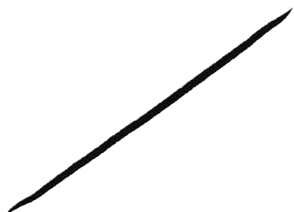


THE PRODUCER IN THE TIME OF ONLINE PLATFORMS

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Abstract: In this article, I will explore the knowledge process in the film industry, analyzing how Hegel's philosophical thesis-antithesis-synthesis model applies to Hollywood producers, auteur cinema, and modern creative producers. I will use the Hegelian model to show how ideas evolve and develop through conflict and reconciliation, and how applying it to the film industry can provide a better understanding of how filmmakers develop their ideas and concepts, as well as how these evolve over time.

Keywords: Hollywood, producer, streaming platform, festival, Hegel's thesis-antithesis-synthesis theory.

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Introduction

In Hollywood, film producers are primarily focused on making maximum profit, which means that they must produce films that attract many viewers. They tend to focus on creating films that cater to the tastes of the majority, which are often simple and easy to understand. These films are based on established theses, such as heroes saving the world, happy endings, and love as the solution to problems. However, these theses are often criticized for being too predictable or shallow, leading to a lack of originality and creativity in film production. Additionally, due to the focus on profit, Hollywood film producers are often subject to constraints, such as budget and audience demands, which can limit the artistic freedom and creativity of directors and screenwriters.

During the period of auteur cinema, producers focused on creating films with a profound content, complex themes, and characters facing deep internal conflicts. These producers thus introduced an antithesis to the simple and superficial theses of Hollywood, encouraging the audience to think and feel more deeply while watching these films. These films were often criticized for being too complex or too difficult to understand for a general audience, which led to a limitation in the number of viewers and a reduction in profit. However, they were appreciated by critics and a smaller audience who appreciated their artistic value and profound message. During this period, filmmakers had greater artistic freedom and were able to explore taboo subjects and controversial themes, leading to an increase in the diversity and quality of film productions.

Today, modern creative producers focus on creating films that combine the two approaches. They strive to create films that are as entertaining and accessible as Hollywood films, but also have the emotional and thematic depth of films from the auteur era. These producers try to find a synthesis between the two

approaches, which brings together both commercial success and critical acclaim. In doing so, they try to keep a balance between profit and artistic value, and this can be seen in many of the successful films of recent years. While tackling serious and challenging themes, these films also have an accessible narrative structure and an attractive cast. Overall, these producers aim to create films that have an impact on both the general public and critics and make a significant contribution to the evolution of contemporary cinema. Two examples of recent films that have both critic appeal and popular appeal are: *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once*, winner at the Oscars in 2023, and *Triangle of Sadness*, winner of Palme d'Or in 2022.

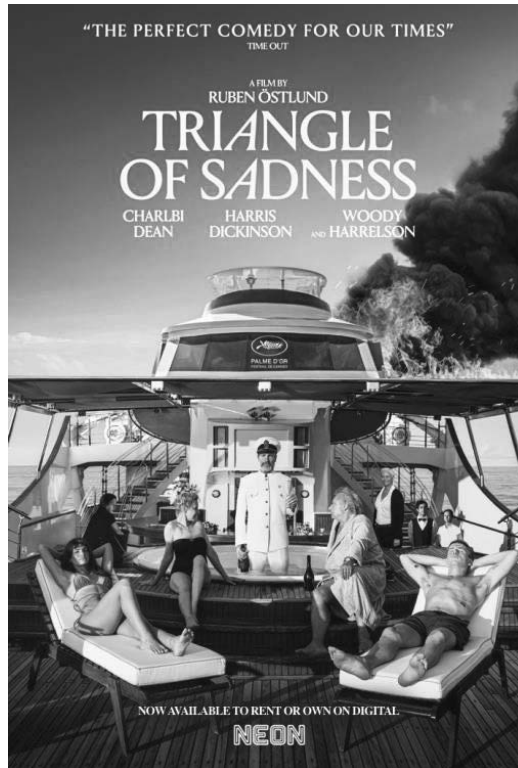


Still from *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once* (2022),
directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert.
Source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6710474/>

The Marvel film series can be also considered a relevant example of this knowledge process applied in the film industry. In its early days, the series was dominated by Hollywood action films that followed a conventional and predictable pattern, with heroes fighting to save the world from some impending evil. However, as the franchise evolved, elements of emotional and thematic depth were added that helped create a synthesis between what appeals to the public and what appeals to the critics.

