

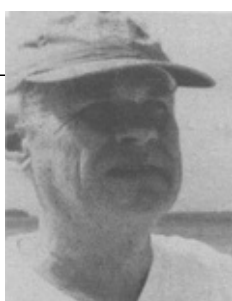
V I N T A G E

eBooks



The Studio

JOHN GREGORY DUNNE



John Gregory Dunne

THE STUDIO

John Gregory Dunne was born in Hartford, Connecticut, and attended Princeton University. He is the author of twelve books, including *Nothing Lost*; *Vegas*; *True Confessions*; *Dutch She* *Jr.*; *The Studio*; and *Playland*. He was a regular contributor to *The New York Review of Books* and *The New Yorker*. He died in 2003.

Also by JOHN GREGORY DUNNE

Nothing Lost

Monster

Playland

Crooning

Harp

The Red White and Blue

Dutch Shea, Jr.

Quintana and Friends

True Confessions

Vegas

Delano

THE STUDIO

John Gregory Dunne



VINTAGE BOOKS

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Introduction to the Vintage Edition

I tend to distrust, and almost never read, books about show business, in particular those about the motion picture community. Too many are written by people who secretly yearn to become communicants at the altar of fame where the religion of film is consecrated. Envy is the currency of such writers. The “warts and all” approach to which they gravitate (recognizing the readership value of the deep, if unsubstantiated, dish) generally means a warts, exposed of course in the interest of truth, thus evening the otherwise unequal equation between unknown author and too well-known subjects. The crimes and misdemeanors of personality tend to take precedence over the work; what is base is valued in these volumes more than what may be lasting. This is not to say that the sources themselves are without spirit or an agenda; there is nothing like the printed word, especially if it is unattributed, for massaging an ego, justifying a career, settling a score, or kissing an ass.

Most of these books belong to the literature of anecdote. Facts are unforgiving, while anecdotes are only factoids of questionable provenance, burnished to a high gloss and purged of nuance and subtext in the interest of keeping the narrative flowing. For best effect, they are usually set against gilded venues (or mean streets for contrary effect) and populated with the famous, the infamous, and the familiar, as if fame, infamy, gilded venues, and mean streets certified authenticity. Whether biographical or autobiographical, all anecdote is essentially self-aggrandizing, allowing the anecdotalist to bask in his or her own created (or someone else’s reflected) glory, and to demonstrate whatever it is in the anecdotalist’s interest to demonstrate, either for his or her own good fortune, or someone else’s ill fortune (an equally winning hand under certain propitious conditions). Since these anecdotes are usually provided by professional storytellers, the not altogether unbecoming result is that the stories show folk tell about themselves have the shorthand sense of being scenes from a screenplay, with dialogue, set decoration, and camera movements. In such circumstances, the narrative is all, and truth an acceptable casualty.

What makes accurate books about the machinery of the movie business so rare is the difficulty of obtaining access. For all their grandiosity, for all their ability to infuriate, movie people are rarely stupid. What they cannot control they do not trust, and a reporter with access they view as others might a terrorist. I have a friend, a producer of some significance who kept getting calls from the press (or “the media,” as movie people invariably call the press) during the production of one of his pictures; was there trouble and temperament on the set between his stars? Absolutely not, he would tell each reporter, but have you heard what’s happening on the Streisand picture? In a single call, he both averted investigation of his troubled set, and, by pointing the reporter toward another troubled set, won a marker he could perhaps later redeem.

I have no idea why Richard Zanuck gave me free access to Twentieth Century Fox while I was researching *The Studio*. I am sure that Lillian Ross, the author of *Picture*, has no idea why Dore Schary and John Huston let her have the run of the set and the MGM offices and cutting rooms during the production of *The Red Badge of Courage*. And sure also that Julie Salamon wonders why no one realized that her presence on the set of *The Bonfire of the Vanities* was

counter to their best interests as she recorded what became *The Devil's Candy*. In each instance, I suspect, a combination of hubris and aberrant behavior. With no false modesty, let me say that *Picture*, *The Devil's Candy*, and *The Studio* are the three best books outsiders have written about how American movies are made. The debt that Ms. Salamon and I owe Lillian Ross is incalculable; she did it first, seventeen years before I did *The Studio*, forty years before Ms. Salamon wrote *The Devil's Candy*: she proved it could be done—if you had the access.

