

10 Slumdog versus Superman: Uncertainty, Innovation, and the Circulation of Power in the Global Film Industry

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You know Hollywood, you are likely familiar with India's Bollywood, and you may have heard of Nigeria's Nollywood. There is also Chollywood in China, Wellywood in New Zealand, Lollywood in both Pakistan and Liberia, and several more in Africa. Such labeling of regional film industries reveals more than an attempt at a catchy gimmick. The reference to Hollywood in all these cases is clear, but so is the alternative desire to produce films that the Los Angeles-based studios are unable or unlikely to offer. Similar reinvention efforts have rebalancing consequences for the film industry, often beyond what their initiators intended. Each of the many "woods" caters to diverse tastes, some more and some less specific than those of Hollywood's traditional target viewers. Most importantly, non-Hollywood film production undermines the pretense of control over cultural templates and meanings that move global audiences and even pushes traditionally powerful actors to abandon the assumptions of calculability. The underdogs of the movie world introduce a decisive degree of fluidity to cultural, economic, and political competition. They thrive on the uncertainty that incumbent Hollywood seeks to reign in, although they are not themselves immune to unexpected challenges at the next creative turn.

The quintessential underdog story that both emerged from and symbolized such ongoing power shifts was the Oscar triumph of *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). Audiences around the world found themselves cheering

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for protagonists in the Mumbai story of unlikely success. *Slumdog Millionaire*, directed by a British director, based on a book by an Indian author, tapping international production talent, and featuring local actors also reveals boundary-blurring trends in moviemaking that provide opportunities for capitalizing on high levels of uncertainty. Power need not come from a single center and flow in one direction only. In fact, we should differentiate between an order that is made and one which forms itself as a result of apparent regularities and their reconfiguration.² *Slumdog Millionaire* illustrates the role of geographically and culturally dispersed activity in enhancing innovation, adaptation, networking of international talent and, ultimately, power.³

What our account employing the concept of protean power captures is that seemingly stable systems can be reconfigured quickly through decentralized innovative moves.⁴ Such changes turn the tables and send challenged leaders scrambling to restore their primacy. Their search for full control, however, may be illusory. Outcomes in such struggles are unpredictable. Analytical quandaries of how to explain and interpret shifting constellations of international power emerge with great regularity. The theoretical framing of this book calls for an additional vantage point for examining power dynamics. Other contributions to this volume aptly illustrate that all too often power does not inhere in the measurable attributes of the actors wielding it. Rather, it rests in the dynamic interactions between the controlling and the controlled.

Without wishing to diminish in any way the importance of control power, we highlight the explanatory significance of protean power. It is diffuse in its effects and lacks an identifiable core as it operates from multiple, often uncoordinated sites. Ultimately, this power can enhance political conformity and social stability while also engendering political innovation and social change. Protean power links actors and networks with distinctive discursive structures. It comes into effect through creative individual or collective actions that tap into the distinctive capacities of and relationships among dispersed actors that do not necessarily mirror the apparent distribution of control power or the propensity to use it.

We explore the dynamics of protean power in a heuristic case study, the American⁵ film industry. At the nexus of commerce and culture,⁶ its

² Hayek 1973: 27. ³ Gerybadze and Reger 1999; Hayek 1945; Ostrom 2010a.

⁴ Ostrom 2010b: 552; Ostrom 1961.

⁵ Our discussion necessitates one note on conceptual clarity. In this chapter's terminology the "United States" references the state and often stresses the central role of the executive branch of government. "America" refers to social actors and their variegated practices. Located in the "United States" and bearing unmistakable traits of "America," Hollywood is not an actor but a site that permits us to observe power processes.

⁶ Kindem 2000b: 1; Nowell-Smith 1998: 1–2.

political and cultural significance make it an important subject for social science analysis.⁷ Are a small number of capitalist and cultural entrepreneurs located at the center of the American movie and media industry controlling the world with films infused by American ideas, norms, and values? Or are foreign governments, producers, directors, and audiences developing effective strategies to circumvent, adapt to, and innovate around American control? The first question is indebted to theories of cultural imperialism with a long pedigree in Marxist theory; the second to contemporary discussions of cultural and economic power. Yet, rather than operating like ships passing at night, control and protean power typically are interacting and co-evolve. Control power of American producers and directors aims at foreseeable consequences that is often undermined by creativity and innovation, characteristic hallmarks of protean power coursing through global viewing publics and non-American film producers.

Although the American film industry enjoys a position of unrivalled primacy in global markets, this does not diminish the radical uncertainty it faces when releasing its movies. This uncertainty stems from unattainable knowledge about the changing circumstances that encompass much more than just audience tastes. In a global marketplace the need for rapid adaptation to such change is greatly facilitated by decentralization.⁸ Innovation and improvisation are bypassing rather than controlling uncertainty. At the same time, the fluidity of relations between actor experiences and the context in which they operate alters the nature of the underlying uncertainty further, making it important to examine the link between culture, markets and power.

