernism.” Rather, he regards the reflexive, exhibitionist, “theatrical” turn as the delayed arrival of modernism in the cinema.⁵ Modernism, in this definition, appears when an art first discovers its freedom (“now anything can be exhibited and so tried as art”) and subsequently recognizes the problem that entails, “that perhaps *all* you can do with your work and works is to exhibit them” (1979, 120). The autonomy of the artwork occasions a search for connection. Reflexivity is a solution to the problem of freedom; it asserts a connection where connection has been lost. “The object itself must account for the viewer’s presenting of himself to it and for the artist’s authorization of his right to such attendance” (1979, 121). Put another way, reflexivity is the tribute art pays to marketing (Caldwell 2008, 275, 309).

A decade later Noël Carroll drew attention to the increasing allusiveness of Hollywood cinema (1982). What had been inside jokes were now extended beyond the comic into other registers where they might serve as shorthand invocations of thematic or historical density. These allusions could, at the same time, ground the authority of post-studio directors who wished to (or needed to) assert what Cavell called their right to our attendance. Yet, after a period in which reflexive irruptions seemed to be everywhere (whether they were, in Cavell’s terms, “serious” or not), Hollywood filmmaking settled down into an era of what David Bordwell calls “intensified continuity” (2006). Flashing forward to the 1990s, viewers continued to encounter all those attention-grabbing devices and more, yet these moments hardly functioned as instances of reflexivity at all; indeed, they barely register as technical flourishes. (Think here of digital lens flare and its banality.) Instead, other features seem to dominate the style. Shot lengths shorten; the depth of field contracts; close-ups get bigger. This is the era of Bordwell’s “mannerist” or “referential” or perhaps “belated” classicism; what I and others have called neoclassicism (Bordwell 2006, 188–189, 23–24; Connor 2000; Smith 1998, 10). What are the stakes of this difference in terminology?

“Intensified continuity” carries with it a critique of histories that regard Hollywood cinema as fundamentally postclassical. On these accounts, to put it briefly, the fragmentation of the production process attendant upon the breakup of the studios is reflected in the fragmentation of the narrative and spatial worlds of the film. But for Bordwell, the general homology between industrial form and narrative form is beyond dubious. Yet Bordwell and Carroll recognize that something general has changed. Within their argument, then, the ideas of belatedness and allusionism amount to a *de minimis* version of postmodernism, one so small that it might still be subsumed by a nearly timeless classicism.⁶

We might, though, reframe the argument about the relationship between art and industry in a way that would avoid any necessary reflection or homology between the product and the process. Intensified continuity editing, multiple

plotlines, and the general referential substrate are the (potential) reflection and (necessary) demand made of (not made by) the production process. Contemporary filmmaking solicits reflection; there is no reason why that reflection might not make itself apparent in the films themselves. After all, if Cavell is right, film as an institution routinely reinterprets its own automaticity and its own requirements.

Here Caldwell's ethnographic work among everyone from below-the-line workers up through the executive ranks helps explain how this aestheticized homology works, how allegory wends its way through the industry. "Film and television companies, in particular, acknowledge image making as their primary business, and they use reflexive images (images about images) to cultivate valuable forms of public awareness and employee recognition inside and outside of the organization" (2008, 110). In the ever more fragmented and flexible film and television industry of the last two decades, industrial reflection has become increasingly fraught:

Within the nomadic labor and serial employment system now in place, any area that wishes to remain vital – in the face of endless new technologies, increased competition, and changes in production – must constantly work, through symbolic means, to underscore the distinctiveness and importance of their artistic specialization. (Caldwell 2008, 116)

The "deep texts" are routinely reflexive; they are "native theories" of practitioner groups at various levels of the hierarchy. The system is manic and anxious. Unable to achieve balance in the work-lives of its practitioners ("If you want work-life balance, go get a government job," said Gill), it sought that balance in various ways on screen. Whether those films might exert any sort of control over the system as a whole is a question, but it is a question that should remain open.⁷

Bibliotechnologies

If the modernism of the New Hollywood lined up all too well with postmodernism, the subsequent decades found the studios reascendant, in what looked like a kind of corporate recidivism. In 1971, Cavell could contend: "Self-reference is no more an assurance of candor in movies than in any other human undertaking. It is merely a stronger and more dangerous claim, a further opportunity for the exhibiting of self" (1979, 124). Yet what does it mean when, for the sake of argument, the modernist moment in the development of a particular aesthetic institution coincides with the postmodern moment in the culture (and the economy)? We have a much better sense of this combined and uneven development 30 years on. Within Hollywood, that precarious moment was followed by a reinstitutionalization, a neoclassicism.

For industrial reflexivity to exist, there has to be an industry to reflect, but those reflections are distributed across innumerable levels, from the lowliest term-contracted computer compositor to the CEO, from union work-rule campaigns to

Motion Picture Association lobbying efforts. In a context of potentially overwhelming anxiety, symbolic forms of coherence replaced durable arrangements of labor and capital. In that period, coherence was provided, I have argued, by the idea of the classical Hollywood studio itself. Central to that idea was a very particular understanding of the office of the motion picture. In 2001, Howard Stringer, then chairman and CEO of Sony Corporation of America, told PBS's *Frontline*:

You could make the case that the movie is the most fundamentally symbolic piece of content that any media company develops. It drives all your content. It's the most visible. It's the most conspicuous. It's the most dangerous. It's the most exciting ... And it lives forever. (*Frontline* 2001)

In the modern media conglomerate, then, the motion picture may have been displaced from the center of the company's finances but it remained, somehow, the center of its corporate identity: "the most fundamentally symbolic piece of content." The movie was the home of collective reflection, where competing visions of the current industrial configuration could play out.

