

The Last Issue

When I first proposed a summative theme for this anniversary issue—Thirty Years on Film—the *CineAction* editorial collective had not yet decided to stop its print publication. However, as was noted in the previous issue, due to a number of circumstances mostly beyond our control, we have come to the end of the road. This issue, therefore, stands not just as a celebration of *CineAction*'s thirty year run but also as a final farewell.

In 1985, a small group of people centred around the renowned film critic Robin Wood who at that time was teaching at York University in Toronto, decided to start a film magazine that would provide an outlet for film writing and criticism reflective of Robin's ideas and interests. From the beginning, though, it was a fluid venture, with room for differing opinions and concerns—the end result being that the individual issues became the reflection of their editors rather than hewing to a homogeneous party-line. From an initial collective of eight members, the group's numbers fluctuated over the years as people joined and dropped out, growing to 10 at one point, and then shrinking to the final four stalwarts—Scott Forsyth, Florence Jacobowitz, Richard Lippe and me—who have been co-editing *CineAction* for the past 10 years. While in retrospect, we (collectively) knew much about film, we knew nothing about magazine publishing, academia being a poor learning ground for such commercial ventures (... we never did get someone to sell advertising!). To this day, the remaining four are still amazed that we made it this far, given how ignorant we were of practical matters. We are truly lucky that we live in Canada, where public funding of the arts is a national concern. Without the Ontario Arts Council grants early on, and the Canada Council's continuing support, we could not have lasted financially these thirty years.

The first issue of *CineAction*, published in the Spring of 1985, was a slim 24 pages in length, type set and printed on inexpensive paper, with a one colour paper cover. Eventually, the magazine increased in size to the present standardized 76 pages, printed on good quality paper with a full colour cover. Technologically, the biggest changes over 30 years have been related to the computer and the Internet. Where manuscripts were once type-written and sent by mail, they are now word processed and emailed. Film stills and files can be obtained through image searches and transferred through vehicles like Dropbox. Once designed and laid out, each article can be sent to its author for final proofing, for return within a matter of days. And a website can introduce the magazine to an International audience.

On the other hand, these new technologies have also brought about the downfall of the commercial print industry.

Just as streaming has brought about the disappearance of the once ubiquitous video store, and digitized music the end of record stores, so the expectation that books and magazines should be obtained for free through the Internet, or at much cheaper rates than those of local book and magazine stores has brought about their rapid disappearance. In addition, now everyone can be a film critic, and post their own opinions online at will.

Hence ... the last issue.

The papers assembled for this issue may be seen as reflecting the concerns of *CineAction* over the decades. The first section, devoted to the theme "Thirty Years on Film", contains papers that provide an overview of issues related to film and film studies. Fittingly, in an elliptical finish to 30 years of publication, Robert Alpert's piece takes a second look at Robin Wood's seminal article "Dominant Tendencies of 80s Hollywood" that was published in *CineAction* n° 1. Richard Rushton and Gary Bettinson also look at the Hollywood film industry in their piece "Whatever Happened to Hollywood". A peripheral concern is expressed in Jean-Pierre Geuens' article on the present state of Film Schools that feed into the Hollywood system. And Jinhua Li has contributed a paper that brings together two other topics that have been of concern to *CineAction* over the decades, Chinese cinema and the representation of women in film. The second section of this issue reflects another major interest—this one dear to Robin's approach—the close readings of specific films. Brandon Taylor looks at the recent films of the Korean director Bong Joon-Ho; Lee Mitchell takes a film that has been poorly received ... Ridley Scott's *The Counselor* ... and provides an alternate reading; and Troy Bordun's, whose concern is with the use of the 'off-screen voice' in Spike Jonze's *Her*. In addition, I have included a paper by Michael Boughn, who takes three recent films about war and looks at the way they have reshaped generic conventions. And a contribution by Richard Lippe on a much-discussed film Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, this time read from the position of recuperating its star Kim Novak as a major contributor to the success of the film.

— SUSAN MORRISON



Florence Jacobowitz

CineAction was founded 30 years ago out of necessity, as a magazine that would publish politicized readings and where theory could be tested against critical practice (instead of simply imposed); we envisioned a place for discussion about value and meaning. *CineAction's* subtitle—a magazine of radical film criticism & theory—was later dropped, but initially we needed a film magazine open to the appreciation of the political in popular culture and the attendant pleasures found in the cinema.

