

Rose Coloured Spectacles

Tom Jennings

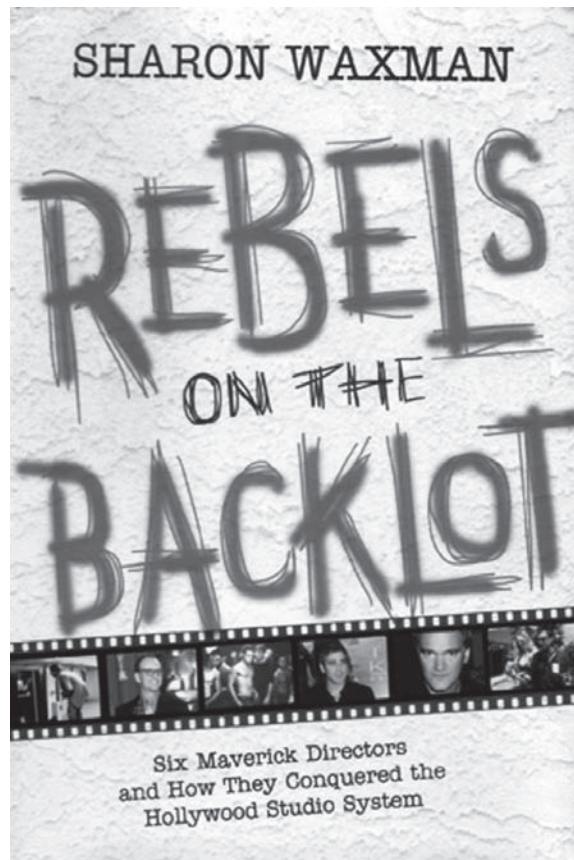
Jonathan Demme's anti-Bush broadside of a film *The Manchurian Candidate* (2004) effectively updates John Frankenheimer's classic 1962 conspiracy thriller – with Iraq rather than Korean War veterans brainwashed into becoming political moles and assassins by corporate, not KGB, agents. Given our familiarity with the amoral criminality of the military-industrial complex and government via mythology, mystification and spin, these revisions seem highly appropriate. The unfolding plot shows Army bureaucrat (Denzel Washington in Frank Sinatra's role) and Vice Presidential candidate (Liev Shrieber for Laurence Harvey) grappling with Gulf War Syndrome zombification amid manipulation by Shreiber's Senator mother (Meryl Streep instead of Angela Lansbury) and sundry electoral, big business and media masterminds, crooks, lobbyists, lackeys and lickspittles.

However, despite a very neat new *denouement*, much of the political sharpness of the source novel by Richard Condon is lost, wherein McCarthyism succeeded thanks to Kremlin plotters finding it thoroughly congenial to their authoritarian aims – a fascinating, if muddled, disentangling of the contradictions of Cold War politics. Unfortunately, the supposedly liberal-left Demme substitutes benign intelligence agencies which only ever use dirty tricks to foil the multinational menace, plus honourable old-school patriotic patricians who have for years fought Party takeover bids by tycoons. In other words, the radical potential of a critique of the interdependency of the state and capitalism is squandered in favour of regressive conservative recuperation – much like, in fact, the 2004 Democratic presidential campaign itself.

The changing contours of cinematic conspiracies can thus be interpreted as adjustments to what filmmakers and studios understand 'politics' to mean to themselves and viewers today – in a trajectory from stark Orwellian paranoia through nihilistic neo-noir to recent efforts such as Demme's glossy pastiche, *Traffic* (dir. Steven Soderbergh, 2001), *The Quiet American* (dir. Philip Noyce, 2002), *Silver City* (dir. John Sayles, 2004), *The Constant Gardener* (dir. Fernando Mereilles, 2005) and *Syriana* (dir. Andrew Gaghan, 2005). Moreover, the last few years have seen a growing tendency for supposedly progressive themes to be tackled in big-budget Hollywood fictions, along with the incorporation of originally marginal-aesthetic choices and strategies in the production of cinematic blockbusters, brands and franchises. This survey describes some of these phenomena and the critical response to them, and discusses their ambivalent implications and limitations.