Stringer, though, is describing the system as it consolidated in the 1980s and flourished in the 1990s. Early in the new century, however, several of the imperial medialiths had begun to sense the limits of their expansion. Where before the trends in corporate behavior and corporate representation were uniform and mutually reinforcing, recent conglomerate and studio activity has been diffuse and inconsistent. Three have been in retreat. Time Warner has sought to unwind its merger with AOL and to spin off its cable arm; Viacom cleaved in twain, leaving the slow-growth television networks on one side and the potentially higher growth media properties, as well as the studio, on the other; and Vivendi simply imploded. In the last instance, the instant French media conglomerate coughed up Universal, which GE merged with NBC, thereby recreating a 1970s-style interindustrial conglomerate. In contrast to the unwinding conglomerates, Sony has been content with Columbia, although it did become embroiled in the latest incarnation of MGM/UA to no great success. News Corp. has retained some of the go-go atmosphere of a decade ago, while Disney has made two crucial acquisitions, Pixar and Marvel.

Have things changed sufficiently to regard today's Hollywood as different in kind from that of merely half a dozen years ago? How would we mark the change? Does Time Warner CEO Jeff Bewkes's June 2006 declaration that synergy is "bullshit" (Karnitschnig 2006) constitute an epochal event in the history of Hollywood? Does the flattening of DVD revenues (LaPorte 2009) mark the transition? What of the disruption of long-term labor relations – made notorious by the 2007–2008 writers' strike but epitomized in the drastic changes in the workflow and hierarchies of production designers, cinematographers, and editors? Or the foreseeable completion of the digitalization of the industry – not simply digital production,

but distribution and exhibition as well? Of course it will be difficult to assess the depth of such transformations at such close range, yet we might suspect that the convergence of radical changes in corporate aims, rates of market growth, and the division of labor ~~point~~ suggest that some breakpoint is at hand.

What might be replacing the neoclassical order? One compelling reading of this new era would contend that the principal locus of corporate reflection has simply shifted to television. Time Warner's landmark HBO series such as *The Wire* (2002–2008), News Corp's *American Idol* (2002–), Disney's *High School Musical* (2006), and NBC Universal's *30 Rock* (2006–) are, in their different ways, emblems as central to their corporations as *Batman* (1989), *Die Hard* (1988), *The Lion King* (1994), and *Waterworld* (1995) were, respectively, in the high neoclassical period. Indeed, the emergence of a broad, auteurist strand of show-running, and its concomitant popular and critical endorsement may amount to what we would call "The New Television" after "The New Hollywood" of the 1970s.

Yet, in the precession of corporate reflexivity, the residual film studios offer an interesting contrast to this new world of authored television. One nonclassical feature of the current order of composition has been the lurch toward radically immersive forms, in this case explicitly three-dimensional forms, at all phases – production, distribution, and exhibition. A second feature, and the one I will concentrate on here, is the pervasive adoption of the discourse of independence as the next step in the rationalization of Hollywood's industrial reflection. While there are incisive and thorough histories of American independent cinema from critics as different as Peter Biskind (2004), Geoff King (2005), and John Berra (2008), there has been little attempt to understand independence through its reflections within studio filmmaking. The notion of studio independence is self-contradictory, to be sure, but not necessarily more self-contradictory than any other ideology of authorship within a highly capitalized, collaborative industry of mass entertainment.

The anaclitic relationship between studio and independent is breaking down. In the neoclassical era, the formal division of labor between the studios and the independents was fairly stable. The studios made deniable allegories of the motion picture process – development (*Notting Hill*, 1999), production (*Jurassic Park*, 1993), distribution (*Outbreak*, 1995), exhibition (*Speed*, 1994) – and the indies made undeniable critiques of that process (*Sleep with Me*, 1994; *Swimming with Sharks*, 1994; *State and Main*, 2000).⁸ As studios identify themselves as indies, though, their reflexive allegories are leaking out all over. In the *New York Times*, Katrina Onstad asked Stanton directly,

Is the ubiquitous, all-powerful Buy n' Large a sly dig at Disney, Pixar's new corporate bedfellow? With a fervent head shake no, Mr. Stanton turns company man. "Part of the contract was: 'You can't touch us, you can't change what we do,' and that's actually gained them such a level of respect and trust they wouldn't have gotten if they'd tried to be Draconian." (Onstad 2008)

Allegory is still deniable, but only barely so. Despite his protestations that *WALL•E* is an “indie” film, Stanton “turns company man”: defending his own independence amounts to defending Disney against the allegorical stories his independence makes possible, which is to say that defending Pixar’s independence amounts to defending Disney’s corporate culture. Pixar, in 2008, had become as overbranded as Disney itself.

We can see that in the initial teaser trailer. Stanton, on-screen, harkened back to an initial pitch meeting, years ago. “In the summer of 1994, there was a lunch.” The sentence is banal, but the cinema is portentous. As saccharine music plays we dissolve into an empty, almost abandoned-looking Hidden City Cafe. “So at that lunch we knocked around a bunch of ideas that eventually became *A Bug’s Life*, *Monsters, Incorporated*, *Finding Nemo*, and the last one we talked about that day was the story of a robot, named WALL•E.” Setting aside the skeptical interpretation – that 14 years on Pixar had finally run out of better options and decided to make the robot romance – the implication was that, as an audience, our associations with Pixar would be strong enough to motivate our desire to see anything the company produces. But even more precisely, the implicit appeal of that first trailer was to our nostalgia for the founding moments of Pixar as a production company, and for its independence. Alongside that nostalgia there was also a sense that the films pitched that day belonged together, that they constituted a unified sensibility, a library waiting to be born. The trailer fosters that continuity linking one filmscape to another: the *Bug’s Life* grass island, *Monsters, Inc.*’s vault of doors, and *Nemo*’s jellyfish. All of Pixar is available to us, the viewers, and all at once.⁹

Indeed, while *WALL•E* has been taken as a fable of ecological destruction and overconsumption, of politics left and right, one thing that has gone suspiciously unremarked is its interest in filing and retrieval. “Filing and retrieval” hardly seem like fodder for the marketing machine, whatever their appeals to juvenile discoveries of order, but they are the necessary backdrop for the film’s invocations of individuality and independence. WALL•E’s occupation is ostensibly trash compacting – he makes cubes and places them in grand architectural structures. But his romance lies not in the Watts Towers aesthetic of his trash cubes – they are simply a stunning byproduct of his day job – but in his retrievals – the bits and pieces of the world that he collects. (Eve’s “directive” is retrieval, too; she is supposed to collect any sign of “ongoing photosynthesis” and return it to the Axiom.)

The film opposes active retrieval to passive consumption. In the dystopia, Buy ‘n’ Large is a vast warehouse retailer that has taken over the entire world, an already shopworn joke from its appearance in *Idiocracy* (Judge, 2006) (where the ultrastore is an actual Costco)¹⁰ and a 2003 *Saturday Night Live* skit about Walmart (“Bathrobes with patriotic ducks is in aisle 6,000 and, here, you’re gonna need this poncho because I think it’s rainy season in that part of Walmart”). In contrast, WALL•E is a DIY recycler. His home entertainment system consists of an old VCR wired to an iPod and viewed through a CRT screen as a magnifier. His walls are lined with racks for other WALL•E units, but they have all been mined for

spare parts. Their places are now filled with the detritus that has struck his emerging subjectivity as worth preserving. (Hidden among the shelves, naturally enough, are characters from earlier Pixar movies.)

On the mother ship (we won't call it Disney), the captain need do nothing but let the autopilot (we won't call it the brand) run everything. Eventually, he discovers just how vast the computer's stores of knowledge are, and surfs its databanks from one entry to another. The troika of WALL•E, Eve, and the captain share more than a commitment to the transformative power of recall; they share Pixar's corporate pedigree. WALL•E's startup sound is the Apple C-major chord, Eve's design was vetted by Apple's chief designer Jonathan Ive, and, slightly more speculatively, the captain is empowered by his computer to throw off the shackles of his autopilot.¹¹

Pixar had been owned by Apple CEO Steve Jobs until 2006, when Disney paid \$7.4 billion for the company, a move that installed Apple CEO Steve Jobs on Disney's board and Pixar chief John Lasseter as Chief Creative Officer of both Pixar and Disney (Holson 2006; Solomon 2006). This is why the *New York Times* reporter asked Stanton if the criticism of Buy 'n' Large was a "dig" at Disney. In the film's version of the change in corporate control, the acquisition of Pixar saves Disney from its own infantilizing complacency. Pixar's own well-tended corporate culture drives that subversive reinvention: The arrival of the Pixar robots leads the captain to unlock the knowledge dormant in the vault. The robots are the keys to the library, and the library is the key to the rediscovery of human purpose.

Libraries may do many things on film. They frequently serve as locations of hidden, total knowledge, as in *Toute la Mémoire du Monde* (1956) or *All the President's Men* (1976) or *The Time Machine* (2002) or *National Treasure 2* (2007). In *Jumper* (2008), the library is a refuge. When David Rice first discovers his ability to teleport, he arrives (twice) in the Ann Arbor public library. ("Escape to your library" reads the helpful poster.) In *Alexander* (2004), Anthony Hopkins as Ptolemy narrates the story from the library of Alexandria, vouching for its historical reality. In *Se7en* (1995), the library is the locus of obsession; in *A.I.* (2001), the "room where they make you read" is the place where David lashes out against his own double, against his own identity as a product. The library as such has no single meaning.

Just offscreen, though, we see that libraries have become the anchors of corporate identity. Legacy libraries feed individual productions. The RKO library is being opened up for remakes (Ice Cube's *Are We There Yet?* (2005) remakes *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948), for example). Libraries also drive mergers and acquisitions. The MGM/UA library was the most enticing element for the private equity investors in the most recent sale of the studio, while the DreamWorks library was monetized in order to make the Paramount/DreamWorks deal possible. Libraries reliably spin off cash that can be plowed into production, as at Lionsgate or Luc Besson's EuropaCorp. In short, library rights are the legal order that makes a culture of "the long tail" possible.

Postmodernism is often understood as a recycling of certain modernist moments in collage form – as pastiche, bricolage, remix, and so on. But within the ordered narrative worlds of contemporary Hollywood, postmodernism (or Cavellian modernism) works through cataloguing and recall, and both of those depend on an underlying structure of reliable availability. The satisfactions of knowing the inside joke align viewers with the property regime of the authoring institution. Theories of the postmodern, like theories of creativity, may emphasize notions of disorder or spontaneous order – the rhizomatic, the playful, the autopoetic, the networked. But the imperatives that organize intellectual property and revenue streams in Hollywood foster a much broader organization of entertainment. That organization has its enforcement side in various Digital Rights Management technologies and the festering legal campaign against individual BitTorrent downloaders. The pseudo-creative flipside is a personalized bibliotechnology that entices users to more intently manage the entertainment they already have the rights to; iTunes Genius playlists, Netflix queues, and TiVo protocols are not simply ways of cataloging what one owns, but are ways of shaping future consumption along the lines of present desires.

The industrial commitment to maximum exploitation of intellectual property and the consumer's commitment to a maximum availability of popular culture offer an explanation for the reappearance within contemporary Hollywood of a version of the "jukebox musical" (*Magnolia*, 1999; *Across the Universe*, 2007; and, most prominently, *Mamma Mia!*, 2008). The fan of a particular artist enjoys the double pleasure of the music for its own sake, on the one hand, and the anticipation of the deployment of particular songs from the oeuvre, on the other, while the production companies benefit from a unified rights situation and the chance to capitalize on the stored value of the song catalog. As Robert Kraft, director of Fox Music, explained, the difficulties in producing a soundtrack like *Juno* (2007) or *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) make *Mamma Mia!* "a dream" (author interview, January 24, 2008).