The Marvel franchise thus began to approach important topics such as the emotional impact of war and trauma, characters' internal conflicts, and ethical questions. These new elements not only brought a deeper level of emotional connection with the audience, but also allowed the franchise to evolve and grow significantly. Furthermore, the addition of these elements helped create a synthesis between the two approaches, bringing both high commercial success and critical acclaim.

In conclusion, the Marvel film series can be considered a relevant example of this knowledge process applied in the film industry. It went from a series of simple action films to a complex franchise that tackles emotional and deep themes while maintaining Hollywood appeal. The Marvel example therefore demonstrates how the thesis-antithesis-synthesis process can be successfully applied in cinema to bring artistic value and commercial profit.



Poster of *Triangle of Sadness* (2022), directed by Ruben Östlund.
Source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7322224/>

The producer in the time of online platforms

Streaming platforms have brought about a big change in the way we consume media content, giving access to a wide range of movies and series on demand, without having to wait for them to air on TV or in cinemas. These platforms have been a real success, providing new business opportunities and a new way to reach the general public.

However, with the rise in popularity of streaming platforms, a major problem has also emerged: the conflict between the interests of film producers and the algorithms used by these platforms. Typically, filmmakers want to create quality content that will attract and retain audience attention, but algorithms on streaming platforms, which are based on data analysis and user behavior, promote more content that is already popular, instead of recommending new and innovative content.

This situation can be problematic for independent producers and niche films, which may have trouble reaching the general public when competing with already popular productions. At the same time, major producers have the choice to promote their own films through streaming platforms, as they are an important source of revenue and publicity. In this way, algorithms on streaming platforms can significantly influence what we see and what we don't see, and producers must adapt to this constantly changing reality to promote their content.

Algorithms on streaming platforms collect and analyze user viewing data, such as films and series watched, preferred genres, ratings, time periods when users are active, and other demographic information. This data is then used to recommend relevant content to the users. Algorithms try to find a mix between content that is popular and content that matches individual user preferences so that they are satisfied and continue to use the platform and pay the subscription.

However, there are some problems with this approach. Sometimes algorithms can be too aggressive in recommending popular content, so lesser known or niche options are ignored. This can limit the variety and diversity of content that users have access to. Additionally, filmmakers may be tempted to adjust their content to suit algorithms and general audience preferences, at the expense of riskier or innovative approaches. In the words of Sorkin, "Knowing what people want and giving it to them is a bad recipe for storytelling ... There are hundreds of ways to prepare beef. But if I prepared beef in the way most people consume it, it would be a McDonald's hamburger" (quoted in Bloom, 2023).

These algorithms, which are essentially computer programs, use artificial intelligence whose main goal is for users to find content to their taste as easily as possible to increase the chances that they will continue to pay the subscription in the long term.

Indeed, filmmakers must consider audience preferences to create content that is very likely to be promoted by algorithms and viewed. However, this approach can lead to a homogenization of content and a lack of diversity in terms of movies available on the platforms. In addition, filmmakers who do not fit these popularity criteria may have to find other ways to promote their films, such as aggressive marketing or releasing them in traditional theaters. This can create difficulties for independent filmmakers or films with more unconventional themes that do not appeal to a wide audience.

