

# HOLLYWOOD/EUROPE: A TRANSNATIONAL FILM CULTURE

Part 3: Americanization I

Imposing Culture (?):

The Case of Hollywood's Postwar Tour of Europe

Department of Film and Audiovisual Culture

Dr. Richard Nowell

# Agenda

12:45-14:20

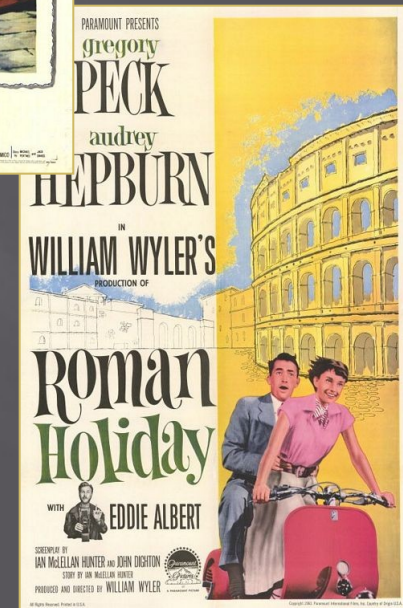
*It Started in Naples* (1960)

14:20 – 14:30

Break

14:30 – 15:45

The Postwar Tour of Europe Films

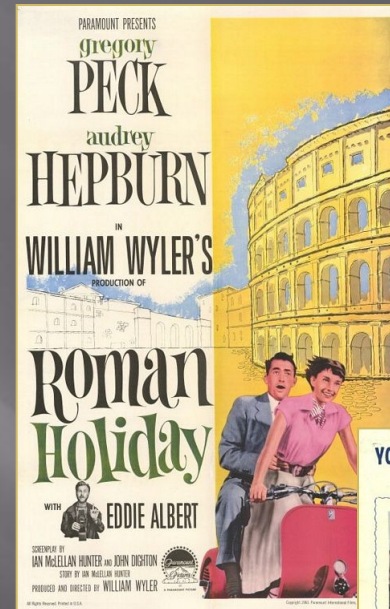


# Focus

Targeting (some) Europeans *as* Europeans

Post-WWII Hollywood and Major European Markets

Selling “American” Hollywood in Europe



# Rethinking “Americanization”

“Americanization” stresses public acquiescence to foreign agents, yet we might note that movie-going is a voluntary activity which is encouraged by compromising content to the assumed preferences of local audiences. Hollywood only has a certain amount of confidence in the exportability of “American” movies, and is aware that its association with the US can be a liability.

Hollywood’s global operations therefore tend to be framed in terms of an imposition of outside culture

It is also important to bear in mind the concessions Hollywood has made – and continues to make – to its non-US audiences

# The Power of the almighty ... Burger

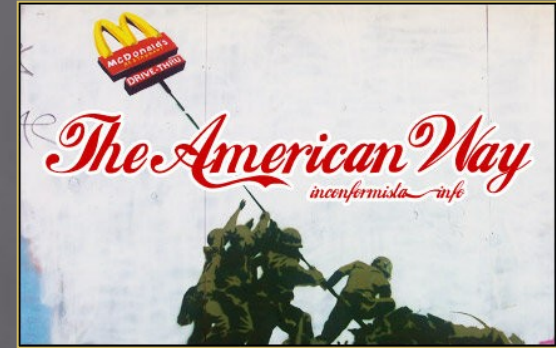
Depictions of Europeans are often identified as central to Hollywood's "Americanizing" agenda

Characters are posited as surrogates for viewers, who are invited to acquiesce to an outside culture

One such case is made by Toby Miller about a scene he extracts from *It Started in Naples*

An American showing an Italian child to make a hamburger is imbued with imperialistic resonance

Yet, could this scene not be read quite differently when re-contextualized textually and industrially?



# Questions

1. How does this film reach out to some Europeans (*as Europeans*)?
2. How is the interaction of Americans and Italians represented in the film?
3. Does this film express a position on Hollywood's role in Europe?