Shifting Perspective

In their book *A World in Chaos: Social Crisis and the Rise of Postmodern Cinema*, Carl Boggs and Thomas Pollard match recent developments in cinema to the lived experiences of its audiences in the "globalizing, consumer-oriented capitalist order" constituted by "gross material inequalities, social polarization, possessive individualism, civic fragmentation, and impending chaos".¹ Elements of classic Hollywood genres are combined and attenuated in many recent films so that their narratives depict incomprehensible and corrupt worlds where conventional rational understanding, collective organisation and public action have lost the capacity to offer explanations or effect political change – thanks in no small part to the saturation of our psyches with corporate media trivia. And although the book's overly loose definition of postmodernism in films encompasses many long-established forms and styles, its proposition is surely plausible: that earlier representations of brutal, miserable, hopeless and confused lives in specific marginal, urban, criminal and/or nightmare milieux have been increasingly



glossed and generalised to apply to society as a whole.

Other treatments of significant trends in contemporary US films have no patience with such pessimistic and totalising assessments of the sector's long-range value and significance. Bucking the tendency of major studio output in the 1990s to converge towards ever more inflated and repetitious replicas with little more than special effects enhancements and celebrity presence to recommend them, a diverse collection of creative film-making talents instead brought the sensitivities and dynamism of subcultural and cult media and genres to bear. The achievements of some of these in persuading major studios to part with substantial production budgets are celebrated by James Mottram in his study *The Sundance Kids*.² This title furnishes a spurious collectivity – when many, such as Soderbergh and Tarantino, had little or no truck with Robert Redford's nursery and showcase at the Sundance Institute. It also encourages a strained intergenerational comparison with the 1970s New Hollywood of Scorsese, Spielberg and Coppola *et al*, who rose to prominence from the sixties countercultural demolition of outdated industry practices before subsequently finding themselves thoroughly tamed by what replaced them. Sharon Waxman's anecdotal survey *Rebels On The Backlot*³ at least concentrates on detailing insider gossip and dissecting networking patterns in showing how an arbitrary selection of younger independent directors have combined personal entrepreneurial prowess and self-promotion with genuine artistic flair in advancing their careers.

Conversely, rather than translating cinematic texts as sociocultural reflections, and with a much less sanguine approach to cultural commerce, Ben Dickenson's *Hollywood's New Radicalism*⁴, focusing on the efforts of liberals and leftists involved in film production to reflect their social awareness in their work, charts the changing structure of an industry whose consolidation and profit-seeking agendas fluctuate according to wider political and economic trends. Recent generations of independent innovators gained arthouse footholds with regular box-office hits refreshing moribund blockbuster formulae – and now that niche marketing and diversification are prominent megastudio strategies, successful Hollywood progressives can juggle mainstream

fare with personal commitment to lower-budget releases paid for with its proceeds. Moreover, after Clinton's neoliberalism, Seattle's protest revival, and post-9/11 Bush barbarism, many also vociferously criticise orthodox politics, publicly supporting grass-roots campaigns instead. By this account, subversive hope unexpectedly supplants cynical despair.

Focusing on Power

Obvious manifestations of these phenomena may be sought in film treatments of formal political processes themselves. Conventional 1990s satires centralised the network of PR spin and corporate and media influence on dodgy leaders, from the Machiavellian machinations of *Bob Roberts* (dir. Tim Robbins, 1992) to more sympathetic power-seekers led astray both by their own narcissism and the electoral farce. *Primary Colors* (dir. Mike Nichols, 1998) and *Wag the Dog* (dir. Barry Levinson, 1998) were comically pertinent to the Clinton regime's practice, but said nothing about either political consequences or ordinary viewers/voters beyond them being suckered (which might apply more to liberal filmmakers falling for Clinton's progressive rhetoric). Meanwhile the historical revisionism of *JFK* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1991) and *LA Confidential* (dir. Curtis Hanson, 1997) had already applied film noir devices to national and local institutional and governmental structures, implying their utter moral bankruptcy. More complex and less conventional narratives followed suit, exploiting the flexibility of genre-crossover to link the lives of the citizenry into the degradations of politics.