If there is one thing these three books have in common, it is the respect they have gained for the people who make pictures. It is brutally hard work, sixteen-to-eighteen-hour days, seven days a week, and the closer a picture edges toward disaster, the harder the filmmakers work to prevent it. There are no surprises: everyone can smell a stiff in the making. Having worked myself in the movie business as a screenwriter for nearly thirty years, I know now there is something I missed in *The Studio*. It is easy to report, and to make light of, the feuds and duplicity, the alliances and conspiracies, that occur on every movie. It is another thing altogether to be part of them, to be overcome with the rages brought about by some minor malfeasance, or even by not getting your own way. Tension is the given of any movie, and it has less to do with ego than with the intensity of short-term relationships, a lifetime lived in a seventy day shoot; if there are location romances, there are also equal irrational location hatreds.

I missed that, but otherwise *The Studio* is not half bad.

New York
August 1997

Foreword

I finished *The Studio* in the summer of 1968, but it was ten years before I actually read it. I did not read it in manuscript, I did not read it in galleys, I did not read it after it was bound. I disliked the book and at one point asked my publisher not to publish it.

I suppose the main reason that I disliked *The Studio* was that it was the only book I have ever written that went exactly according to plan. Before I started, I knew the voice I wanted: the omniscient cool narrator. I knew the style I wanted: short takes, shifting among a whole range of onstage and offstage characters. I knew where I wanted the book to start (at the annual stockholders' meeting) and I knew where I wanted it to end (at the premiere of the major motion picture). I needed only access; if I got the access, I knew I had the book.

The access was granted by Richard D. Zanuck, who was then the vice-president in charge of production at Twentieth Century Fox. There was no reason for him to give it to me, and to this day I do not know why he did; the nature of reporting is such that it certainly was not to his advantage to let me, or any reporter, see the inner workings of his studio. But Richard Zanuck did not hesitate for more than a moment after I proposed that he give me the run of the place. He called in his secretary and dictated a memo to all producers and department heads telling them to give me all the assistance I wanted. If they thought any information was privileged, they were to tell me it was off the record, or ask me to leave the room, location, or set. It is an indication of the access I enjoyed that I was put "on hold" only once in the months I was at the studio.

I was given a parking space and an office, and a secretary to type my notes. I never availed myself of the last perquisite. It was several weeks before the personnel at the studio were comfortable in my presence, but after that I became as anonymous as a piece of furniture. My notebook was always out and visible, but I rarely took notes. After a meeting, I would race back to my office and transcribe the scene I had just witnessed—always in dramatic form; if a meeting or a confrontation was running long, I would duck into the men's room and jot down the things I wished to remember. Because I wanted no complaints that I had suckered anyone, I always identified myself and what I was doing.

Some months after I began my research, the studio's vice president in charge of public relations came out to California from his headquarters in New York. He was appalled at the access I had been given and ordered it stopped. At a meeting in his office, he offered to buy me off, to make it "worth my while" to let the studio have editorial control over my book. I refused, I would not be let back on the lot. I was in a quandary. I had no intention of giving up editorial control of the book, but at the same time I needed two set pieces—the premiere of *Dr. Doolittle* in Minneapolis and the picture's premiere in Los Angeles—to complete the research on the book. I asked to see Richard Zanuck.

We had seen each other nearly every day I was at the studio, sometimes at lunch (I had a standing invitation at his table in the commissary), sometimes at dailies (I also had a standing invitation to watch the rushes with him). I told him that I could not in good conscience give him veto over the book and that, if that were the condition, I would pack it in. I suspect he wondered if I already had enough material to make a book; I also suspect he thought the

throwing me off the lot at that late date would make any book I wrote less amiable. He finally asked if he could read the manuscript and make suggestions that I would be under no obligation to follow. I agreed. He ultimately asked me to delete three minor references. One—a producer’s bad rapping of an actor—my lawyer had already said was libelous; the other two would have complicated Zanuck’s divorce proceedings from his first wife. I made the deletions he requested.

The Studio was simplicity itself to write. It was mainly a matter of transcribing and rearranging my notes. That there were no surprises—I knew exactly what I was going to do—was for me the problem. Writing is essentially donkey work, manual labor of the mind. What makes it bearable are those moments (which sometimes can last for weeks, months) when the book takes over, takes on a life of its own, goes off in unexpected directions. There were no detours like that in *The Studio*. My notes were like plans for a bridge. Writing the book was like building that bridge.

When I finally read *The Studio*—I had picked it up because I had to check something in it—I was surprised at how much I enjoyed it. In the decade since I finished it, I myself had worked extensively in the movie business. Indeed, the first picture I wrote was for Richard Zanuck and Twentieth Century Fox. “Look,” he told the producer, “do you mind if we don’t mention *The Studio* in the announcement? It would make my life simpler.” He remains the best executive I have met in the movie business, forceful and decisive. If he makes a wrong decision (and I think he might like to reconsider opening up Fox to me), he sticks by it, never apologizing, never explaining. That I had written *The Studio* was one thing; that I had now written a screenplay ready to go into production was another altogether.

If I were writing *The Studio* today, I would probably be more compassionate, but that is a factor of age and experience. The story of Henry Koster’s meeting with Zanuck troubles me more than anything in the book, yet I think I would probably still put it in: a fact of the movie business is that people are used and discarded like so many wads of Kleenex. I would also change a nuance here and a nuance there, largely because I am convinced that it is impossible for anyone who had never worked in the movie business to understand the dynamics of any given picture. But on the whole, I am surprised and a little gratified at how accurate the portrait remains. In some circles, it is an article of faith that Hollywood is dead, the studios extinct. To which I can only say rubbish. Movies must still be financed and distributed, and they are still largely financed and wholly distributed by the major motion picture companies. If there are fewer pictures, the stakes are higher. A film like *Star Wars* can redeem the mistakes of ten years. Richard Zanuck was fired by his father at Fox; he went to Warner Brothers and was fired there. He formed an independent production company, went to Universal and co-produced *Jaws*, which probably has made more money than all the films his father produced personally in a lifetime.

Hollywood is a technological crapshoot. Table stakes open at a million dollars. It was true in 1968, it is true now.

I suppose that is why after seventeen years I like *The Studio* now. I got it right.

Los Angeles
January 1985

The characters

DARRYL F. ZANUCK, president, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

RICHARD D. ZANUCK, his son, executive vice president in charge of world-wide production
Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

And in Alphabetical Order

MORT ABRAHAMS, associate producer of *Dr. Dolittle*

IRWIN ALLEN, a science-fiction entrepreneur

JULIE ANDREWS, a film star

EDWARD ANHALT, a screenwriter

ARMY ARCHERD, a gossip columnist

TED ASHLEY, president of the Ashley-Famous Artists Agency

GEORGE AXELROD, a Renaissance Man

JACK BAUR, assistant head of the Studio's casting department

PANDRO S. BERMAN, a film producer

JOEY BISHOP, a television personality

JACQUELINE BISSET, an actress

PAUL BLOCH, press agent

JOHN BOTTOMLY, technical advisor on *The Boston Strangler*

LESLIE BRICUSSE, scenarist-composer-lyricist, *Dr. Dolittle*

DAVID BROWN, husband of Helen Gurley Brown and the Studio's vice president in charge of story
operations

ROBERT BUCKNER, producer

REGGIE CALLOW, assistant director of *Star!*

CAROL CHANNING, an actress

GEORGE CHASIN, partner in the Park-Chasin-Citron Agency

CHER, as in "Sonny & Cher"