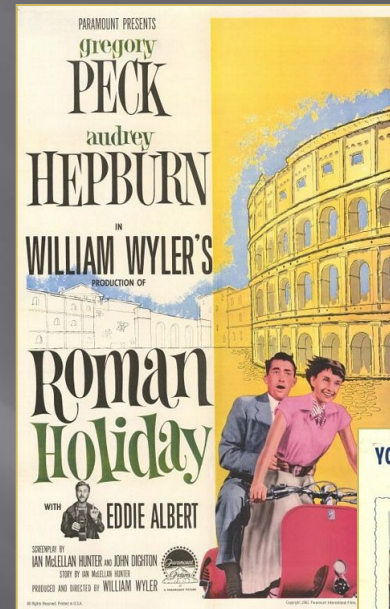


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# Accessibility vs. Specificity

Historically, Hollywood's cultivation of overseas markets has oscillated between a general inclination toward one of two approaches

## 1. Accessibility

Largely relies on the broad international appeal of its films

Preeminent when the domestic market is particularly robust

For example, 1910s, WWII, and the late 1960s to the early 1990s

## 2. Concessions

Tailors some films specifically for the US and major overseas markets

Preeminent when domestic market falls well short of supporting cost:  
such as the 1950s to late 1960s, and the late 1990s to the present day



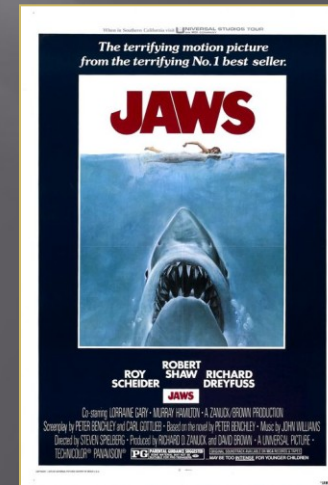
# The Dynamics of Hollywood's Concessions

Concessions are thus made when needed

However, we should remember that:

The US remains the prime market, and no single overseas market approaches it

1. Efforts made to retain domestic market
2. Steps taken to not alienate small markets
3. Steps taken to appeal to major markets ...  
[usually in various combinations]



# Audience Targeting, Content Tailoring, and General Principles

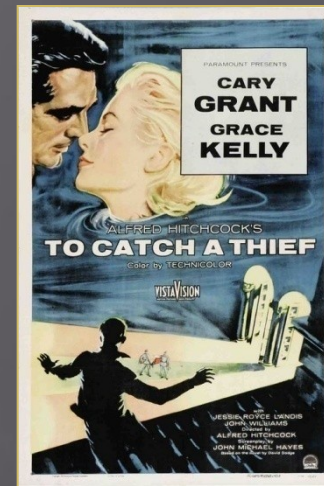
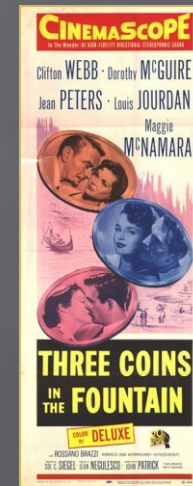
To reduce risk and maximize returns by ...

1. Maximizing marketability of individual films
2. Maximize pleasure to increase +ive word of mouth
3. Generate long-term “brand” loyalty to Hollywood

Industry shaped by speculation and opportunism

- 1 Elements of hits are replicated and recombined
2. General strategies therefore develop rapidly

This explains how assembly can be both a calculated practice and naturalized within a production culture



# Hollywood's Postwar Tour of Europe

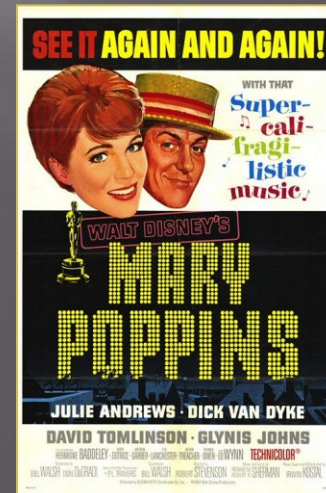
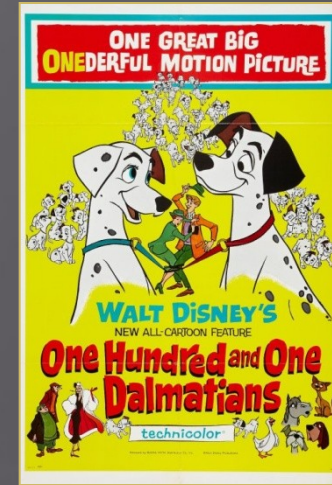
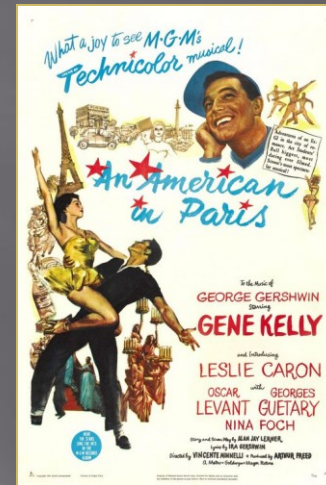
One of the most prominent periods in which concessions were made was 1950s and 1960s