This issue has been addressed in various ways, such as creating special sections for independent content or for films with various themes or casts. However, more needs to be done to ensure a fair distribution of content and to encourage diversity in the entertainment industry. For one, this can lead to a lack of diversity in film production, with more focus on films with greater commercial potential and less innovation and experimentation in terms of content. It can also be an obstacle for producers looking to approach less conventional topics or include alternative perspectives, as they may be overlooked by algorithms and not promoted on the platform. In general, algorithms on streaming platforms can have a significant impact on how entertainment content is produced and promoted, which can have important consequences for diversity and innovation in this field.

Finally, the conflict between the interests of film producers and the algorithms on streaming platforms can lead to a reduced diversity in the content offer available on these platforms. Filmmakers may be tempted to produce only content that pleases the algorithms, at the expense of other genres or art forms.

In conclusion, conflicts between the interests of film producers and the algorithms used by streaming platforms are a major problem in the entertainment industry.

The film festival in the era of streaming platforms

The film festival has an important role to play in the film industry, and therefore can also weigh on the relationship between the producer and the streaming platform. When asked about his initial refusal to include Netflix films in the Cannes Film Festival, Thierry Frémaux, the director of the festival, said:

Give me a name of a young filmmaker discovered by Netflix with a film on its platform—not a TV series. Our mission is to discover and put new names on the map. I am not sure Netflix or whoever can skip the Cannes Film Festival. (quoted in Goodfellow, 2021)

He is referring to the ongoing dispute between the Cannes Film Festival and Netflix, which has resulted in Netflix films being barred from the competition. There was a big debate over the rejection of *Roma*, directed by Alfonso Cuarón, by Cannes as the film was backed by Netflix. Frémaux maintains that Cannes is committed to promoting new and emerging talent in the film industry, as this is a crucial part of the festival's mission.



Poster of *Roma* (2018), directed by Alfonso Cuarón.
Source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6155172/>

His answer to the question about whether Netflix's absence could affect Cannes' position as the most prestigious film festival in the world suggests that he believes the festival's focus on discovering new talent is key to its reputation. He challenges the idea that Netflix is the only way for young filmmakers to gain exposure and implies that Cannes' role in promoting new names is irreplaceable.

By emphasizing the importance of film over TV series, Frémaux also highlights the festival's commitment to promoting cinema as an art form. He suggests that the Cannes Film Festival is more than just a showcase for established names in the industry, but rather a platform for emerging talent and new ideas.

Another very important role of the festival mentioned by Thierry Frémaux is:

[F]or a film to become part of history, it has to go through cinemas, box office, critics, the passion of moviegoers, awards, books ... collective discussion in cafes, in theaters, on the radio. All this is part of a tradition on which the history of film is based ... the history of cinema and the history of the internet is not the same thing. (quoted in Keslassy, 2018)

This statement highlights the importance of cinema as a cultural institution and its role in shaping the history of film. According to him for a film to become part of history, it must go through a variety of different channels, including cinemas, box office sales, critics, and the passion of moviegoers.

In addition, Thierry Frémaux notes that awards and books also play a key role in cementing a film's place in history. Winning awards, such as an Oscar or a Cannes Palme d'Or, can help a film gain critical recognition and establish its place in the canon of cinema. Books too can provide a more in-depth analysis and context for a film's significance, allowing it to be studied and appreciated by future generations.

He also emphasizes the importance of discussion and conversations about films in cafes, cinemas, and on the radio. These conversations help to create a shared cultural experience around a particular film, allowing it to become part of the fabric of society and the larger cultural conversation.

Importantly, he argues that the history of cinema and the history of the internet are not the same thing. While the internet has revolutionized the way we consume and distribute media, it cannot replace the cultural significance and tradition of cinema. The experience of watching a film in a cinema, surrounded by other moviegoers, and engaging in conversation and debate about it afterwards is a unique and important part of the cultural history of film.

However, in recent years the festivals have accepted films from the streaming platforms and made a sort of partnership to have festival titles included on the online platforms.

But still, we must underline the importance of film festivals in providing a platform for first-time directors or films without big-name actors in their cast. While online festivals and streaming platforms have become more prevalent in recent years, they may not provide the same opportunities for these types of films to gain exposure and recognition.

