

C27

CHAPTER 27

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THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY,
FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT,
AND HOLLYWOOD'S
GLOBAL HITS

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C27.P1 THE Walt Disney Company released *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (J. J. Abrams, 2015) three years after it had taken over Lucasfilm Ltd., ten years after the last film in the series made by George Lucas (*Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* [2005]) had been released, and thirty-eight years after the original release of *Star Wars* in 1977 had helped to change Hollywood. Conceived, marketed, and widely understood as a film in the Disney tradition—a modern fairy-tale “aimed at kids—the kid in everybody”—*Star Wars* came out after a decade (1967–1976) in which Hollywood had largely turned away from family entertainment. By contrast, since 1977 the major studios have been the most successful, both in the United States and in the rest of the world, with films addressed to an all-inclusive mass audience (including children and their parents as well as teenagers and young adults), mostly in the science fiction and fantasy genres.¹ Many of the biggest hit movies since 1977 tell, just as *Star Wars* did, stories about large-scale, even all-encompassing threats and destruction.² Also like *Star Wars*, these films often focus on families or family-like groups, especially on the often traumatic relationship between children and their parents or parental substitutes.³

C27.P2 *Star Wars* played a central role in reorienting the output of the major Hollywood studios and the viewing patterns of cinema audiences around the world; however, it did not do so on its own. Several big-budget science fiction films, notably Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and the DC comic book adaptation *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978), both of which had already been in production by the time *Star Wars* was released, also helped to set the stage for future developments, and two films George Lucas produced in the wake of *Star Wars* consolidated the overall trend. Indeed, a list of the top-grossing films in cinemas around the world for the five-year period from

1977 to 1981 has *Star Wars* (later retitled *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*) at number one; its first sequel *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back* (Irvin Kershner, 1980) at number two; the fantastic (in places decidedly supernatural, even religious) adventure *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981), a Lucas-Spielberg collaboration, at number three; *Close Encounters* at number five; *Superman* at number six; and the space-themed James Bond movie *Moonraker* (Lewis Gilbert, 1979) at number eight (as a rule, I look at the top ten, but the Box Office Mojo list I am using here does not include films below number eight).⁴

C27.P3 A comparison with the ten biggest hits in global cinemas for the five-year period from 2012 to 2016 reveals striking continuities, which is quite surprising considering that the (home-based and portable) media technologies competing with cinema-going have changed so much in the meantime, as have global cinema markets (most notably through the explosive growth of box office revenues in China). The chart for 2012–2016 looks eerily similar to that of 1977–1981, insofar as it includes a *Star Wars* film at number one (*Star Wars: The Force Awakens*); *Jurassic World* (Colin Trevorrow, 2015)—a sequel to Steven Spielberg’s near-future science fiction film *Jurassic Park* (1993)—at number two; and four superhero movies (based on Marvel rather than DC comics): *The Avengers* (Joss Whedon, 2012, at number three), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (Joss Whedon, 2015, at number five), *Iron Man 3* (Shane Black, 2013, at number seven); and *Captain America: Civil War* (Joe Russo, 2016, at number nine).

C27.P4 Unlike the list for the years from 1977 to 1981, the 2012–2016 top ten also include two animated features: the fairy-tale adaptation *Frozen* (Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee, 2013, at number six) and the *Despicable Me* prequel *Minions* (Pierre Coffin and Kyle Balda, 2015, at number eight). And unlike the earlier chart, these top ten are dominated by Disney, which produced *Frozen* and, through its fairly recent takeovers of Lucasfilm and Marvel Entertainment (acquired in 2009, although Marvel films up to and including 2011 were distributed by Paramount), is also responsible for five more films. From having no film among the ten top-grossing films for 1977–1981, Disney thus moved to have six films in the top ten for the years 2012–2016.

C27.P5 As of April 2020, Disney accounted for seven of the top ten films released since 2017, including the top five. The seven films are three more Marvel movies (two of them—*Avengers: Infinity War* [Anthony and Joe Russo, 2018] and *Avengers: Endgame* [Anthony and Joe Russo, 2019]—dealing with a genuinely universal threat, with half of all life in the universe being wiped out and a totally clean sweep being attempted as well), another *Star Wars* film and two “live-action” remakes (which in fact consist largely of computer-generated imagery) of 1990s animated features: *The Lion King* (Jon Favreau, 2019) and *Beauty and the Beast* (Bill Condon, 2017). The seventh title is *Incredibles 2* (Brad Bird, 2018) by Pixar Animation Studios which Disney had acquired in 2006 (though it had already owned all of Pixar’s features from 1995 onwards).

C27.P6 As if this was not sufficient proof of Disney’s dominance of global cinema, in March 2019 the company completed its takeover of 21st Century Fox, which means that it now controls all aspects of the *Star Wars* franchise and also owns the rights to James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009), arguably still by far the highest-grossing theatrical release

of all time (if it were possible to adjust box-office revenues to changes in ticket prices around the world, *Avatar* would leave the official number one, *Avengers: Endgame*, far behind). Cameron has been working on four *Avatar* sequels, the first of which is scheduled to be released in 2022.⁵

C27.P7 The first section of this chapter examines how Disney achieved its current dominance; the second section shows that Disney paved the way for *Star Wars* and helped to reshape the operations of the other major studios as well. My analysis focuses on Hollywood's biggest global hits, highlighting their appeal to an all-inclusive mass audience and the internationalism of their stories, characters, and themes, with a special emphasis on the centrality both of parent-child relationships and of global threats and devastation.⁶

C27.S1 DISNEY'S HITS AND COMPANY HISTORY

C27.P8 For the Walt Disney Company today, its corporate history, which goes back all the way to 1923 (when it was called the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio), is more alive and more relevant than for almost all other entertainment companies, because, highly unusually, Disney's intellectual property from many decades ago is still of enormous value today.⁷ This concerns not just the name and likeness of Mickey Mouse, which the company has used since 1928, making numerous films and licensing a myriad of products as well as featuring Mickey in all kinds of live performance, but also the first five animated feature films it produced between 1937 and 1942. With the exception of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (David Hand et al., 1937), these were not major hits during their original theatrical release, but Disney re-released them into cinemas on a regular basis for decades, and also had enormous success with their video releases, so that today they are among the biggest movie hits of all time. It is important to note that, from the outset, Disney's animated features were by no means targeted exclusively, or even predominantly, at young children.⁸ They were also meant to appeal to the parents who would accompany their children to the cinema, and to the cinema-going public more generally. Through their many re-releases across the decades, these films could specifically build on the nostalgic feelings of adult audiences who had first seen them during their childhood.

C27.P9 While Box Office Mojo's all-time chart of all movies that have grossed in excess of \$200 million in cinemas around the world (789 titles as of September 30, 2019) is probably not very reliable for the decades before the 1970s (due to insufficient data on foreign grosses), it is interesting to note that three of the four films released before 1972 included on this list are Disney animated features. *Bambi* (David Hand et al., 1942) is only beaten by *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939, with numerous re-releases thereafter); the other two are *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (Clyde Geronimi et al., 1961) and *The Jungle Book* (Wolfgang Reitherman et al., 1967).