Deploying Control Power By and Against Hollywood

To talk about power and culture is a subject fraught with difficulties. Josef Goebbels reportedly reached for his gun when he heard the word culture. The philosopher Slavoj Žižek reaches instead for culture when he hears the word gun.⁹ Political philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah uses less martial imagery but also conveys the challenge of working with the

⁷ Chase 2008; Christopherson 2011; Christopherson and Storper 1989; Flibbert 2007; Hozic 2001; Kirshner 2012; Leaver 2010; Scott 2005; Wasko 2003.

⁸ Hayek 1945: 524.

⁹ Žižek 1999: 4. Popular culture and the arts more generally have elicited an aesthetic turn in international relations theory that is indebted to post-modernism and that differs from the argument developed in this chapter. The aesthetic turn focuses on cinema, literature, visual art, music, and other forms that encompass high art and extend into popular culture. Sensibility, imagination, and emotion are all part of aesthetic approaches, complementing cognition, knowledge, and reason. The aesthetic turn insists on the unavoidable necessity of interpretation that links the values of the perceiver to the phenomena she

concept: "It's reached the point," he writes, "that when you hear the word 'culture,' you reach for your dictionary."¹⁰

Compulsion, institutions, and structures are three different faces of control power. Compulsion occurs in relations of direct interaction of control by one actor over another. Institutional power is found in the control that actors exercise indirectly over others, including through controlling the process of agenda-setting in various institutions.¹¹ Structural power affects directly both the context and the conduct of actors.¹² It often entails its opposite, structural uncertainty, which frequently makes it difficult to translate successfully policy intentions into action with predictable consequences. Structural power in no way guarantees success. Hollywood's all-too-many failed or middling movies show this clearly.¹³ This section focuses on historical episodes of control power deployment by the American film industry, with particular attention to why such strategies would have seemed viable and the reasons why they ultimately proved to be inadequate.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Hollywood gained the upper hand over its competitors by standardizing film production through the adoption of more capital-intensive technologies aiming at greater economies of scale. Brand loyalties flourished together with the star system and the ever-widening appeal of the nascent Hollywood studio complex's products.¹⁴ Regional concentration and later subcontracting in and around Los Angeles were efficient "for an industry where standardization is important to keep costs down, but innovation remains critical as a hook for audiences."¹⁵ The production complex that had emerged in California during the 1920s and 1930s was thus well positioned for extending its reach nationally and internationally.¹⁶ The high cost of producing movies generated an advantage for established players in both production and promotion.¹⁷ This advantage was reinforced further by American dominance over channels of distribution.¹⁸ Taken together these added up to a powerful structural advantage of American moviemakers.¹⁹

In the annals of the history of movies, compulsion plays a role in times of war and postwar reconstruction. Before the Second World War the

or he seeks to illuminate. Aesthetic approaches focus on the gap between the object of representation and the form of representation not as a problem to be overcome, but as the location of a profoundly important politics. And that politics should be made accessible to all human faculties and not just human reason. Since representation is always also an act of power, as Foucault has reminded us, scientific realism should be subjected to questioning and the aesthetic turn in cultural studies provides us with one such opportunity. Bleiker 2009: 18–47; Steele 2010.

¹⁰ Appiah 2005: 114. ¹¹ Barnett and Duvall 2005. ¹² Hay 2002: 185–86.

¹³ Leaver 2010; Litman 1998. ¹⁴ de Grazia 1989: 61. ¹⁵ Moran 1996: 77.

¹⁶ Waterman 2005: 272. ¹⁷ Berra 2008: 17; Cowen 2002: 7. ¹⁸ Flibbert 2007: 52.

¹⁹ Christopherson 2012.

German movie industry dominated European markets and Josef Goebbels built on that strength to construct an imposing propaganda machinery. In the midst of the Second World War American movie moguls planned, with the active support of different branches of the US government, to establish European markets freed from German, though not American, influence. According to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith this was little more than “a cover for obstructing the revival of any [European] film industry.”²⁰ Since film was an essential tool of the government’s de-Nazification campaign, government and industry were engaged in a relationship of competitive cooperation.

“Studio bosses like Darryl L. Zanuck demanded the total destruction and unlimited prohibition and elimination of their strongest pre-war rival, the German film industry.”²¹ Somewhat reluctantly, the Information Services Division (ISD) of the American occupation authorities obliged and insisted on a total dismantling of the Ufa conglomerate, the center of German movies in the Weimar Republic and a docile instrument in the hands of Josef Goebbels after 1933. After 1945, West Germany was soon fully permeated by American culture, including movies.²² But only after the US Army gave in to Hollywood’s most far-reaching demands in 1949, did the studios release Hollywood movies in the German market in large numbers.²³ The result, in T. P. Elsaesser’s words, was that after 1945 “Hollywood stands at the very heart of the New German Cinema becoming a national cinema.”²⁴

Some German filmmakers resented the decartelization of the German movie industry, modeled after the change in America’s domestic film industry in 1948; others welcomed it as offering an escape from the meddling of local conservative state and religious leaders.²⁵ By being free to join Germany’s central film industry trade organization during the military occupation, American distributors enjoyed a unique advantage which gave Hollywood an effective veto over German film policy. It is therefore hardly surprising that American film companies had a profound influence over West Germany’s cultural policy.²⁶ This manifest success of control power in Hollywood’s penetration in postwar Germany justified its continued prioritization and expectation of efficacy.

