Economics and Culture. The inclusion of economics is a unique feature of the WZB among social science institutes. Its Research Area on Markets and Choice centers on economic decision making and its societal consequences, combining psychological and economic perspectives. Applications include the analysis of political processes and market design, particularly for matching problems. Research is also conducted into aspects of culture through shared projects with the Research Unit Cultural Sources of Newness, which concluded its work at the end of 2014 but will continue to inspire WZB research in the future.

Economics and Creativity A Look at the Future of the Film Industry

Steffen Huck

The motion-picture industry is once again mired in crisis. Attendance at movie theaters in Germany is down about a quarter from 2001 levels, and the summer of 2013 amounted to an unprecedented washout for Hollywood blockbusters. Granted, cinema has always been something of a commercial roller coaster, and it has always managed to recover. But this time things looks grimmer; this time the crisis is one of creativity.

Nothing makes that drastic condition more apparent than a glance at the list of the top films as rated by users of the Internet Movie Database. On the whole, motion-pictures made in the recent past come off better than older ones; people tend to be wired with rather short-term memory. But a comparison between the first decade of the twenty-first century and the 1990s reveals a different picture. Whereas 14 films from the 1990s made it into the top 50, only 10 of those made from 2000 to 2009 place so well. They include all three parts of *Lord of the Rings* – something to keep in mind in this accounting.

What happened? The answer is startlingly simple – brain drain, television, the revolution of TV epics. Initiated by Tom Fontana's Oz and brought to the fore by *The Sopranos* and *The West Wing*, both launched in 1999, nothing less than a new art form arose in the previous decade. Television gave birth to the novel in moving pictures. And wherever something new, radical, and exciting is occurring, talent gravitates to it. New York authors who flirted with the movie industry in the 1990s dream today of television series. The young people are not the only ones seeking to make television. There are veterans, too. Martin Scorsese, Dustin Hoffman, Kevin Spacey, and David Fincher are prominent examples of establishment film-makers who have found their way to television. It is almost touching to read that an actress like Anjelica Huston dreams of landing a role someday in a series like *Downton Abbey*.

Of course, television and TV epics had some luck. Technological innovations figure prominently in this success story. Without hard-drive recorders and DVDs,

the new form of the series would have been inconceivable. It requires the viewers to see every episode because otherwise they lose the storyline. Internet streaming has done its part to promote this development in recent years. Netflix, with *House of Cards*, has gone the next logical step in taking serial publication of novels in printed journals to the public broadcast of an entire novel on a single day.

The classical format of motion pictures has always been the short story. It is no wonder that, with just ninety minutes available, film versions of good novels have seldom been good films. The discernible decade-long trend toward inflating the span to two hours has only highlighted the relationship between form, genre, and length even more emphatically than before. How often in recent years have you sat through quite respectable movies and wished they were just a tad tighter and shorter? Now equipped with a new alternative, the public has tired of bad short stories and must force the cinema to reflect on its inherent advantages over the solitary experience of watching television. They are the big screen (which beats even the 50-inch television screens), the communal experience, the scenic quality, and the emotional culmination reserved only unto those who share it.

It will be an economic imperative that will compel the motion-picture industry into creative renewal. The cinema of the next decade will become riskier, as did television of the previous ten years. Anyone with his back up against a wall has nothing to lose. A foretaste has come from directors such as David Lowery, with his mural of love and crime in *Aint't Them Bodies Saints* (2013), and Nicolas Winding Refn (celebrated by Alejandro Jodorowsky as the savior of the cinema), with his triptych of heroes in *Valhalla Rising* (2009), Drive (2011), and *Only God Forgives* (2013). The hate he reaped in Cannes for his Bangkok phantasmagoria is more than a shimmer of hope. "Children, do something new!" was Richard Wagner's dictum that appears to resonate from the nineteenth century into this one. Of course, those who really do something new are not met only with love.

Reversion to the extreme concentration of images in ninety minutes is one prospect, but nothing stands in the way of making a novel for the cinema, either. Why not run a miniseries on Thursdays over a few weeks to attract the lovers of the long form into the movie theater, where they could all share their amazement and fright at twists and turns, their like and dislike of characters, and their surprise at changes in them?

The cinema has something that television will never have: the theater in which others are sitting. Sharing laughter and shudders (the contagion of the little shrieks!) is something other than feeling waves of joy and fits of anxiety alone in a living room. Sheer comprehension, too, is sparked by the reaction of others, by a burst of laughter somewhere in the room when you have actually just felt shock – or vice versa. Classics of the early 1990s, such as *Bitter Moon* and *Reservoir Dogs* (both 1992), marvelously demonstrated this effect, and their tragicomic ambivalence, which made them masterpieces in the collective mind, would never have become apparent in living rooms as quickly as did.

The novel on paper was the most important new art form of the twentieth century. Like TV epics today, though, it was condemned to consumption by the individual. The movie industry has the chance to learn from the television revolution and give people a new novel they can share with others, as they used to do with the ninety-minute short story. That change would be a revolution comparable perhaps only to that of late-nineteenth-century opera. It is purely economic exigency that tells me: Children, you will do something new!

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