C27.P10 Much more reliable and informative than Box Office Mojo is an all-time US box office chart that is adjusted for ticket-price inflation and includes revenues from all re-releases

(it lists 300 titles).⁹ Although this chart cannot tell us about the foreign earnings of Hollywood films, it is quite likely that many, if not most, of the films that did particularly well in the United States were also export hits.¹⁰ The top-grossing films from 1937 to 1941 are, in this order: *Gone with the Wind*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and two more Disney films, *Fantasia* (James Algar et al., 1941) and *Pinocchio* (Ben Sharpsteen et al., 1940). The only Disney animated feature made in this five-year period missing from the list is *Dumbo* (Ben Sharpsteen et al., 1941). *Bambi* is the top-grossing film from 1942 to 1946. To put the success of these films in perspective, in the all-time adjusted US chart the top-grossing films of the last twenty years—*Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *Avatar*, and *Avengers: Endgame*—are all ranked below *Snow White*, and just ahead of *Fantasia*.

C27.P11

Another measure of success are rankings in the all-time sales charts for VHS tapes, DVDs, and Blu-ray discs. I have only found US charts, but once again, as a rule of thumb, we can assume that films that sell particularly well in the United States also do so in the rest of the world. Videotape was the dominant medium for movie rentals and sell-through from the late 1970s to the early 2000s, when it was overtaken by DVD; Blu-ray discs have been selling in significant numbers since 2006, but these numbers are far lower than for DVDs.¹¹ In recent years, both DVD and Blu-ray sales have collapsed (and video has disappeared altogether), so that it is unlikely that the recently compiled all-time charts will see much change at the top from now on.¹²

C27.P12

As with the adjusted box office chart, *Dumbo* is missing from the all-time US sales chart for VHS tapes (listing the top twenty-five titles), but the other Disney titles from 1937 to 1942 did extremely well on their video release in the late 1980s and 1990s, outperforming the vast majority of recent movies (and all other movies released theatrically before 1982, except for two more Disney animated features: *Cinderella* [Clyde Geronimi et al., 1950] and *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*). *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (first released on video in 1994) comes in at number two, beaten only by Disney's *The Lion King* (Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, 1994; on video in 1995); *Fantasia* (on video in 1991) follows at number seventeen, *Pinocchio* (on video in 1993) at number eighteen and *Bambi* (on video in 1989) at number twenty-one.

C27.P13

Although these earliest Disney animated features did not sell quite so well on DVD and Blu-ray discs, an all-time Blu-ray sales chart (listing the top ten titles) has *Snow White* (first released on Blu-ray in 2009) at number ten, and a consolidated all-time sales chart for all formats (listing the twenty top titles) has it at number three, beaten only by *The Lion King* and Pixar's *Finding Nemo* (Andrew Stanton, 2003). Apart from *Snow White*, there is no film on the Blu-ray chart released theatrically before the 2000s, and on the all-formats chart only *Snow White* and two other Disney animations (once again, *Cinderella* and *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*) were released before the 1990s.

C27.P14

Unlike other film companies, Disney has thus been able to keep re-releasing its oldest features for many decades, in theatres and on VHS, DVD, and Blu-ray, each time with considerable if not outstanding success. As clichéd as it may sound, it does seem to be the case that these animated features do not age like other movies; they are timeless. This is one of the main reasons for the company's financial success. However, an even more important reason has been the success of its theme parks, the first of which, Disneyland,

opened in 1955 in California, while the second, Walt Disney World, opened in 1971 in Florida. By the mid-1970s, these two theme parks generated the majority of Disney's revenues and profits, and they continued to do so until the mid-1990s, when, in the wake of Disney's takeover of Capital Cities/ABC in 1995, television became the company's main source of revenues and profits.¹³

C27.P15 The theme parks were intimately connected with Disney's classic shorts and features, bringing many of their characters (among them Mickey Mouse) and settings (among them Sleeping Beauty's castle) to life, and thus drawing on their popularity. While the theme parks owed a lot of their success to Disney movies, the steady income generated by Disneyland (and later Walt Disney World) allowed the company to sustain, and eventually enlarge, its film operations. These operations had already changed in the 1940s, when, having complemented the company's initial output of animated short films and its licensing of all kinds of merchandise with the release of animated features from 1937 to 1942, the company branched out into live-action films, initially focusing on documentaries and live-action/animation hybrid features, and then also including live-action features, starting with *Treasure Island* (Byron Haskin, 1950). After eight years during which Disney's feature-length animations were all anthologies of short films, in 1950 the company also started releasing "proper" animated features again. In 1954, the company produced its first television show (*Disneyland*), among other things to advertise its soon-to-be-opened first theme park and its new movie releases. And in 1953, Disney set up its own distribution network in the United States, Buena Vista Distribution, adding an international distribution arm in 1961. In the 1950s and 1960s, Buena Vista released, on average, five films a year.

C27.P16 Continuing with the breakdown of the inflation-adjusted all-time US chart into five-year periods allows us to track the huge box office success of Disney films of the 1950s and 1960s, in the case of animated features mostly achieved through regular re-releases. *Cinderella*, which marked Disney's return to animated features in 1950, is the top-grossing film from the years 1947–1951. *Lady and the Tramp* (Clyde Geronimi et al., 1955) is the fifth highest-grossing film from the years 1952–1956, and *Peter Pan* (Clyde Geronimi et al., 1953) is at number eight. *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* is the top grosser from 1957 to 1961; *Sleeping Beauty* (Clyde Geronimi et al., 1959) is at number three, and the live-action adventure *Swiss Family Robinson* (Ken Annakin, 1960) is at number six. *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1964), another live-action film (which includes some animation), is at number three for 1962–1966. *The Jungle Book* is the second highest-grossing film from 1967–1971, and the live-action *The Love Bug* (Robert Stevenson, 1969) is just outside the top ten at number eleven.

C27.P17 Again, there is more to the success of these films than these box office rankings. *Cinderella* was also very successful on VHS, DVD, and Blu-ray (at number ten on both the all-time VHS and all-formats charts). *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* is at number twelve on the all-time VHS sales chart for the United States, and at number 18 on the sales chart combining all formats. *The Jungle Book* is the thirty-fifth best-selling DVD of all time in the United States; no other title released theatrically before 1989 is among the forty-two films listed in this chart.

C27.P18

None of the films that Disney released between *The Love Bug* in 1969 and the late 1980s could match the huge commercial success of the titles discussed above, but Disney had successful theatrical re-releases of its classic animated features both in the United States and abroad during this period. The company also released these films on video (making them available for only a limited period of time before withdrawing them again, awaiting another re-release). Disney and Jane Fonda, with her immensely popular exercise videos, dominated annual video sell-through charts in the United States from the mid-1980s onwards. Indeed, the sell-through market (as distinguished from the sale of videos to rental shops), which by the early 1990s had become Hollywood's single most important source of income, was in many ways created and sustained by the success of Disney's (and Fonda's) releases.¹⁴

C27.P19

During the 1980s, Disney branched out from its exclusive focus on family entertainment, first by setting up the more adult-oriented Touchstone Pictures, whose first release was *Splash* (Ron Howard, 1984), an updated and mildly risqué live-action version of the "Little Mermaid" fairy-tale. Later Disney added Hollywood Pictures (set up in 1984, but its first film, the horror comedy *Arachnophobia* [Frank Marshall, 1990], was released only several years later), and it acquired the "indie" studio Miramax in 1993. The takeover of Capital Cities/ABC then added more and soon-to-be dominant (in terms of revenues and profits) products and services, which did not fall under the Disney brand (one of Disney's most important assets, for example, is the sports cable network ESPN).¹⁵ In the new millennium Disney refocused its film operations once again on family entertainment, not least through the acquisitions of Pixar, Marvel, and Lucasfilm. One of the main reasons for this was the extraordinary success of a new batch of Disney movies from the late 1980s onwards; all but one were family films.