There were parallel attempts to adopt the strategy of structural positioning, institutional backing, and economic muscle to protect the rising dominance of Hollywood studios in America and abroad. This power has been widely recognized. Aspiring presidential candidates, especially of

²⁰ Nowell-Smith 1998: 6. ²¹ Wagnleitner 1994: 202.

²² Cooke 2007b: 26–27; Fay 2008; Fehrenbach 1995. ²³ Wagnleitner 1994.

²⁴ Elsaesser 1994: 284. ²⁵ Fehrenbach 1995: 52–53. ²⁶ Segrave 1997: 209–10.

the Democratic Party, make Hollywood a regular stop on their fund-raising trips. With ready access to the halls of power, the lobbying of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) has been very successful.²⁷ By trying to have movies covered under the catch-all rubric of intellectual property rights, the US government, for example, has backed the industry's demand at the international level. Such interventions were often without great success;²⁸ however, that is not a reflection of the limits of control power wielded by Hollywood but rather that of the US government.

The recognition of Hollywood's control power resulted in valiant efforts to resist it. Both comparatively strong European producer countries (such as Britain, France, and Germany) and weak ones (in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East) have relied on a panoply of direct and indirect protectionist and promotive measures.²⁹ What Anne Jäckel describes for Europe holds also for other parts of the world. Most countries "continue to implement some form of protection for their national film industry . . . films are considered far too socially important to be left to market forces."³⁰ Yet, because non-American audiences have come to share American tastes for films and genres that translate well across national borders and different subcultures, political resistance against the import of American movies often has been half-hearted and short-lived.³¹ Informed or instructed by the preferences of viewing publics, American and foreign producers and governments are thus enmeshed in an unending game of probing and adaptation.³²

Hollywood studios have also used their dominance to shape markets.³³ For example, exclusive distribution of "one-size-fits-all" movies, selected by a few leading distributors, spurs markets that favor "a homogenized film product that can be profitable everywhere" and generates pressures that leave only limited market segments available for international competitors of American movies.³⁴ These developments set the stage for a profound transformation of global cinema in the 1980s and 1990s. Film production, financing, and distribution have each become increasingly global, and are dominated by America's major studios. This has created a system in which the national production of movies abroad, through different commercial linkages, became an integral part of the American industry.³⁵ Film production in the United States has long been seen as a

²⁷ Wasko 2005: 14.

²⁸ Flibbert 2007: 159; Miller, Kurunmäki, and O'Leary 2008; Miller et al. 2001: 38–39.

²⁹ de Grazia, 1989: 54, 86; Flibbert 2007: 8, 19. ³⁰ Jäckel 2003: 1.

³¹ Flibbert 2007; Puttnam and Watson 1998.

³² Cooke 2007a; Kindem 2000a; Moran 1996. ³³ Cowen 2002: 75–77.

³⁴ Flibbert 2007: 138; Iordanova, Martin-Jones, and Vidal 2010. ³⁵ Moran 1996: 6–7.

template for corporate and industrial change.³⁶ The advent of the era of conglomerates allowed for the development of digital technology,³⁷ which further boosted Hollywood's distribution system.³⁸ More recently, the combined effect of big-budget moviemaking and expanded marketing opportunities that include the full range of media and sales outlets³⁹ has extended the reach of Hollywood to secondary markets in soundtracks and other paraphernalia, creating additional advantages for the American movie industry.⁴⁰ The movie industry is part of a thriving American popular culture complex that includes television programs, rock, rap and pop, theme parks, sports, clothes, fast food, advertising, the internet, and social media that easily reach customers across national borders.⁴¹ Across a broad front, Hollywood has frequently succeeded in muting refusal to submit to its control by cajoling actors abroad.

The fact that Hollywood has benefitted greatly from the different kinds of control power does not mean that key representatives of the industry followed a strategic plan. As Michael Storper writes, "outcomes need not be intended or planned by large firms; if new production techniques are superior, at a given moment, to what they replace, the path taken can be the outcome of short-term strategies or even accidents."⁴² This describes accurately the workings of protean power as partially intended and at the same time unanticipated in a situation shot through with fundamental uncertainty. As we argue here, while the effects of control power are real, fundamental uncertainty is not eliminated by measures focusing on market share and risk calculations.

