

As Charles Altman pointed out in his article 'Towards a Historiography of American Film' (*Cinema Journal*, 16, 1977) the chronic problem regarding the history of Hollywood is paradigmatic periodization. How do we understand the history of that form of cultural production in terms of time and (simultaneously) in terms of a particular approach—production (technology, technique, personality, film in relation to the other 'arts', chronicle, social, studio, auteur, genre, ritual), or distribution (legal, industrial, sociological)? That, to be sure, does not exhaust the possibilities, as knowledge of *Ciné-Tracts*, *Cinéaste*, *Screen* or *After-Image* would show. However, the problems do not stop there—for some years now certain neat defining divisions between 'documentary' or (a real joke this!) 'factual' film and Hollywood have come to be seen as convenient fictions which carry forward the machinery of curriculum, pedagogy, criticism and the rest—a disciplining of the forms of film to suit non-filmic purposes. Finally, in almost all of this there is a crushing, crippling absence—what of the audience? Marketing/trade 'demography' and silence! All these comments could apply to any and to all forms of cultural production.

Cagin and Dray produce a text that belongs in a particular genre (both historical and fictional) which has to do with the spatialization of time. Its time to say clearly that decade thinking (itself highly selective, based on one version of the Christian calendar standardized by certain imperialist nations in the 1880s and now adopted as a world standard by the International Standards Organization) is fictional, not factual. It's exactly like writing political history in terms of the periodization of elected assemblies/ruling monarchical reigns. It is also, in terms of psychoanalysis, a good version of phenomenal symptomology: take a spurious spatial container (the ...ies) and from it select half a dozen (or 2,000) 'events' and say these comprise that box of time. Things then get messy when people can turn around (on this silly box of tricks) and make comparisons from one fiction to another—'Oh, yeah, that's a sixties thing' or 'The seventies are different from the fifties'. Who, whom?

Apart from the recent book-length version of *Social Text*, *The 60s Without Apology* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), consider Gerald Howard (ed.) *The Sixties: The Art, the Attitudes, Politics and Media of Our Most Explosive Decade* (New York, Pocket Books, 1982)—which opens with an extract from Wordsworth's *The Prelude*! Or better compare Cagin and Dray with the much preferable Peter Biskin's *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1983). This last comparison is not without special point. Unlike Jody Berland's vastly superior work on replaying the fifties (forthcoming in *Parachute*), what we find in Cagin and Dray's book is simple narrative discussion of films made in the fifties and sixties. Chapters 1 and 2 are all about anticipations, in which certain films—notably *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and *Easy Rider* (1969) are given an honorary 1970s status! But it then becomes a lot worse in subsequent chapters. Films like *Easy Rider* come to operate like magnets, allow-



HOLLYWOOD FILMS OF THE SEVENTIES

by Seth Cagin and Philip Dray
(New York, Harper & Row, 1984)

ing a clustering of 'convincing demonstrations': so *Alice's Restaurant*, *Medium Cool* and *Z (all 1969)* support their contention of a 'new move'. Alas our old enemy/friend 'the last instance' might well have been interpellated here! Cagin and Dray report *Easy Rider's* pre- and post-budget to be \$555,000 and its gross profits world-wide to be \$60 million. Apart from the fact that David Pirie's *Anatomy of the Movies* (London, Windward, 1981) says *Easy Rider* grossed \$33.8 million (allowing for inflation, and during its initial release period, by contrast *Gone With the Wind* (1939) grossed \$310 million under the same criteria), there are a few salient facts that might be added. First, according to Ned Tanen, president of Universal Theatrical Pictures, "'Two films nearly destroyed this industry'", *The Sound of Music* (1965) and *Easy Rider* since both produced a spate of copying, copying, copying; most copies flopped (*Anatomy of the Movies*, where also Joan Didion talks of the 'hangover summer of 1970'). But as well, ignoring Peter Fonda, some of these boys were rather connected: the father of Bert Schneider, co-organizer of *Easy Rider* with Bert Rafelson was chairman of the board of Columbia, and his brother was president of the studio. This kind of sliding across significant phenomena continues. Thus *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* (also 1969!) is considered by Cagin and Dray as 'immensely popular'; *Anatomy of the Movies* places it 41st in all-time Hit Comedies, lower than thirteen other 1970s movies!

The pace *thins* as it speeds—it is not until around the 190s of this 290 page book that we have serious attention to the mid-1970s! In fact, the Epilogue begins with 1977—called, of course, 'the late seventies'. The book splutters out with the most superficial—well, par for the book as a whole—treatment of *Coming Home* (1978), *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

If times were not so hard (and fearful) we might simply annotate this book as *charmingly innocent*, but since—in 1984—this kind of spurious texting of the serious subject of representation can appear—it's long, teasing subtitle being part, of course, what it is 'about'—there is cause for some ascerbic criticism.

Innocence in these times is a simpering plea of guilty to the rightful, mindful accusations of ignorance. Apart from one (largely useless) footnote on a 'short-lived phenomenon'—every liberal's heart-throb, of course—the ignoring of Afro-Americans in Hollywood films (p.116) and some—why not?—slovenly writing about class and some even more gratuitously inadequate words about the original 'Native Americans', the way in which Hollywood's image-repertoire works is hardly mentioned. How many years will it be before the specificity of the cultural production we know as *cinema*—far more than film—comes to be taken seriously? It is not about how it makes use of other forms (notably the textual/musical), it is about its own aboutness which is

not that of narrativity (as in that ludicrous cul-de-sac comparison 'the classic realist text') but of *diegesis*. How do movies *move*? How do they organize space/time? How do they catch us up, *move us*? Which particular 'us' did you have in mind, Philip? The marketing categories—'the' audience? Or those doubling and yet fragmenting social identities that produce that completely new (on this, yes, I insist!) separation which can also be love and hate, pleasure and pain, fearful dread and plentitudinous joy. That combinatory is *what cinema is* and hardly anyone is prepared to face the degree of this new kind of social difference. In cinema we find a separation that is qualitatively different. In ordinary social relations, love and hate desire proximity; whereas separation involves distance and loss. Cinematic separation is a place to enable a certain 'I' to see, be seen, play, gamble. All cultural productions are like this, of course, their real subject is the subjectivity who constructively audits, watches, waits, being there and not being there. But this is all about difference, and Cagin and Dray are guiltily innocent of that consciousness. They paste films like wrapping—or better wallpaper onto some specific (also inaccurate) 'history' in which the male possessing heterosexual can alone be pictured. It's a bad trip!

Apart from Peter Biskin's book I mentioned, I urge everyone to read John Berger's *And Our Own Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos* (New York, Pantheon, 1984) and—even more so—George Trow's *Within the Context of No Context* (Boston, Toronto, Little, Brown, 1981) (for knowledge of which I thank Elizabeth Asner). To understand films/cinema, aside from these glancingly sparkling tangential sources for hope, read Annette Kuhn's *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), Teresa de Lauretis' *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington, Indiana U.P., 1984) and *Screen*. Don't bother to read, certainly to buy, this—let's be charitable—pitiful book.

Philip Corrigan's forthcoming book (with Stevie Bezencenet) is *Photographic Practices: Towards a Different Image* (London, Comedia).

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