C27.P20

The ten top-grossing films around the world from 1987 to 1991 included the Touchstone release *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990, at number five)—a romantic comedy which presents itself as a modern fairy-tale but features a prostitute—the animated *Beauty and the Beast* (Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 1991, at number nine), and the live-action/animation hybrid *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (Robert Zemeckis, 1988, at number ten). While the animated *The Little Mermaid* (Ron Clements and John Musker, 1989) came in only at number twenty-six, it is at number twenty-five on the list of the all-time best-selling videos in the United States (with *Beauty and the Beast* at number five), at number twenty-two on the list of the all-time bestselling DVDs, and at number nine on the list of the all-time best-selling films across all formats (*Beauty and the Beast* is number four, the same rank it has on the all-time Blu-ray sales chart for the United States).

C27.P21

From this point onwards, Disney was once again producing outstanding hits on a regular basis, placing at least two films among the ten global top grossers for each of the following five-year periods (if we include all the Pixar films, and all the Marvel films on this list, and the *Star Wars* movies Disney released after the Lucasfilm takeover): two in 1992–1996, three in 1997–2001, two in 2002–2006, four in 2007–2011 and, as already mentioned, six in 2012–2016. It is also important to note that, as a consequence of its takeover of Lucasfilm and Fox, Disney now (co-)owns *Home Alone* (Chris Columbus,

1990), the number one film of 1987–1991; *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Chris Columbus, 1993), and *True Lies* (James Cameron, 1994), respectively numbers three, seven, and ten for 1992–1996; *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) and *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* (George Lucas, 1999), the two top films for 1997–2001; *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* (George Lucas, 2005), the number eight for 2002–2006; and *Avatar*, the number one for 2007–2011 (as well as, for example, the Indiana Jones films, which did particularly well in the 1980s).

C27.P22 Several of these huge box office hits from the last three decades—as well as other Disney releases—were also placed highly in the all-time video, DVD, Blu-ray and all-formats sales charts for the United States, with, for example, *Frozen* at number one on the Blu-ray chart, *Finding Nemo* at number one on the DVD chart, and *The Lion King* at number one on the VHS and all-formats charts. Indeed, all these charts are dominated by Disney releases, making up six of the top ten on the Blu-ray chart, five of the top ten on the DVD chart, and seven of the top ten both on the VHS chart and the chart for all formats. If we add older films that Disney has acquired through its recent takeovers, the numbers are seven, six, nine, and nine.

C27.P23 The global reach and future potential of many of the features Disney has released up to now is further demonstrated by the company's increasing output of remakes and sequels, including live-action remakes of, as well as live-action sequels to, animated features;¹⁶ by the (in some cases hugely) successful launch of stage musicals based on both animated and live-action features, which run for years in theatres all around the world;¹⁷ and by the expansion of rides or themed areas based on certain film franchises, such as *Star Wars* and *Avatar*, in Disney's parks (in addition to California and Florida, these can now be found in Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong, and Shanghai). Disney's features are also the main attraction of the company's new streaming service Disney+, launched in November 2019. Furthermore, these features drive the sale of all kinds of merchandise, ranging from picture books and toys to clothes and collectibles. In other words, Disney's global hits are everywhere. And, as we will see next, the rest of Hollywood has done much in recent decades to emulate the Walt Disney Company.

C27.S2 DISNEY AND HOLLYWOOD'S GLOBAL HITS

C27.P24 Like Disney, today's other major Hollywood studios—Paramount (now part of National Amusements/Viacom), Warner Bros. (AT&T), Universal (Comcast), Sony Pictures Entertainment (formerly Columbia), as well as Disney's recent acquisition Fox—can trace their corporate histories back to the early decades of the twentieth century. These studios (and other majors that have since disappeared [RKO] or been reduced to a much diminished status [Loew's/MGM, United Artists]), quite unlike Disney, organized the production of large numbers of feature films (most of them eventually settling on one film a week) across the 1910s and 1920s.¹⁸ In addition to their production plants in and around Los Angeles and their international distribution networks, several of the majors

also owned large movie theatre chains in the United States and, to a lesser extent, abroad, mostly in Canada and Europe.

C27.P25 From early on, the major Hollywood studios tried out various forms of self-regulation (of potentially problematic content), culminating in the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (later Motion Picture Association of America) Production Code, which operated from 1930 onwards, so as to reduce the interference of official censorship (which in the United States existed at the municipal and state levels but not at the federal level) and to make sure that, in principle, each film was suitable (but not necessarily attractive) for all age groups.¹⁹ The film industries of many, possibly most, other countries were subjected to more extensive official censorship and also early on introduced age ratings, which excluded young children and, in many cases, most teenagers from screenings of particular films.²⁰ Through their contacts with censorship boards and other organizations around the world, the Production Code Administration tried to ensure that Hollywood exports would encounter minimal controversy and censorship abroad, especially in Europe, the most important export market.

C27.P26 From the outset, American feature-film producers invested a lot of money in films set in Europe (as well as other foreign parts) and/or featuring European characters in stories that were often based on well-known European source material, such as fairy-tales, novels, and plays.²¹ Both published studio ledgers and studies of box office charts in various European countries indicate that these European-themed films tended to be Hollywood's biggest export hits.²² Many of them also were big hits in the United States. From the 1910s to the late 1940s, however, American-themed films were more successful at the top of the US charts than the European-themed productions, as exemplified most clearly by the extraordinary success of two Civil War epics, *The Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, 1915) and *Gone with the Wind*.²³

C27.P27 This situation changed in the late 1940s when, as the result of an anti-trust case, the major studios had to divest themselves of their domestic theatre chains and also confront rapidly declining ticket sales in the United States (while the European market was growing), to which they responded with a reduction in, and a reorientation of, their output.²⁴ These and other developments (such as changes in public opinion and audience preferences) led to the increased production of European-themed films. Quite surprisingly, from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, such films (especially historical epics, international adventures, and musicals) dominated the US box office charts. The thirteen biggest non-Disney hits of this period were mostly set outside the United States: the historical epics *The Robe* (Henry Koster, 1953), *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1956), *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean, 1957), *Ben-Hur* (William Wyler, 1959), *Cleopatra* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1963), and *Doctor Zhivago* (David Lean, 1965); the international adventures *Around the World in Eighty Days* (Michael Anderson, 1956), *Goldfinger* (Guy Hamilton, 1964), and *Thunderball* (Terence Young, 1965)—at a stretch one might also include *The Greatest Show on Earth* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1952) in this category because of its itinerant, international cast, though all the action takes place in the United States; and the musicals *West Side Story* (Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, 1961), an updated and Americanized version of *Romeo and Juliet*, *My Fair Lady* (George

Cukor, 1964), and *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, 1965).²⁵ These films also did well abroad, especially in Europe.²⁶

C27.P28 Upon its initial release in 1937, Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* immediately became the highest grossing European-themed film of all time in the United States (according to not-inflation-adjusted figures, but the film would probably maintain the top position, without its re-releases, even in an adjusted chart).²⁷ As discussed in the previous section ("Disney's Hits and Company History"), through regular re-releases, many of Disney's subsequent pre-1970 animated features (and several live-action films), almost all European-themed, also became massive hits in the United States—and, following the general patterns identified here, presumably in export markets as well, especially in Europe (still Hollywood's largest export market but increasingly challenged by Latin America and Asia).