CURT CONWAY, New Talent School

GARY CONWAY, a television actor

ALEXANDER COURAGE, co-arranger of the score of *Dr. Dolittle*

TONY CURTIS, a film star

PAMELA DANOVA, New Talent School

BOBBY DARIN, singer

JOHN DE CUIR, production designer of *Hello, Dolly!*

JAMES DENTON, the Studio's head of West Coast publicity

BOB DENVER, an actor

ABE DICKSTEIN, the Studio's head of domestic sales

LOU DYER, a Studio press agent

JAMES FISHER, the Studio's West Coast story editor

BERNARD FLATOW, head of Latin American publicity

RICHARD FLEISCHER, director of *Dr. Dolittle* and *The Boston Strangler*

HENRY FONDA, a film star

KURT FRINGS, an agent

WILLIAM FROUG, a television writer

ROBERT FRYER, producer of *The Boston Strangler*

PHIL GERSH, an agent

HAPPY GODAY, a song plugger

JOYCE HABER, a gossip columnist

SHEILA HACKETT, assistant to Michael Kidd

LINDA HARRISON, an actress in the New Talent School

REX HARRISON, a film star

HARVEY HART, director of *The Sweet Ride*

DALE HENNESY, a Studio art director

HAL HERMAN, television production manager

CHARLTON HESTON, a film star

JACK HIRSHBERG, a Studio press agent

STANLEY HOUGH, head of the Studio's production department

ARTHUR P. JACOBS, producer of *Dr. Dolittle*

GENE KELLY, director of *Hello, Dolly!*

MICHAEL KIDD, choreographer of *Star!* and *Hello, Dolly!*

HENRY KOSTER, director of *A Hundred Men and a Girl*

ERNEST LEHMAN, writer-producer of *Hello, Dolly!*

PERRY LIEBER, former head of West Coast publicity

FRANK MC CARTHY, a film producer and friend of General Omar Bradley

MARY ANN MC GOWAN, secretary to Richard Zanuck

HARRY MC INTYRE, a Studio executive

BARBARA MC LEAN, head of the Studio's cutting department

OWEN MC LEAN, head of the Studio's casting department

TED MANN, a Minnesota theater magnate

IRVING MANSFIELD, husband of Jacqueline Susann

DANIEL MASSEY, an actor

ARNOLD MAXIN, a music publisher

LOUIS MERMAN, assistant head of the Studio's production department

PAUL MONASH, a film and television producer

FRANK NEILL, a Studio press agent

LIONEL NEWMAN, head of the Studio's music department

JOE PASTERNAK, producer of *The Sweet Ride*

DAVID RAPHEL, vice president in charge of international sales

DON RECORD, a title designer

JERRY REYNOLDS, an engineer from the Boeing Aircraft Corporation

JONAS ROSENFELD, the Studio's vice president in charge of publicity

ED ROTHMAN, an agent for Ashley-Famous Artists Agency

FRANKLIN SCHAFFNER, director of *Planet of the Apes*

IRENE SHARAFF, costume designer of *Hello, Dolly*

RICHARD SHEPHERD, an agent for Creative Management Associates

SPYROS SKOURAS, chairman of the board, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

MILT SMITH, a Studio press agent

HARRY SOKOLOV, executive assistant to Richard Zanuck

SONNY, as in "Sonny & Cher"

BARBRA STREISAND, a film star

JACQUELINE SUSANN, an authoress

NATALIE TRUNDY, friend to Arthur Jacobs

DAVID WEISBART, producer of *Valley of the Dolls*

ELMO WILLIAMS, producer of *Tora, Tora, Tora*

ROBERT WISE, director of *Star!*

EVARTS ZIEGLER, partner in the Ziegler-Ross Agency

FRED ZINNEMANN, a film director

“As a story it was reasonable enough to pass, and I sometimes believed what I said and tried to take the cure in the very real sun of Desert D’Or with its cactus, its mountain, and the bright green foliage of its love and its money.”

Norman Mailer, *The Deer Park*

1

“And now he’s working for me,”

Darryl Zanuck said

Shortly after two o’clock on the afternoon of May 16, 1967, Darryl F. Zanuck stepped out of an elevator on the eighteenth floor of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. He was wearing sunglasses and smoking a large black cigar and in the lapel buttonhole of his well-tailored blue blazer was the rosette of the *Legion d’Honneur*. In his wake, stopping when he stopped, walking when he walked, trailed a convoy of equally well-tailored men in the employ of the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, over whose annual stockholder meeting Zanuck was scheduled to preside that afternoon in the Waldorf’s Starlight Room. Leading the convoy, but a half step behind his father, the dauphin to the king, was Zanuck’s only son, Richard Darryl Zanuck, a member of the board of directors of the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and the Studio’s Los Angeles-based executive vice president in charge of world-wide production.

As Darryl Zanuck entered the meeting room, a number of stockholders rose and began to applaud. The elder Zanuck paid no attention, and he seated the young woman with him, a slender French girl in a green silk Pucci dress, in a chair at the rear of the room. Then he headed for the dais, shaking hands with board members and embracing old friends as he went. Over the dais hung the green, gold and black flag of the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. Already in his place at the end of the front table on the dais was Fox’s chairman of the board, Spyros P. Skouras. During the years when Darryl Zanuck held the same post his son holds now, Skouras had chaired these annual meetings, but on this afternoon, he sat impassively, looking like an aging white-maned lion, his hands folded in front of him.

Darryl Zanuck took his place at the lectern, his son in a chair immediately to his right. The cigar was still implanted in Darryl Zanuck’s mouth. “Well, here we go again,” he said to Richard Zanuck. The microphone picked up his nasal Nebraska twang and there was a titter from the audience. Darryl Zanuck glared impatiently and then called the meeting to order, placing the agenda in front of him. Suddenly he stopped and took off his sunglasses.

“Are these the right goddamn glasses?” he said. “For Christ’s sake, no.”

He replaced the sunglasses with reading glasses and began to introduce the members of the board and Studio executives sitting on the double-tiered dais. When he came to his son, he stopped, fumbling for effect: “On my right, I can’t remember his name, heh, heh, now I’ve got it, Richard Zanuck.”

There was an appreciative laugh from the audience. Darryl Zanuck continued the

introductions. "At the end of the table, a man—I worked for him once, I overthrew him once, I took the company away from him once, and now he's working for me, but I still have the greatest affection for him, Mr. Spyros Skouras."

Spyros Skouras did not move a muscle.

Each stockholder attending the meeting had been provided with a thirty-two-page four-color annual report which attested to Twentieth Century Fox's robust financial health. *The Sound of Music*, with a gross approaching \$100 million, was the most successful film in motion picture history, there were over thirty other feature films in various stages of production, and the television department had ten shows totaling nine hours of prime-time viewing on the network airwaves. Gross revenues of the company were \$227,259,000 for fiscal 1966, earnings before taxes \$23,763,000, net earnings after taxes \$12,504,000, earnings per share of stock \$4.28. Richard Zanuck's salary was \$150,000 with an additional \$150,000 a year deferred; one television producer was being paid \$435,000 a year, another \$365,000 a year.

With the reading of the financial statement, the meeting was thrown open for questions. There were no complaints from the stockholders. A resolution was introduced praising Darryl Zanuck for his running of the company. Less than two hours after it began, the annual meeting of the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation was adjourned.

Five years before, the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation had been flat on its back. In 1962, Fox lost \$39.8 million after taxes, and in the three preceding years the company had lost an additional \$48.5 million in feature film production. To keep itself going, the Studio had sold 260 of its 334 acres just outside Beverly Hills to the Aluminum Company of America for \$43 million. In Rome, production had started on *Cleopatra*, which began to sop up money faster than Fox could pour it in. The Studio was dying. Bankruptcy threatened, the sound stages were closed, the parking lots were empty. Spyros Skouras was fired as president, and Darryl Zanuck, after first threatening a proxy fight, was elected to take his place and save the sinking ship.

The reversal of fortunes of the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation had long interested me, for the vicissitudes of that studio seemed to suggest not only the *modi operandi* of all studios, of all motion picture people, but something else as well: I had the feeling that by spending some time at the Studio I could get close to the texture of life in the subtropical abstraction that used to be called The Motion Picture Capital of the World; that by watching motion picture people at work I could see and perhaps understand their ethic. I had been exposed to the motion picture industry at oblique angles ever since I arrived in Los Angeles in 1964, and some of its working arrangements seemed to me far more magical than that glamour for which the Industry was noted: there was the way in which failure escalated the possibilities of success, the way in which price bore no relation to demand. There was the way in which millions of dollars were gambled on ephemeral, unpredictable and uncomfortably often, invalid ideas of marketability. There was the way that many, perhaps most, people in the Industry remained unconscious of their own myths and superstitions. There was the Eldorado mood of life in the capital, the way in which social and economic fortunes could shoot up or plummet down, as in a mining boom town, on no more than rumors, the hint of a rich vein, the gossip that the lode was played out.

All this seemed interesting to me, and not entirely for its own sake: the truly absorbing

aspect of the motion picture ethic, of course, is that it affects not only motion picture people but almost everyone alive in the United States today. By adolescence, children have been programmed with a set of responses and life lessons learned almost totally from motion pictures, television and the recording industry. It is difficult to banish the notion of one's own life situations as part of a scenario, appropriately scored: "Lara's Theme" for an ill-starred love, "Colonel Bogey's March" for indomitable courage, "Waltzing Mathilda" for bittersweet apocalypse. Few situations fail to evoke a cinematic response; in matters of principle we play *High Noon*, in renunciation scenes *Casablanca*. ("Walter, Barton T. Keyes is a great man," Edward G. Robinson says about himself to Fred MacMurray in *Double Indemnity*, and whenever I am feeling particularly pleased with myself, the line comes back.) In picture there is no problem without a solution: the Mafia has been cut down to size at every studio, from Burbank to Culver City; Gregory Peck has personally taken on anti-Semitism, the Bombs and Southern bigotry, licked them all, and we all feel, however spuriously, the better for it.