In attempts to retain control by preserving and expanding its primacy, it is easy for Hollywood executives to overreach in their international ambition. Structural power can have unexpected consequences. Outside the United States there exists, for example, considerable resistance to treating movies as normal economic commodities that should be traded freely.⁴³ In the words of one French movie director "the majors have been laying the foundation for future domination by infiltrating countries with cartel power. As a result, audiences get accustomed to US production values and *voilà*, the Yanks control the world."⁴⁴ That sentiment is likely to be even more pronounced in culturally different and institutionally distant international markets, China and India most prominently, possibly limiting the industry's widely touted growth opportunities abroad.⁴⁵

³⁶ Hozic 2001: xvi. ³⁷ Allen 2003: 36, 220. ³⁸ Hozic 2001: 22–27.

³⁹ Wasko 1994: 242. ⁴⁰ Aksoy and Robins 1992; Kunz 2007; Litman 1998.

⁴¹ Press-Barnathan 2013. ⁴² Storper 1993: 291. ⁴³ Flibbert 2007; Scott 2005.

⁴⁴ Wasko 1994: 226. ⁴⁵ Leaver 2010: 474.

Whatever the dominance over global markets by Hollywood creators and the blockbusters they produce, it does not make the American film industry immune against unknowable fluctuations. On the contrary, a lack of knowledge about the preferences of global audiences makes the industry often operate under conditions of radical uncertainty.⁴⁶ Hollywood has set key standards for the global film industry, gaining considerable market control, only to find that the markets for which the strategy was devised may follow an entirely different course. “Much of what Hollywood does,” Prindle writes, “can be interpreted as a series of strategies to replicate the unpredictable . . . People in Hollywood . . . face the incalculable every day.” As in the crisis-prone markets for sophisticated financial products with highly uncertain future values, in which agents’ expectations are often (contingently) stabilized by market conventions (see Chapter 8), Hollywood producers thus have developed strategies to cope with the fact that few movies actually make a return on the invested capital. “Brand loyalty” and “star power,”⁴⁷ specific genres, sequels, and series to tap into stable audiences,⁴⁸ cutting production costs, expanding markets, control over distribution channels and finance,⁴⁹ high production and advertising budgets and moderately priced stars⁵⁰ – all make the list of practices and strategies employed by predictability-seeking Hollywood producers.⁵¹ Yet De Vany’s statistical analysis of the covariates of Hollywood films’ box office performances rejects as useless nearly all of these strategies, without weakening the tenacity with which they are pursued.⁵² More recent (and ever-more sophisticated) attempts at forecasting the performance of films have proved to be similarly unsuccessful.⁵³ The bi-modal (and unusually long-tailed) shape of the distribution of box office returns is captured in Figure 10.1. The figure plots the box office performances for 8,401 films

⁴⁶ Cassidy 1997.

⁴⁷ Statistical script testing is the latest illustration of these beliefs. “It takes a lot of the risk out of what I do,” says producer Scott Seindorff (quoted in Barnes 2013).

⁴⁸ Prindle 1993: 18–29. ⁴⁹ Aksoy and Robins 1992: 13. ⁵⁰ *The Economist* 2016a.

⁵¹ Uncertainty is reduced also by vertical integration of production, distribution, and exhibition; careful audience research – test screenings and focus groups on rough cuts of films; completion guarantors – companies that, for a fee, guarantee money necessary to finish production; negative pickup – major studios agree to pay part of the costs of the movie’s production upon the delivery of the negative; creative accounting techniques to mask the true net loss and profit of a film; developing ancillary markets like video and DVD; and increasing access to foreign markets. See Acheson and Maule 1994.

⁵² Cassidy 1997; De Vany 2004.

⁵³ For example, two physicists developed a machine learning algorithm to pre-assign films (based on publicly available information) to different categories (ranging from “flop” to “blockbuster”); when they compared the actual performance to the prediction, they found that the routine correctly classified only about one-third of the films in their dataset of over 5,000 films. Pan and Sinha 2010.