C27.P29 Like most of Hollywood's other top hits before the late 1960s, Disney's biggest hits from *Snow White* to *The Jungle Book* and *The Love Bug* tended to be set not only abroad, but also in the past (*The Love Bug* being one of the rare exceptions), and like a good proportion of these other top hits, most of them were musicals.²⁸ They frequently revolved around familial or family-like relationships, especially between young children or teenagers and their parents (or stepparents or other parental substitutes) and all kinds of associated emotional trauma, themes surprisingly absent from, or only marginally present in, most of Hollywood's biggest non-Disney hits during this period. Disney hits from the late 1930s to the 1960s (and beyond) featured incomplete and dysfunctional families; orphans and children left to their own devices and exposed to mortal danger; cruel, even murderous maternal characters; and, famously, a child having to deal with the death of his mother (in *Bambi*).

C27.P30 Also unlike other top hits before the late 1960s, Disney's best box office performers emphasized fantastic elements, such as magic, talking animals, a sentient car, and so on. When supernatural elements appeared in Hollywood's biggest non-Disney hits, it was mostly in the context of biblical epics, and thus they were associated with religious faith rather than fantasy. Furthermore, Disney produced a series of substantial science fiction hits dealing with the impact of advanced technology both in the future and in the past, starting with *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* (Richard Fleischer, 1954) and including, for example, *The Absent-Minded Professor* (Robert Stevenson, 1961). In fact, these Disney movies were, together with James Bond movies featuring futuristic technologies, the highest-grossing films in the United States that could be classified as science fiction before the release of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) and *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968).²⁹

C27.P31 Some of Disney's most successful science fiction films and animated features echo a key theme among the top hits produced by the other major studios, namely, the threat and/or enactment of large-scale destruction in many historical epics and international adventures, caused by, for example, armed conflict, divine intervention or a supervillain. The echoes of the theme of large-scale destruction in Disney hits include the devastating fire (caused by human intrusion into the forest) in *Bambi* and the advanced military technologies (including a nuclear bomb) deployed by Captain Nemo in *20,000 Leagues*

under the Sea. Through their emphasis on fantasy or science fiction and on parent-child relationships (with the possibility of throwing a global threat into the mix), Disney films thus prepared the ground for *Star Wars*.

C27.P32 The company also exerted an enormous influence on the way in which the other studios conducted their business. When compared to the rest of Hollywood, from the mid-1950s to the 1970s Disney stood out because it was consistently and highly profitable with its focus first on one, then two theme parks, on a small number of features (few of which required huge budgets), television programmes, and all kinds of merchandise. All the company's offerings were addressed to family audiences and many of them referenced each other, thus potentially generating additional business for each other (a process later to be called synergy).³⁰

C27.P33 By contrast, the other studios focused on a larger number of often extremely expensive movies, which were rarely related to the other products and services the studios offered (for example, television programmes) or the other businesses of their parent companies (which were often in completely unrelated industries). Being largely dependent on the income their films generated in movie theatres, first and foremost in the United States, the other studios were particularly strongly affected by the dramatic decline in ticket sales in the United States from the late 1940s onwards, reaching a historical low point in 1971 (it appears that, by and large, export markets had been shrinking since the late 1950s, but it is unclear when they bottomed out).³¹

C27.P34 The historical low point in the United States had a lot to do with what was in effect a suspension of the Production Code in 1966 (it was replaced by a rating system based on age appropriateness in 1968). This led to the production of a series of high-profile and often extremely successful taboo-breaking films that alienated large audience segments from the cinema-going experience and left a preponderance of young, educated urbanites in the cinema audience.³² With a shrinking market and an increasing number of big-budget flops, several of the major studios took huge losses in the years around 1970.

C27.P35 In this situation, the Disney company provided a model for the reorientation of the American film industry. Some filmmakers, notably Lucas and Spielberg (who cited Disney movies among their inspirations for *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters*; indeed, both films, as well as later Lucas/Spielberg releases, were widely understood by the press as Disneyesque),³³ and some studio executives saw the possibilities for making movies for an all-encompassing family audience once again, and also for synergy.³⁴ Warner Bros. used its ownership of DC as the basis for the big-budget *Superman* movie, and Paramount converted fan favourite *Star Trek* (1966–1969), a TV show produced by its television subsidiary, into the equally big-budget *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (Robert Wise, 1979), its “G”-rating (standing for “General audiences. All ages admitted”) being by that time closely associated with children's films. The licensing of all kinds of merchandise (especially items for children) for these and other productions of the late 1970s and beyond also became ever more important.

C27.P36 In the 1980s, *synergy* became a buzz word, leading to the reorganization of existing conglomerates, several of which came to focus on media and entertainment instead of

operating across diverse industries, and the formation of new media conglomerates.³⁵ The idea was that the entertainment products and services offered by these conglomerates would promote each other—but, unlike in the case of Disney, there is serious doubt about whether this strategy was, in fact, successful.³⁶ There is little doubt, however, that the types of Hollywood movies that were the most successful changed dramatically. Having been pushed aside by the taboo-breaking hits of the late 1960s, family entertainment returned to the top of the charts a decade later.

C27.P37 The ten top hits in the United States for 1967–1971 included the erotic comedy-drama *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967, at number one) and the graphic war and hospital movie *M*A*S*H* (Robert Altman, 1970, number six). The biggest US hits for 1972–1976 included *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975, number one), which featured nudity, mutilated bodies, and graphic depictions of shark attacks; *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973, number two), in places a highly sexualized horror film featuring obscene, sacrilegious talk and images of a grossly disfigured child's body; and the extremely violent gangster movie *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972, number four). These three films also were Hollywood's biggest global hits during this period.

