

—and by focusing so intently on the ways that Anderson plays with his star's well-established comic persona, he gives short shrift to Emily Watson's performance and the way it arguably transcends a character located perilously close to manic-pixie-dream-girl land.

It's in the transition from *Magnolia* to *Punch-Drunk Love* to *There Will Be Blood* that Sperb makes his strongest connections, noting the importance and strange ambivalence toward salesmanship and consumer culture in all three movies—especially the latter, which mirrors its protagonist's hard-sell tactics in its judiciously excessive technique. Again working against the grain of many auteurist tributes, Sperb emphasizes the hugely collaborative aspects of *There Will Be Blood*, not only with regard to Daniel Day-Lewis—who comes off as an affable perfectionist—but also production designer Jack Fisk. He also does better than any critic I've read at explaining just how deeply ingrained the style and sensibility of Stanley Kubrick are in *There Will Be Blood* (if anybody else has pointed out the *Barry Lyndon* allusion of Daniel Plainview sullenly slashing his signature on a series of checks close to the end, I've missed it), which is why it's too bad that he misses the Kubrickian aspects of *The Master*, although this last section is obviously rushed and provisional—a pitfall of trying to take the long view on an active filmmaker. If one of Sperb's clear models for *Blossoms & Blood* is Robert Kolker's *A Cinema of Loneliness*—merely the finest book on commercial American filmmakers published in the last thirty years—then hopefully, like Kolker, he'll get a chance to revise his findings in a follow-up edition.—Adam Nayman

Mad as Hell:

The Making of Network and the Fateful Vision of the Angriest Man in the Movies

by Dave Itzkoff. New York: Times Books, 2014. 287 pp., illus. Hardcover: \$27.00.

Mad as Hell offers two books between one set of covers—a biography of Paddy Chayefsky and the story of the film *Network* (1976). Either subject could easily merit the attention of a single volume. Chayefsky, a colorful, combative writer who made his early reputation in 1950s live television drama, would go on to win three Academy Awards for his screenplays. *Network* was one of the great and ambitious films from the glory days of Seventies cinema.

Drawing on archival material and an avalanche of celebrity interviews, Dave Itzkoff, a culture reporter for *The New York Times*, has fashioned a breezy account that reads easily but does not do justice to either of its principals. About Chayefsky we learn many details—he wrote at an L-shaped desk, collected *National Geographic*, and sat

in Box 13, Row f, Seat 46 the night he picked up the Oscar for *Network*—but he never really comes to life. A more intimate sense of Chayefsky can be gleaned from glimpses of him caught in Sam Wasson's biography of Bob Fosse; Shaun Considine's 1994 biography remains the more comprehensive treatment of Chayefsky's life and work.

As for *Network*, Itzkoff dutifully traces the evolution of the film from one that was “dismissed in its day even by some of its admirers as an impossibly absurd satire,” yet now “does not play as a radical comedy so much as a straightforward...statement of fact.” But we already knew that. And given the opportunity to revisit the landmark, *Mad as Hell* routinely invokes trivial details, such the pronunciation of the word “emeritus” (which eventually had to be overdubbed), yet seldom pauses to interrogate deeper meanings.

Chayefsky was that rarest of Hollywood creatures—the powerful writer—who enjoyed enormous creative control over his productions. Both *Network* and his previous film, *The Hospital* (1971), feature the remarkable credit “by Paddy Chayefsky” as the final opening title, and Itzkoff covers in humorous detail the looming presence of the writer on set, leaning in to protect every word, his would-be shadow filled in by what the crew dubbed the “Paddy light.”

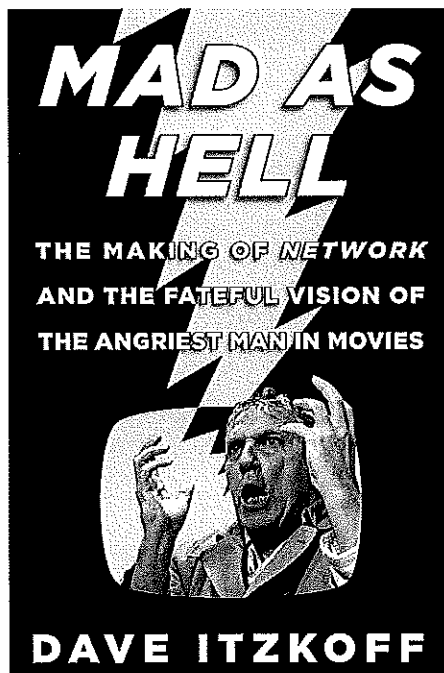
Such an approach invariably soft-pedals the contributions of other collaborators, such as director Sidney Lumet, but a larger problem with *Mad as Hell* is its incuriousness about what those artists were attempting to achieve in favor of gossip and anecdote. Itzkoff interviewed director of photography Owen Roizman, who, like Lumet, had worked on a number of gritty New York City location films. (Roizman shot

