



Cinema Through the Lens of Distribution

Film 140, Fall 2006

Course Description:

Mondays 4-7P, 188 DWINELLE HALL

Cinema is undergoing a tremendous shift in how it is created, edited and distributed. While distribution technologies evolved substantially even in the medium's infancy, the advent of digitization has drastically altered these means and their scale in ways inconceivable before the Internet.

Changes in distribution necessitate new business models, but they remain by and large unsettled. Apple Computer's success with the iPod and iTunes Music Store will provide us with at least one successful model for digital distribution. The low costs of Independent filmmaking, the rapid unauthorized copying and distribution of films over DVD and the Internet and the increasing costs of traditional marketing and distribution have placed such powerful pressures on the large studios that many in the business say the system is in danger of breaking down completely.

This course will provide the historical background necessary to understand the sociological, cultural and technological transformations of cinema and its distribution. We will see how the production of cinema is inextricably linked to its distribution. We will discuss the development of radio, film, television, HDTV and the internet in the context of copyright, pornography, the studio system, multiplex theaters, peer to peer internet technologies and digital personal video recorders.

We will read key critical texts alongside films and new media in order to delineate their changing social and cultural functions. As a medium already indelibly marked by technology, cinema's technization through digital technologies alters not only its form but also its function. This transformation reflects fundamental changes going on in other cultural spheres.

In addition to the historical topics, we will also cover the concepts and technology that underlie the new distribution technologies, especially the Internet and Peer to Peer technologies. Intellectual Property and Copyright issues will be examined alongside Critical Theory, Post-Fordism, and Post-structural theories of reproduction and. Readings will include texts by Benjamin, Baudrillard, Jameson, McLuhan, as well as more recent writings on the technical, aesthetic, legal and political implications of new media. Among the films to be discussed: Metropolis, The General, Face in the Crowd, A Clockwork Orange, The Conversation, Blade Runner, Videodrome and others.

This is highly interdisciplinary course: students from all disciplines are encouraged to attend. The coursework has implications within a wide variety of discourses beyond Film, including Computer Science, Law, Journalism, Comparative Literature, Sociology, Anthropology and Rhetoric.

Alexander Cohen joined the faculty at UC Berkeley in 1990, and has taught courses on the philosophy and rhetoric of science, Film and the Internet and the critical theory of technology. He is a senior inventor for Intellectual Ventures and a senior analyst at Quantum Intellectual Property Services, where he focuses on software patent analysis, and portfolio analysis and management for clients. Alex is also chairman and co-founder of Undergroundfilm.org, an online, non-profit website dedicated to connecting independent filmmakers with their audiences via digital distribution technology.