Most trenchantly, elite Democrat Senator *Bulworth* (dir. Warren Beatty, 1999) goes AWOL in South Central LA after a nervous breakdown on the campaign trail, emerging as a champion of the underclasses. Borrowing elements of '90s 'hood film' style works here, thanks to immense respect shown for ghetto philosophy, intelligence and creativity, counterposed by Warren Beatty's hysterical vanity and, crucially, laughably incompetent rapping.⁵ Other recent films also bridge the gap between culture and politics in diverse ways and with varying degrees of success. However, apart from *Bamboozled*'s (dir. Spike Lee, 2001) exposure of corporate media's racism in colonising Black traditions, all invoke heroic individualism to drive history: *Cradle Will Rock* (dir. Tim Robbins, 2000) revisits the political context of the 1930s US Federal Theatre Project in a musical celebration of proletarian art served up by elite intellectuals like Orson Welles and John Housman; *Good Night & Good Luck*'s (dir. George Clooney, 2005) implied critique of modern media requires merely journalistic integrity to scupper McCarthyism; and *8 Mile* (dir. Curtis Hanson, 2003) and *Erin Brockovich* (dir. Steven Soderbergh, 2000) connect uplift from the constraints of working-class culture only with personal success in music and law respectively – reducing those represented (whether in the hip-hop or legal senses) to passivity.

More ambitious is *Silver City*'s bitter denunciation of prevailing power. This crime thriller-cum-political conspiracy follows an ex-crusading journalist (Danny Huston) grappling with environmental destruction and the exploitation of migrant workers perpetrated by corporate greed – all fronted by cretinous mouthpieces elected through omnipresent soundbites and photo-ops. Although crippled by annoyingly patronising expositions (when the message emerges more effectively from the narrative), the film is effective in critiquing left, right and centre while still hinting at hope. So the right-on countercultural veteran does eventually uncover the 'truth' – but to no effect other than his own satisfaction (signalled by a successful

romantic *denouement*), while his 'concern' for the plight of immigrants doesn't extend to any regard for their welfare as he exploits their goodwill in helping him. The self-obsession of the '60s generation thus neatly trashed, potential is nonetheless glimpsed in the lead character's former associates – still committed, but now engaged in muckraking internet activism.

Treatments of transnational political and corporate conspiracies themselves adopt more complex narratives – *The Quiet American* and *The Constant Gardener* show middle-ranking professional protagonists nudging toward an appreciation of the dirty institutional deeds they're implicated in, and that they've somehow hitherto avoided awareness of – but they are helpless given their isolation. *Traffic* and *Syriana* claim to represent a global range of 'stakeholder' perspectives on the wars on drugs and terror respectively. But although no-one sees the bigger picture, and all subplots end more or less tragically, characters are given more depth the higher their social status – reflecting the possibility of meaningful agency, and hence some kind of redemption if only in noble failure. In the process, hierarchies are meticulously preserved along with the identification with middle class paths required by the stereotypical rendering of everyone else. Even *Lord of War's* (dir. Andrew Niccol, 2005) attempt to stitch together personal deployments of national mythology with the globalising sociopathy of capitalism (via the evils of the international arms trade) only acquires narrative drive – and thus purchase as metaphor – by shadowing Nicolas Cage's crazed Ukrainian-American entrepreneur with Ethan Hawke's ineptly idealistic Interpol authority-figure.

The comforting banality of simple-minded redemptive aesthetics is taken to extremes in the treatment of war itself. Continuing Sam Mendes' generic deconstructions of inadequate US existential masculinity begun in *American Beauty* (2000) and *The Road to Perdition* (2002), *Jarhead* (2005) demonstrates the hysterical convolutions of redundant machismo among marines in the 1991 Gulf War. Unfortunately the film adopts the perspective of Jake Gyllenhaal's pretentious nerd frustrated by the military's failure to resolve his dysfunctional family coming-of-age drama – while most army recruits rationalise their positions after joining up to give their lives income, rather than meaning. At least here the adolescent 'philosophising' is bracketed as a defensive response to insane reality, whereas in Spielberg's odious *Munich* (2006) it is privileged as ideological support for Israeli state terrorism.⁶ Much more interesting is the playfulness of *Three Kings* (dir. David O. Russell, 1998), with the first Iraq war cast as heist movie where heartfelt solidarity

replaces the cynical self-interest of a US platoon once the malevolence of official policy becomes clearer during a surreal excursion in pursuit of buried treasure. *Jarhead* and *Three Kings* are also saturated with reference to cinematic precursors – in style, structure and the social and internal intercourse of their characters – and it's precisely the dissolving of such boundaries that seems to give these films more chance of saying something interesting and original.

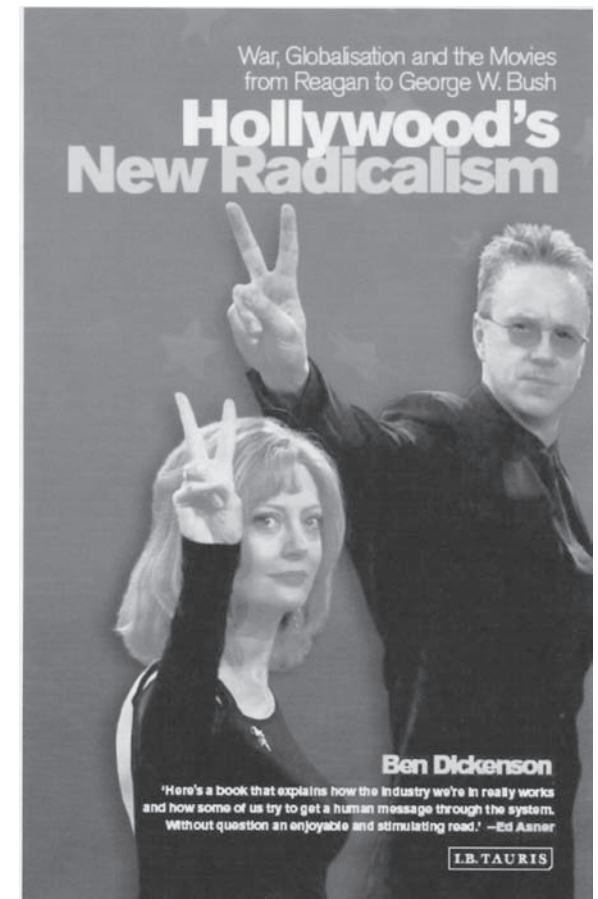
Blurred Vision

The mixing of genres resonates with viewers' media and cultural biography and literacy, while simultaneously questioning the reliability of conventional patterns of knowledge and understanding of our own lives and the world.⁷ The apparently apolitical nihilism of postmodern cinema, especially in its treatment of transgression and excess – violence, crime, sexual and social – began to extend in the '90s away from the virtual solipsism of Lynchian fantasy, yuppie nightmares and neo-noir, as narratives became fractured in time and space as well as according to character psychodynamics. Tarantino's exuberant comic book capers and *Natural Born Killer's* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1994) venom against media opiates reflect the mundane madness and horror visible in contemporary society, finding echoes in later films tackling similar themes in highly original ways. Now it is commonplace for skewed perceptions and private fantasies to overflow and reverberate among participants in social networks, influencing or overdetermining prospects for the future of the self and others.

