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TRANSCRIPT



Challenging media

**BEHIND THE SCREENS**

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HOLLYWOOD GOES HYPER-COMMERCIAL

# **BEHIND THE SCREENS**

*Hollywood Goes Hyper-commercial*

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## INTRODUCTION

**[Movie: *Fallen*]**

-- *Budweiser's good for me.*

-- *Budweiser? – Yeah.*

-- *Good.*

-- *No, no, no, we're going imported here. You can't afford that.*

-- *Budweiser. – OK.*

-- *Have a Bud Ice, or a Bud Dry. – It is just a Bud!*

**JANET WASKO:** It seems that Hollywood is indeed becoming rapidly another advertising medium.

**[Movie: *Other People's Money*]** *Is there a Dunkin Donuts in this town?*

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** Advertising is a form of propaganda. We must never forget this. Propaganda makes one point repeatedly.

**[Movie: *The Firm*]** *Grab a Red Stripe out of the fridge.*

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** Repeatedly.

**[Movie: *Murphy's Romance*]** *Can I have two Extra Strength Tylenol and a glass of water, please?*

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** Repeatedly.

**[Movie: *Mystery Men*]** *Is it true that you lost your Pepsi endorsement?*

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** When you look at the ways movies are made today you almost should be in the aisles of a supermarket they are so closely connected with selling products.

**[Movie: *Independence Day*]** *See that Coke can on top of the alien craft?*

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** When advertising and marketing are the defining logic of an age it affects everything including the movies.

**[Montage of movie clips]**

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** There has never been a moment when Hollywood was not tied up with commerce. From the very moment that Thomas Edison invented the technology, the movies have always been organized as a profit-making venture. So we shouldn't be idealizing any sort of golden age of film with some pure untainted art form. But having said that, nonetheless, in the last thirty years

there's really been an institutional shift that's integrated movie making into the much broader industries of marketing, advertising and selling products. I call this shift hyper-commercialism. What I mean by that is simply that the whole process of selling, promoting, and commercializing has permeated every nanosecond, every pore of our culture.

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** So, advertisers are looking for any place that is not already cluttered with other people's messages, and the movies are perfect for that.

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** You know there is a fairly long history of these kinds of placements. Back in the 1950s, for example, the DeBeers company used to bribe scriptwriters to prominently place discussions of diamonds as engagement rings in the dialogue of Hollywood films.

**[Movie: *Men on Her Mind*]**

-- Here's your engagement present, darling.

-- Oh, Jeffrey, it's beautiful!

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** Early placements were mostly informal arrangements and they really weren't that frequent. What's changed now is that far from being any sort of exception they've gone to almost being the rule in Hollywood. In fact, today there is a whole new industry with its own trade association whose primary role is to broker deals between the advertisers in one hand, and the movie producers in the other hand. These companies boast, in fact, that they've got a finger on every active script in Hollywood.

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** An early revelatory moment here in how effective movies could be as a sales vehicle was, interestingly, the movie *Dirty Harry*.

**[Movie: *Dirty Harry*]** *Being this is the .44 Magnum, the most powerful handgun in the world and would blow your head clean off...*

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** Now this was a gun that was not selling particularly well but after *Dirty Harry* came out, the sales of the .44 Magnum went through the roof. And this, I think, caused light bulbs to go off in producers' heads when they realized that a movie could actually be an incredibly affective vehicle for selling a product. When you have Reeses Pieces being the thing that lures ET along, well, the sales of Reeses Pieces went through the roof. I mean, how cool did Tom Cruise look in those Ray-Bans in *Risky Business*? And after that everybody wanted Ray-Bans.

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** Why has this happened? Well, primarily because advertisers are always looking for some way to get a controlled environment where audiences can't escape the ads by zapping them or ignoring them. Film producers like it because they can get money to make their films. But if you're a

fan of movies, the question you have to ask is, “What does this do to the process of movie making?”

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** Placement is just one example, and a really flagrant example, of the kind of overpowering commercialism that has come to distort the whole film making process.

