

**Reproduction of Hegemonies in Film: An Analysis of Price, Value and Gender Visions
in *You've Got Mail***

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Fiction, including film, has the great possibility of showing us alternatives to the reality we live in. Fiction can produce alternative utopias to current hegemonies. However, it can also narrate current hegemonies as normal or superior and help sustain the status-quo. Hence, analysing the narratives produced in film can shed light on the dominant, hegemonic visions of a society's reality. We analyse the film *You've Got Mail* as a magnifier to the dominant economic paradigm of the 1990s, spanning over visions of monopoly, price, value and feminism.

You've Got Mail is one of the rom-com films of the 90s, following *When Harry met Sally* and *Sleepless in Seattle*, occupying a prime spot on many of the film rankings for "the best 90ies-rom-coms". Like the other two, *You've Got Mail* was written and directed by Nora Ephron, who, as a female director, was a rarity in Hollywood at that time. The film is set in New York City and is about the rivalry of Kathleen Kelly (Meg Ryan), an owner of a little, familial children's bookstore, and Joe Fox (Tom Hanks), the owner of a big book chain. Kathleen and Joe meet anonymously in an online chatroom as Shopgirl and NY152. Over time, they share deep conversations and fall in love online. In real life, however, they are archrivals in the book business. Joe is CEO of a chain bookstore imperium founded by his grandfather. Kathleen owns a small, beloved, independent neighbourhood-bookshop which her mother opened. Ultimately, Joe drives Kathleen out of business AND wins her heart in real life. Even though the film has received mixed reviews at its release, it has occupied a place in rom-com-fans' hearts and is still being watched today.

Based on Nancy Fraser, we argue that *You've Got Mail* tells a story of capitalism and its cannibalistic relation to its background conditions. For one, *You've Got Mail* positively narrates about endless accumulation and the concentration of capital in fewer hands, here the hands of *Fox Books*. From a Marxist perspective, this accumulation is on the one hand, a crucial characteristic of capitalism; on the other hand, it is also the source for destabilisation of the capitalist system itself. However, the film portrays accumulation as inevitable and emphasises this with the seeming *happy* end, where the independent bookshop loses against the monopolist. *You've Got Mail* portrays a superiority of the capitalist system without any alternatives and reproduces the neoliberal hegemony of how the economy works. It does not ask what *worth* societies draw from ever cheaper products and manifests the price-centricity over value

crucially as the organising principle of our society. The film similarly backs the patriarchal hegemony with devaluing female entrepreneurial role models and the disavowal of the possibility that independent women live a satisfying and happy life.

However, not only can film reproduce hegemonic visions, but current hegemonies influence filmmaking too. Films are a product of their time, and *You've Got Mail* was a film of the 1990s, which were characterised by second wave neoliberalism under Bill Clinton in the US and Tony Blair in Great Britain. Furthermore, due to the rise of Amazon and superstores, the topic of dumping prices and the crowding out of small bookstores was a pressing topic at the time. In the context of the 1990-economic boom, there was additionally no reason to doubt the economic paradigm nor its policy prescriptions. Therefore, *You've Got Mail* can be seen as a producer and a product of its time.

Our contribution to this year's Momentum Kongress *Hegemonie* is one that traces hegemony in one specific film but keeps findings in perspective to hegemonies produced and reproduced through the media landscape at large. Critically scrutinising the stories we are told from lead roles, anchormen, and journalists is a way to understand which ideas dominate and which our society is missing.