The French Connection, *Three Days of the Condor*, and *The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3*; Lumet had *The Anderson Tapes*, *Serpico*, and *Dog Day Afternoon* under his belt.) Yet, few insights are offered about *Network*'s ambitious visual style; instead Roizman shares the tale of Chayefsky and William Holden changing tables to join him for lunch—“they treated me like royalty.” Itzkoff does note the movie's three visual phases, naturalistic, realistic, and commercial, designed to match the progression of the story. But this observation and the few others like it come not from probing interviews but sources like *Making Movies*, Lumet's fine book.

There are some nuggets uncovered. Drawing on Chayefsky's papers to quote from early drafts, Itzkoff reveals how the clumsiness of some of these passages underscores the brilliance of the final product. Itzkoff also makes fine use of his interviews with Arthur Burghardt, who plays “The Great Ahmed Kahn,” the leader of the “Ecumenical Liberation Army.” And there is the laugh-out-loud story of how the New York Stock Exchange originally agreed to have Ned Beatty's big speech filmed at its Wall Street headquarters, only to withdraw after someone read the text. A spellbinding evangelical articulation of globalization decades before the term was coined (“There are no nations, there are no peoples,” there is only the market), apparently it hit too close to home.

Mad as Hell also notes an important curiosity—at the urging of the studio, Chayefsky dropped a scene in which Diana (Faye Dunaway) picks up a bisexual hustler in a gay bar and has an emotionally complex sexual encounter with him. But Itzkoff does not follow this lead, a choice that is consistent with his generally unconscionable treatment of Dunaway, an actress notorious for being difficult to work with. Itzkoff recounts every cheap and gratuitous shot—an expensive wig she purchased, tabloid accounts that noted her “crow's feet, laugh lines, and facial puffiness.” With regard to Dunaway's later struggles, he sees the need to share the claim of an anonymous source that she was dropped from one magazine cover because she had “simply become too fat.”

These distractions are not just unkind; they divert attention from a serious discussion of the actress and the film. *Mad as Hell* pauses on three separate occasions to elaborate fights over just how much (and which bits) of Dunaway's breasts might appear on screen. On Dunaway's “sudden display of modesty,” Itzkoff writes she had been seen “wearing just as little or less” in *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Chinatown* (if you must know, actually, not really in the former and barely in the latter). But, in any event, this “controversy” is given much more attention than is serious consideration of Dunaway's outstanding performance, and the dramatic choices made by one of the leading performers in one of the great roles of the 1970s.



Diana's navigation of her sexuality as a professional woman in a male-dominated business is one of the many important themes in *Network* that Itzkoff glosses over. Considine's study, for example, reports that the dropped sex scene was intended to immediately follow her triumphant speech at the convention. That scene, written to end in postcoital tears, would have further accentuated the movie's interest in complex questions about gender, sex, identity, and personal compromises.

Network is a film about which there is so much more to say. Hints of Watergate-era surveillance and paranoia shape the context of several scenes. This is also a film about aging, and the approach of death—in the first thirty minutes, Max Schumacher (Holden) twice tells a joke with the punch line, "You're young, you've got your whole life ahead of you"; his ally George Ruddy suffers a heart attack; "mad as hell" Howard Beale (Peter Finch), is told plainly he is "an old man." And with age comes *Network's* generational politics—television is not just dehumanizing; it establishes a divide between those who were brought up on it and those from an earlier era. The trajectory of Laureen Hobbs's black radical activist character captures the corroding influence of TV, invites further discussion of race and gender issues, and illustrates the principal underlying theme of the movie: the relentless encroachment of the market. The motivating conflict of the film is UBS's new corporate masters' insistence that the news division—traditionally a public service expected to lose money—become profitable, and, "accountable to network." *Mad as Hell's* celebrity commentators note the prophetic nature of the film, but tend to miss this central point. (To the contrary, Itzkoff explains that when Chayefsky did some work on *Reds* for Warren Beatty, the writer found it difficult because communism was "a system Chayefsky fervently believed was inferior to capitalism and destined for failure.")

There is an irony here. *Network* is a struggle between Max, the old-school reporter championing serious, thoughtful analysis, and Frank Hackett (Robert Duvall), who favors sex, stars, and gossip, because he wants nothing more than "a big, fat, big-titted hit," a line Itzkoff quotes twice. We're supposed to be rooting for Max. *Mad as Hell* reads like it was commissioned by Hackett.—Jonathan Kirshner

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