## PRODUCT PLACEMENT – Advertising Goes to the Movies

**[Interview: John Schwartzman, DP Armageddon]** BMW gave us a lot of money if we put their car in the movie, so we did.

**[Interview: Michael Bay, Director Armageddon]** We used a TagHeuer clock and I put that little TAG logo there and it saved me \$75,000.

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** You know, movie producers used to look to investors when they were trying to get a movie off the ground but now they look to advertisers, too. Pampers paid \$50,000 to appear in *Three Men and a Baby*. Huggies, \$100,000 for *Baby Boom*. Cuervo Gold, \$150,000 for *Tequila Sunrise*. Exxon, \$300,000 for *Days of Thunder* and Larks Cigarettes, \$350,000 for *License to Kill*.

You know, this can get very competitive. Forbes and Fortune were duking it out with each other over which of the magazines was going to appear in Wall Street.

**[Movie: Wall Street]** Well, it's in the Bible.

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** Since it is now so expensive to promote a movie, tremendously costly, producers are often looking for ways to get some money back and some promotions as well. This can be a matter of putting a product in the background of a scene. It can be a matter of actually writing a dialogue into the script.

**[Movie: For Love of the Game]** What is it with single men and V-8 Juice?

**[Movie: Demolition Man]** You do not realize that Taco Bell was the only restaurant to survive the franchise wars.

**[Movie: Back to the Future]** All I want is a Pepsi.

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** Or it can involve, what I like to call “plug deluxe” which is a shot of the star actually using and enjoying a product, which is I suppose, worth its weight in gold to the advertiser. Product placement, to put it very simply, is a practice that turns movies into outright commercials.

**[Movie: Ghostbusters]** It's Miller Time!

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** There's the moment in *Good Will Hunting* where we see Matt Damon and Ben Affleck carrying their Dunkin' Donuts tumblers to the car, which is fine, Dunkin' Donuts is a Boston institution. But the fact that they hold the tumblers so that those logos are faced directly into the camera, that makes it a plug and therefore not realistic.

You've got a very good thriller called *Internal Affairs*. And all of the sudden there are these logos staring at me like a couple of big eyes and at that point the movie just kind of stops for a second. Same thing happens in *Summer of Sam*. You've got all these guys sitting around in a diner drinking their Pepsi's and Spike Lee, the director of many a TV commercial, has the logos facing the cameras and there again suddenly that's what we see, that's what we notice. It upstages everybody.

There is a particularly rich example of concentrated placement from the mid-Eighties when Columbia Pictures was purchased by Coca-Cola and they started writing whole scenes into movies that were about Coke. For example, there's the John Candy comedy, *Who's Harry Crumb?*

**[Movie: *Who's Harry Crumb?*]**

-- *Cherry?*

-- *No fruit, thank you.*

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** Really pointless but striking as an example of utterly gratuitous product placement.

**[Movie: *Who's Harry Crumb?*]**

-- *Coke?*

-- *No, thank you.*

-- *Mix them together, you get a Cherry Coke!*

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** We see the cola wars coming to the movies in a film called *Missing*, which is produced by Columbia, which was owned by Coca-Cola. *Missing* is a film about an American student who was murdered and in the film we see repeatedly images of Pepsi and the Pepsi logo associated with the Pinochet Regime and the soldiers and the bad guys and Coca-Cola associated with the Americans, the good guys.

**[Movie: *Missing*]**

-- *I love you, Dad.*

-- *I love you.*

-- *To life.*

-- *To life.*

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** We all know through the strategic placement of products that advertisers colonize space, all kinds of space. But we don't necessarily think about the way in which advertisers colonize time. And by time I mean history. Our notions of the past, our notions of the future. So that we see a product in a film that's allegedly about the 1950s and it gives that product an inevitability as if it was always there.

**[Movie: Pleasantville]** *I guess I'll have a salad and an Evian water.*

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** Or we see the same product in the future in a futuristic movie as if it's always going to be there.

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** There is a kind of tradition of mocking product placement.