In particular, the status of the 'reality' presented to viewers is unsettled when visual design and cinematography confuse perspective; with subjective states no longer conveniently tagged as 'flashback', 'daydream', 'nightmare', etc. Together with the unpredictable vicissitudes of the external world, its implacable material force and proclivity for coincidence, this hints at the open-endedness of history rather than closure – modulating the emotional rush traditional *denouements* aim for as 'entertainment'. Then, when the juggling of genres leaves a narrative with no single obvious outcome, dissonant resolutions may be tacked on whatever the thrust of the foregoing would conventionally suggest. You'd think the indie rebels and radical mavericks purportedly populating Hollywood could exploit these profitable fashions as golden opportunities to represent political struggle in their work. But only very few films have shown public, collective action and conflicts of interest – involving varying forms and levels of explicit political ideology and motivation – to be suffused and surrounded with, and energised and confounded by, the misrecognition and desire both practical and cinematic experience suggest are inevitable.

Based on the iconoclastic cult novel by Chuck Palahniuk, David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999) drips with comic invective concerning the comfortable alienations of commodity fetishism and managed misery. Corporate bureaucrat Jack (Edward Norton) has a solipsistic private life of Ikea catalogue completism, filling the resulting spiritual vacuum with self-pitying voyeurism at self-help groups for cancer sufferers. This pathetic existence is blighted by escalating narcissistic insults and material disasters, until libidinal nihilist Tyler (Brad Pitt) rekindles his anguished masculinity in regular bareknuckle fistfights on city backstreets. Fascinated onlookers from all walks of life join in, mushrooming and coalescing as an underground movement to overthrow consumer society via unspoken male solidarity. Their plan to blow up finance companies' headquarters proves too much for Jack, who shoots himself in the head – merely wounding himself physically but killing Tyler (revealed as schizoid personification of suppressed desire) – and the newly-integrated Jack finds heterosexual love as the bombs detonate.

Even if dismissed as hermetic schoolboy fantasy – or worse, flirting with the fascistic appeal of cult violence powered by psychotic charisma – *Fight Club* at least foregrounds passionate bodily yearning as potential antidote to the poison of capitalism.⁸ David O. Russell's *I [Heart] Huckabees*

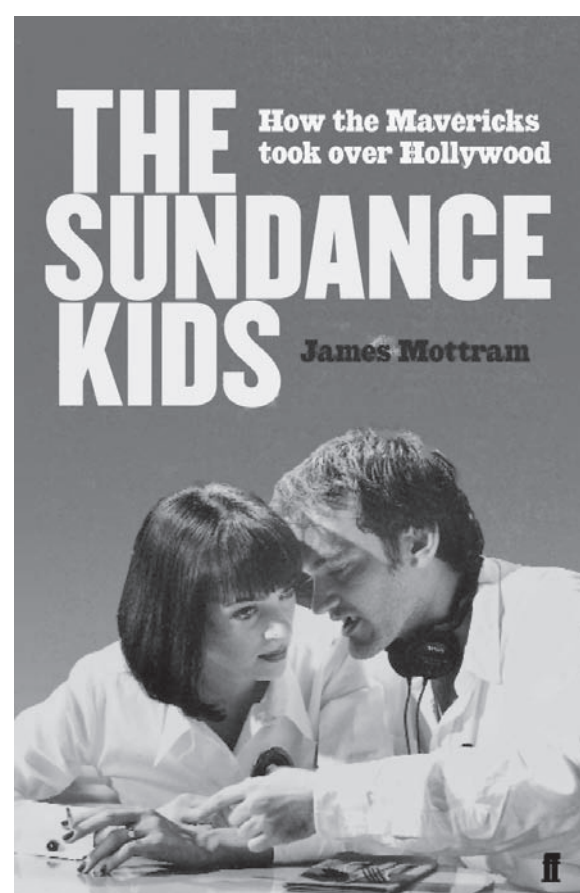


(2005) follows the more unthreatening route of surrealism-lite (as favoured by global brand advertisers), sacrificing the urgency and emotional desperation conjured by Fincher. The gentler, screwball farce comedy is likewise enervating rather than energising – but both choices suit the film's theme of the New Age reduction of politics to personal morality and lifestyle marketing. Here, Jason Schwartzman's earnest environmentalist agonises over the ethics and efficacy of single issue campaign compromises with corporate interests. So troubled that he fears for his sanity, various counsellors and consultants are invited to compete in obsessing over his sense of identity, making suitably shallow interventions in his social and activist circle. 'Finding himself' quickly takes precedence over preserving wilderness – implying that the previous concern for 'real' nature merely externalised anxieties concerning his own self-indulgent whingeing human nature.

