



Network

1976, USA, Colour, Drama, Running time: 121 mins.
Rated U.

Directed by Sidney Lumet. Screenplay: Paddy Chayefsky
Cast: Peter Finch, William Holden, Faye Dunaway, Robert Duvall, Ned Beatty, Beatrice Straight .

First film in our 'Future from the Past' Season

Tuesday 23rd
Jan 2018 at
7.15 pm

Film essay by
Dominic
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(InFiFa) and
notes compiled
by Mark
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Welcome to INFIFA's first film in our 'Future from the Past' season. Aaron Sorkin, writer on 'The West Wing' amongst other productions, wrote that 'No predictor of the future, not even Orwell, has been as right as Chayefsky was when he wrote 'Network'.

This film was regarded on its release as brilliant, but 'an outrageous farce' (Leonard Maltin) or a 'messianic farce' by Pauline Kael, both influential critics of the time.

In 2005 George Clooney, after a screening to young film students, was surprised to discover that they did not read the film as a satire, but rather as a drama. What it had once depicted as a baleful warning regarding the nature of the media and its internal estimation of its value, had in the eyes of these students, actually come to pass.

So what is it that this film prophesises? That is one of the questions that I ask you to keep in mind as you watch this film.

What will you as an audience make of this film in today in 2018? When putting together films that could be read as predictors of the future that we are now living in, this film was the 'lynch-pin' in our selection. It made a terrific impression on the writer of this piece when he viewed it in the cinema in 1976, most especially in relation to power over others shifting into the hands of a limited number of power brokers, and how information is disseminated and shaped, both becoming ever more relevant.



In the John Ford film 'The Man who shot Liberty Valence' the journalist decides that 'when legend becomes fact, print the legend'. This film also suggests that what is important is not the truth, (shades of Jack Nicolson's famous line 'You couldn't handle the truth') but the ratings, because ratings means money and money means influence.

It garnered one of the largest Oscar hauls ever in terms of acting plaudits, (nominated for 10 Oscars) although it

something that sat badly with Lumet as the director.

The film affords a sensational performance from the Australian actor Peter Finch, who was far from the initial choice of the newsman who rants that 'He's mad as hell, and not going to take it anymore' which has gone down as one of the most famous lines in cinema history. Others actively considered were Henry Fonda, Glenn Ford, George C. Scott, (who never even read the screenplay) Gene Hackman and two actual newscasters, Walter Cronkite, and John Chancellor. Paul Newman, James Stewart (objected to the number of curse words), & Cary Grant were also in the frame initially. Interestingly William Holden, who plays a major role here as a TV executive, also turned down the Beale role. You might like to imagine how differently the film might have been if Finch had been denied his heart's wish to play the part. If Lumet had realised how advanced was the actor's heart condition he might have denied him the opportunity. As it was, in the 'Mad as Hell' speech Finch only did two takes (ultimately spliced together) as the performance was so exhausting for him Lumet recognised that to ask for a third take risked killing his leading actor.



Faye Dunaway, established from 'Bonnie and Clyde' also had plenty of competition for her role, which Chayefsky as the writer insisted was to be played as 'soulless' and Lumet promised that if she tried to do otherwise he would excise it in the editing suite. Her character was apparently based on an actual TV executive, Lin Bolen, which unsurprisingly Bolen always challenged. Although the Howard Beale character is the one who has come to represent the film in the memory of its viewers, the critic Roger Ebert asserts that it is actually the Dunaway character who is its heart, (albeit 'soulless') in her pursuit of ratings at any cost, including the promotion of a terrorist group. We may wish to consider the role that Isis play in the broadcast agenda of our nightly news, and perhaps even more to the point, to the coffers of Facebook, and Google on the internet.



Beatrice Straight won best supporting actress for her role as Louise Schumacher, notable as the shortest screen time, then and to this day, winning an Oscar at a record 5 minutes and 2 seconds. Incidentally,

Ned Beatty as Arthur Jensen, advised never turning down work as his one day of filming also earned him an Oscar nomination.

Two further points of interest when watching this film are to recognise the absence of any music; the only soundtrack comes in the form of screened commercials or the heralding theme music of the shows as they appear within the film.

Also the lighting, which is very subdued at the outset, almost in documentary style, then becoming ever more fully lit until by the finale it has achieved a fully-lit, 'slick' look at the end, a deliberate decision by Lumet to externalise the shift from serious news-casting to the entertainment brief, and the broadcast industry itself becoming newsworthy, a shift that this film suggests is taking place in the media industry.

The film has a place as a serious foretelling, having been cited in several serious academic explorations, such as James Parker's 'Madder than Hell-How 'Network' Anticipated Contemporary Media (published in 2014). InFifa have recently shown a number of Lumet pictures, some in a season of three of his films, but also, as here, as examples of various genres. Ebert suggests that due to Lumet's capacity to make movies in various styles his reputation is not that of an auteur, but he argues that in lesser hands this film 'might have flown to pieces'. Keep this in mind as you watch this landmark movie.

Our next screening.....Being There

The Second film in our.....Future from the Past Season



Eden Court Cinema

6th February 2018 at 7.15 pm

Hailed as a genius for his simplistic approach to life, an aging simplistic gardener called Chance (played by Sellers in a perhaps career best performance) rises, by accident, into the game of politics. The man is soon presented as a possible Presidential candidate although no one knows his true background. A fascinating, funny film from acclaimed director Hal Ashby



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