Some features of Hollywood's "bibliothecarian imagination" are almost constant, such as the oppositions between reserve/prolepsis, stasis/circulation, artifact/idea.¹² In what follows, I will look at two additional ways in which the potential of the library as technology or social form or concept is realized. In the first, typified by Marvel Studios' aggressive self-understanding, the library functions as a reserve of characters and stories through which producers and audiences renegotiate the terms of franchise identity. The Marvel example shows how Hollywood balances innovation and consistency today. The second example, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, turns even further inward, toward the histories of its creators. Yet *Crystal Skull* casts the disordered archive of its own history (of film) as an analogue for both its own practice and its reception. The differences between these three deployments (including *WALL•E*) suggest the contours of a broad swath of contemporary reflection. Through them we approach not the meaning of the library, but the possibilities of meaning and creative work defined through the library. Which is to say that we begin to answer the question of Hollywood's order of composition.

From Library to Reboot

Returning to the biggest independent film ever made, *Hulk* (2003), famously, was a disappointment – an odd disappointment, given that it grossed \$245 million worldwide. But it was only a disappointment, not a flop. By the following summer, it had become possible to imagine a sequel – at least outside Universal. In July, *The Onion* published a column by the Hulk himself headlined “Why no one want make *Hulk 2*?” (The Onion 2004). In a world where franchises exist, in Caldwell’s phrase, to be strip-mined, the notion of a character in search of a sequel was only slightly implausible. The *Onion* piece turns the Hulk into a wheedling self-promoter with his characteristic fractured English intact. He drops articles and prepositions, ignores verb tenses, and remains trapped in the third person. Still, he has a keen sense of craft of the sequel: “Hulk work out treatment for next movie Hulkself. It have everything in *Hulk*, only more intense.” Hulk is working on the pitch, which will tie up some of the loose ends in the sequel-porous initial installment and capitalize on the array of characters already available in the comic: “Many unanswered questions from last *Hulk* movie. What happen to puny human Banner in rainforest? Is there cure for Hulk? ... Is there future with Betty Ross? Where villains that make comic so great?” But he is also thinking up merchandising possibilities (“If Hulk Hands big hit, Hulk Feet even bigger hit!”) and marketing campaigns (“This time it personal”).

If much of Hulk’s column seems persuasive – why not make *Hulk 2* indeed? – the tagline gives the game away in its allusion to the campaign for *Jaws: The Revenge* (1987), a film widely regarded as the worst sequel ever made. The industrial logic of sequels (“everything in *Hulk*, only more intense”) is inexorable but risks franchise-killing, clichéd badness. Hulk recognizes this possibility, too. “First studio exec to suggest Joel Schumacher get smashed!” In place of the *Batman Forever* director, he pins his hopes on the indie credentials of Schamus (“Him really get what Hulk all about”) and Lee.

Why no one appreciate daring vision of Ang Lee? Aaargh! Ang Lee genius! Maybe panels on screen gimmicky, but him try something new. When last time you try something new?! Ang Lee willing to work in unfamiliar genres. Him brave like Hulk. Hulk wish for him to work on *Hulk 2*, if he willing, but Hulk understand if he not want to. Ang Lee like Hulk: He not stay in one place for too long. Him working on gay western right now. That prove Hulk’s point.

In the paramarketing world of insider-styled coverage of Hollywood, what Justin Wyatt calls the “enfotainment” complex, every interpretation is also a defense of certain choices, of certain ideologies (Wyatt and Vlesmas 1998). Alongside interpretation, then, there is also plenty of room for accusation: “When last time you try something new?!” Even if that accusation would be utter

bad faith (this is a sequel pitch; it is trying something *again*), it stings, and it stings whether it is directed at the “puny humans” in the general public who want the same thing, only more of it, or the gutless producers who have not greenlit the sequel. Finally, within this defensive castigation of the audience, Hulk offers an auteurist allegory, though it is unfocused. Lee’s genre-bending is evidence of both his Hulk-like bravery and, somehow, his Hulk-like persecution (“Sometimes Hulk so sad and alone”).

In this last respect, *Hulk*’s claim to be the biggest independent film ever made was Marvel and Universal’s attempt to duplicate the strategy that had worked for Fox on *X-Men* and, before that, for Warner Bros with *Batman*. If one could put a franchise in the hands of an indie director, there could be something fresh and enticing to audiences; it would not seem rote.¹³ At the same time, though, the franchise had to deliver on the promises of the underlying property (“Where villains that make comic so great?”).

The original *Hulk* marketing campaign already embodied this two-sidedness; it suggested deep reserves of independent authorship beneath its “popcorn” facade. For Ang Lee, the indie-auteur model succeeded. The *New Yorker* ran a long profile of him with particular attention to his role not simply as a director but as a performer (Lahr 2003). Lee had begun as an actor at Indiana University and had put that talent to work in *Hulk* by donning the motion capture suit and providing the initial data points for the computer rendering of the monster. (The DVD release included plenty of behind-the-scenes footage of him hulking out.) The protagonist was not simply a plausible allegory of the director but was actually – that is, kinetically – him. In an era when digital effects are contracted out, potentially leaching the director’s control over the process, Lee’s performance background became the means of bringing effects back under his signature.

For Schamus, though, the model failed. He wrote a piece in the *Times* touting the Hulk as “a perfect embodiment of American repression, a curiously asexual rampaging id” and *Hulk* as an exploration of the nearly timeless notion of the hero:

Spectacles hold little fascination without the heroic figures who are inscribed within them. It is the constant testing, reconfiguring and evolution of such heroes that make these movies so compelling, and the Hulk provides the opportunity to explore a particularly complex member of the heroic tribe. (Schamus 2003)



89.1 Director Ang Lee dons the motion capture suit in order to generate the data that will become the Hulk in *Hulk* (2003). The roll of carpet stands in for Jennifer Connelly (producer James Schamus).