At the time of *CineAction's* inception, the author was dead (an editor of *Jump Cut* commented on my submission of Max Ophuls' *Caught*, whether I was seriously suggesting that Ophuls *intended* the lucid critique of women's oppression dramatized in the film) and semi-otics didn't always allow for a film's nuance, complexity or ambiguity in its theoretical grid.

CineAction developed its own unique, hybrid identity and found a specialized international readership. It was wonderful to work with colleagues and friends like Robin Wood and Andrew Britton whose criticism I still find inspiring. It has been gratifying to share many articles and issues with Richard Lippe on stars, performance, the art film, the New Wave, the city and film, many tributes, in memoriam and whatever else we felt deserved acknowledgment. I learnt a lot over the years; for example, I was able to deepen my commitment to Isabelle Huppert through my coverage of TIFF for the magazine.

I still hope *CineAction* may one day be revived online for the 21st century, but I will miss terribly a tangible, physical magazine that could be found on a newsstand, produced as an object to be touched.

Richard Lippe

CineAction began as a response to the rejection of the practice of film criticism in the heyday of privileging theory in academic study. The magazine was intended to illustrate the value of criticism through a close reading of a film's style and content. It was a process of evaluation that provided insights into the construction and meaning of a work. It was conceived as a political forum that included challenging the then contemporary theoretical notion that ideology was monolithic and, as such, put into question the possibility of political change.

Our other goal was to produce a serious-minded magazine that wasn't arcane and elitist in its nature; instead, we wanted to provide an open-minded reader with a magazine that was accessible while retaining its integrity and sense of purpose. *CineAction* was meant to be wide ranging in its content, embracing the medium in all its manifestations, whether it be the Hollywood cinema, the art film, the documentary film or other cinematic formats.

As an editor, I have found the experience of putting an issue of the magazine together as an adventure which has been demanding at times but also gratifying and rewarding. As for the latter, it has led to connecting with

writers, both seasoned and beginnings, who are insightful critics, enthusiastic about film, and inspiring to read.

While run as a collective, the magazine's content remained diverse and lively. As individual issues were themed, it allowed the editor(s) to explore aspects of the cinema that engaged him or her or were considered as topical at the time. I feel fortunate to have co-edited many issues (and co-written numerous articles) with my friend and colleague Florence Jacobowitz. Our working relationship has been consistently productive and a pleasure experience.

It would be an oversight to neglect mentioning the significance of having Robin Wood as one of the founding members of *CineAction*. Robin's participation in the magazine was on-going until 2009 when his failing health prevented him from practicing his craft. He valued the magazine's contribution to film culture. Robin also valued it as a place to publish regularly and do so without having restrictions imposed on his work.

CineAction has been an important part of my life and its demise in a print format is a sad occasion. On an upbeat note, it is conceivable that the magazine will reappear online but that is a possibility that is pending at this point.

Scott Forsyth

The Persistence of the Political: Films, Festivals and Looking Back

Looking thirty years back in the life of *CineAction* is daunting, if not aging. It is a record of significant accomplishment, contributions to scholarly discourse on virtually any film subject across those thirty years, an archive of critical debate and interpretation, always with an

expansive sense of film's vast history.

We always aimed to have a wider, popular engagement than the academy, although clearly our writers contributed to film scholarship, and many articles over the years were reprinted or revised for collections and books. We began with the proud subtitle *A Magazine of Radical Criticism* and the proclamation of varied commitments, across what was always a diverse collective, to socialism, feminism, gay liberation—as was then

said—and Marxism. For me, my Marxist commitments remain the same. But clearly, the magazine moderated its presentation, became more respectable and academic. Despite our editorial injunctions about style and avoiding footnotes, our contents adapted to the institutionalization of film studies that deepened over those years.

