

Abstract for Sercia Conference on Cinema and Seriality

An episode in the history of Hollywood cinema, television and seriality: the case of the Mirisch Company

The Mirisch Company is a missing chapter in Hollywood's history. It helped build the bridge between classical, studio era Hollywood (which ended in about 1960) and the birth of the New Hollywood with the movie brats approximately a decade later. It re-invented the art of the cinematic sequel in the 1960s, long before *Jaws*, *The Godfather* and *Star Wars* made it famous as a long tail strategy for blockbusters in the 1970s. And it showed the way in which series could provide synergies between film and television, with both the *Pink Panther* and *The Magnificent Seven* - not to mention the *Wichita Town* TV series for NBC (1959). There was even an unlikely pilot for a *Some Like it Hot* (1960) series, which began with Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis having face transplants to escape the mob and being replaced by new actors for those never-to-be-made subsequent episodes.

The Mirisch Company was responsible for some of cinema's most well-known and best-loved film franchises, sequels, series or spin-offs. Mirisch productions with returning characters include *The Magnificent Seven* quartet - *The Magnificent Seven*, (1960), *The Return of the Magnificent Seven* (1966), *Guns of the Magnificent Seven* (1969) and *The Magnificent Seven Ride* (1972) and the subsequent TV series *The Magnificent Seven* (1998-2000); *The Pink Panther* (1963), *A Shot in the Dark* (1964), and *Inspector Clouseau* (1968) and *The Pink Panther Show* (TV 1969); *In The Heat of the Night* (1967) and its two sequels *They Call Me MISTER Tibbs* (1970) and *The Organization* (1971), and the bestseller adaptation *Hawaii* (1966) and its sequel *The Hawaiians* (1970).

Their serials occupy numerous genres – comedy, crime thriller, animation and western, and epitomize the film franchise as a survival strategy for independents without the traditional studios' guaranteed cinema release, after the divorce of exhibition from production imposed by the Paramount Decree; they were among the postwar pioneers of adaptation from other media – from stage and page, music (the Elvis vehicles) and TV (Steve McQueen rebooted for the big screen), illustrating their links with talent agencies and their tactical risk aversion in using original publications or performances as readymade R&D, paradigm and pretext, for their own new adaptations (including *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Hawaii* and *The Hawaiians*).

And they raise the question of authorship – since each franchise ‘authorizes’ sequels as much as any auteur. (Indeed directors, writers and stars often seem to change from one iteration to the next – see the credits of *The Magnificent Seven’s* spin-offs). Does this make the first outing of a series its aesthetic instigator, providing a blueprint for its successors? Or is there a case to be made for the Mirisch Company itself - as auteur?

This paper proposes the pioneering role played by the Mirisch Company in re-inventing the serial for Hollywood in the 1960s and 1970s – pre-empting the Movie Brats who are often accredited with it, and of retrofitting the cinematic spin-off to a Hollywood once again in need of future-proofing its product lines.

Since summer 2013 Dr Paul Kerr has been Senior Lecturer in Television Production at Middlesex University. He is the author and editor of a number of academic books (including *The Hollywood Film Industry* and *MTM Quality Television*) and articles on television and film. He started his career at the British Film Institute but then spent 25 years as a television producer, making dozens of programmes for the BBC and Channel Four as well as a number of international co-productions. He began his TV career by specialising in major series about the media – *Open The Box* (C4 1986), *The Media Show* (C4 1987-90), and the award-winning cinema series, *Moving Pictures* (BBC2 1990-96) but developed into working in a range of documentaries about the arts and history including series about gay theatre, the Crimean War, black British history and international design. A number of his documentaries have been screened at film and TV festivals around the world including New York, Turin, Dinard, Florida and Bologna. His research interests include documentary, drama documentary, ‘quality’ television, arts programming, the independent production sector in film and television, Hollywood, and international art cinema.

He is a former member of the Screen editorial board and was a producer-director at October Films from 1999 to 2007.