The backlash against the piece suggests the dangers of indie insistence. The sense of a structural interpretive imbalance captures some of what made it possible for *Hulk* to seem “disappointing” regardless of the numbers.¹⁴

The problem with *Hulk*'s marketing was not the simple fact that there were two registers of meaning directed at two audiences ranked in a hermeneutic hierarchy. As Richard Maltby has argued, that split audience was a foundational principle of classical Hollywood (1996). Instead, the problem with *Hulk*'s split marketing was that it had violated the implicit division of labor between the neoclassical studios and the independents. In indie fashion, *Hulk* made its reserves of authorship *explicit*, thus insistently forcing the “popcorn” audience to contend with a denigration of the “mere entertainment” that it sought, while, at the same time, *Hulk* short-circuited the “deep” interpretive work of the audience for whom that work constitutes entertainment. For any classical aesthetic, this loss of balance is fatal.

The Onion's *Hulk* was two years too early in his sequel pitch. If, that is, *The Incredible Hulk* (2008) is actually a sequel to *Hulk*. It would be hard to know even apart from the lack of a numeral. The characters remain, but all the actors are new. And despite *Hulk*'s plea, Ang Lee and James Schamus were not part of the film; Louis Leterrier directed while *X-Men* writer Zak Penn did the screenplay. The origin story is rehearsed behind the opening credits, as is typical in a sequel, but this version is aligned not with the universe of *Hulk* but with that of the 1970s television show. All these things make *The Incredible Hulk* less a sequel than what today is called a “reboot.”

The reboot has taken the place of the sequel in the way that the reimagination has taken the place of the remake. Each new term has been inserted into the rhetoric of the intermittent franchise narrative and its attendant, pulsed revenue streams in order to capitalize on the discontinuities inherent in the lags between installments. These terms do this work in four ways. First, where the sequel and the remake suggest a smooth continuity and a machinic replication, the reboot and the reimagination locate creativity in delay. Second, at the same time that they vouch for the creativity in the system, the terms also promise to purge older stories of whatever might have become problematic in them – whether those are problems of politics, narrative balance, pacing, or, most generally, style. Third, rebooting and reimagining also more directly solicit the audience's reflection on the differences and connections between the incarnations. That reflection is aided by the release of new, more feature-laden DVDs that promise to take the audience not simply behind the scenes but behind the decision-making that led to the now-outmoded version. Ultimately, though, the efforts to intensify certain viewers' attention to difference and connection are not in the service of a radical problematization of the text, for the studios' aims stop short of such a complete deconstruction of identity. Instead, the reboot and the reimagination posit a real property that can be the hermenaut's true object of desire. There is value in the library. The studios know this, they defend that intellectual property



89.2 “This is all you”: Bruce Banner (Edward Norton) discovers the library made from his blood in the reboot, *The Incredible Hulk* (2008) (director Louis Leterrier, producer Avi Arad et al.).

extraordinarily vigorously, and in the reboot and the reimagination, they inculcate that belief in the audience.

The reboot may veer away from fundamental critique, but at the heart of *The Incredible Hulk* lie potentially radical worries about identity and replication. When Banner intentionally draws his blood to send it back to a willing researcher (Mr Blue) he unwittingly gives rise to a library. He arrives in New York to test out a possible cure and discovers that Blue has generated a vast collection from that initial sample. “You didn’t send me much to work with so I had to concentrate it and make more,” says Mr Blue. Here, Blue gives voice to the film’s hybrid identity as reboot-sequel. The franchise must be rebooted (because “you didn’t send me much to work with”) while it fulfills the demands of a sequel (“concentrate it and make more”). It is, for the researcher, a utopian scene of production and reproduction: “This is potentially Olympian ... We will unlock hundreds of cures.” Characters are libraries or bibles, filled with data and stories. “Bruce, this is all you,” says Blue, gesturing to the library. At the same time libraries are populated by the exploits and potentials of the characters they catalog. This vacillant equivalence lies at the heart of the latest wave of industrial reflexivity. What has become more explicit is the stored value that can be unleashed, Hulk-like, when necessary. “It has to be me, you have to take me back there,” Banner says, before dropping out of a helicopter and into the fray against Abomination.

But if the *Hulks* were intended to be summer tentpoles and were, therefore, important occasions for a studio and its employees to ponder their own fates, then they might for the same reason be isolated occasions. If, however, the *Hulks* are part of a strategic pivot in which the assertion of a reflexivity corpus now occupies a crucial space in Hollywood, then we should find similar reflection even in downmarket properties. And in the case of *The Punisher*, that is exactly what we find.

When Lionsgate released *The Punisher* in 2004, Marvel (under Avi Arad) had become a zealous developer of its intellectual property, and its studio brand had begun to vie with its distributors' for prominence.¹⁵ *The Punisher* is odd and unique: Its broody hero vies with subtropical sun (Tampa, Florida), the aesthetic is neon moderne in a too-crisp, video-edged way reminiscent of *CSI: Miami*, and the tone veers from broad, absurdist violence, to domestic comedy, to (supposed) melodrama. Itself a relaunch from a Dolph Lundgren vehicle from 1989, the version starring Thomas Jane reads as low budget as its hero.

The 2008 reboot *Punisher: War Zone* puts the Punisher back in New York City, and while it is a cold, wet New York, overly familiar from the *Batman* films and *Grand Theft Auto IV*, the setting better explains the baleful, retributive moralizing of the film than even Frank Castle's own tragic backstory. Five years have elapsed since Castle's family was gunned down. In the meantime he has been busy meting out justice. Friends on the police force look the other way, feeding him inside information, until Castle accidentally kills an undercover FBI agent. When the dead man's partner, agent Butiansky, joins the "Punisher Task Force" (staff of one), he is directed to a basement library. The endless rows of metal shelves and archival boxes are the materialization of the department's bad faith. The locale makes it all too clear that the police have no interest in arresting Frank. Still, Butiansky intends to persevere. When he asks for the Punisher case files, he is told they are right here. "Which drawer?" "All of them." As with Mr Blue's "Olympian" fantasies, this represents the producers' dream. The Punisher library provides a narrative equivalent of the hardware racks on which Frank stores his armory. And just as each weapon promises a different way to die, so each drawer promises a different death. These libraries are extensions of a character, but they are also, in the Marvel universe, the equivalent of characters. The film's final battle at the Brad Street Hotel takes this cataloging to the next level by literalizing the characters involved. The city's ethnic gangs have been invited to take their best shot at Frank, their shared nemesis, and each gang occupies a different space in the hotel, filed neatly away in rooms ready to launch into the fight and the story.