Crowd Scenes

Fight Club and *Huckabees* are unquestionably highly original films, with wildly inventive camerawork, editing and plotting, and complex characterisations and cultural reference points. And despite their considerable limitations – for instance depicting political action as, at best, misguided – both complicate the striving for commonality with the difficulties inherent in the uncertain status of knowledge and interpretation experienced by characters and viewers. More conventional ensemble dramas also emphasise the influence of randomness, shared fantasy, flashbacks and alternative versions in shaping local social contexts. The fractured stories and multiple perspectives pioneered by Robert Altman have been very influential among independent filmmakers – though rarely exploited to illuminate political themes.⁹ Moreover, other groundbreaking work – such as the ghettocentric cycle initiated by Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (1990), films directed by Sean Penn (*The Indian Runner*, 1991; *The Crossing Guard*, 1995; *The Pledge*, 2001) and those written by Guillermo Arriaga (*Amores Perros*, 2001; *21 Grams*, 2004; *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, 2006) – locate agency and potential most firmly within individual protagonists, who are always flawed, damaged and disruptive of simplistic solutions, and the ramifications of their normal or abnormal pathology ripple out into their social environments to highlight collective implications.

Paul Haggis' *Crash* (2005) focuses on the sickness of racism infecting all levels of US society in a tapestry of neatly interlocking and sharply scripted vignettes featuring a dozen-and-a-half characters crossing fractious paths over two days in Los Angeles. Its manipulative conceit is to include only occasions dominated by racialising attributions, with scant contextualisation



in deeper backstories and a fuller range of interactions. Despite consequently actively stereotyping those it accuses, the scenarios frequently overflow this constraint to reveal the bases of conflict in class distinction and economic inequality – with particularly acute detailing of the complicit hypocrisy of liberal elites and the fatal delusions of political correctness. But with the redress to racial prejudice artificially overdetermining the narrative ebbs and flows, acts of humility and humanity on the part of those towards the bottom of the cosmopolitan heap are isolated as exceptions to the rule rather than countervailing force. *Crash* thus embodies and exemplifies the organising power of racism yet, paradoxically, was lauded and awarded best film Oscar for its bravery in exposing it. But the film is much less honest than *Short Cuts* (dir. Robert Altman, 1993) pinpointing of the bitter pressure-points of the city's downwardly-mobile trajectory, ultimately being just as distanced and melancholic as *Magnolia's* (dir. Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999) meandering meditation on the ineffable strangeness of LA life.

Refusing the panoramic omnipotence of such efforts, Kathryn Bigelow's magnificent *Strange Days* (1995) experiments viscerally with the phenomenology of simulation offered by new media, gradually expanding the significance of their alienating distraction for confused thrill-seekers out into the seething public sphere of a chaotic neo-noir 1999 LA under brutal martial law. The troubled pairing of ex-vice squad porn merchant Ralph Fiennes and streetwise action heroine Angela Bassett tangle with corrupt entrepreneurs and lowlives in a decadent cross-fertilising cultural milieu of hip-hop punk, blundering into a conspiracy to assassinate a Black revolutionary leader which threatens to tip the civic millennium festivities over the brink into grass-roots insurrection. Through an unprecedented synthesis of film and psychoanalytic theory, exploitation of cinema traditions and bravura design, editing and photography, it is far more nuanced than *Crash* in tackling the subjective and social significance of race, as well as of gender and class.¹⁰ The film also works hard to specify its historical contingency in the best traditions of science fiction as speculation on the present (for example by Stanislaw Lem, William Burroughs or Philip K. Dick) – rather than hysterical inflation into universal values, or the fashionably subversive adolescent hype which passes for philosophical resonance in the Wachowski brothers-produced *V for Vendetta* (dir. James McTeigue, 2006), as in *The Matrix* (dir. Andy & Larry Wachowski, 1999) series.¹¹ *Strange Days* even excuses its major flaws (such as a deliberately implausible, if arguably utopian, central relationship) by managing to render its politically ultra-conservative resolution as

dystopian recuperation – a final knowing flourish on the role of mass entertainment in taming desire in labyrinths of repressive desublimation.

Changing Lenses

The general timidity of dream factory visionaries in tackling political change may, then, be best conceived in terms of a wider disillusionment among the middle classes with social democracy as the handmaiden of capitalist progress in our strange days, given their failure to predict or comprehend the unravelling liberal consensus. 1980s and '90s neo-noir, postmodern and 'slacker' stories appeal for their thoroughgoing refusal of traditional disciplines and delusions, which is partly also what makes new forms of collective mobilisation such as anti-globalization possible among those growing up without the benefits of 1960s naiveté and aristocratic modernist optimism. However, the recent spate of films translating oppositional attitudes into populist cinema use largely retrograde narrative conventions and characters, without the stylistic and technical experimentation elsewhere employed to reflect underlying malaises in Western society. The most obvious symptoms of war and corporate excess are thus presented as ultimate causes, to be adjusted by enlightened reform. Similarly, whereas the deeper colonisation of intimate life by the instrumental logic of commodification ironically has Hollywood at its vanguard, any cinematic response more robust than trivial lifestyle tinkering leads to shattered identities or social breakdown which only the desperate reassertion of established authority can resolve.

While at least corruption and malpractice by government and business, environmental damage, and the effects of corporate imperialism on the poor at home and abroad are now gratifyingly familiar on the big screen, merely updating clichéd film formulae reproduces traditional resolutions revolving around heroes and leaders. The corresponding notion that suitably nimble strategies among liberal filmmakers guarantees progressive content does justice neither to contemporary political circumstances – where the intentions and interests of professional elites are so widely, thoroughly and understandably distrusted – nor to a media culture in which superficial appearance is fetishised to mask the depressing difficulties of real life. Negotiating prevailing tastes and engaging deeper desires while also offering genuine critique is much trickier than the voluntaristic idealism of celebrities suggests. So radical directors often skilfully portray middle class protagonists striving to maintain their positions entangled in complex local hierarchies and histories, with very mixed consequences for those with less room to manoeuvre. Regrettably, the latter's rich social dynamic is usually homogenised into frozen victimised masses – either destined to be thawed by personal heroics and histrionics, or simply functioning as a reactive backdrop against which the stars shine.

Conspiracy theories have long been fertile territory for cinema, with political thrillers sensing the world's complexity while rendering historical phenomena in simplistically individual terms. Action films hysterically mobilise adolescent masculinist muscle in desperate response and, given that paranoia represents the psychotic underbelly of individualism, parapolitics likewise seductively suggests that humanity's ills result from the hidden agendas of evil elites. Of course the latter exist, and create havoc, but the more difficult truth is that domination is sedimented into the routine material of institutions, discourses, bodies, societies and economies – conditioning the patterns of stratification, distinction and difference which constitute the texture of everyday life irrespective of whose interests can be said to be ultimately served. This is precisely the terrain which postmodern existential nightmares effectively excavate, albeit usually inside single isolated and tortured psyches. Furthermore, expansive dramas of community life are eminently capable of depicting the ways in which the interests, beliefs, actions and affiliations of friends and neighbours, lovers and strangers mingle subjectively and socially. When parallel

storylines and biographies clash and intersect, this is as likely to yield collective synergy as the familiar cinematic staples of destructive conflict or sterile equilibrium.