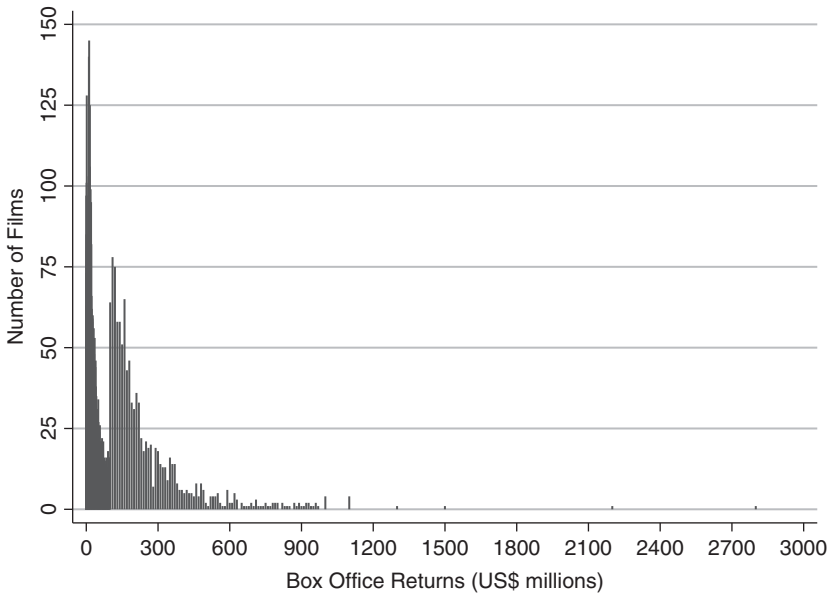


Figure 10.1 The Distribution of Box Office Returns, 1950–2010

released between 1950 and 2010.⁵⁴ The data confirm that many films earn little, a few do well, and a very, very small number become global blockbusters – and no one can predict in advance of the release into which category a film will fit.⁵⁵ Screenwriter William Goldman encapsulated the radical uncertainty that defines the modern movie business in his best-known *bon mot*: “nobody knows anything.”⁵⁶

Despite Hollywood’s dominance in select areas, like box office revenues, which enhance control in domestic and international markets, the battles for survival are hardly won. Returns on investments are low, and the ability to reach global audiences and retain their loyalty has been a

⁵⁴ Bamman, O’Connor, and Smith 2013. The film data used to construct the figure can be accessed at: www.ark.cs.cmu.edu/personas.

⁵⁵ And what is true for Hollywood is true for Bollywood as well: “fewer than 8 out of the 800 films made each year [in Bollywood] will make serious money.” Torgovnik 2003: 6.

⁵⁶ Asked seventeen years later whether the *bon mot* still held true, Goldman replied “now more than ever.” Quoted in Lavin 2000. The micro-level evidence on the total unpredictability of audience tastes is strong. Experimental evidence shows that slight shifts in social cues can move audience valuations of cultural objects in wildly divergent directions. These micro-level studies shed additional light on the “pervasive ‘nobody knows’ problem, whereby even sophisticated cultural industry insiders have difficulty predicting which cultural products will become highly popular and which will fail.” Zuckerman 2012: 226.

source of permanent anxiety among Los Angeles film producers. Analyses of the movie industry stress its history of instability.⁵⁷ Although fewer films are made today than two decades ago, competition within the industry remains fierce, and is aggravated by competition with television, Blu-ray, online streaming services, other entertainment industries, and with piracy. The unpredictability of consumer preferences in Hollywood's domestic and foreign markets is also well known.⁵⁸ In a complex market place, the frequency distribution of profits and losses in the film industry is non-Gaussian and has very long tails.⁵⁹ Hollywood's film producers may try to exert control power, and they have been assisted in this endeavor by the establishment of a template for global blockbuster movies that has helped to create key markets in its viewing public, as well as aspiring moviemakers wanting to create global hit movies. But they are often frustrated when their competitors have a better view of the (moving) target, or once creative entrepreneurs in other sites of protean power master, perfect, and substitute the tools devised by Hollywood to reach the widest audiences.

Put differently, Hollywood's control over global markets and audiences is not limited only by the counter-power of state and corporate actors seeking to evade its control and to impose their own instead. It is also limited by a protean power that circulates among producers, directors, and viewing publics and that can, at times, also course through Hollywood, although not as a result of deliberate strategies. That protean power operates in a decentralized manner and indirectly, appearing to lack identifiable agents, and often results in novel practices.

Both control and protean power are, therefore, deeply intertwined. To focus only on one or the other type of power impairs our understanding. It is the dynamic relation between the two kinds of power that best elucidates developments in the movie industry. "Movies are both art and commerce."⁶⁰ Existing studies typically provide either an economic analysis of the system of production and distribution⁶¹ or focus on the movies themselves, the culture of consumption and the ultimate arbiter, the moviegoer.⁶² The analysis of the movie industry should, however, capture both economic relationships and cultural exchanges.⁶³ Economic and cultural crosscurrents reveal clearly power's two different and complementary facets and practices that enhance the circulation of power.

⁵⁷ Allen 2003: 37. ⁵⁸ Swann 1994: 181. ⁵⁹ De Vany 2004: 2–3, 6.

⁶⁰ Kindem 2000b: 1.

⁶¹ Chase 2008; Christopherson 2011; Christopherson and Storper 1989; Flibbert 2007; Leaver 2010; Scott 2005.

⁶² Hozic 2001; Kirshner 2012; Wasko 2005. ⁶³ Nowell-Smith 1998: 1–2.

Protean Power

The uncertainty that Hollywood faces comes in forms that are not fully captured by market competition. Cultural producers tackling the problem of competitiveness head on and relying on risk-driven shortcuts are often frustrated. Those strategies fit the template for exercising control power, which is not ineffective but limited both as a practical guide, evidenced by Hollywood's struggle for dominance, and as a conceptual framework, since it neglects the dynamic complexity characterizing the world of global film. Control power would suffice if specific market moves met with predictable responses that could be thwarted and neutralized by still more calculated action. No global actors, and certainly not Hollywood, operate in such a laboratory-like environment where controlled experiments produce transparent results. Rules of the game and of "competitiveness," if they are set at all, remain temporary and the creative content of films offered to diverse audiences is only the most visible manifestation of the impossibility of anticipating success. Behind this fluidity, we find control-eluding improvisation-turned-innovation, which both sustains and unravels the relations of power between actors.