If *The Punisher* was part of Marvel's attempt to exploit its lesser properties – to see, in effect, how the new "Marvel Knights" label would match up with the zeitgeist – *War Zone* was also part of a more conscious attempt to bring all of Marvel together. A frozen Captain America would have made a cameo appearance at the beginning of *The Incredible Hulk*, but it was later cut. However, Robert Downey, Jr.'s Tony Stark did appear at the end, visiting from Marvel's Fox release, *Iron Man*. Across studios and seasons the pieces are being assembled, cataloged, and held in readiness. "We're putting a team together," says Downey. The plan is to bring Hulk, Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, and the Ant-Man together as the Avengers in 2012 (McClintock 2009). With the Spider-Man series ensconced at Sony and the Fantastic Four/Silver Surfer cross at Universal, Mr Blue speaks as the genius of the (Marvel) system: "With a little more trial and error there's no end to what we can do."

Indy and the Indie

Hulk may have been the biggest independent picture ever made, but at the box office the biggest Indy is Indiana Jones. The first installment, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), was a triumph of deal-making: Lucas and Spielberg received nearly half of the gross; they participated in the music and merchandising; they had control over the poster and trailers; and Paramount reduced its distribution fee (Dick 2001, 187). Culturally, the film drove home the nostalgia at the heart of the Lucas-Spielberg axis of postmodernism by cloaking its 1930s setting in something like the form of an old serial. It looked like narrative “slumming,” and it was quickly diagnosed by Fredric Jameson as part of the Reaganite populism of the era (Jameson 1998). But it also advanced a serious aesthetic claim, namely, that the attempt to comprehensively recapture a period’s authentic look and feel ought to be marked by that period’s demotic narrative forms even as it elevates those forms to the center of film art. This winking historicism mixes the pleasures of childhood with a recognition that something separates this film from the serials it evokes. That “something” is quality, a recognition that, despite its narrative and formal debts, *Raiders* is good by our standards and not those of the past. In its famous concluding joke, *Raiders* tucks the Ark of the Covenant in some vast warehouse where it is in principle cataloged but in actuality lost. The political lesson is simple enough: the fate of independence and adventure is bureaucratization, the loss of control to “top men.”

The fourth installment released in 2008, *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, begins at that warehouse, which we come to learn is Hangar 51, putative resting place of the aliens who crashed at Roswell, NM. Like the “book of secrets” in *National Treasure 2* (2007), this warehouse-cum-soundstage is the place “where you and your government have hidden all of your secrets,” and the new adventure is triggered by the arrival of the ultimate bureaucrats, the Soviets and their top woman. Where the Americans hid things away for the good of the citizenry, the communists desire total knowledge. The glimpse we get of the Ark as they leave the warehouse makes the irony of their fate clear from the outset.

The merger of 1930s tale and 1930s telling from *Raiders* gives way to a 1950s version of the same. As Lucas put it, “It was the idea of taking the genre from the 1930s serials, action-adventure serials, to the B science fiction movies of the 50s ... I wanted to rest it on a cinematic antecedent, like we did with the other one.” The entire Lucas-Spielberg team still operates within a classicist/nostalgist aesthetic. These are the basic terms of their art. Screenwriter David Koepp describes it as needing to adhere to “the rules” of the series while somehow being “fresh.” Sound designer Ben Burtt will say, “When I think of the Indy films, I always think I want to give things a classic sound.” But if these are “classic” sounds they are also new: “There’s been a conscious choice to create the supernatural sounds as if maybe they were created for movies back in the 1950s. I’ve tried to derive a style from

those movies, to make new sounds in that old style.” Composer John Williams will describe the *Crystal Skull*’s musical motif as a product of this same effort:

The crystal skull, certainly for its various appearances in the film, needed to have some musical identification, and what I tried to do was to try to get some kind of homage if you like to the science fiction films of the 50s that would bring an aspect of nostalgia into this piece.¹⁶

The filmmakers may be trying to merely update their 1980s neoclassicism, but *Crystal Skull* is decisively inflected by a reading of its period in a way that *Raiders* was not. Spielberg, describing Lucas’s pitch to him, drifted in and out of quotation, but even when it is unclear who is speaking, it is absolutely clear that the shared terms of the discussion are interpretive:

But George insisted, and he said, “This will be like a B movie. It’ll be like those 1950s B movies, *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, and all those exploitation movies that were really about government paranoia, Cold War fears and things like that, and Hollywood turned them into *Invaders from Mars*.”¹⁷

It is a truism of film history that the alien invaders of the 1950s movies represent the marching forces of communism, or conformity, or both. On this understanding of Cold War culture, social and political anxieties would occasionally find more literal expression in social problem or exploitation films – juvenile delinquency in *Rebel without a Cause* or nuclear anxiety in *On the Beach*. *Crystal Skull* stages both aspects of this reading via confrontations between the actual period threats and their allegorical period stand-ins: the (actual) Russians want to know everything the (allegorical) aliens know. If communists came to 1950s cinema dressed as aliens, *Indy*’s communists now want to *be* aliens. (Indeed, Cate Blanchett’s black bob, drawn cheeks, and bulging eyes make her an alien manqué.) Meanwhile, the film offers us the ultimate conformists in the form of TV-watching mannequins who populate a Potemkin Eisenhower suburb. They will soon perish in a nuclear test strike. If the social discipline of suburban conformity was the complement of the anxieties of the nuclear age, *Crystal Skull* takes that functionalism a step further: its suburbs exist only in order to be destroyed by the bomb.