C27.P38 Between 1967 and 1976, historical films continued to be prominent on the US charts (and probably also abroad)—for example, *The Jungle Book*, *M*A*S*H*, and *The Godfather*. Unlike historical films made in the preceding two decades, these top hits were mostly set in the United States rather than abroad, and in the recent rather than the distant past, and they had largely lost their epic dimension; that is, they did not deal with events and developments that had changed the course of history. Both international adventure movies and musicals had a much reduced presence on the US charts during this decade (although the former, especially the James Bond movies, appear to have performed much better abroad).³⁷

C27.P39 Newly prominent hit patterns in the decade 1967–1976 concerned, as we have seen, films breaking long-standing taboos to do with sex, violence, race, and religion, and also films—usually labelled *disaster movies*—about threats to large numbers of people and large-scale death and destruction caused by a combination of human error, technological failure, and natural catastrophe (thus putting a different spin on the threatening developments and destructive events so often central to historical epics and international adventures).³⁸ These films, which, compared to Hollywood's taboo-breakers, were often perceived as a return to old-fashioned family entertainment, included *Airport* (George Seaton, 1970, number five in the US top ten for 1967–1971); *The Towering Inferno* (John Guillermin, 1974, number seven for 1972–1976); and *The Poseidon Adventure* (Ronald Neame, 1972, number ten for 1972–1976; *Earthquake* [Mark Robson, 1974] was just below the top ten).

C27.P40 Importantly, since the mid-1960s the relationship between parents and children, long a staple of Disney's output, had also emerged as a key theme in many non-Disney hits—notably in *The Sound of Music* (1965, the top hit in the United States for 1962–1966) and *The Exorcist*, but also, with regard to (young) adult characters and their parents, in *The Graduate*, *Love Story* (Arthur Hiller, 1970, at number four in the United States for 1967–1971), and *The Godfather*.

C27.P41 One way to understand the huge impact of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* had in 1977 around the world is to see them as films that avoided the taboo subject matter and narrow focus on the United States that was characteristic of so many hits between 1967 and 1976, and managed to combine most of the other hit patterns of the preceding decades—that is, epics, international adventures, Disney fantasy films, and disaster movies, with a particular emphasis on the parent-child relationship and a sense of global threat. In doing so, these two films were able to connect with key cinema experiences of the different generations of people who were going to the movies at the time (whereby younger people had often become familiar with older hits through theatrical re-releases and television broadcasts).

C27.P42 *Star Wars* is a fairy-tale (beginning with “A long time ago...”) featuring magic-like spirituality (“the Force”) and talking machines. It tells a story that is not set in the United States and does not feature American characters (although the actors are mostly Americans) about an orphan who loses the people who raised him, as well as his recently acquired mentor. It is a historical and futuristic epic about the fate of whole civilizations (all about to be absorbed into an Evil Empire); an interstellar (not merely international) adventure, ranging across a whole galaxy; and a film that both threatens and enacts ultimate disaster (the Death Star’s explosion of Alderaan, an almost successful attack on the rebel moon). It was also designed and marketed to appeal to all age groups, and commentators at the time acknowledged that it had, in fact, managed to assemble an all-inclusive mass audience.³⁹

C27.P43 Similarly, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* is an epic movie and international adventure (key scenes are set outside the United States, and a globe-trotting Frenchman is a central character) about contact with an extra-terrestrial civilization. The film revolves around two families who are being torn apart (in one a single mother is violently separated from her son; in the other a father pushes away his wife and children), with musical (and, in some versions of the film, dialogue) references to Disney’s *Pinocchio* and a quotation from the biblical epic *The Ten Commandments*, which is shown on television in an early scene and suggests a religious interpretation of the story of *Close Encounters* (about a man called to climb up a mountain, where he encounters heavenly beings). There is a sense of threat—after all, the aliens have vastly superior technology and abduct children, military pilots, and others, and a secretive international organization keeps the world’s population from learning about all this—but the emphasis is on the possibility of what we might call transcendence, or perhaps redemption, offered by contact between humanity and extra-terrestrials. Like *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters*, despite its many disturbing thematic and formal elements, was widely understood as entertainment for the whole family.⁴⁰

C27.P44 Since 1977, most of Hollywood’s biggest global hits have, in different ways, been inspired by the synthesis of preceding hit patterns achieved by *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters*.⁴¹ Some hits focus only on a subset of the elements making up this synthesis; others replicate it in full.⁴² The latter include the *Star Wars* sequels and prequels. As already noted, most of these films were top-ten global hits for the five-year periods in which they were released.

C27.P45 The *Harry Potter* movies (2001–2011) also stay close to the *Star Wars* model (or perhaps, it is better to say that they stay close to the source novels, which are, to a considerable degree, modelled on *Star Wars*). They feature another young orphan who belatedly learns about the fate of his parents, from whom he has inherited the potential to master a mysterious force (here called *magic*), and another villain who is building an evil empire, initially only in the United Kingdom but surely intended to be expanded later, thus constituting a threat to the global political order and changing the overall course of history. The films centrally revolve around the relationship between young children (later, teenagers) and their parents and parental mentors, and they are neither set in the United States nor have American protagonists. Much the same can be said about the *Lord of the Rings* movies (2001–2003), with the important exception that the four hobbits at the centre of the story are in some respects childlike, but they are not children, and their parents do not play an important role in the story, although parental mentors do. Unlike the *Harry Potter* films, the *Lord of the Rings* movies range across different lands. Based on best-selling books for children and teenagers, these two film series made up half of the global top ten for the years 2002–2006, and three of the top ten for 2007–2011.

C27.P46 Arguably, many of the adaptations of superhero comic books also stay close to the *Star Wars* model, starting with *Superman*. Based on a comic strip that most people would first have come across as children, the film focuses on a child losing his parents, finding loving foster parents (and also encountering a ghostly projection of his dead father), and travelling across the galaxy and then all around Earth. It depicts global destruction (of Superman's home planet) and a large-scale disaster in California, involves supernatural abilities, and allegorizes religious tales by sending a young male to Earth, where he will do great things for humankind. The protagonist is an immigrant to the planet rather than a native-born American. *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame* contain variants of most of these elements, taking, as already noted, the epic scope of the story and the global threat it revolves around to the furthest extremes and also the internationalism—or rather, *interstellarism* (if this word existed)—of the settings and cast, with parent-child relationships quite central as well, especially those of the antagonist and his (adult) daughters. These and other superhero movies occupy one place each in the global top tens for 1977–1981, 1987–1991, 2002–2006, and 2007–2011, and four places in the global top ten for 2012–2016, and they are shaping up to dominate the global top ten for 2017–2021.

C27.P47 While the *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* films are set in an imaginary past, and the *Harry Potter* and superhero films in a kind of alternative present, there are also a number of science fiction films set in the (near) future in the global top ten for the various five-year periods. Films like *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1991, number three for 1987–1991), *Independence Day* (number three for 1992–1996), *Men in Black* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997, number five for 1997–2001), *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998, number six for 1997–2001), *The Matrix* (Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 1999, number nine for 1997–2001), *Avatar* (number one for 2007–2011) and *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (Michael Bay, 2011, number three for 2007–2011) deal with, actual or possible, turning points in human history, including the very end of that history. They not only emphasize

the threat of large-scale destruction but also enact it on-screen, and they engage in different ways with biblical ideas about the apocalypse (as indicated already by the titles of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and *Armageddon*). These films may focus on American characters and settings, but they also include scenes set in other countries, in space, or in a future in which the United States is long gone. Several, especially *Terminator 2*, focus on the relationship between parents and their (in some cases adult) children. Similarly, the near-future science fiction films *Jurassic Park* (number two for 1992–1996), *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1997, number four for 1997–2001), and *Jurassic World* (number two for 2012–2016) centre on the threat and reality of large-scale destruction and the relationship between adults and children, and though they mostly feature American characters, they largely take place in exotic locations.

