Lynda Obst could not help noticing that, in 2011, the 10 top-grossing films in the United States included eight sequels: "Harry Potter (8)," "Transformers (3)," "The Twilight Saga (4)," "The Hangover Part II," "Pirates of the Caribbean (4)," "Fast Five," "Cars 2" and "Rise of the Planet of the Apes."

How did this happen, she wondered. What went wrong?


A useful primer for the uninitiated, the book, alas, generalizes too much from Obst's own experiences, which have generated nostalgia for what she calls "The Old Abnormal" at the turn of the 21st century, and tends at times to conflate short-term responses with long-term trends.

Obst is surely right about the challenges facing Hollywood studios. Thanks to piracy and Netflix, DVD sales, which once accounted for 50 percent of profits, have collapsed.

And in "The New Abnormal," where the international market is the only growth area, action movies, "must-have" brand-name actors and what Hollywood calls "tentpoles" (prequels, sequels and reboots) get green-lighted.

The 21st-century equivalents of "The Graduate," "Moonstruck," "Field of Dreams" and "Driving Miss Daisy," she claims, are less likely to make it to the big screen.

Obst just as surely romanticizes "The Old Abnormal." Acknowledging that "it was always show business, never show art," she nonetheless claims that 10 and 20 years ago, the submission of a script was followed by a "thoughtful response," pitch-meetings were a vital force - "the fuel of development" - and the studios made movies "because they were good," often "putting craft before marketability."

Tellingly, Obst undercuts her own analysis about "The New Abnormal." In 2012, she acknowledges, almost every studio boasted "a fancy offering" at Oscar time (e.g. "Zero Dark Thirty," "Argo," "Flight," "Life of Pi," "Lincoln").

And 2013 releases "had among them the most varied set of films Hollywood had made in years." Obst's explanation,
as she herself seems to recognize, may well be based more on faith than facts.

"Attention deficit disorder executives with bounding knees," she writes, "don't sit very long in the face of compelling counter-evidence." A spate of expensive failures and a recent run of financially successful Academy Award winners ("The King's Speech," "The Social Network," "Moneyball," "The Help") created "more careful discernment as to what should and should not be made; a new fiscal model is born that may allow for more originals; new ideas about what works in both domestic and international markets emerge."

Is "there still a business in the business?" Obst asks. "Are the glory days gone?" She doesn't know but chooses, like so many people - including, perhaps, studio executives - to put her faith in technology.

"Someone will soon be making money on the 'Net somewhere," she concludes. "He that taketh away sometimes giveth back." Original Print Headline: Lack of film creativity lamented

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The Old Abnormal’ by Lynda Obst laments Hollywood's lack of creativity... http://www.tulsaworld.com/site/printerfriendlystory.aspx?articleid=2013...