What to make of the film’s reliance on such a reading? Is *Crystal Skull* a critique of 1950s paranoia or an endorsement of it? In truth, the film is neither. The McCarthyite thugs who badger *Indy* about his loyalties are off-track not because there are no communist subversives on campus, but because there are actual Soviet spies all over the country, stealing its secrets. The populuxe design of the fake suburb and the intended glee that greets its destruction imply that the film endorses the critique of suburban homogenization, and yet it brings that critique to ground when it nukes the place. The further implication seems to be that if you think that the suburbs are full of consumerist mannequins who “deserve it,” you are no

different than the bombers. Whether this conclusion amounts to a critique of the critique, whether it reverts to an “endorsement” of suburbanism or not, is unclear. Regardless, the whirl of interpretation verges on the ludicrous. Indy rides out the bomb in a lead-lined refrigerator; fans and critics everywhere object. “Nuke the fridge” replaces “jump the shark” in the critical lexicon.

In Spielberg’s work, the collapse of the oppositions between cultural resistance and approval, on the one hand, and between allegory and literalism, on the other, had actually occurred by the time he made *War of the Worlds* (2005). Where *Jurassic Park* (1993) had maintained a studied ambivalence about the relationship between showman and exploiter, *War of the Worlds* couldn’t keep its allegory straight. Spielberg explained that the humans fighting off the aliens were like 9/11 victims fleeing Manhattan, while Koepp told *USA Weekend*, “You can read our movie several ways ... It could be straight 9/11 paranoia. Or it could be about how U.S. military interventionism abroad is doomed by insurgency, just the way an alien invasion might be” (Barboza 2005). To Koepp, it did not matter which account was right. All that mattered was that there be some story, *any* story to link the summer sci-fi blockbuster to terrorism and war. Those plucky Americans fighting off the aliens might be the plucky Americans they appeared to be, or they might be members of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Regardless, the horizons of interpretation had been opened for the audience. The mission in *Crystal Skull* was very much the same.

Crystal Skull begins by excavating hidden secrets; it ends with a nightmare of total recall. At the climax of *Raiders*, Indy’s nemesis Belloc looks at the angels rushing around the Ark and proclaims, “It’s beautiful!” – just before he becomes a column of fire. In *Crystal Skull*, the problem is not too much beauty but too much knowledge. “I want to know everything. I’m ready,” Cate Blanchett’s Spalko tells the alien. She is not. Bombarded with too much knowledge, Spalko attempts to turn away from the alien’s eyes, but it refuses to let her go. Reanimated, the creature from another dimension reveals itself to be a postmodern connoisseur of irony. Fountains of knowledge will come streaming out of her eyes and mouth like so much ectoplasm. Spalko vaporizes because her skull lacks the capacity of the scaphocephalic aliens. Indy, though, will survive because he doesn’t want to know everything the aliens do; he simply wants to be able to access it. She wants to be the library; he wants to be the librarian.

But we can be even more explicit: *Crystal Skull* tells the story of the digitalization of library access. *Raiders*’s concluding joke was analog. As Michael Rubin, Lucasfilm veteran and author of *Droidmaker: George Lucas and the Digital Revolution*, put it,

If you want to know what editing was like before George came along, visualize that warehouse at the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* ... If you shot a movie like *Star Wars*, you had 300,000 feet of film and sound rolls that had to be code numbered and matched by hand. If you wanted to cut the scene where Luke was doing this and Han Solo was doing that, some poor schmuck had to find those pieces so you could

fit them together with tape. It was like the Library of Congress with no librarian. (Silberman 2005, 141–142)

When *Crystal Skull* revisits that warehouse, Indy becomes that librarian, tossing handfuls of gunpowder in the air and allowing the strong magnetic field of the alien sarcophagus to lead the way to the alien's crate. In this new magneto-digital world, the randomness of the library's arrangement becomes irrelevant: your data know you want it.

At this point, it becomes difficult to sort through the multilayered grid of historical references behind *Crystal Skull*. Sloshing around in the film we find the 1950s of its setting, the 1930s of its origins, the 1980s of the series' origins, a healthy dose of Lucas's late 1960s libertarian paranoia (the politics of *THX-1138*), and, of course, the contemporary. In characteristic fashion, the film stages this pastiche as self-reflection. Standing in the antechamber to the crystal aliens' chamber, among the bric-a-brac of thousands of years of civilization gathered from across the globe, Indy recognizes his own profession: "They were collectors ... Archeologists." The room may be as haphazardly arranged as the boiler room in *Citizen Kane*, but the aliens know what they have. As their saucer rises through the shell of the temple, it looks for all the world like a spinning hard drive.

When IBM debuted the hard disk drive in 1956 (in plenty of time for the events of *Crystal Skull* the next year), they announced it this way:

[The] 305 RAMAC and 650 RAMAC [are] two electronic data processing machines using IBM's random access memory, a stack of disks that stores millions of facts and figures less than a second from management's reach. Because transactions are processed as they occur, the fresh facts held in a random access memory show business as it is right now, not as it was hours or weeks ago. (IBM 1956)

The total library, stocked with "fresh facts" and instantly available: this has been a remarkably durable commercial utopia. The digital library promises to make sense of the convergent flux of filmmaking practices, corporate mythologies, and audience involvements; it promises to *show business as it is right now*. That is what Schamus and Gill were promising as well, when they played their parts in one of dozens of self-reflexive Hollywood rituals.

In this new era, when it is impossible to distinguish between the indie blockbuster and the blockbuster as such, both "the biggest independent pictures ever made" and their less-indie complements are drawn from a standing reserve, a library of stories and storytelling. Yet the library is not simply a theme or a motif, the way that the absent father (in Spielberg) or the recognition of impending climate change (at Fox, home of the *Ice Age* series) are. While themes and motifs bring order or coherence to a film or group of films, the library offers the possibility of imagining order as such – an order that is not merely narrative, but always potentially so; an order that is not necessarily "logical," but nested within the social

and aesthetic practices of Hollywood. Libraries look most thematically insistent when they suggest the parameters of self-understanding in general. Today's Hollywood films are themselves industrial reflections even as they serve as communicating channels between the layers of reflexivity that compound into the evanescent industrial self-consciousness. Whether we attribute that reflection to the studio, the indie director, the author of the source text, the community of fans, or the assembly of artists and artisans is a matter to be decided in each case. Yet the order of reflexive composition in contemporary Hollywood makes our decision one the film has already imagined – imagined, and filed away.

