

HOLLYWOOD/EUROPE: A TRANSNATIONAL FILM CULTURE

Part 1: Hollywood ≠ Europe (?)

Transatlantic Hollywood: or why Hollywood is more
than an American Institution

Department of Film and Audiovisual Culture

Dr. Richard Nowell

Agenda

12:35–14:15

Mamma Mia (2008)

14:15–14:25

Break

14:25–15:45

Transatlantic Hollywood: Or why
Hollywood is more just an American
Institution



Screening Questions: *Inglourious Basterds*

1. Do you feel like you are watching an American movie?

If so, what exactly makes it American?

If not, why does it not feel like an American movie?

How else would you classify it?

2. How does this film dramatize some of Higson's ideas?

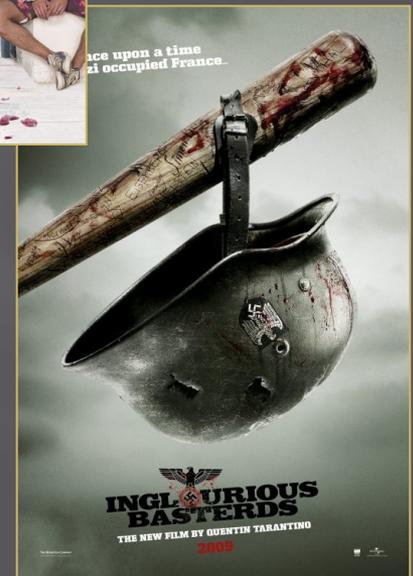


Agenda

Cinema and cross-border flows

Hollywood International

Transatlantic dimensions of Hollywood



Reconsidering the Concept(s) of National Cinema

To what does the term “transnational cinema” refer?

In “The Limiting Imagination of Transnational Cinema”, how does Higson suggest cross-border flows undermine the notion of national cinema?

Transnational Cinema: National Purity vs. Messy Reality

Cross-boarder flows of money, people, goods, and ideas undergirding cinema are usually subsumed under the term “transnational cinema”

Notions of national cinema are underpinned by sense of national purity:
Production → Content/Address → Appreciation/Consumption

The various cross-border flows characterizing Hollywood complicate its status as a nominally American institution ... at all of these stages

Crucially, flows between the United States and Europe impact upon every Hollywood film ever made, albeit in different combinations

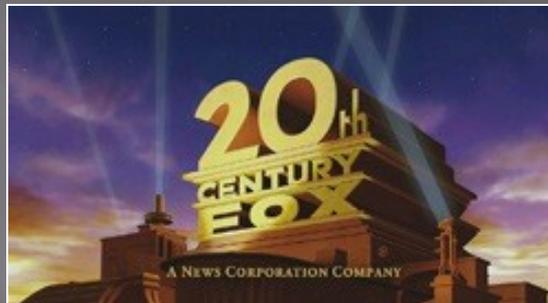
The cumulative effect of the transatlantic dynamis of Hollywood output makes it difficult to maintain the idea that Hollywood is American

The “Economic” Approach: Industry Structure and the International Circulation of Labor

What is Hollywood?

... and how does its structure undermine its
nominally American status?

Hollywood, Now: The Member Companies of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)



Popular film financing/distribution/
licensing arms of these six *multinational*
conglomerates

SONY

TimeWarner

VIACOM

 News Corporation


COMCAST

The
WALT DISNEY
Company

Demystifying the Dream Factory: Brand and Structure

Hollywood is a group of financier-distributors-licensors (MPAA members), each owned by a **multinational** corporation

These companies outsource production to independent companies, around the world, who in turn outsource aspects of production

These operations involve numerous individuals and companies scattered across the globe – some in European countries

The notion of Hollywood imbues these countless temporary relations with a reassuring but misleading sense of unity

“Hollywood” is in effect a brand name for an internationally structured institution whose spiritual and ancestral home is in the United States