During this time, tales of “Americans” in Europe were made in large numbers

Many of these films were romances, often read as allegories of transatlantic harmony

Trend ended when it became associated with overspending and box office failure

Hollywood turned to underserved Americans like blacks and youth, and home delivery



What does Kramer identify as some of the conditions that incentivized the production of Euro-friendly fare like *Roman Holiday* (and by extension similar films)?

# Targeting Major Western European Markets: The Perfect Storm

Post-WWII domestic slump – caused by suburbanization and the baby boom – means Hollywood needs overseas and US viewers to survive

[Failure to offset losses through an unlikely plan to dominate East Europe leads Hollywood to look to western European markets]

UK is shrinking but still large; but Italy and Germany are increasing

Guaranteed exhibition there as Hollywood owns some theatres

Hollywood also has backlog of pre-WWII films ready to be released

Off-shoring: cheap labor, use frozen assets, secure state subsidies

# The Discursive Hurdle

The cultivation of European markets was potentially problematized by notions of Anti-Americanism directed at Washington and Hollywood

Some Europeans were concerned that the US would undermine their sovereign powers as nation-states by interfering in European affairs

Meanwhile, some elites lambasted Hollywood as part of a broader threat posed by imported “American” commercialized culture

Hollywood was framed as a threat that might transform Europeans into labotomized distracted avatars who would be prone to totalitarianism

Crucially, Hollywood was also framed as a threat to the ongoing purity of nominally indigenous culture – as spoiling its distinctiveness

# The Governing Principles of Specifically Exportable Hollywood Fare

We can conceptualize Hollywood's European content-tailoring strategies as three complementary, overlapping discourses:

## Familiarization

Practice: Mobilize local reference points; romanticize Target markets  
Logic: Europeans tend to gravitate to what they think is domestic fare

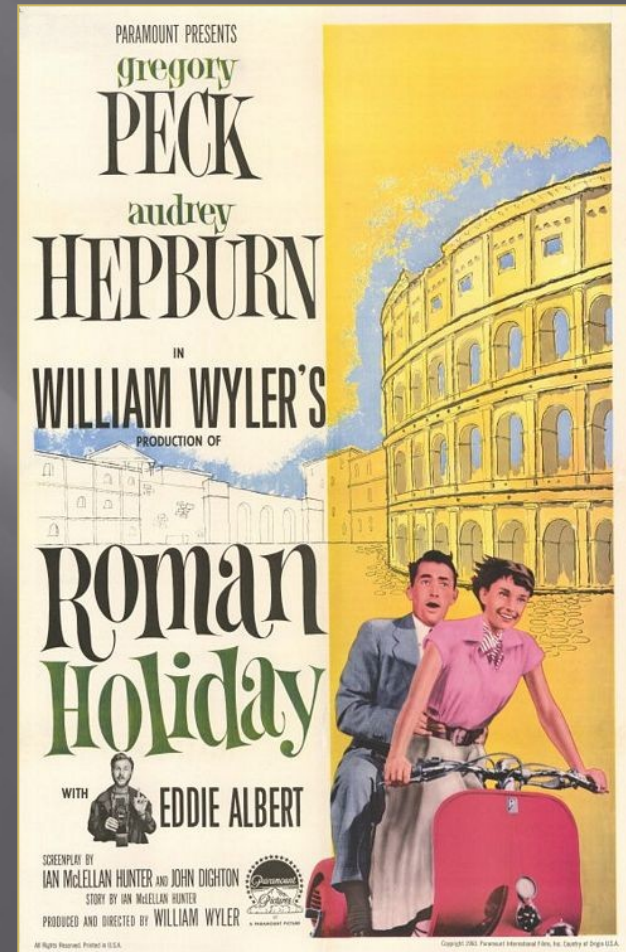
## Dilution

Practice Temper perceived American-ness formally and thematically  
Logic: Some Europeans thought to be ambivalent about "US" culture

## Cultural Diplomacy

Practice: Posit the normalcy and benefits of a US presence overseas  
Logic: Anti-American sentiments can ultimately be overcome

How does Kramer suggest that the content and themes of *Roman Holiday* were tailored for certain European audiences?