Notes

- 1 All figures here and later from boxofficemojo.com.
- 2 The idea of the “normal” film derives from Thomas Kuhn’s account of normal science. But filmmaking does not progress in the ways that science does, and it may be that what is “normal” is both always undergoing transformation and is yet, at the same time, only defined in contrast to something else (“indie kinds of filmmaking”). What would it mean then to speak of “normal” filmmaking? It might mean something like the “average” film of the sort analyzed in Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson’s *Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985), where random sampling is supplemented by a selection of other landmark films to provide a portrait of a broad range of Hollywood filmmaking. But I am less interested in the average or baseline film than in a competing positive notion of what studio filmmaking might entail. To look ahead: If independence is associated with the endlessly renewed surprise of creativity, normal filmmaking will be aligned with the inherently sustainable, with films that look like models.
- 3 For responses to Mark Gill’s speech, see Thompson 2008, Goldstein 2008, Poland 2008, and Macaulay 2008, who begins: “I’m blogging from Paris where, the other night, I had dinner with two Palme d’Or-winning French producer friends. ‘What did you think of the Mark Gill article?’ one wanted to know. Yes, Gill’s speech is dinner conversation across the Atlantic. In fact, the producer had printed it out and circulated it among her staff.” He goes on: “I’ve commented before on the Gill piece, which I mostly agree with. Now we’re seeing a second wave of responses to the article, and one must-read for indies is by writer/director John August, who blogs about the release of his Sundance film *The Nines* and relates it to the speech.”
- 4 This notion is derived from T. J. Clark’s *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*. The crucial sentence appears in a note: “It matters what the materials of a pictorial order are, even if the order is something different from the materials, and in the end more important than they are” (Clark 1985, 78). Cinema has more than a pictorial order (there is, at the very least, a sonic order), but the principle holds. In what follows, I address a comparatively special case in which the materials and the order have converged; one of the questions I want to answer is how materials matter.
- 5 His use of “theatrical,” here, is heavily indebted to Michael Fried’s development of the same term.

- 6 This is a characteristic move. After a decade of denying that “high concept” constituted anything at all, in *The Way Hollywood Tells It* Bordwell contends that Justin Wyatt’s notion of high concept “skillfully captures a distinct trend in early 1980s cinema, but the films’ fashion-layout gloss remains a fairly isolated phenomenon” (2006, 7).
- 7 Caldwell puts it this way: “Ultimately I will suggest that material and conceptual uses of space do impact the sense of space and narrative that viewers experience when watching the screen at home or in the theater. But this connection between the space of making and the space of watching is more circumstantial than direct” (2008, 69).
- 8 Within the system, movie-movies from the studios would seem to offer a more candid reflection of the industry, but they are almost invariably played for laughs. In this comedic form they preneutralize their critique of the system – as in *Bowfinger* (1991), or in the mirthless spoofs that stretch endlessly from *Not Another Teen Movie* (2001) to *Epic Movie* (2007) and *Disaster Movie* (2008), and, doubtless, beyond.
- 9 Of course the story was mythical, and even Stanton could not remain committed to it. When Steve Weintraub asked him, “Was this kind of the end maybe of the first generation of Pixar?” Stanton answered: “I mean, that lunch got a little mythologized once we got the fully-formed ideas, like it was the only lunch we ever had. But it is funny that, out of that lunch, came *A Bug’s Life* and *WALL•E*, but there were many other lunches and meetings that, eventually, those seeds turned into ~~*Monsters, Inc.*~~ and ~~*Finding Nemo*~~” (Weintraub 2008).
- 10 Although *Idiocracy* was given a token release in 2007 it had languished on Fox’s shelf for a year following disastrous test screenings.
- 11 For the history of the Mac startup sound, see Whitwell 2005. For Ive’s visit to Pixar see Weintraub 2008: “I had two things. One, I had the making-fun-of-the-iPod joke, I was having the Apple sound joke and I also had decided that if I was going to make the prettiest robot in the world, for a machine, what would that be and we all agreed that, currently, Apple products are the most gorgeous looking machines in the world. They could be art objects without adding a function. We didn’t want to literally make her be Apple, but we wanted her to feel that same design sensibility, where the functions are hidden. It’s a mystery and you’re not exactly sure how it all works, but it seems almost magical and everything is almost perfectly molded into one another. It became obvious to us, but I wanted Steve to be comfortable with it and he said we should have Johnny Ive come over and see what he thinks, because he designs everything for Apple. He came over and pretty much fell in love with immediately and it was the biggest shot in the arm. He didn’t have anything to approve on, he just said, ‘I love her.’ It was a great afternoon with him that was pretty much the stamp of approval.”
- 12 There seems to be no common adjective meaning library-like in English.
- 13 Caldwell points to another possibility, that such a film might be made more efficiently because its indie-based creative team would not be beholden to union work-rules and divisions of labor. In the case of summer tentpoles, though, that advantage tends to fade. The sheer bulk of effects work puts the responsibility for squeezing efficiencies out of a budget in the hands of the ultracompetitive effects shops themselves.
- 14 Regardless of the numbers: This is a crucial point. Whether the estimation of Hollywood films by Hollywood can escape the tyranny of the numbers is an open

- question. When it looks like it does, this suggests that certain discourses (or ideologies) have sufficient sway that they might, at times, overpower the economic.
- 15 See Donahue 2002. This history is encapsulated in the leaders running before the three installments of the *X-Men* series. I discuss that series in the opening chapter of *The Studios after the Studios* (in preparation).
- 16 “Adventures in Post Production,” transcript from DVD feature, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, Blu-Ray 2-Disc Special Edition, Lucasfilm, 2008.
- 17 “The Return of a Legend,” transcript in *ibid*.

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