**[Movie: Wayne's World]** *Contract or no, I will not bow to any sponsor.*

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** Interestingly enough, none of the advertisers take an offense. Nobody is really hurt by this satire. It's toothless satire.

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** Even in a film like *The Truman Show*, which has various spoof placements put throughout the film...

**[Movie: The Truman Show]**

-- *Why don't you let me fix you some of this new Mo-Cocoa drink? All natural cocoa beans from the upper slopes of Mt. Nicaragua, no artificial sweeteners.*  
-- *What the hell are you talking about?*

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** They kind of serve as a smoke screen because there actually is a paid placement in the film for Ford Taurus. So, these spoof placements kind of take away from people's awareness that there are real placements in the film.

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** Defenders of the practice say over and over and over again that it's more realistic to have products placed in the frame than not. There is a very big difference between a world of products that looks like the world we live in and the world of products that's based on placement. Placement is very, very unrealistic because it is a way for the products to look as glamorous and as heavenly as they do in a TV commercial and that's not the way life is. A movie like *Armageddon*, for example, has a love scene between Liv Tyler and Ben Affleck in which the setting sun shares the frame with this lustrous new BMW and we also see him cutely walking animal crackers over her luscious body. That something you see in advertising all the time. The sexual allure is kind of deflected onto a thing you eat or drink. That's a pure advertising moment because it's so reductive.

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** What advertising suggests is that products, commodities are the agents of love, happiness, success.

**[TV ad: Jif]** *Big or small, you give your all – moms like you choose Jif.*

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** Now when the movies start taking over this function, advertising and products move to center stage in these very powerful narratives.

An early example of this is *Mac and Me*, in which the space aliens are revived by Coke. A more recent example is *Bowfinger* that ends with FedEx delivering the contract a live time to Steve Martin's character.

And it's not just scenes; products now actually provide the emotional core of films. In *At First Sight*, for example, about the life of a blind man, the first thing he sees is a can of Coke.

**[Movie: At First Sight]** *It's a can.*

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** This kind of corporate investment is illustrated really well in a film like *Happy Gilmore* in which Subway actually becomes the agent, the protector, the provider who helps the Adam Sandler character save his grandmother's house.

**[Movie: Happy Gilmore]**

-- (ad in movie) *Talk about a hole in one! Subway sandwiches will drive away your hunger.*

-- *That commercial put us up to \$275,000 – let's go get your house back!*

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** You can see how this is changing the way movies are conceived by looking at films from different time periods.

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** *You've Got Mail* is at the end of a long tradition of really great movies from Hollywood. A lot of their Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn comedies, movies like *The Awful Truth*, *His Girl Friday*, they're generally witty and they are about something, they are about a kind of romantic tug of war. *You've Got Mail* is a different thing. It takes that general situation, it feeds it into this advertising mill. All that *You've Got Mail* is really about is AOL.com and Starbucks.

**[Movie: You've Got Mail]** *The whole purpose of places like Starbucks is for people with no decision making ability whatsoever to make six decisions just to buy one cup of coffee: short/tall, light/dark, caf/decaf, low fat/non-fat...*

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** The movie, in other words, is not really about this love affair. It is about this cool service and its leading corporate provider. Imagine, now, think ahead and try to picture yourself say forty years from now when maybe there is no more Starbucks and AOL has been long since replaced by some other service. Imagine what you'd make of a movie like this. It will be like some artifact from a distant era. I mean, who cares? If the drama, if the dialogue, the pacing, if these things aren't enough then there's nothing there.

## MAKING MOVIES FOR MARKETERS – Cross Promotions, Merchandising & Tie-ins.

**[Movie: *Spaceballs*]** *Spaceballs the T-shirt! Spaceballs the coloring book! Spaceballs the lunch-box! Spaceballs the breakfast cereal! Spaceballs the flamethrower!*

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** You know, sometimes I hear people say “Hey, what’s the big deal about all this product placement?” We’ve had movies like *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* forty years ago that had a brand name right in the title. But there is a huge difference and the difference is simply this: We live in a commercial society. If we’re going to do fiction, films on the society, you’re going to have commercial names in it. But back then it just went with the flow, you had to have a store. *Tiffany’s* didn’t make any money off of it. Today it’s a whole industry where firms are making a pile of money and this is where it’s really crucial. It’s become almost impossible to think of making a big Hollywood movie divorced from the broader strategies of marketing consumer goods.