C27.P48

In addition, the top hits since 1977 include a series of historical films, among them *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (number three for 1977–1981), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (Steven Spielberg, 1984, number six for 1982–1986), *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (Steven Spielberg, 1989, number four for 1987–1991), *Dances with Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990, number six for 1987–1991), *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (Kevin Reynolds, 1991, number eight for 1987–1991), and *Titanic* (number one for 1997–2001). Most of these films also have an epic scope and deal with (the threat of) large-scale destruction. Thus, the first and third *Indiana Jones* films concern the rise of the Nazis and their attempt to utilize divine power to achieve their evil purposes; *Dances with Wolves* traces the ongoing destruction of Native American societies; *Robin Hood* features a kingdom in disarray; and, somewhat allegorically, the sinking of the *Titanic* represents the final disintegration of Victorian culture. Apart from *Dances with Wolves*, none of these films is primarily set in the United States (and even *Dances with Wolves* is set on land that in the film's time frame has only just begun the process of being integrated into the United States), and the first three could be described as international adventures. Several of them deal centrally with the relationship between parents and their (young) adult children, and, to a greater or lesser degree, they can all be regarded as family entertainment.

C27.P49

This last point certainly applies to almost all the films in the final two groups that I want to discuss—namely, ghost stories and fairy-tales. The former include *Ghost* (Jerry Zucker, 1990, number two for 1987–1991), *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999, number three for 1997–2001), and the three *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, which are placed at number two for 2002–2006 and at numbers five and seven for 2007–2011. The fairy-tales include *Beauty and the Beast* (number nine for 1987–1991), *Aladdin* (Ron Clements and John Musker, number five for 1992–1996), and *Frozen* (number six for 2012–2016) and the parodic *Shrek 2* (Andrew Adamson, 2004, number five for 2002–2006), as well as *Alice in Wonderland* (Tim Burton, 2010, number six for 2007–2011), which is not based on an actual fairy-tale but has most of the characteristics of such tales. It is unclear how exactly to categorize the following four animated hits: *Toy Story 2* (John Lasseter, 1999, number seven for 1997–2001), *Finding Nemo* (number three for 2002–2006), *Toy Story 3* (Lee Unkrich, 2010, number four for 2007–2011), and *Minions* (number eight for 2012–2016). They are not, strictly speaking, fairy-tales, but they do

feature quasi-magical elements: toys that are alive, talking fish, and the eponymous fantastic creatures in *Minions*.

C27.P50 Of the films mentioned in the preceding paragraph, most are addressed to an all-inclusive family audience, and many explore, at least in parts, the experiences of children and child-like characters and their relationship to parents or parental figures. The majority are set outside the United States and have no American characters. All of them are characterized by drastic departures from everyday reality that we may label fantastic, supernatural, or, indeed, religious. The religious dimension is fairly explicit in *Ghost* and *The Sixth Sense*, which both feature souls who linger in this world after their deaths, before they can finally move on, and in the first and the third *Indiana Jones* movies, which emphasize the reality of divine power (through the ark of the covenant and the holy grail).

C27.P51 I want to end this overview of global movie hits since 1977 by taking a closer look at *The Lion King* (number one for 1992–1996), which is the cornerstone of one of Hollywood's most successful franchises. Even without taking merchandise sales, television income, and many other revenue streams into account, the numbers are truly impressive:

- C27.P52 • Global box office revenues for the 1994 and 2019 films: \$0.97 billion and \$1.64 billion, respectively (the former figure would be much higher if one were to adjust it for inflation);⁴³
- C27.P53 • US VHS and DVD sales revenue for the 1994 film: \$0.52 billion and \$0.22 billion, respectively, plus \$0.30 billion in VHS sales revenue for the straight-to-video sequel *The Lion King II: Simba's Pride* (Darrell Rooney, 1998) (again, these figures would be higher if they were adjusted for inflation; the film is likely to have earned a similar amount on VHS and DVD abroad);⁴⁴
- C27.P54 • Revenues for the stage version of the 1994 film, which was launched in 1997 in the United States and has since been presented all around the world: \$8 billion (as of 2017).⁴⁵

C27.P55 Not coincidentally, *The Lion King* comes very close to the synthesis of preceding hit patterns achieved by the *Star Wars* saga (of which here I mainly invoke Episodes IV–VI). In the film's truly epic narrative, much of the animal kingdom is under threat because of the rise of an evil king; indeed, after his ascendance, the kingdom comes close to total ruin, shown in scenes of horrendous devastation. A young male lion (Simba), who has lost his father—a powerful leader who makes ghostly appearances after his death, offering spiritual guidance—is at the heart of the story. This young male goes on a journey across different lands, but in the end, must return home because only he can defeat the evil king and restore the kingdom. Needless to say, neither the setting nor the characters are American (in the dubbed versions shown in the non-English-speaking world, the voice actors are not American either).

C27.P56 The element that sets *The Lion King* apart from the original *Star Wars* trilogy is that Simba witnesses his father's death and is made to feel responsible for it (whereas in *Return of the Jedi* [Richard Marquand, 1983], Luke refuses to kill his father and, in fact, redeems him by rousing him to turn against the Evil Emperor).⁴⁶ In this respect, *The*

Lion King reaches back to a foundational moment in Disney storytelling—namely, the death of Bambi’s mother. This reminds us that, though *Star Wars* has provided the model for most of Hollywood’s biggest global hits since the late 1970s, among the preceding hit patterns *Star Wars* synthesized so well Disney’s animated features stand out. When it comes to exploring the traumas associated with the relationship between children and parents, Disney has always tended to go much further than *Star Wars* or Hollywood’s other big global hits.

CONCLUSION

C27.S3

C27.P57

Starting with the release of its first animated feature in 1937, the Walt Disney Company produced a series of extraordinarily successful, and impactful, movies until 1969. The majority were (musical) adaptations of fairy-tales or of more or less fairy-tale-like children’s books. From the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, the largest group among the biggest hits for the other Hollywood studios in the United States and, it seems, abroad were historical epics (including biblical tales), followed by international adventures and musicals. Like most of Disney’s biggest hits, these films were mostly set in the past and outside the United States (in Europe, especially), and they had few American protagonists. They were designed to be suitable for and, ideally, to appeal to people of all ages, both in the United States and abroad (again, especially in Europe). Indeed, we might want to call all of them “family films.”

C27.P58

As Noel Brown has argued, “family film” is a complex category, and applying it in any particular case may require, in addition to an analysis of the film itself, extensive research into contextual factors (to do, among other things, with the marketing and critical reception of a film).⁴⁷ A movie may fit the category “family film” when it is presented in some contexts, but not in others (I have argued that *2001: A Space Odyssey* functioned, for most people, as a family film during its original US theatrical release but has rarely been regarded as such in other contexts).⁴⁸ To clarify the status of Hollywood’s biggest hits from the 1930s to the 1960s as “family films” would therefore necessitate research into where, when, and how these hits were presented to which audiences, obviously a mammoth task that goes far beyond the possibilities of a chapter such as this one.