The festival circuit can be a valuable way for new or lesser-known filmmakers to showcase their work and connect with industry professionals who can help bring their films to a wider audience. The festivals provide a more focused environment for these filmmakers to get noticed, as opposed to the vast and often overwhelming world of online content.

The festival circuit can attract visionary critics and distributors who are always on the lookout for hidden gems. This is important for independent filmmakers who may not have the same resources and connections as bigger studios or established directors. By participating in festivals, they can showcase their work to these industry insiders and potentially get their film picked for distribution.

Without the opportunity to participate in real-life festivals, these independent films are more likely to get lost in the vast sea of online content, making it difficult for them to gain the attention and recognition they deserve. The statement emphasizes the importance of film festivals in providing a space for independent filmmakers to showcase their work and connect with industry professionals who can help bring their films to a wider audience.

In the era of streaming platforms, film festivals continue to play a crucial role in the film industry. While streaming platforms offer a way for films to reach a wider audience, film festivals provide a unique opportunity for filmmakers to showcase their work to industry professionals and the public, network with other filmmakers, and potentially secure distribution deals.

Film festivals can also provide a sense of community and cultural exchange, bringing together filmmakers and audiences from different regions and backgrounds. They offer a platform for films that may not have the budget or marketing power to gain widespread attention on streaming platforms.

Furthermore, many streaming platforms have partnerships with film festivals, allowing them to acquire content that has been selected and recognized by the festival circuit. This can help to promote quality filmmaking and offer audiences a curated selection of content.

Overall, while streaming platforms offer a convenient and accessible way to consume content, film festivals remain a crucial component of the film industry, providing a platform for new voices and perspectives to be heard and celebrated.

Cinemas in the era of streaming platform

In their article, Hadida et al. (2020) discuss the impact of Netflix on the traditional Hollywood studio system. They argue that Netflix operates on a different institutional logic than traditional studios, and that this has disrupted the established practices of Hollywood filmmaking.

Hadida et al. (2020) note that traditional studios prioritize the theatrical release of films, as this is seen as the primary way to generate revenue and build a successful film franchise. Netflix, on the other hand, prioritizes the streaming release of films, with little or no theatrical distribution. This has led to a shift in

the way films are produced, marketed, and distributed, as studios try to adapt to the changing landscape of the industry.

Hadida et al. (2020) also note that the different institutional logics of Netflix versus traditional studios have led to divergent approaches to content creation. Traditional studios focus on creating franchises and sequels, which are seen as low-risk investments with built-in audiences. Netflix, on the other hand, prioritizes creating a diverse range of content that appeals to niche audiences, with a focus on original content rather than adaptations or sequels.

Overall, Hadida et al. (2020) argue that the rise of Netflix has disrupted the traditional Hollywood studio system, leading to new ways of thinking about content creation, distribution, and revenue generation. They suggest that this constitutes a broader cultural shift towards a more personalized and fragmented media landscape, and that traditional studios must continue to adapt to remain relevant in this changing industry.

Hegel's theory of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis suggests that progress and change occur through a process of conflicting ideas and their resolution. The theory of Hadida et al. (2020) about the opposition between the traditional logic of Hollywood studios and the logic of streaming platforms can be analyzed using this framework.

In this context, the traditional logic of Hollywood studios can be seen as the thesis, representing established, dominant ideas about how the film industry operates. The logic of streaming platforms can be seen as the antithesis, representing new and disruptive ideas that challenge the traditional way of doing things.

According to Hegel's theory, the resolution of these conflicting ideas leads to synthesis, which is a new and improved understanding that incorporates the best of both the thesis and antithesis. In the case of the film industry, the synthesis could involve finding a way to combine the strengths of both traditional Hollywood studio methods and the innovative approaches of streaming platforms.