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** Movies are generally integrated into marketing through three basic approaches: cross promotions, merchandising, and tie-ins, and often these three overlap. Cross promotion is a deal in which a product is placed in a particular movie and in the advertising for the product the movie is mentioned.

**[TV ad: *Heineken*]**

-- *Why did you stop?*

-- *I was just admiring your Heine.*

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** You’ve got a movie like *The Faculty*, which had its trailer directed by Tommy Hilfiger, who also designed all the clothes that the characters in the film wear. You’ve got the *Mod Squad*. You’ve got all the characters wearing Levi’s and then you’ve got Levi commercials that are clips from the film that stop the action and highlight the fact that they’re wearing Levi’s. Another good example is *Tomorrow Never Dies*, which was really just all about cross promotion.

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** One of the most important criteria right now, in addition to whether a film will sell tickets or be a popular film, that a studio has to consider, is how much other stuff you can sell as a result of the movie. Mugs, T-shirts, other products. It’s become so important, in fact, that often times with big films you make more money from the other product sales than you do from ticket sales and just interest in the movie itself.

**EILEEN MEEHAN:** The point of merchandising is profit. But its profit from a very cost efficient point of view, and that is you can take one central product, you can invest a tremendous amount of money in it. And then you can break that product

into material to feed into every other segment of the company. So a movie is no longer just a movie. It's the book, the comic book, the soundtracks, the licensing ventures, and whatever else this particular company happens to be involved in.

**JANET WASKO:** Characters are created because they are in Hollywood's terms particularly "toyetic", they lend themselves to toys. To become toys. And it's not an accident some of those characters are actually written into scripts. They become merchandise very easily because they've been created with merchandise in mind. Any kind of film that has animals that act like humans, those make nice toys. A lot of action adventure films lend themselves nicely to action figures that can be sold as merchandise.

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** There is a shot in *Jurassic Park*, loving pan, of all the goods available in the gift shop at. Well, you could walk out of the movie and into the lobby of the theater where the film opened, and see the same kind of display.

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** Commercials in imbued directly into the creative process of making films today in a way that wasn't the case ten or twenty years ago. The line between the creative side and the business side of making films has been eroded and almost doesn't exist anymore.

**JANET WASKO:** Movie tie-ins are arrangements made with businesses, companies, brands that already exist to tie into a movie in some way.

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** The most important deal along these lines came in the mid-late 1990s when Disney and McDonalds signed a ten-year deal. So whenever a Disney movie came along it would be the only thing advertised in the Happy Meal at McDonalds in all 23,000 McDonalds restaurants around the world.

*[TV ad: McDonalds] Now at McDonalds, you can get cool plates from Disney's new movie – like Zeus, Phil, and Herc. A dollar-ninety-nine more when you get a Happy Meal.*

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** So, it's an enormous boost for Disney. Every time you have a kid's movie, it gets the entire McDonalds crowd knowing about it in their Happy Meals so people think of a Disney movie and they think of McDonalds at the same time. The trade press is even called them McDisney, so you get some sense of how closely joined at the hip they are.

**JANET WASKO:** Star Wars' *Phantom Menace* represents a leap forward perhaps in tie-ins, in that they featured Taco Bell, KFC, and Pizza Hut tied in very closely with the film and we had three, not one, fast food restaurants not only featuring products tying into *Phantom Menace* but also providing the bulk of the advertising, at least broadcast television advertising, for the film.

**[TV ad]** *In theaters across the country, you can see the most famous heroes in the galaxy. (Dog:) Well, second-most famous.*

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** There's nothing that marketers and advertisers like better than to turn the whole culture into a kind of echo chamber for their latest pitch. They want to make the whole world around us resonate with nothing but the message.

**[TV ad]** *The Star Wars trilogy is back on the big screen and it's even better with a Pepsi. – Great effects, man.*

**[TV: The Rosie O'Donnell Show]** *And I can hardly wait because, as you know, Star Wars is coming out in May. Premiere magazine has four collectors' editions with different covers. See, here's Natalie, here's George, there's that cutie-patootie Ewan McGregor.*

**[TV: Late Show with Dave Letterman]** *You can buy these right now. You can go to various stores, pick them right up. Star Wars glow-in-the-dark puzzle. You see it, right there? You got a little warning label here in the corner: By the time you complete this puzzle, George Lucas will have made another billion dollars.*

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** If you look at the *Phantom Menace* carefully it shows us really clearly the product saturation logic that's going to dominate Hollywood in the twenty-first century. Although the film itself was pretty expensive to produce, around \$115 million, that figure is overwhelmed, it's dwarfed by the merchandising deals that have already been set up before the film even opened. Those were worth \$3.5 billion. I think that's why a lot of people were disappointed with the *Phantom Menace*, because it was essentially an extended ad for all this merchandise. But Hollywood has created movies as commercials before. Back in the 1990s Time Warner made a movie called *Space Jam*, it was a film that linked Michael Jordan with Bugs Bunny and it was based on the idea that had been generated in the Nike shoe commercial on television a couple of years earlier. And when they made the film they basically said, "we don't really care if this film does well at the box office, because we think we can sell a billion dollars worth of merchandise of Michael Jordan and Bugs Bunny on the shirts and the cups and the mugs. So anything we get from the box office in this case is fringe benefit. I think here you get to see the logic of the commercial system. Warner Bros. Made this film but they could have made another film that might have been a great film in its own right but wouldn't have sold all sorts of stuff like T-shirt, mugs, and socks.

**[TV ad: Bugs Bunny]** *A new Warner Brothers catalog. Use it to order your Warner Brothers ball cap. And while you're at it, you can order stuff like T-shirts, posters, movie books...*

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** If you look at the way Hollywood is structured now it's clear that they are not interested in making the best movies, they are interested in making the best deals.

**[TV: The Today Show]**

**Katie Couric:** *In Hollywood, you believe they're less interested in the pure art of making movies and more interested in the marketing of movies, primarily?*

**George Lucas:** *I think that's a fair statement.*

## HIJACKING THE MOVIES – Hollywood In An Age of Conglomerates

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** This new structure of selling in Hollywood did not arise by accident. This is the result of new institutional structures in Hollywood. Many of them made possible by these huge mega-mergers.

*[PBS News] The deal will create a company with a major television network, a movie production studio, vast holdings in cable television, the largest outdoor advertising company, and assets that will rival other media moguls like Time Warner and Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation.  
-- And in the process, we will create an eighty billion dollar giant.*

**JANET WASKO:** One of the things to keep in mind when one goes to see a film in a theater is that it probably has been produced and distributed by a company that also owns a television network, music companies, theme parks, lots of other kinds of media activities.

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** So, why has this happened? What's the logic here? Well, the reason is that these companies discovered that they can be much more profitable if they are conglomerates. In fact they can't even survive unless they are conglomerates. So, what we've seen in the past two decades is the number of media firms has shrunk from over twenty to less than ten dominant media firms in the US. Take Time Warner, the largest media company in the world. It's one the top three of four film companies, it has more cable channels than anyone in the United States, it's a major book publisher, its one of the largest music companies in the United States. It's the largest magazine company in the United States. And this is what's happened, the largest firms have become conglomerates.

**JANET WASKO:** I think the Disney Company is a good example to use to understand the concept of synergy.

*[TV ad: Disney] From magical movies to unforgettable adventure, from the thrill of the theater to the comfort of your home, you can always count on something new and exciting from Disney.*

**JANET WASKO:** Here we have a company that begins to think about a film but at the same time they think about the kind of merchandise that can accompany that film. They think about the kind of theme park ride that can be produced from that film. They think about how it can be promoted across all of their other media outlets.