Film producers operating in other national and international markets do not necessarily compete with Hollywood's domination head on. Films produced for specific audiences, like those of Bollywood, "have carved out an autonomous history alongside American popular films on an international and now an increasingly global scale."⁶⁴ For example, in serving their respective diaspora communities, the Chinese and Indian film industries harnessed Hollywood's content-standardizing strategies that generate product according to the "most-exportable" formula.⁶⁵ Cairo, Mumbai, and Hong Kong have significant cultural divides that differ from Hollywood's, which helps to explain "why producers in these cities have been able to sustain distinctive product lines and survive the onslaught of a much more powerful competitor."⁶⁶ In striving to become their own force, prospective competitors to Hollywood in India, China, and Korea adapt the organizational content of Hollywood films, sometimes unwittingly. Their power lies in their less-than-fully-deliberate revision of audience tastes and their tapping of local talent, both moves that unintentionally end up transforming practices in major Hollywood studios as well.

⁶⁴ Baumik 2007: 202. In fact, Bollywood is an inaccurate label. India actually produces films in thirty languages and multiple genres. Hindi movies have a supportive audience even in Pakistan, despite India's troubled relationship with that country.

⁶⁵ Curtin and Shah 2010.

⁶⁶ Curtin 2007: 19. Powerful, we would add, only if measured as control-power linked to financing capacity and advertising clout, not audience impact.

For example, the rise of the Nigerian film industry since 1992 has been a totally unexpected development in the global film industry. The emergence of “Nollywood,” decidedly low-budget and rooted in Nigeria’s informal economy,⁶⁷ is popular throughout Africa and even generates worries about the continent’s “Nigerization.”⁶⁸ Within two decades the film industry has displaced Hollywood films not only in Nigeria but throughout Africa. It has become the second largest sector of Nigeria’s oil-dependent economy and employs about 200,000 people directly and 1 million indirectly. In 2013, it generated \$800 million.⁶⁹ Between 1992 and 2009 it released about 11,000 full-length features, which made Nollywood the world’s leading producer of digital video films. Production costs typically are well below \$50,000 and the average production time is seven days. Low-quality is a hallmark of Nigerian movies. In the words of veteran Nigerian director Eddie Ugbomah, “you don’t produce 20 films a week. You must be producing rubbish.”⁷⁰ Movies are produced in English and in one of Nigeria’s 521 native dialects. Customized to existing markets, they sell about 50,000 copies, successful ones ten times more. Without a strong property rights regime creativity has flourished. And competition is weak in Africa’s most populous country. The entire country has less than fifty movie theaters. Programming on state-run TV is unappealing. Internet connections are slow and unreliable. And about two-thirds of households have either VHS or VCD players. Piracy is widespread and discs now sell for about a dollar. Distribution networks are highly decentralized and have regional and even global reach.⁷¹ Typically, within two weeks of their release date new films are distributed across the continent.⁷²

Actors from other African countries, mostly living in Lagos, are hired to enhance the appeal of Nigerian movies in markets throughout Africa.⁷³ Still, times are changing and competition is bound to emerge from other African countries. Filmmakers in South Africa, Tanzania, and Cameroon are producing hundreds of movies a year. And in an exercise of creative self-branding, South Africa, Ghana, and Kenya are describing their own nascent film industries as “Sollywood,” “Ghallywood,” and “Riverwood.” Uganda’s “Wakaliwood” is taking this development to its extremes;

⁶⁷ Lobato 2010; McCall 2004. ⁶⁸ Onishi 2016. ⁶⁹ Rutschman 2015: 693.

⁷⁰ Ang 2016: 225.

⁷¹ Arewa 2012: 3–4, 7, 9, 12, 15–16, 22–23, 25–26; Olopade 2014: 23–26.

⁷² *The Economist* 2010.

⁷³ The success of the Nigerian movie industry is in contrast to the experience of other African countries where resources are too limited to support state-of-the-art filmmaking equipment; poorly organized distribution and exhibition sectors have forced the government to assume most or all of the production costs; and direct governmental control over the content and style of filmmaking have stifled creativity. See Diawara 1992.

emblematic of the growing industry is Isaac Nabwana's dusty backyard in Kampala's Wakaliga neighborhood, where he has written, directed, shot, and edited forty-seven movies since 2008, the last one at a cost of less than \$200 (selling 20,000 copies in the first week after release before wide-scale piracy took its toll on sales of the film).⁷⁴ Film has become Africa's dominant popular cultural medium, ahead of music and dance.