Movies, moreover, have given most Americans their entire fix on how other Americans live. How many of us grew up thinking of the medical profession in terms of *Not As a Stranger*, of the literary life as *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, of heroin addiction as *The Man with the Golden Arm*? The South was *Gone with the Wind*, and later *The Long Hot Summer*; the Catholic priesthood, *Going My Way*. For the socially mobile, movies have constituted an infinitely accessible, if infinitely inaccurate, primer in traditional social behavior. This very inaccuracy of social milieu in Hollywood pictures—the rich in Southampton do not wear white dinner jackets in the summer (*From the Terrace*), United States Senators do not drive Rolls-Royces (*Seven Days in May*), army officers do not salute as if they are hailing a cab, nor do they allow enlisted men to call them by their first names (any picture about the military—seemed to suggest that Hollywood lives at a considerable remove from the rest of the society, lives and thrives entirely on its own myths. In some ways Hollywood seemed a perfect example of a closed and inbred society, and the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, not long ago on the brink of ruin, now the most successful studio in Hollywood itself shored up by all the basic tenets of the Industry, seemed the best place to observe it in action.

And so, some time ago, I arranged to follow the Studio's activities over the course of a single year, to see how some of the people there got along, got ahead, fell behind, stayed in place, and, above all, fabricated the myth. What I hoped to find at the end of that year was something of the state of mind called Hollywood.

The day I arrived in the small austere lobby of Fox's administration building in Los Angeles, an elderly Studio policeman stood guard behind a glassed enclosure, examining each person entering the building before pressing a button opening the door into the Studio's inner sanctum. Beside him was a clipboard on which was written:

North Reception

Pico Time Gate

Okays for Monday March 22

26 musicians Stage 1, 1 P.M.

New Gate Okays

Alex Cord—actor

Gila Golan—actress

Sonia Roberts TV writer will be in 22 Old Writers

Peggy Shaw TV writer will be in 21 Old Writers

The following will be pulled from files

Thomas, Jerry—TV writer

Richard Zanuck's office is just across the hall from his father's, but at that time, the elder Zanuck had not once returned to Hollywood since he had taken over the Studio. He preferred to remain in New York where the books are kept and the financial decisions made, leaving the picture making to his son. The suite occupied by Richard Zanuck is cavernous. It is dark paneled and on the wall hang art department sketches of forthcoming Fox productions. Behind his desk, in a gold frame, there is a color photograph of his ex-wife, Lili, and their two daughters, Virginia and Janet, as well as two pairs of bronzed baby shoes. There is no hint of show business in the office, no framed *Variety* headlines, no pictures of movie stars with fulsome messages of endearment, no sentimental props from old Fox films. On the mantel over the fireplace there is a four-clock console, showing the time in Los Angeles, New York, London and Paris, and in the adjoining bar-dressing room are leatherbound scripts of all the pictures Fox has made since Richard Zanuck took over as production chief. The anonymity of the office is in a way reflective of what it means today to be a production chief in the new Hollywood, dominated as it is by the independent producers. As much as is possible, Richard Zanuck tries to function by the rules prevailing in Hollywood before the independents took over, guarding Fox's slowly eroding right to shape every picture from story conference to cutting room. But it is virtually impossible today for a production chief to put his personal stamp on a picture in the way that Darryl Zanuck did. He is, in many ways, a traffic manager whose flexibility of action is far more limited than that of, say, the chief executive of an automobile company. Instead of assembling a "package"—story, talent, director, producer—he is more apt to be *presented* with one, take it or leave it. If he takes, which means putting up the money and providing the facilities, and he ends up with a *Lord Jim*—Hollywood equivalent of the Edsel—his job is in jeopardy, although he had almost nothing to do with the making of the picture.

Richard Zanuck shook my hand and asked his secretary to bring us each a cup of coffee. He is a tightly controlled man with the build of a miniaturized halfback, twelve-month tapering receding brown hair and manicured fingernails that are chewed to the quick. He has hesitant blue eyes, a quick embarrassed smile and a prominent jaw whose muscles he reflexively keeps knotting and unknotting. He was wearing a monogrammed Sulka shirt and a gray hopsack suit. He blew on his coffee to cool it, and as he sipped, he reflected on the state of the Studio when he took over in 1962.