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** So, you've got a film like *The Lion King*, made by Disney in 1994. It was one of the great animated films in Hollywood history. It did

something like \$800 million in global box office. But, Disney, the film company, gets to keep about half that. The other half goes to the film theaters. So, they have \$300 or \$400 million in their revenues. You know how much profit Disney made? They made over a billion dollars in pure profit from *The Lion King*. How do you get a billion dollars in profit out of \$300 million in revenue? That's some pretty funny math, right? But then you stop and you consider what Disney can do with *The Lion King*. They can make a TV show for its Disney channel, or for its ABC television network, they can make Lion King rides for its Disney Land and Disney World and Euro Disney amusement parks. It has created two hundred Lion King products that it could sell in its 660 Disney stores, CD-ROMs, it can make spin-off comic books, soundtracks – the possibilities are endless. So, what this means is very simple, this is where it is important. If you only make animated films and do nothing else, your margin for error is a lot less and your risk is much greater. You're out there on a high wire and if your film bombs, you're dead. Disney, on the other hand, they're out there. Even if their film doesn't do that well at the box office, they can make \$500 million doing all that other stuff.

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** One example of how difficult it can be for new content providers to break in to this kind of field and succeed is Dreamworks SKG, which features three of the richest and possibly the most creative and talented people in Hollywood, Spielberg, Katzenberg and Geffen. But DreamWorks SKG is not part of one of these multimedia conglomerates so it doesn't have the structure to advertise and promote.

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** The best example came in the fall of 1998 when DreamWorks released its much acclaimed film *The Prince of Egypt*. But it didn't do very well in the box office. At the same time the *Rugrats Movie*, released by Viacom, which owns Nickelodeon and Paramount, did extremely well at the box office. If you put the two together, *The Prince of Egypt* was a much more impressive film. It should have done better, you'd think, on surface. But what advantage did the Viacom film, the *Rugrats Movie*, have? Well, the *Rugrats Movie*, made by Paramount, could be pumped and promoted incessantly on Nickelodeon, the TV network owned by Viacom. It could be pumped and promoted even on MTV, which is owned by Viacom. It was pumped and promoted repeatedly on *Entertainment Tonight!*, the TV show produced by Paramount television. In short it had massive publicity that the Viacom corporate machine could throw into gear to pump up an audience and prepare it for this movie and it worked. It made a fortune on this movie that didn't cost very much to produce. DreamWorks, on the other hand, if they want to compete with that movie, what do they have to do? They have to buy ads, they have to pay money, because they don't own TV stations, they don't own cable networks, they don't produce TV shows that are carried across the country. And they couldn't afford to do that. That would come out of their bottom line. And that is now seen as a primary reason that that film did not become a smash hit at the box office, it didn't have that sort of promotional muscle behind it.

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** As the media industries tend more and more to be owned by the same huge, few corporations, so that the news divisions too are part of the same system, you tend more and more to get “news” items, big “news” stories that are really nothing more than journalistic echoes of the latest hype or product form the entertainment side of the business. So you get, for example, *Time Magazine* devoting a cover story to the phenomenon of tornados. And I don’t think it is entirely accidental that the cover of that issue bears a striking resemblance visually, compositionally to the poster for the movie *Twister* that came out just before that issue appeared and which is a Warner Bros. Film. See, same parent company. Time Warner owns the magazine and the movie studio, so, why not? Why not use the magazine’s journalistic resources to intensify, to ground the hype.

The great meltdown of the media, the fact that all the cultural industries are basically owned by the same huge concerns has had disastrous effects on what used to be known as film criticism, film reviewing. Now, most film reviewers work for one or another of the same companies that make the movies. If you look at the blurbs, if you look at the affiliations of these reviewers, and these are owned by, as often as not, the very companies that either made that movie or other movies. And even if it’s not the same company, they’re all engaged in the same enterprise, which is promotional. You know, you can’t be a critic and a promoter at the same time. It’s impossible.

