



Movie Time

James Combs

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Movie Time is a study of temporal mythmaking in American popular movies. The work is rooted in American pragmatic philosophy and contemporary traditions of inquiry in the social sciences and humanities. It proceeds on the premise that social beings and social orders are interested in the mediation of time, and attempt to make sense of their present world through the reconstruction of important pasts of interest in the present, develop new presents with the help of popular expressions which define new situations and responses for a new time, and foresee possible futures which impinge upon life in the here-and-now. In particular, the work focuses on the subsequent treatment of the American 1950's in films set in that era, beginning in the 1970's and continuing, with an effort to create a rough taxonomy of mythemes in such retrospective films, and why it is that future times would find the Fifties to be so important that people wish to revisit it. Too, the mediation of time includes the development of a new present, in this case the emergence of conservatism as a social force in the 1970's and beyond. The movies were an important form of expression in the dramatization of the conservative myth, leading to the pervasion of conservative leaders and ideologies into the new century. Finally, the unrealized but imminent future of the country and world was increasingly on people's minds, as both millennial hopes and fears and unanticipated threats began to emerge at century's end, so movies which anticipated alternative futures appeared in response to that prospective interest. It is hoped that this present inquiry will stimulate further work on the social relevance of popular expression and in particular the social mediation of time.

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