

EDITORIAL

The Best of Youth

After years of enduring alarmist jeremiads concerning “the death of cinema,” “the death of print criticism,” and “the death of celluloid,” film critics under thirty-five speak out against glib generalizations in “Film Criticism: The Next Generation,” this issue’s initial installment of a two-part Critical Symposium. As Mark Peranson observed in *Cinema Scope* #50, “[A] crisis in film criticism does not exist, as film criticism has never been in such a vibrant, healthy state, and should really be reconfigured as a crisis signaling the end of modern media (e.g., the newspaper, the alt-weekly).” Although George Bernard Shaw famously quipped, “Youth is wasted on the young,” it is also unquestionably true that the middle-aged and elderly often treat the younger generation with condescension and even contempt. In an effort to rectify facile notions that a generation that missed out on the days of repertory cinemas is doomed to cinematic ignorance, we’ve polled some of the most knowledgeable and savvy of the new crop of film critics. As a group, they appear to be as immersed in film culture as any of their distinguished elders; most became committed film addicts in their preteen years and retain voracious appetites for both classic cinema and innovative new films.

Our young critics all agree that the digital era has its downside—particularly the scarcity of archival 35mm prints in the age of DCP. Yet, despite disparate aesthetic and personal agendas, they nevertheless insist that the age of the Internet has engendered rich new opportunities for both independent critical voices and the cultivation of collective cinephilia. As Vadim Rizov (whose contribution is available on our Website as a Web Exclusive) points out, “The digital era’s effect on cinephilia has been rather dazzling...the sheer amount of information has increased exponentially...We may not have an indexical grasp of film history in all its aspects, but we’re much, much closer than before.” In a similar vein, Calum Marsh, age twenty-six, nonchalantly remarks that, “I take it for granted that I can find any Jacques Rivette movie I want online, and I take it for granted that I can find fifty people online who’d like to toss opinions and readings of *Out 1* back and forth with me.” Russian critic Boris Nelepo concludes, “New editions of DVDs continue to rewrite and complete the history of cinema before our very own eyes.”

Of course, you may ask, how can we have critical tastemakers in such a fractured media environment; where are today’s equivalents of Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael? According to *New Yorker* critic David Denby’s introduction to his recently published *Do the Movies Have a Future* (reviewed in this issue), “The thought of a film culture without widely read print critics standing between the marketing machine and the public is more than a little frightening.” While the “marketing machine” has certainly

not sucked in our brigade of youthful critics, they vehemently take exception to accusations that the perilous state of print criticism has triggered an irreversible erosion of critical standards. Even in the supposed “Golden Age” of criticism during the Sixties, intelligent writing on cinema was restricted to a handful of publications. Despite the inevitable accommodation of “niche interests” imposed by Internet culture, the efflorescence of critical commentary available today both in print and on the Web far exceeds what was available during the mid-twentieth century.

Our contributors, moreover, rightly emphasize that the critical landscape on the Web, while failing to provide a living wage to most critics, young or old, has the distinct advantage of promoting discussion of films—whether experimental, nonfiction, or merely obscure—that are frequently considered “marginal.” In his contribution (also available as a Web Exclusive), Leo Goldsmith, the coeditor of *The Brooklyn Rail*’s film section, confides that he “is very suspicious of the practice of publishing comprehensive coverage of major new releases. Justified by the (probably cynical) assumption that this is what readers are interested in or out of a sense of duty to weigh in on cinematic Zeitgeists, it is wholly unnecessary. Criticism should be a form of advocacy, not a gesture of reinforcement (even of the negative variety) of already amply funded publicity campaigns.”

While we have never asked to see birth certificates when submissions from new contributors are accepted for publication, we’ve later learned that many of our new freelance writers are members of the thirty-something or even the twenty-something demographic. Regular readers of this magazine will be well aware, then, that our Critical Symposium’s support of youthful critical brio does not entail any disregard for the virtues of age and experience. Like many other long-running publications, *Cineaste* has always found it easier, and editorially safer, to rely on more, shall we say, *mature* contributors, particularly our venerable staff members and tried-and-true freelance authors. Indeed, we have recently added a number of particularly accomplished contributors who comprise the new Contributing Writers category on our editorial masthead.

A respect for their elders, whether as mentors or role models, is expressed by many of the contributors to our Critical Symposium, including Andrew Tracy, who cites the ninety-something Stanley Kauffmann, *The New Republic*’s longtime staff film critic, as one of his major influences. In this spirit, we believe that young writers can revivify an occasionally petrified critical practice and that these young guns can, in turn, continue to appreciate and learn from their older colleagues. And all practitioners of the critical craft, young or old, should remember Oscar Wilde’s dictum, “An inordinate passion for pleasure is the secret of remaining young.”—**The Editors**

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Manufactured and Printed in
the United States of America

Cineaste (ISSN 0009-7004) is published quarterly at 243 Fifth Avenue, #706, New York, NY 10016, phone (212) 366-5720, www.cineaste.com, cineaste@cineaste.com. Subscription address: P.O. Box 2242, New York, NY 10009-8917. All articles represent views of their authors and not necessarily those of the editors. Copyright © 2013 by *Cineaste* Publishers, Inc. For permission to photocopy material from *Cineaste*, write to Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, info@copyright.com, www.copyright.com. *Cineaste* is available electronically through products and services provided by ProQuest LLC, 789 East Eisenhower Parkway, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346, www.proquest.com. This issue published in February 2013. Publication of *Cineaste* is made possible, in part, with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency.