



High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood (Texas Film Studies Series)

By Justin Wyatt

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Steven Spielberg once said, "I like ideas, especially movie ideas, that you can hold in your hand. If a person can tell me the idea in twenty-five words or less, it's going to make a pretty good movie." Spielberg's comment embodies the essence of the high concept film, which can be condensed into one simple sentence that inspires marketing campaigns, lures audiences, and separates success from failure at the box office.

This pioneering study explores the development and dominance of the high concept movie within commercial Hollywood filmmaking since the late 1970s. Justin Wyatt describes how box office success, always important in Hollywood, became paramount in the era in which major film studios passed into the hands of media conglomerates concerned more with the economics of filmmaking than aesthetics. In particular, he shows how high concept films became fully integrated with their marketing, so that a single phrase ("Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water...") could sell the movie to studio executives and provide copy for massive advertising campaigns; a single image or a theme song could instantly remind potential audience members of the movie, and tie-in merchandise could generate millions of dollars in additional income.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Anyone who has ever wondered about the reasoning behind formulaic mainstream films will learn probably more than they wanted to know in this academic examination of high-concept films. Although popularly thought of as films that can be summarized in one sentence, Wyatt, a former market-research analyst for the film industry, defines high concept as "a product differentiated through the emphasis on style in production and through the integration of the film with its marketing." The author contends that these economically motivated products (films like Flashdance, Top Gun, Batman and Grease) form the most significant strain in motion pictures of the last 20 years. Their common stylistic elements include easily exploitable visual images, pre-sold premises, stars matched to predictable genres and musical segments which may be extracted for promotional videos. Wyatt traces the economic histories of the major film studios, especially their conglomeration with other industries, to demonstrate how this modular approach became favored by corporations increasingly dependent on market research as a means of minimizing financial risk. The author's dry, repetitive style and the numbing effect of phrases like "market segmentation" and "multiple regression analysis" may frighten off readers interested in this necessarily sobering subject. Fortunately for those who believe that films should have something to do with art and that art is more than the sum of its parts, Wyatt concludes that the high-concept era is on the wane. Illustrated.

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Review

"A thoughtful and informative exploration of the subject." (Perry Katz, Executive Vice President of Marketing, Universal Pictures)

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Users Review

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