Over thirty years, changes and developments in the world of film and media have been constant and complex. This issue features several discussions that rise to the challenge of assessment and contextualization of both continuity and rupture. Some things don't seem to have changed all that much however. *CineAction* always placed a strong emphasis on the political and aesthetic analysis of Hollywood—classic and contemporary—and our first few issues had several considerations of formal and ideological features of the Hollywood of the eighties. Robin Wood outlined key reactionary trends in what he called Dominant Tendencies. That influential assessment is updated in this issue. I contributed a discussion of Hollywood's ideological contradictions and persistent liberalism and briefly considered the formal features of what was clearly becoming the prevailing commodity form of corporate Hollywood—the blockbuster. None of these analyses seem out of place in the High Concept Hollywood of the twenty-first century, as we watch another *Rocky* or *Red Dawn*, wait for the female *Ghostbusters* or line up for the latest superhero franchise installment. Indeed, a book shelf of recent studies of the formal and ideological features of global and industrial Hollywood seem to be consistent with those thirty-year-old discussions.

It is also striking how persistently our writers and editors have maintained a dedication to the political in our themes and criticism. The voice may be moderated but over the years, and over several waves of critics and scholars, we have constantly returned to the politics of film. Issues on feminism, sexual politics, queer cinema, imperialism and globalization, race and racism, documentary and social movements have consistently focused on radical critique. Indeed, we have repeated our focus on the politics of criticism in multiple issues. As well, our many issues on diverse genres always emphasized the political possibilities and complexities of popular film, while attendant to changes in performance, style and conventions too. Looking at several issues on genre I edited—Horror, Global Apocalypse, Science Fiction, Fantasy and CGI—clearly showed how critics like Robin Wood had politicized a generation of genre criticism.

We also consistently highlighted Canadian films in regular issues, helping development of a cohort of young Canadian critics and scholars. Writers and articles from *CineAction* are prominent in many of the books and collections that have marked a boom in Canadian film studies in recent years.

One important change in film culture that developed over the years was the importance of the Toronto International Film Festival. Essays on premiering films at the Festival became an annual feature of the magazine's organization and were one of our most enjoyable editorial

tasks. The Festival gave us access to films we might never have seen. Partly, this reflects the significant growth of the role and profile of festivals around the world. Festivals are part of the vast corporate organization of production, promotion and distribution. But they still function in the tradition of cinemathèques—allowing the latest obscure art film or documentary or newest film from Burkina Faso to be discovered and savoured. For the collective, it allowed us to follow particular interests and critically update them—Asian action, French auteurs, whatever chance spectatorship provided. For me, while the Festival was always immersed in the Global Hollywood behemoth, it was simultaneously dedicated to bringing me the political films I craved. I was stunned by Paul Leduc's beautiful *Frida naturaleza viva* in 1984, one of the great later films of Third Cinema. A few years later, *Roger & Me* introduced me to Michael Moore. The Festival was where I discovered the Dardenne brothers, saw Ken Loach's *Sweet Sixteen* and all his latest films. I saw Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's last film, *Guantanamera*, and interviewed Juan Carlos Tabío, his co-director. I could keep up with Tabío's later films, like *So Far Away* and could follow independent Cuban films in recent years. The Festival was an inspiration to write about many of these films and incorporate them into teaching about film and radicalism.

In recent years, the Festival premiered films that looked back at earlier moments of radicalization to celebrate and to question. Olivier Assayas's harsh judgment on his revolutionary youth, *Something in the Air*, documentaries on the Black Panthers and Angela Davis—these films are targeted at both today's young radicals and old sixties and seventies revolutionaries like me. Last year, Mina Shum's *Ninth Floor* movingly recalled the Sir George Williams occupation of 1969, one of the high points of Canada's sixties radicalization. The protest against racism by a handful of Caribbean students became a confrontation with the university authorities, a mass occupation, with a dangerous fire and a police riot. The young radicals are now sombre, dignified elders. The film places the events in the context of sixties mass movements and revolutions, with striking newsreel footage. Images of Montreal police brutality and thousands denouncing Canadian imperialism outside a Canadian bank in Trinidad are unforgettable. This may be radical nostalgia, but it functions not only as remembrance but as part of re-imagining the possibilities of the present.

Finally, what kept us political was the influence of two great political film critics, Andrew Britton and Robin Wood. Their work remains important to any serious political discussion of film and they were always inspirational for my work. They are still missed. I am sure Robin meant that the last issue he edited a few years ago, on Protest and Revolution, was a reminder to the rest of us.

Looking back at *CineAction*, we have made a serious contribution to the culture of film criticism and to the politics of film. That is what we set out to do.