Inglourious Basterds: A VERY International Co-production

Production Companies: US and German

Distributors: (Mainly US)

Writer- Director: Quentin Tarantino (US)

Cast Brad Pitt (US)

Melanie Laurent (France)

Christoph Waltz (Austria)

Michael Fassbender (DE-IE)

Diane Kruger (DE)

Daniel Bruhl (ES-DE)

Til Schweiger (DE)



The Mamma Mia!: A US/Pan-European Hollywood Co-production

Production Companies:

Universal (Multi-national)

Relativity (US)

Littlestar (UK)

Playtone (US)

Internationale Filmproduktion Richter (DE)

Distributors

Universal (and UIP [Universal and Paramount])

Producers

Swedish and US (inc. Tom Hanks and ABBA!)

Director: Phyllida Lloyd (UK)

Writer: Catherine Johnson (UK)



Mamma Mia!: On-Screen Talent – a transatlantic ensemble

Amanda Seyfried (US)
Meryl Streep (US)
Stellen Skargard (Sweden)
Pierce Brosnan (Irish)
Colin Firth (UK)
Julie Walters (UK)
Christitne Baranski (US)
Rachel McDowell (UK)



Why might it be the case that the nationality of creative talent be deemed to be important?

Upon what rather questionable assumptions does this position lie?

The Significance of National Personnel

Supposedly bringing a specifically national perspective to the material: Spielberg as American

Assumes that:

1. Such a thing as a national perspective exists (back to the national discourse problem)
2. Personnel act upon it in their work lives
3. Other aspects of identity are not mobilized

We do not know, we posit intention based on our OWN understanding of the material



How does the concept of transnational cinema complicate traditional conceptions of the consumption based approach?

What does Meers study tell us about

Rethinking Consumption: International Circulation

Distribution

Economic necessity ensures most Hollywood fare is made to be released internationally

Uptake

Most consumers are “Cultural Omnivores” who are not loyal to what they see as “national” forms

Hollywood films often enjoy deeper penetration into non-US markets than the US

Meaning

Hollywood fare is a meaningful component of the cultural experiences of countless non-Americans



How would you go about gauging the extent to which a Hollywood film penetrated the cultural sphere of a European nation?

Inglourious Basterds: Ticket Sales (Source: www.boxofficemojo.com)

North America: 37.5%/ International: 62.5%

USA: 25th/2009

Germany: 12th/2009

France: 11th/2009

Italy: 17th/2009

UK: 27th/2009

Spain: 13th/2009

Holland: 8th/2009

Czech Rep. 9th/2009



What important information do these data not reveal?

Meers: Rare Empirical Support of the “Imbeddedness” of Hollywood

Meers study is quite rare in Film Studies, as it considers how Europeans think of Hollywood

His study sidesteps box office data, which shows the extent to which Europeans gravitate to some Hollywood films

Instead, he shines a light on how young Flemish audiences perceived Hollywood, and compare it to other cultural products

They were drawn to the slickness, escapism, and plausible fantasies they saw in Hollywood films, and to American English

Hollywood was was very much a part of their cultural experience

How, in a general sense, does transnational cinema complicate the text-based approach ...

... in terms of the content and themes of a film?

... in terms of how it addresses audiences?