In short, in Africa Nollywood rather than Hollywood came out on top. Though we usually fail to notice until it has already happened, when the shift occurs, the innovative sway of protean power can be so forceful that it may transform even what newly empowered actors do, perpetuating the uncertainty of the environment surrounding all film producers. The direct connection to audiences, the low-cost operation, and the ambition to penetrate markets beyond Nigeria has also exposed Nollywood to the vulnerabilities stemming from uncertainties only seemingly separate from film production.⁷⁵ The emergent threat of Boko Haram, for instance, necessitated agile responses that Nigerian military leaders hoped to borrow from Nollywood.⁷⁶ In an attempt to tap access to viewing households and gain valuable legitimation, the army has sought cooperation in portraying the fight against Boko Haram in Nollywood films.⁷⁷ Interestingly, a parallel strategy is being pursued by Pakistan's army, whose soldiers work as extras in otherwise low-cost productions and participate in spreading a deliberately positive picture of anti-insurgent operations.⁷⁸ Although it is only a matter of time until audiences see through such efforts, this additional layer of resourcefulness and innovation in addressing terrorist threats reinforces the argument made by Barak Mendelsohn (Chapter 9). The profound uncertainty that gave rise to Nollywood is exacerbated by growing security challenges, opening new territory not only for market-political relations but also redefining threat, with an impact on the future uncertainty within the sector.⁷⁹

Protean power does not denote direct or actor-specific effects. It speaks to the degree to which the attempted transfer of values sets free creative processes that generate new capacities as the values in question are examined, breached, negotiated, affirmed, and undermined. The flow of ideas and information as well as fashions and fads on a global basis, with American society as an important node, thus reflects protean power's face. It is partly shaped by the spontaneous preferences and practices of ordinary people.⁸⁰ Just like imported movies, the international success of the TV-series *Dallas*, for example, illustrates the ability of

⁷⁴ *The Economist* 2016b. ⁷⁵ Tsika 2015. ⁷⁶ Klein and Palmer 2016.

⁷⁷ Abulude 2016. ⁷⁸ *The Economist* 2016c. ⁷⁹ Klein Murillo 2016.

⁸⁰ Wagnleitner and May 2000.

non-American viewers to interpret, select, resist, and adapt to the themes of a quintessentially American television show to suit their own distinctive institutions, values, and practices.⁸¹

The lack of an overarching strategy that marks protean power, given the right circumstances, is readily discernible in the case of American cinema and supports our core point about the co-evolution of and interaction between control and protean power. In the words of film historian Vanessa Schwartz, the globalization of culture produced a “‘cosmopolitan’ cinema . . . this term denotes multinational production teams making films that represented subjects, themes, and plots that underscored a transnational cultural experience and perspective rather than a discrete national experience of culture that contributed to separate national identities and rivalries.”⁸² While this cosmopolitan cinema is neither anti- nor un-American, it retains unmistakable American traits. David Puttnam, a producer, puts it this way: “The norms and values embodied in Hollywood films have come to be absorbed as universal . . . American films have always been consciously tailored to a multicultural audience; in the early days they had to be simply because of the high proportion and diverse mix of immigrants in America. In defining itself in acceptable national terms, the US domestic industry quite naturally tended to be international.”⁸³

It would be unfair and inaccurate to argue that Hollywood has misguidedly used control power only and has been immune to the opportunities resting with protean power. In fact, what may seem as a structural advantage is an element that has been exploited by both Hollywood and its competitors. They all watched the dynamic unfold with some intention, but without any ability to anticipate the full extent and depth of the resulting impact. Exemplifying this dynamic in the case of Hollywood, the polyglot character of American culture may well have greater access to and be more readily accessible by members of other communities. Looking well past structural power, Janet Wasko singles out not only the effects of Hollywood’s diverse cultural milieu, but also the role of English as a *lingua franca* that enhances the narrative transparency of American movies.⁸⁴ As film director Sidney Pollack observed while reflecting on the American obsession with remaking foreign films: “You can’t understand a lot of Japanese movies unless you understand Japanese culture. You don’t have to understand American culture to understand our movies.”⁸⁵ The narrative transparency of many American movies is a great asset in global markets. “Transparency is defined as any textual

⁸¹ Liebes and Katz 1990. ⁸² Schwartz 2007: 5. ⁸³ Puttnam and Watson 1998: 277.

⁸⁴ Wasko 2003: 175–81; de Grazia 1989: 59–61. ⁸⁵ Quoted in Allen 2003: 85.

apparatus that allows audiences to project indigenous values, beliefs, rites, and rituals into imported media or the use of those devices. This transparency means that American cultural exports . . . manifest narrative structures that easily blend into other cultures.”⁸⁶ Protean power thus reflects the very construction of American fantasies and the illusions of control and pleasure that cannot be actualized anywhere.⁸⁷

Returning to the de-Nazification example, elements of protean power underpinned much of that success as well. Even under the extreme circumstances of US occupation German audiences did not passively accept or imitate Hollywood norms. “Hollywood was a cultural palimpsest upon which local audiences construed their own readings.”⁸⁸ Jennifer Fay writes in a similar vein that “German spectators and filmmakers did not merely imitate Hollywood examples; they reinterpreted, adapted, and domesticated these fictions. German directors even managed to subtly mock, boldly contest, and at times empty these constructs of American citizenship by inverting the conventions of Hollywood genres.”⁸⁹ This has also happened under more normal circumstances in recent decades.