# Kramer: Postwar Integrated Europe as Hollywood's Commercial/Creative Ideal

Integrated European taste promises to simplify the assembly of films with pan-European appeal

Exemplified by shared heritage of Cinderella story, “multinational” Hepburn, and royalty

Kramer argues film also uses Peck character to symbolize the postwar role of the United States

US is thus positioned as an anodyne facilitator of pan-European and transatlantic cooperation

But, its presence is framed as not extending to the political sphere (although the film is political!)



Do the makers of this film also try to communicate something about Hollywood to European audiences?

# Harmless “American” Entertainment

Peck character soothes fears of the piratical, propagandistic nature of US media in Europe

He is presented an American presence abroad; but as an émigré and therefore not as integrated

He is also a penniless, moral, off-shored media worker: thus an emblem of US media overseas

His role is to provide relief to weary young Europeans by helping them to have fun

Hollywood is thus posited as an anodyne supplier of apolitical “American” entertainment



# Questions

1. How does this film reach out to some Europeans (*as Europeans*)?
2. How is the interaction of Americans and Italians represented in the film?
3. Does this film express a position on Hollywood's role in Europe?



# A world on which children eat burgers and pasta, but prefer coffee to milkshakes ...

Gable is framed as a symbol of US and Hollywood; Loren as a symbol of Italian cinema

The film shows shared appreciation of the two, their coexistence, and gradual negotiated exchange

Custardy battle can thus be read as suggesting what is best for the new Italian moviegoer

It suggests the next generation of Italian will benefit from this harmonious cultural duality

Italians are not pictured as dupes, but as discerning consumers who make choices for themselves



# Coda: History Repeating Itself

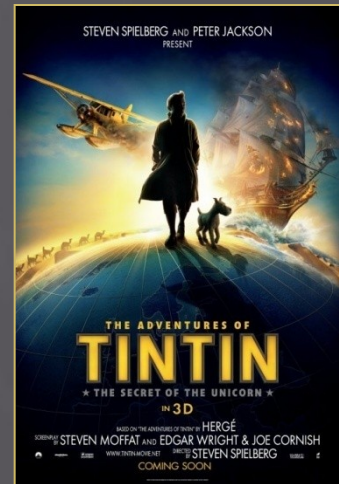
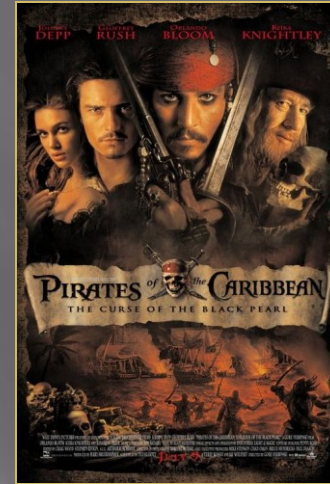
Mid-1980s, Hollywood anticipates a new reliance on major overseas markets

Gentrifies European exhibition circuit, and capitalizes on deregulation of TV, and VHS

By Early 1990s, international returns surpass US returns, as costs sky-rocket

Again prioritizes films with appeal to major overseas markets: W. Europe, Pacific rim

Only this time, it portrays itself less as a US institution and more as an international one



## In Sum: Hollywood – the Good American

Hollywood's postwar European operations are often framed as an e.g. of Americanization: a piratical institution imposing outside culture

But decline of the domestic market, and of the Soviet Sphere Project, meant Hollywood needed US and western European markets to survive

This led Hollywood to make concessions vis-à-vis content, in part by tapping into a perceived European predilection for domestic fare

Some films sought to quell fears of Americanization, depicting Americans as moral, unthreatening, and at times financially subordinate

They posited the notion that Hollywood embodied such qualities: it was really just an anodyne supplier of harmless *American* entertainment ...