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** Listen to what some of the principle players have to say in private. Michael Eisner, the CEO of Disney, said in a memo and I quote, “We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art. We have no obligation to make a statement. To make money is our only objective.”

**JEREMY PIKSER:** The greater the degree to which things are concentrated in huge multinational corporations, the more things that aren’t guaranteed to produce hundred million dollar profits will be marginalized and wiped out and ironed out and homogenized. And that’s the curse of living in a culture that is dominated by the marketplace.

## LIMITING STORIES – Making Movies in a Hyper-commercial Age

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** I like my share of superficial blockbusters, too. I mean, I think I have seen *Dumb and Dumber* eight times. But the question we have to ask is that just enough for a movie culture, is that enough for the society? If we want to get more out of entertainment than that, more out of films than that, then we've got to ask tough questions about making room for other kinds of films, other kinds of movies, that aren't based on this hyper-commercial logic. Take a look at a film like *The Full Monty*, this offbeat British comedy that through word of mouth in the US became a really popular film. Or something like the *Blair Witch Project*, which used the Internet really in a clever way to get out and get publicity.

What if instead of being the exceptions that proved the rule, there really was a space in Hollywood for that kind of film to be produced all the time? This country is brimming with talented people, the problem is we have a system doesn't allow this talent to really develop and fulfill what it is capable of doing. To the extent we get great movies or original movies out of Hollywood, it is usually because some very talented and creative people have marshaled all of their capital together from all of their commercial successes to push something through that the studios would never do otherwise. The classic case in point recently was Warren Beatty, where after doing bit hit after big hit for the studios, was able to get Fox to go ahead and produce his film *Bulworth*, which is one of the most radical and interesting creative movies that Hollywood made in a decade.

### **[Movie: *Bulworth*]**

-- *We can't get health insurance, fire insurance, life insurance. Why haven't you come out to Senate Bill 27?*

-- *Well, because you haven't really contributed any money to my campaign, have you?*

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** Beatty, to do that, basically had to push everything I had on the table to get it done. A lesser star wouldn't have had a prayer.

**JEREMY PIKSER:** One of the wisest pieces of advice I was ever given, when I went pitching, because that's one of the things you do as a writer, you go around to the studio executives and you tell them a story, "wouldn't this make a good movie?" And a very friendly and smart guy that was at Universal at the time, named Tom Craig, said to me, "That's a really good story and could be a really good movie. But we would never but that pitch because we don't want to buy things that have to be well made in order to be successful. That story, if it is not done with the right director and the right actors, will be a big flop. But if you say Tom Hanks and a bull dog are partners in a police thing, it could be the worst movie ever made and it we won't lose a dime."

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** Not too long ago, just two or three years ago, Siskel and Ebert had one of their television shows where they looked back at the 1970s, which is now considered the golden age of Hollywood film. They made a list of the ten best movies of the 1970s. At the end of the show, they concluded that none of those films, not any of those ten films, could have been made in the studio system that we have today. They all would have been thrown out, because they didn't have happy endings, they didn't have the sort of unambiguous good guys and bad guys that films seem to have today.

**SUSAN DOUGLAS:** The movies have always been a place where commerce and art have mixed. But in the last few years this balance has really shifted dramatically.

**MARK CRISPIN MILLER:** If we think of film making as a narrative enterprise, if we think of a film maker as obliged to tell a good story, which is a pretty traditional definition, then we have to recognize that commercialism has, in many ways, distorted the whole enterprise of making movies.

**BOB MCCHESENEY:** Peter Bart, the editor of *Variety*, the main trade publication of the film industry, formally a studio executive, has written repeatedly how today it is virtually impossible to make great movies. Once the marketing people get done with it and the focus groups get done with it, virtually all the integrity, virtually all the creativity is stripped out of the process. We've seen this happen in television and now we are looking at it take place in films. The question we have to ask is "Are we going to allow film to be hijacked like this by advertisers and corporations into the future?"