PREFACE

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Perhaps the most important thing to do when thinking about ‘world cinema’ is to destabilise the term, to question the logic of each word. Clearly, the concept is designed to go beyond two central rubrics for film followers, critics and historians: national cinema and Hollywood. In this sense it is to be welcomed. But it also buys into the semantic field of ‘world music’, a tidy agglomeration that suits the marketing and governing principles of major multinational industrial concerns but deracinates the cultural histories and conflicts that make possible its very components. ‘World’ is not so much a sign of a cosmopolitan relativism, where diverse cultures are permitted promiscuous interplay, as it is a sign that massive changes in population, and the emergence of a New International Division of Cultural Labor,¹ have generated affluent audiences equipped to enjoy a *mélange* of difference under the jurisdiction of a small number of corporate conglomerates. ‘Cinema’ is equally problematic, given that most ‘films’ are viewed on television sets via broadcast, cable, satellite, tape or disk, while the future of ‘film’ creation and reception seems likely to be digital. China provides the first major data on the appeal of movies in ‘digital’ versus ‘film’ theatres, and the difference is clear (see table overleaf).

But the idea of long-form recorded drama available via audiovisual technology, sometimes for collective, anonymous consumption and sometimes for domestic, familiar consumption, remains. While we must be careful not to lump together distinctly different producing and viewing formats and experiences, the term ‘cinema’ may well continue to describe something that makes sense to audiences, gaffers, censors, culturecrats, newspaper editors and critics.

Percentage difference of digital versus conventional releases

<i>Title</i>	<i>Star Wars 2</i>	<i>Harry Potter – Chamber</i>	<i>Finding Nemo</i>
Screen #	1.7	4	8.4
Box office	11.6	14.25	22
Admissions	248.8	290	151.02
Ticket Price	171.8	138	155.84
Revenue per screening	426.3	247	234.7

Source: Adapted from Zhou (2004).²

And just because ‘world cinema’ and ‘world music’ exist as signs of commodification and governmentality, dominated by the First World and subject to technological change, this does not characterise their totality, as Ana María Ochoa (2003)³ has convincingly demonstrated. And using these concepts does not militate against further subdivision and problematisation. For example, Edward Buscombe’s magisterial *Cinema Today* (2003)⁴ is a coffee-table volume in its pictorial splendour and format, but an innovatively subversive one in its intellectual design. For Buscombe includes the usual suspects, but also such chapter headings as ‘Gay and Lesbian Cinema’ and ‘X-Rated’, thereby extending and querying the ideas of space and connoisseurship that superintend the normal science of film history and criticism.

And despite claims that cinema is dying because of the Internet and television, films are still important cultural phenomena, as these 2002 expenditure figures indicate:

Source: Screen Digest (2002).⁵

Over 4,000 movies are made each year, evidence enough of a thriving production culture. But once we examine which films are actually seen, the numbers are not indicative of a Panglossian pluralism. US companies own between 40 and 90 per cent of the movies shown in most parts of the world. This is not to deny the importance of other screen cultures: non-US-based people of colour are the majority global filmmakers, with much more diverse ideological projects and patterns of distribution than Hollywood. For example, the various language groups in India produce about a thousand films a year, and employ two and a half million people across the industry.

Source: Hancock (1998).⁶

Key: light shading = 1996; dark shading = 1997

Source: Hancock (1998).⁷

But where does this filmmaking end up? Arthur Andersen predicted in 2000 that Indian cinema would earn US\$3.4 billion in overseas sales by 2005⁸ – but given that firm's probity, we must wait to find out! For even with its vast production, strong export trade and extraordinary filmmaking tradition, China's total overseas sales of films between 1996 and 2000 amounted to just US\$13.86 million.⁹ In 2001 and 2002, the top twenty films in the world were from the US, if one controls for such co-production conceits as that *Scooby-Doo* (Raja Gosnell, 2002) is Australian, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001) British and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Peter Jackson, 2001–03) New Zealand. Between 1996 and 2002, of the most remunerative twenty films released in Europe, each one was from the US, with the exception of *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, 1999) and some co-productions that used British studios, such as the James Bond franchise.¹⁰

In that context, volumes such as this one and the series that it seeks to represent are of great importance. The editors and contributors record alternatives to this domination. They transcend the categories of nations to consider regions, genres and histories as classificatory mechanisms for understanding film. They give us critical tools and an infrastructure of memory for contextualising the past, present and future of audiovisual production. In a time when the extraordinary global hegemony of the United States is so dominant across commercial, military and cultural sectors, any and every sophisticated source that chronicles alternatives is more than necessary. For what if, as per the global dreams of so many, today's US domination, seemingly so violent and so overwhelming, actually signals the blazing end to an epoch? What if foreign investors suddenly declined to buy the stocks and bonds needed to sustain the gigantic US current account deficit and the nation's bizarre consumption rituals, or the Euro displaced the dollar as the world's unit of exchange?¹¹ Then alternative possibilities, visions from elsewhere, would become crucial. As the most prominent sign of the old order of US domination, film will be one of the first places we look for those new visions, drawing on the heritages and the struggles so ably outlined in this collection.

NOTES

1. Toby Miller, Geoffrey Lawrence, Jim McKay and David Rowe, *Globalisation and Sport: Playing the World* (London: Sage, 2001); Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria and Richard Maxwell, *Global Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).
2. Tiedong Zhou, 'China: The Operation and Development of Digital Cinemas', *European Cinema Journal*, 6, 1 (2004), p. 3. As the table indicates, digital releases are considerably more profitable than conventional ones in terms of percentage of box-office revenues, admissions, ticket price and revenues per screening. This is often the case even though digital releases constitute only a small percentage of total screenings. For example, *Finding Nemo* was released on thirty digital and 690

regular screens, but the digital releases accounted for 22 per cent of the box office (Zhou, 'China', p. 3).

3. Ana María Ochoa, *Múscas Locales en Tiempos de Globalización* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Norma, 2003).
4. Edward Buscombe, *Cinema Today* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003).
5. 'Average Annual Spending Per Head on Cinema', *Screen Digest* (2002), <http://www.screendigest.com/> (accessed 5 February 2005).
6. David Hancock, 'Global Film Production'. Paper prepared for EURO-MEI Venice Conference, 29–30 August 1998, European Audiovisual Observatory, http://www.obs.coe.int/oea_publ/eurocine/global_filmproduction.pdf.en (accessed 5 February 2005).
7. Ibid.
8. 'Andersen Report on Indian Cinema', *Reuters*, 2000. *diehardindian.com* <<http://www.diehardindian.com/ntertain/morenter/cinema.htm>> (accessed 7 July 2005).
9. 'Chinese Film Industry to go Global', *China Daily*, 29 March 2001, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/home/index.html> (accessed 5 February 2005).
10. European Audiovisual Observatory, *Focus 2003: World Film Market Trends/Tendances du marché mondial du film*, 9 (2003), p. 25, http://www.obs.coe.int/online_publications/reports/focus2003.pdf (accessed 5 February 2005); Peter Calder, 'The Hoard of the Rings', *New Zealand Herald*, 29 November 2003.
11. World Trade Organization, *World Trade Developments in 2001 and Prospects for 2002*, Geneva, 2 (2003), http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/its2002_e/its02_general_overview_e.htm (accessed 5 February 2005).