

Editor's Note:

Hollywood and Liberalism

R. Colin Tait

"We know that polls are just a collection of statistics that reflect what people are thinking in 'reality,' and reality has a well-known liberal bias."

— Steven Colbert at the White House Correspondent's Dinner, 2006

Welcome to the third issue of *Cinephile*: The University of British Columbia's Film Journal. Our mandate involves considering this cinematic *zeitgeist*, while challenging the basic assumptions which permeate our field. We consider film studies an important emerging discourse, particularly when we consider the absolute dominance of visual culture in our society. Our current theme, "Hollywood and Liberalism," follows our tradition of addressing topics which engage the pressing issues of film, while at the same time proving its ongoing relevance to society at large.

In our shorthand culture, most often communicated through talking points, it seems natural to assume that Hollywood and Liberalism are synonymous concepts. However, even a brief look at the history of Hollywood demonstrates that the opposite is true. The institutional and systemic logic of "Hollywood" exists as a miniature version of U.S. Capital, embedded in the larger logic of the increasing corporatization of society. Historical events – ranging from the institutions self-censorship via the repressive and draconian policies of the Hays Code, McCarthyism, and the increasing spread of Hollywood as the dominant mode of world cinema – all speak to the essential fact of Hollywood's hegemony, not to mention its inherently conservative formal qualities.

It is the residents of Hollywood who perpetuate the myth of liberal Hollywood. The recent fundraising effort in Hollywood, where prominent Democratic presidential hopefuls kowtow to the "cultural elite," does nothing to separate the perception of this link, nor does the annual ritual of the Academy Awards. If anything, the metalinguistic entity known as Hollywood more often represents its precise opposite – a place where starlets get drunk and crash their (electric) cars. We must further consider that the films which stand for Hollywood's "liberal" efforts do not represent a significant fraction of the profits that Hollywood garners. Rather, they accounted for a mere 5% of the total American domestic gross. In short, we should recall that none of 2005's Best Picture Academy Award nominees – which included the most unabashedly "liberal" films in recent history – none of these nominees even came close to cracking the top 20 box-office earners for that year.

Dealing specifically with the semantics of "liberalism," our goal is to disentangle the term's popular meaning

by recontextualizing it within industrial, theoretical and historical terms. This endeavor entails repatriating and dislodging the political connotations of the word within the media as most often expressed in the historical conflation of "Commie" and "Pinko" respectively. It is imperative that we clarify that this enterprise aims not at reviving the now-defunct project of "political correctness" but rather for precision about the words we speak (and images that we trade in), in addition to dealing with the meaning-effects of these words and images. We propose that there needs to be space to let ideas breathe, and that this involves a nuanced discussion which exceeds either/or partisanship. As an exemplar of this mentality, the statement that anyone is either "with America or with the terrorists" only impoverishes the public sphere as it leaves room for only the one-dimensional left and right positions, ignoring ahead, behind, up, and down. The questioning of anything outside of the party lines of Left and Right, replete with accusations which begin with the empty signifier "anti" (American/Israeli/nationalist, etc.) only serves to greater undermine the idea of "freedom," by limiting and censoring everything we do and say in a democratic society.

We will illustrate this contemporary deadlock by investigating film's tangible industrial, ideological and metaphorical contributions to perpetuating and dispelling these myths. Until these positions are clarified and redefined, the current perception of both these discourses (conservative and liberal alike) are akin to the recent farcical (and scary) depiction of "The Jew" in Sacha Baron Cohen's film *Borat: Cultural Learnings for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, 2006. We propose that the rhetoric used to define both the liberal and the conservative is as absurdly propagandistic as *Borat's* monstrous othering of "the Jew" as a mythical egg-laying beast with claws and horns.

We are incredibly fortunate to have one of the world's prominent thinkers join us in our endeavor and are happy to present a new article by Slavoj Žižek in this issue. I cannot fully express my gratitude for this collegial gesture, and thank Professor Žižek endlessly for his contribution to our journal. It is only fitting that in an effort to clarify our positions within the field of public discourse that we follow Professor Žižek's recent imperatives to think before we speak, read before we write and learn before we do either.