Text-based Approach: Content, Themes, and Address

1. Most films do not focus on a nation:

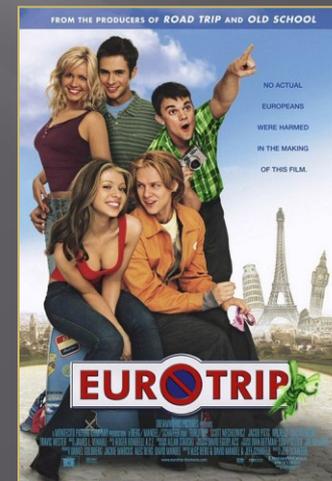
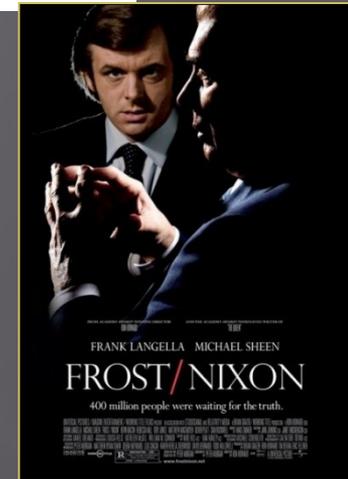
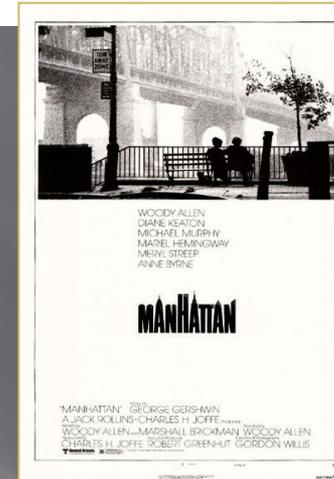
A. Focus on tiny communities

B. Dramatize international events

C. Set in fantasy space

2. Viewers are invited to focus on perennials
underpinning topical themes – honor, love

3. Audiences are addressed as members of
other types of community – e.g. youth



How does the content and address of *Inglourious Basterds* complicate the text-based approach?

How does the content and address of *Mamma Mia!* complicate the text-based approach?

Inglorious Basterds: Meta-Transnational Cinema

Content

Focuses on international events and transnational cinema

Spotlights regional, ethnic, political, and taste communities (not national though)

Themes

Perennials: revenge, power, fate, hubris

Address

International cine-literate audience:
young hip “indie” crowd defined by taste



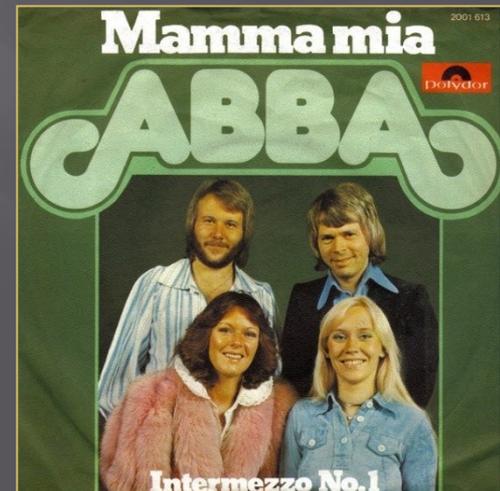
Mamma Mia!: Meta-meta-transnational Pop

A multi-layered expression of the transatlantic circulation of shared popular culture

1. Producers seek to bring moviegoers together across the globe around the film *Mamma Mia!*
2. The international community-building role of popular culture is spotlighted on the screen

[Characters overcome problems and unite around a shared love for internationally known ABBA music]

3. Indeed, that music showcases joy of international cultural exchange: lyrically, stylistically, tonally



What could be more Hollywood than British and American actresses singing an international hit song - with a Spanish name, written in English by Swedes and played in a style accented by internationally recognizable Spanish and German folk music – from a US-German-Swedish-British coproduction about a wedding between a Brit and a Greek-born woman of American and unknown European parentage on a Greek isle, which was one of the most-see films of 2008 in countries such as Holland and the Czech Republic?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmFhcst0s9I>

In Sum

Despite its reputation, Hollywood is best approached as an international institution with both American and non-American dimensions

“Hollywood” is a brand name for myriad global operations conducted under the auspices of six multinational conglomerates

Hollywood utilizes the international circulation of capital, goods, people, and ideas to assemble products for international markets

Hollywood films often tell international, regional, or post-national stories, and cannot avoid being underpinned by perennial themes

These films are invariably intelligible to, consumed by, and play important roles in the lives of international audiences esp. in Europe