These tentative and emergent representational paradigms seem to offer the possibility of providing visions of the grounds for genuine solidarity and the pursuit of shared purpose in circumstances in which business as usual is decisively threatened. However, it would be necessary to acknowledge the central role here of autonomous grass-roots activity or expression outside of the boundaries, preoccupations, conceptual frameworks, guidance and control of middle-class mediators. But this would entail the latter surrendering their recuperative power, and accordingly the privileged positions granted for loyal opposition to the status quo. Even the more challenging of the films referred to above can therefore be interpreted in terms of a reluctance to tackle such suffocating restraints in their makers' own cultural practice – amounting to a wholesale failure of nerve as well as self-censorship. This helps explain why manifestations of conscious struggle, collective public dissent or mass action are so rarely properly explored, and certainly not celebrated – and, especially when their subjects lack social status, hasty negotiation and patronising contempt are the order of the day. Instead a regular refrain of self-important gestures by and about special ones creating history emanates from aspiring or actual cinema industry heavyweights and their (un)critical cheerleaders – whose rose-coloured spectacles conceal an inability to conceive of alternatives to the political coordinates of Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Notes

1. Carl Boggs & Thomas Pollard, *A World in Chaos: Social Crisis and the Rise of Postmodern Cinema*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, p.249.
2. James Mottram, *The Sundance Kids: How the Mavericks Took Back Hollywood*, Faber & Faber, 2006.
3. Sharon Waxman, *Rebels On The Backlot: Six Maverick Directors and How They Conquered the Hollywood Studio System*, HarperCollins, 2005.
4. Ben Dickenson, *Hollywood's New Radicalism: War, Globalisation and the Movies from Reagan to George W. Bush*, I.B. Tauris, 2006.
5. See Paula J. Masood, 'Ghetto Supastar: Warren Beatty's *Bulworth* and the Politics of Race and Space', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No.4, 2002, pp.287-293.
6. The grounds for which, in this case, are presented as neutral historical record rather than falsified propaganda; for a corrective, see As'ad Abu-Khalil, 'Spielberg on Munich: the Humanization of Israeli Killers, and the Dehumanization of Palestinian Civilians', 2005, <http://angryarab.blogspot.com/2005/12/spielberg-on-munich-humanization-of.html>. For a relevant discussion of the deeper relationship between media images and contemporary international government, see: Retort [Iain Boal, T. J. Clark, Joseph Matthews & Michael Watts], *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, 2nd edition, Verso, 2006.
7. See my 'Class-ifying Contemporary Cinema', *Variant*, No. 10, 2000, pp.16-19.
8. As, in various contexts, Slavoj Žižek concludes re: *Fight Club*: "Liberation Hurts!" (Eric Dean Rasmussen, 2003, www.lacan.com/zizekillinois.htm). See also Žižek: 'I am a Fighting Atheist: Interview with Doug Henwood', *Bad Subjects*, No. 59, 2002, <http://bad.eserver.org> (and in Joel Schalit, ed., *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, Akashic Books, 2002); and 'Art: The Talking Heads', in *Organs Without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences*, Routledge, 2004. For the director's take on his film, and the controversy it spawned, see: James Swallow, 'Hit Me', in *Dark Eye: The Films of David Fincher*, Reynolds & Hearn, 2003.
9. Significant exceptions being *City of Hope* (dir. John Sayles, 1991), *Lone Star* (dir. John Sayles, 1996) and *Sunshine State* (dir. John Sayles, 2002) – like *Silver City*, financed by John Sayles' journeyman scriptwriting and independently produced and distributed by his and partner Maggie Renzi's company, The Anarchists' Convention.
10. See: Christina Lane, 'The Strange Days of Kathryn Bigelow and James Cameron'; and Steven Shaviro, "'Straight from the Cerebral Cortex": Vision and Affect in *Strange Days*'; both in: Deborah Jermyn & Sean Redmond (eds.) *The Cinema of Kathryn Bigelow: Hollywood Transgressor*, Wallflower Press, 2003.
11. See Robert Allen's and my comments on *V For Vendetta* in *Freedom* magazine, Vol. 67, No. 7, April 2006.