For example, Hollywood studios could adopt some of the data-driven decision-making processes and digital marketing strategies used by streaming platforms. At the same time, streaming platforms could benefit from collaborating with established Hollywood studios to create higher-quality content and secure distribution deals.

Overall, the application of Hegel's theory of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis can help us understand the continuing evolution of the film industry and the potential for progress through the resolution of conflicting ideas.

Conclusions

Reading the evolution of film development and release strategies through a Hegelian lens, I can conclude that the art of filmmaking has gone through a full cycle up to the present day, complete with a thesis (the logic of the Hollywood studios centered on the producer), an antithesis (the continental logic of auteur cinema centered on the director), and a synthesis (the logic of independent cinema centered on the creative producer-director couple). If I were to put these three stages on a timeline: the thesis would cover the period from the beginnings of cinema to the 1950s, when antithesis crystallized around the famous magazine *Cahiers du cinéma*, and synthesis began to emerge from the 1980s onwards. As shown in the article, and also from the point of view of film themes, a Hegelian reading would suggest that the seventh art has completed the cycle a few years ago: from the thesis of commercial cinema initially promoted by Hollywood studios, which proposed to audiences movies on themes that were successful in other fields (screenings of novels, plays or biblical subjects) to the antithesis of the auteur film, which offered to the audience the director's vision on the human condition and themes whose commercial success with audiences was not guaranteed (the auteur film is often linked to the idea of *cinéma d'art et d'essai* or arthouse) to the synthesis specific to our time when even the most commercial of films incorporate themes linked to the human condition and famous directors use the immense popularity of sub-genres such as superhero movies to deliver their own cinematic vision of these characters. Had this article been written five or ten years ago, that would have been the end of the story.

The emergence and rise of big streaming services, the #MeToo #BlackLivesMatter movements promoted on big social media, and the COVID-19 pandemic have radically changed the social context of cinema. Will all these changes outside the frame translate into a new thesis? Probably yes.

The current state of filmmaking is influenced by both technological advancements and social trends. As Martin Scorsese famously said, "Cinema is a matter of what's in the frame and what's out." In recent years, digital technology has become more accessible and affordable, enabling filmmakers to create high-quality films with very small budgets. The emergence of streaming services has also revolutionized the distribution of films, making them more accessible to a global audience.

However, the filmmaking industry still faces challenges, particularly in terms of diversity and representation, because the big-data feed algorithms will push popular content over socially relevant content. Filmmakers, especially independent ones, must outsmart the algorithms and come up with innovative and out-of-the box marketing strategies to promote their projects.

Quoting Steven Spielberg, I hope, on the big wave of the streaming platforms, "... to see the survival of cinema theaters. I want the cinema experience to remain relevant in our culture" (quoted in Barnes, 2019).

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Daniel Constantin Mitulescu has earned an MBA in Audiovisual in Madrid and a master's degree in Anthropology at the Sorbonne University in Paris. He initially worked for Spanish broadcaster Antena 3 before becoming a production assistant on his brother Cătălin Mitulescu's short *Traffic* (2004) awarded with the Palme d'Or in Cannes. Cătălin Mitulescu's feature debut *The Way I Spent the End of the World* (2006), which premiered in the official selection in Cannes, was Daniel's first feature film as producer. He then went on to produce Florin Șerban's *If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle* (2010) which won the Silver Bear and Alfred Bauer Award in the Berlinale, and his brother Cătălin Mitulescu's second feature *Loverboy* (2011) which screened in Official Selection at Cannes. He worked as a producer on several other feature and short films and documentaries. Most of them are international co-productions that won international awards in Berlin, Cannes, Karlovy Vary, etc. Besides producing, he has also done film distribution, releasing Romanian and independent arthouse films. He organizes the Metropolis Open-Air Cinema Caravan that travels to Romania's largest cities, and he is also the director of the first Romanian International Children Film Festival – KINOdiseea. He teaches at UNATC "I.L. Caragiale" (the National University of Theater and Film in Bucharest) and is member of ACE (Ateliers de Cinema European) and the European Film Academy.