

The Rise of the Indies in America

1. Defining Indies

- * “Not produced within the system” (Peter Bogdanovich)--but what is the system?
- * Low-budget
- * No “name” stars, and not a star vehicle
- * Financing by individuals and non-film entities
- * Distribution and production companies are different
- * Distribution/exhibition by non-corporate entities (the film is “corrupted” when picked up commercially)
- * Not produced with commercial success as the goal
- * Written/directed/produced by *the “unenfranchised”*
- * A particular “vision” apparent
- * Auteur willing to risk it all for film
- * Groundbreaking; never been done before
- * The role of supposedly “non-commercial” film festivals in the determination of distribution

- * Overall: Can there be “levels of indie-ness”?

2. The Death of the Hollywood Studio System

- * The 1948 Paramount decision (no more vertical integration)
- * Blacklisting and HUAC
- * The growing dominance of TV, aided by the growth of suburbia and the failure of last-gasp gimmicks by moviemakers
- * 1941 Revenue Act--resulted in many artists-as-producers (by 1959, 70% of features were produced by independent companies)

3. Amateurization of media and public acceptance of “low quality” (e.g., YouTube)
4. Multistreaming of Media and the Individuation of Gatekeeping
 - * 500 channels + Internet
 - * A search for contact in an anonymous world--the cult of the indie film
5. Regional & Niche filmmaking—
 - * Cleveland Film Society & the Cleveland International Film Festival
 - * Independent Pictures & the Ohio Independent Film Festival
 - * The Greater Cleveland Film Commission
 - * Robert Banks, the starving artist—“X The Baby Cinema,” “Motion Picture Genocide”
 - * “Script Doctor,” the “calling card” film of the Fields brothers
 - * Cleveland State University
 - * Films shot in Cleveland include:
 - *American Splendor* (2003)
 - *A Christmas Story* (1983)
 - *Deer Hunter* (1978)
 - *The Fortune Cookie* (1966)
 - *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984)
 - *Telling Lies in America* (1997)
 - For more, see Dr. N’s COM 493 2001 website

Social Role Images in Film

* For films, unlike television, few studies exist on the *content* or *effects* of viewing. However, it's reasonable to expect viewing impacts, based on social learning theory, cultivation theory, and uses and gratifications theory.

* This is particularly true because of the *durability* of film images—movies are “forever.” We see outmoded images and old stereotypes every day as we flip channels.

* Images of the “unenfranchised” are particularly problematic:

- Women (see below)
- African-Americans (see below)
- Native Americans (“The Only Good Indian. . .”)
- other minorities
- the elderly
- professors?
- etc.

* Women's images through U.S. film history:

1. The sweetheart
e.g, Mary Pickford, "America's sweetheart" of silent films, a powerful businesswoman behind the scenes
2. The vamp
e.g., Theda Bara
e.g., Mae West, the walking double entendre of 1930's; challenged the Hays Office

3. The strong, independent (working) woman of 1930's and 1940's
e.g., Katharine Hepburn, Rosalind Russell roles
4. The martyred mother of 1940's
e.g., *Stella Dallas*, *Mildred Pierce*
5. The Feminine Mystique of the 1950's--back to the kitchen or into male fantasies (the blonde bombshell)
6. Contemporary diversity (?)--Even today, female performers are outnumbered in films and on TV, 3-to-1; behind the scenes, female directors and writers are finally beginning to have an impact (e.g., Penny Marshall, Allison Anders, Susan Seidelman, Jodie Foster)

* African-American images through U.S. film history:

1. Whites in blackface (e.g., D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, 1915)
2. Blacks featured in Hollywood movies during the Studio Era—a range of images, e.g.:
 - Stepin Fetchit, the stereotypic shuffling slave
 - Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Shirley Temple's partner
 - Hattie McDaniel, the mammy with attitude
 - Paul Robeson, a multitalented dynamo
 - The Nicholas Brothers, dancers defying gravity
 - Lena Horne, from *Stormy Weather* ('43) to today
 - Dorothy Dandridge, Cleveland's own chanteuse

3. The "Race Films" of the 1920's and 1930's-- Oscar Micheaux and others created films by, for and about African-Americans/a parallel industry
4. Sidney Poitier (1950's-on)
5. 1970's Blaxploitation films (e.g., *Superfly*, *Blacula*)
6. 1980's-on: The New Wave of African-American filmmakers--a revival of "Race Films"? (Robert Townsend, Spike Lee, Malcolm Lee, John Singleton, Mario Van Peebles)

Animation

- * *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) & Winsor McCay
- * Cels vs. Stop-motion animation
- * Stop-motion animation:
 - * Ray Harryhausen (*Jason & the Argonauts*, etc.)
 - * Aardman Animation (Peter Lord & David Sproxton + Nick Park; *Chicken Run*, 2000; *Wallace & Gromit in the Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, 2005)
- * Full animation and Multiplaning (only the biggies— Disney, Don Bluth, DreamWorks, Japanese studios)
- * Backlighting (e.g., *Beauty and the Beast*, 1991)
- * Rotoscoping/Reference film (live action film as reference) (e.g., Ralph Bakshi, *Lord of the Rings*, 1978; Richard Linklater, *Waking Life*, 2001; *A Scanner Darkly*, 2006)
- * Optical printer used to combine live action w/ animation as early as 1920's (e.g., *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, 1989)
- * Japanese Anime --not only for kids! Cel animation at its best. . . e.g., *Akira* (1988); *Cowboy Bebop* (2001)

* Studio Ghibli, the “kinder, gentler” anime studio, founded by Hayao Miyazaki (*Princess Mononoke*, 1999), *Spirited Away*, 2002, *Howl’s Moving Castle*, 2005) and Isao Takahata (*Grave of the Fireflies*, 1988)

vs.

- * Computerization of animation
e.g., *The Secret of NIMH* (1982), many others to follow
- * Computer animation (computer generated imagery, or CGI)—Pixar, DreamWorks
e.g., *TRON* (1982); *Toy Story* (1995); *Finding Nemo* (2003)

cel

- * Performance animation (using computers to generate CGI characters moving in "real time")
- * With computer animation, we have a blurring of the line between animation and digital special effects
 - The majority of feature films released in the U.S. contain at least some CGI (with live action)
 - Even Studio Ghibli, which still uses hand-draw animation, uses computer applications for highlights and sparkles, etc.