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Organizational dynamics in social networks : contracts and reputations in the film industry

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Preface

Not surprisingly, over the years I have watched quite a lot of films both at the cinema and at home. For me personally, during the 1980's, especially video was an exciting piece of home entertainment. Before we bought our own video player, at special occasions, such as birthday parties and Christmas holidays, my parents would rent a so-called Movie Box – a kind of video player in the form of a heavy black briefcase – at the small local video rental shop 't Draaipunt' in the equally small village of Amerongen. In addition, my brothers and I would pick three or four films from the selection of mostly American films that were available. Over the course of the weekend we would watch these films over and over again before returning the tapes to the video rental shop on Monday. Some quotes and images of 1980's films of varying quality are firmly nested in my – and my brothers' – memory such as: 'Brigh light...bright light', 'Let of some steam Bennet' or 'Leave me alone, I don't like fast women'.¹

Only later did I start wondering how these films are made in the first place. How do you divide all the work that ultimately leads to a coherent film? Although the credits at the end of each film provided some information about how this worked, it still largely remained a mystery of how this would work in practice. Only when I started studying in Amsterdam did I get the chance to see with my own eyes how a film is made when at some stage I got to work as a runner at the Dutch television film 'Dichter op de Zeedijk'. Runner is an entry level job in which you have to transport things and people to and from the film set. I got this job through a friend who also worked as a runner, and who in turn – and not uncommon in the film industry – got this job through one of his friends. This turned out to be a great job to combine with a study at university. I really enjoyed having worked on a number of film sets in a number of different roles. Especially having been a tiny part of the film shoots of 'Ocean's 12' in Amsterdam was a wonderful experience.

¹ Gizmo in the Gremlins (1984), Arnold Schwarzenegger as John Matrix in Commando (1985), and Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones in the Last Crusade (1989).

At the time I finished my master thesis in international relations, I seriously considered pursuing a career in the film industry. Besides my lack of formal training it was mainly my curiosity about all those other opportunities out there, however, that ultimately kept me from doing so. Only a few years later when I was in the final stage of a traineeship at the European Commission in Brussels, did I stumble upon an opening for a Ph. D. position in which I could seriously study the film industry. 'Stumbling upon' is close to the truth since chance did play an important role. Who would have expected that after typing in the search terms "cultural industries" and "Ph. D. position" in Google, it turned out that, of all places in the world, there was one right in my hometown of Amsterdam.

Writing a dissertation is quite a ride. Except for the stressful moments before finishing the book it has mainly been a joyride. An important reason for that joy is all the people that I have met over the past four years. They have been stimulating, supporting and challenging. I am therefore really grateful for all kinds of discussions and support that I received both in and outside academia. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Nachoem Wijnberg for having given me the opportunity to pursue a Ph. D. at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). I am glad that you believed my motivation and enthusiasm were sincere. I admire your independent mind, broad interests, conceptual clarity, and aversion of nonsense. I always got your extensive feedback way before I expected it. After reading your poem 'Bij de dokter' it somehow started to make sense to me.

I am also very grateful for all the people in the industry that took the time and effort to explain how things work in the Dutch film industry. I would especially like to thank Maarten Wijdenes of the Nederlands Fonds voor de Film, Michiel de Rooij of the Nederlandse Vereniging van Speelfilmproducenten, Martijn Mewe of the Dutch Directors Guild, and all the film producers and directors for allowing me to interview them. In addition, I would like to thank Ryclef Rienstra of the VandenEnde Foundation, Michael Lambrechtsen of the Nederlandse Vereniging van Filmdistributeurs for

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I also want to thank all my colleagues in academia for their advice and company. Stefan Mol, Niamh O'Sullivan and Gabor Kismihok thanks for your advice on methodology, feedback on drafts of papers and the enjoyable dinners; Jonatan Pinkse for sharing your experiences as a Ph. D. student at the UvA; Hella Sylva, Hung-Yao Liu, Nesrien Abu Ghazaleh and Pawan Bhansing, I enjoyed sharing an office with you; Karianne Kalshoven, Liselore Havermans, Marlène Vock, Meg Lee, and René Bohnsack it was fun sharing all kinds of events with you; Maurice Bun for your advice on econometrics; Gino Cattani for hosting my stay at New York University Stern; and all colleagues at the Strategy and Marketing section at the Amsterdam Business School.

I would also like to thank my family and friends. Thanks mom and dad for providing support, trust, and advice. Thanks Luc for igniting all kinds of discussions over the last decades. Thanks Hans for – among many things – the pleasant Kingfisher café visits and for being my paranimf. Thanks also Hendrik for being my second paranimf. Thanks to all friends – especially Chris, Ferry, Joenemans, Koekoek, Maarten and Tijs – for the great dinners, wine trips, and efforts of sponsoring the catering industry both at home and abroad. Finally, and most importantly, thanks Aniëlle for sharing your life with me. Your infectious drive and practical anecdotes based on your on-the-job experiences in the film industry – how convenient for my research – have been very stimulating over the years.

Amsterdam, 21st July 2009