Protean power helps us to understand why Hollywood’s control over domestic and international markets remains limited. Protean power sets unavoidable limits to the notion of control that focuses on the mechanisms of compulsion, institutions, and structures. It has decentralized and indirect effects. These effects create the innovations and unpredictabilities in a world marked not only by calculable risk but also unavoidable uncertainty.

Conclusion

The American film industry illustrates a puzzle. Hollywood controls the global industry by many conventional measures such as screen time, artistic and technological inventiveness, prestige, and access to capital. Yet the confidence that control should instill is not what Hollywood experiences. The American film industry operates in an uncertain environment marked by the intersection of control and protean power. In entertainment, Nate Silver states, “statistics do not provide all the answers; you have to measure the uncertainty in a problem.”⁹⁰ Overstating a good point, Taleb emphasizes uncertainty even more when he writes that “what we call talent generally comes from success, rather than its opposite . . . a large dose of nonlinear luck makes the movie.”⁹¹ Control power, therefore, is an incomplete guide for fathoming the direction of the next big wave of hot cultural

⁸⁶ Olson 1999: 5. ⁸⁷ Hozic 2001: 28. ⁸⁸ Swann 1994: 184. ⁸⁹ Fay 2008: xvii.

⁹⁰ Caro 2013. ⁹¹ Taleb 2010: 30–31.

products that will capture the imagination of consumers, directors, producers, and investors. The statistical effect of the wisdom of the crowds on the revenues a film generates is ten times stronger than the reviews of film critics.⁹² Crowds thus have agency in shaping Hollywood, but in an attenuated sense of that term.

As this chapter has sought to demonstrate, the world of movies is marked by the intersection between control and protean power. Despite its formidable compulsory, institutional, and structural resources, protean power stands in the way of the American movie industry's secure control of markets and recurrent attempts to transform radical uncertainty into manageable risk. Thinking of power in differentiated terms highlights dynamic relationships between power types that can be mutually reinforcing, undermining, or indifferent. As a practical matter, in the film industry, America's institutional and structural power is more important than its compulsory power. Still, the former two operate in direct interaction with protean power – the greater the push to streamline production processes and bet on previously proven horses, the greater the inclination to assume away important changes in market context, thus opening up room for innovative interventions. As such institutional and structural power are both enhanced and set back by the dispersed and indirect effects of protean power.

The American and global movie industry is an institutional complex full of conflicts and contradictions revealed in both the refusal of national governments to submit to US pressure for unfettered access to protected national markets and the improvisations and innovations by foreign producers and moviemakers, setting free protean power dynamics. The historical trajectories of the movie industries in different parts of the world diverge widely in both the scope they reached and the means they use, while subject to the scrutiny of choice-wielding audiences. The American and European film-production complexes date back to the beginning of the twentieth century; Nigeria's cottage industry saw the light of day as late as 1992. The difference in timing, scale, and audience responses has a lot to do with the balance between centralizing and decentralizing movements in each industry and in its links to global networks, from finance to diasporas. Uncertainty has typically defeated efforts at forecasting audience preference with the help of risk-based models. Yet it is that same uncertainty that provides a fertile ground for the exercise of creative, innovative, and improvisational protean power.

The existence of and configuration between different types of power is helpful for rethinking what we mean by the term Americanization and

⁹² *The Economist* 2016a.

how processes that this concept describes link to the broader world. Rather than arguing that America made the world⁹³ or extolling that world's flatness⁹⁴ in imposing one best standard, the analysis of different types of power points to two perspectives. First, the transnational movement of American film elucidates how and why American culture is an important part of global culture. The broad context of world politics connects local and global domains of social and political life. Local practices remake global culture just as global culture remakes local practices. It is unhelpful to think of national cultures as stable and global culture as intrusive. Contested local and global cultures change as they travel. Second, the protean power of American society interacts with the control powers of the United States. Circulation is not a one-way process. Just as American society affects others, so do others affect American society and the United States. Protean power can be genuinely creative, innovative, and original in developing new social practices, knowledge regimes, and policies.

Like the American imperium of which it is a part, Hollywood is remarkable for the open access it grants to outsiders.⁹⁵ Distinctive of the contemporary American movie industry is the fact that most of its studios are foreign-owned; many of its most distinguished directors are non-American; and many foreign producers can come to make "Hollywood" movies for non-American audiences. The intimate relation between the American movie industry, foreign producers and directors, and global audiences expresses widely shared commonalities and differences across boundaries that make global viewing publics both receptive and resistant to the industry's products.⁹⁶ Located in America and belonging to the world, Hollywood thus embodies very different and complementary faces of power in contemporary world politics.

⁹³ Kagan 2012. ⁹⁴ Friedman 2005. ⁹⁵ Katzenstein 2005: 149–78.

⁹⁶ Acland 2003: 11.