C27.P59

The same applies to Hollywood’s global hits since the 1970s. Although some can easily be ruled out (it is, for example, very hard to imagine circumstances under which people would regard *The Exorcist* as a film for the whole family), and others just as easily ruled in (under what circumstances would a Disney animated feature *not* be regarded as a family film?), there are many films that may function as family entertainment in some contexts and not in others. Based on previous research but also, admittedly, on anecdotal evidence and hunches, in this chapter I have suggested that the vast majority of Hollywood’s biggest global hits since the late 1970s are, in effect, family films; that is, they function as family entertainment for most people in most circumstances. I have also suggested that the enormous commercial success and impact of *Star Wars* had a

lot to do with the fact that it had synthesized most of the key hit patterns of the past to do with epics (in the case of *Star Wars*, futuristic as well as historical), including biblical epics (belief in “the Force” in *Star Wars* taking the place of Judeo-Christian faith); international (now interstellar) adventures; and Disney fairy-tales (“A long time ago” instead of “Once upon a time,” and magic being replaced by “the Force”).

C27.P60 Like many epics and international adventures, as well as the 1970s cycle of disaster movies, *Star Wars* revolved around the threat of large-scale destruction and the actual, spectacular display of such destruction (here taken to the extreme of an exploding planet, this display of power being in the service of subjecting all the known universe to the rule of an Evil Emperor). Like many Disney fairy-tales, *Star Wars* was also centrally concerned with the difficult, even traumatic relationship between a young person and parents as well as parental substitutes. And, like the vast majority of both Disney hits and the biggest hits from other Hollywood studios between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s, *Star Wars* was neither set in the United States nor featured American characters.

C27.P61 Finally, I have tried to show that most of Hollywood’s biggest global hits since 1977 have, more or less directly and more or less strongly, been influenced by *Star Wars* and, therefore, through the mediation of this film, have in many ways continued the hit patterns of the more distant past. However, the orientation in most of these films has been more global than it was in the pre-1970s hits. For instance, the non-American settings are no longer primarily European, but might be anywhere on Earth or, indeed, elsewhere in this or an alternative universe. The Bible and Judeo-Christian faith are also less important, while other forms of spirituality play a larger role. Last but not least, the threats to people’s freedom, happiness, and lives that many of the stories revolve around relate to much larger groups than ever before, in some cases to all humans (as well as non-human animals) on Earth, or even all life in the universe. Thus, with its biggest hits, Hollywood is telling truly global stories for a global audience. At the same time many of these stories also concern the most intimate human relationship, the one that is the foundation for everything else: that between children and their parents.

NOTES

1. This chapter is a summation of research I have conducted over the last three decades. To avoid listing countless primary and secondary sources in the endnotes, I draw on several of my previous publications. With regard to the topics covered in the first few sentences, see Peter Krämer, “‘It’s Aimed at Kids—the Kid in everybody’: George Lucas, *Star Wars* and Children’s Entertainment,” in Yvonne Tasker (ed.), *Action and Adventure Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 358–370, on the making, marketing and reception of *Star Wars*. On changing hit patterns in the United States between the late 1940s and the early 1980s, see Peter Krämer, *The New Hollywood: From Bonnie and Clyde to Star Wars* (London: Wallflower, 2005). On global hit patterns since the late 1970s, see Peter Krämer, “Hollywood and Its Global Audiences: A Comparative Study of the Biggest Box Office Hits in the United States and Outside the United States since the 1970s,” in Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst, and Philippe Meers (eds.), *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case*

- Studies* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 171–184. Also see Noel Brown, *The Hollywood Family Film: A History, from Shirley Temple to Harry Potter* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), on the various definitions and the changing status of family entertainment, and James Russell and Jim Whalley, *Hollywood and the Baby Boom* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), on changing hit patterns in the United States from the 1950s to the present.
2. Peter Krämer, “Welterfolg und Apokalypse: Überlegungen zur Transnationalität des zeitgenössischen Hollywood,” in Ricarda Strobel and Andreas Jahn-Sudmann (eds.), *Film transnational und transkulturell: Europäische und amerikanische Perspektiven* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2009), pp. 171–184.
 3. Peter Krämer, “Would You Take Your Child to See This Film? The Cultural and Social Work of the Family-Adventure Movie,” in Steve Neale and Murray Smith (eds.), *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 294–311.
 4. Based, as are all subsequent five-year global charts, on Box Office Mojo, “All-Time Box Office: World-Wide,” <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/?pagenum=1&p=.htm> [accessed September 30, 2019]. One of the reasons for looking at five-year periods is that global box office revenues are not comparable over longer periods of time due to ticket price inflation, fluctuating exchange rates and changes in the overall size of the global cinema market. Within each five-year period, the influence of these factors on the ranking of films can be expected to be minimal. Five-year breakdowns also are a good way to track historical changes and continuities.
 5. Sarah Whitten, “Avatar Sequels Are a Huge Risk for Disney, But You Can’t Doubt James Cameron,” CNBC.com, July 26, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/07/26/james-cameron-avatars-sequels-are-a-huge-risk-for-disney.html> [accessed September 30, 2019].
 6. For a discussion of the reasons for studying hit movies, see, for example, Peter Krämer, “Big Pictures: Studying Contemporary Hollywood Cinema through Its Greatest Hits,” in Jacqueline Furby and Karen Randell (eds.), *Screen Methods: Comparative Readings in Film Studies* (London: Wallflower, 2005), pp. 124–132; see also Krämer, *New Hollywood*, pp. 6–37.
 7. For a succinct history of the Disney company, see Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2001), pp. 6–69.
 8. See, for example, the discussion of *Snow White*, *Pinocchio* (1940), and *Fantasia* (1940) in Leonard Maltin, *The Disney Films*, 3rd ed. (New York: Hyperion, 1995), pp. 25–45.
 9. Box Office Mojo, “Domestic Grosses Adjusted for Ticket Price Inflation,” <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/adjusted.htm> [accessed October 22, 2019].
 10. In a previous study, I have shown that there is considerable overlap between Hollywood’s biggest domestic and export hits from the 1970s to the early 2000s. One key difference is the greater success of non-American-themed films outside the US. As most of Disney’s biggest hits in the US are neither set in the US, nor do they feature American characters, they are quite likely to have replicated their domestic success abroad. See Krämer, “Hollywood and Its Global Audiences,” pp. 171–184.
 11. Paul McDonald, *Video and DVD Industries* (London: British Film Institute, 2007).
 12. Samuel Axon, “DVD and Blu-ray Sales Nearly Halved over Five Years, MPAA Report Says,” *ArsTechnica.com*, April 12, 2019, <https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2019/04/dvd-and-blu-ray-sales-nearly-halved-over-five-years-mpaa-report-says/> [accessed 30 September 2019]. The all-time VHS, DVD, Blu-ray and all-formats sales charts for the US that I am going to use are from Wikipedia, “List of Best-Selling Films in the United States,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_best-selling_films_in_the_United_States [accessed 30 September 2019].

13. This paragraph and the one that follows are partly based on Peter Krämer, “Disney and Family Entertainment,” in Michael Hammond and Linda Ruth Williams (eds.), *Contemporary American Cinema* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), pp. 265–266.
14. Peter Krämer, “Disney, George Lucas und Pixar: Animation und die US-amerikanische Filmindustrie seit den 1970er Jahren,” *Film-Konzepte* 33 (February 2014), pp. 6–21.
15. For a detailed breakdown of Disney’s divisions, see the company’s annual financial reports; the one for 2018 can be found at <https://www.thewaltdisneycompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2018-Annual-Report.pdf>. For an international study of perceptions of the Disney brand, see Janet Wasko, Mark Phillips and Eileen R. Meehan (eds.), *Dazzled by Disney? The Global Disney Audiences Project* (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 2001).
16. Wikipedia, “List of Disney Live-Action Adaptations and Remakes of Disney Animated Films,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Disney_live-action_remakes_of_animated_films [accessed September 30, 2019].
17. Wikipedia, “Disney Theatrical Productions,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disney_Theatrical_Productions [accessed September 30, 2019].
18. For an overview of the development of the major Hollywood studios, see Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005).
19. This paragraph is based on Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918–1939* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1997).
20. See Daniel Biltereyst and Roel Vande Winkel (eds.), *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship Around the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
21. Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale, *Epics, Spectacles, and Blockbusters: A Hollywood History* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010).
22. Joseph Garnarcz, *Wechselnde Vorlieben: Über die Filmpräferenzen der Europäer 1896–1939* (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld, 2015), pp. 127–134, 203–251. Information on the biggest export hits of several Hollywood studios in selected years before the 1970s can be found in their internal ledgers which were published as microfiche supplements to the following essays: H. Mark Glancy, “MGM Film Grosses, 1924–1948: The Eddie Mannix Ledger,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 12:2 (June 1992), pp. 127–143; Richard B. Jewell, “RKO Film Grosses, 1929–1951: The C. J. Tevlin Ledger,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* 14:1 (March 1994), pp. 37–50; and H. Mark Glancy, “Warner Bros. Film Grosses, 1921–51: The William Schaefer Ledger,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15:1 (March 1995), pp. 55–74.
23. Joel W. Finler, *The Hollywood Story* (London: Octopus, 1988), pp. 276–277.
24. This paragraph is largely based on Peter Krämer, “‘Faith in Relations between People’: Audrey Hepburn, *Roman Holiday* and European Integration,” in Diana Holmes and Alison Smith (eds.), *100 Years of European Cinema: Entertainment or Ideology?* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 195–206; and Peter Krämer, “Stanley Kubrick and the Internationalisation of Postwar Hollywood,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 15:2 (June 2017), pp. 250–269.
25. Krämer, *New Hollywood*, pp. 19–27, 111–115.
26. See, for example, Joseph Garnarcz, *Hollywood in Deutschland: Zur Internationalisierung der Kinokultur 1925–1990* (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld, 2013), pp. 91–97; 185–200.
27. Finler, *Hollywood Story*, p. 276.
28. Krämer, *New Hollywood*, pp. 19–27, 111–115.
29. Peter Krämer, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (London: BFI Publishing, 2010), pp. 31, 37–38, 90–95.

30. This paragraph and the next two are largely based on Krämer, “Disney and Family Entertainment,” pp. 265–269.
31. For changing cinema attendance levels in Europe, see Ginette Vincendeau (ed.), *Encyclopedia of European Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 1995), pp. 466–467.
32. Krämer, *New Hollywood*, pp. 47–63.
33. Peter Krämer, “‘The Best Disney Film Disney Never Made’: Children’s Films and the Family Audience in American Cinema since the 1960s,” in Steve Neale (ed.), *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood* (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), pp. 185–200, at 187, 190. Also see Krämer, “It’s Aimed at Kids—the Kid in Everybody,” pp. 358–370; and Peter Krämer, “Spiritual Science Fiction for the Whole Family: Spielberg, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and 1970s Hollywood,” in David Roche (ed.), *Steven Spielberg, Hollywood Wunderkind and Humanist* (Montpellier: Press universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2018), pp. 35–49.
34. Krämer, “Disney and Family Entertainment,” pp. 269–276.
35. Thomas Schatz, “The Return of the Hollywood Studio System,” in Erik Barnouw (ed.), *Conglomerates and the Media* (New York: New Press, 1997), pp. 73–106.
36. Jonathan A. Knee, Bruce C. Greenwald, and Ava Seave, *The Curse of the Media Mogul: What’s Wrong with the World’s Leading Media Companies* (New York: Portfolio, 2009).
37. See, for example, the West German charts in Garncarz, *Hollywood in Germany*, pp. 193–196.
38. Krämer, *New Hollywood*, pp. 63–65.
39. Krämer, “It’s Aimed at Kids,” pp. 358–370.
40. Krämer, “Spiritual Science Fiction for the Whole Family,” pp. 35–39.
41. The absence of an explicit and forceful threat to large groups of people, and of the enactment of large-scale destruction, makes *Close Encounters* a less influential model for future global hits. However, the film’s emphasis on transcendence and redemption, in the absence of global threats, is also arguably a key element of, for example, *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982, the number one global hit for 1982–1986), *Ghost* (1990, number two for 1987–1991), *Forrest Gump* (1994, number four for 1992–1996), *The Sixth Sense* (1999, number three for 1997–2001) and *Finding Nemo* (number three for 2002–2006). Four of these five films—as well as, for example, *Home Alone* (number one for 1987–1991)—also centre, just like *Close Encounters*, on the relationship between young children (or childlike characters) and their parents.
42. Cp. Krämer, “Would You Take Your Child to See This Film?,” pp. 294–311; “Disney and Family Entertainment,” pp. 275–276; “Disney, George Lucas und Pixar,” pp. 6–21; and “Big Pictures,” pp. 124–32.
43. Box Office Mojo, “All-Time Box Office: World-Wide,” <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/?pagenum=1&p=.htm> [accessed October 22, 2019].
44. Wikipedia, “List of Best-Selling Films in the United States,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_best-selling_films_in_the_United_States [accessed October 22, 2019].
45. Wikipedia, “*The Lion King* (musical),” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lion_King_\(musical\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lion_King_(musical)) [accessed October 22, 2019].
46. In fact, *The Lion King* goes as far as suggesting that, on some level, Simba did indeed wish his father to die; after all, he sings “I Just Can’t Wait to Be King,” thus expressing a desire that can only be fulfilled if the old king dies. On this and other intriguing aspects of this film, see Peter Krämer, “Entering the Magic Kingdom: The Walt Disney Company,

The Lion King and the Limitations of Criticism,” *Film Studies* 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 44–50. Interestingly, the *Star Wars* prequels revolve around Anakin Skywalker’s separation from his mother and his mourning of her death, and also around his responsibility for the death of his wife. And in the recent sequels, the antagonist Kylo Ren kills his father.

47. Brown, *Hollywood Family Film*, pp. 6–8.
 48. Peter Krämer, “‘A Film Specially Suitable for Children’: The Marketing and Reception of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968),” in Noel Brown and Bruce Babington (eds.), *Family Films in Global Cinema: The World beyond Disney* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), pp. 37–52.

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