The demise of Fox had actually begun a half dozen years before, in 1956, when Darryl

Zanuck had resigned as vice president in charge of production. The elder Zanuck was tycoon in Hollywood when the title carried with it feudal power and virtual *droit de seigneurie*. He came out of Nebraska after World War I, parlayed a novel which was underwritten by patent medicine maker into a Hollywood writing job, wrote a series of films for Rin Tin Tin, became production chief at Warner Brothers at twenty-four, and founded Twentieth Century Fox with Joseph Schenk at thirty-one. "He has so many yes-men following him around the Studio," Fred Allen once observed, "he ought to put out his hand when he makes a sharp turn," but he won three Academy Awards and two Irving Thalberg Awards and came closer to the ideal of Thalberg (the prototype of Scott Fitzgerald's last tycoon, Monroe Stahr) than any other Hollywood mogul.

But the advent of television, in 1948, had changed the face of Darryl Zanuck's Hollywood. Weekly audiences shrank from a peak of 90 million customers in the halcyon days to 30 million, and feature film production fell from a high of 600 a year to less than 150. With production so sharply curtailed, the studios were no longer able to keep under contract a complete roster of stars, producers, directors and writers. Independent producers moved in to fill the void and agents became the new czars of Hollywood, allocating to their clients the profits and perquisites that once had belonged solely to the studios. The changes dismayed Darryl Zanuck, and he quit as Fox's production chief, went to Paris and formed an independent production company. Richard Zanuck joined him there as a story and production assistant.

The younger Zanuck was born in 1934. There was no paternal coddling. Even when his son was a child, Darryl Zanuck took delight in trouncing him at checkers. Nor was Richard Zanuck allowed to win a point at badminton until he was big enough to ram the shuttlecock down his father's throat. He attended Harvard Military School in Los Angeles and after that graduated from Stanford. Summers he worked at the Studio, first on the labor gang and in the editing room, then in the advertising department in New York, and finally in Paris, as his father's assistant. In 1959, tied up in Africa with another picture, Darryl Zanuck gave his son a chance to produce *Compulsion*, a fictional re-enactment of the Leopold-Loeb case. Richard Zanuck brought *Compulsion* in under budget, ahead of schedule and good enough for its two stars, Bradford Dillman and Dean Stockwell, to win best acting awards at the Cannes Film Festival.

Meanwhile, back in the U.S., Twentieth Century Fox had fallen on lean days. Management was ineffectual and the production reins finally passed to Spyros Skouras, the Greek theater owner and company president who had always been content in the past to watch the books and let Darryl Zanuck supervise the picture making. At a time when other studios were retrenching in the face of television, Skouras pushed through dud after dud; with the sale of the back lot and the debacle of *Cleopatra*, the company was in a state of financial ruin. Then, after repeated absences, Marilyn Monroe was fired off a picture called *Something's Got to Give* and she went home and not too long afterward committed suicide. The picture was scrapped for a \$2 million loss. It was the last straw. The board of directors issued a terse, three-paragraph announcement saying Skouras had been forced to "resign" because of "ill health."

From his headquarters in Paris, Darryl Zanuck, who was drawing a \$150,000 annual consultant's fee from Fox, watched the company scramble for a new management. His family's large bloc of Fox stock—something in the vicinity of 100,000 shares—seemed in danger of going down the drain, as did his own production of the World War II epic, *The*

Longest Day, which he had planned to release through Fox as a hard-ticket, roadshow picture but which the panicked studio was preparing to saturation-book across the country. "I looked around for someone to recommend to them," he said later, "but found no one who would be an improvement." Except himself.

Zanuck's announcement of his candidacy stirred no enthusiasm on the board of directors which was concerned with his profligate ways in both his business and private lives, and lines were drawn for a proxy fight. The prospect of a destructive proxy battle, however, was far less tolerable to Fox stockholders than the return of Darryl Zanuck. Whatever his faults—and his rivals took pains to chronicle in detail Zanuck's romantic interludes and the millions he spent in abortive efforts to make stars out of such former consorts as Bella Darvi and Juliet Greco—Zanuck at least offered a lifetime of film knowhow, experience totally lacking in the bankers and brokers who opposed him. The stockholders threw their support to Zanuck and the board backed down, naming him president and relegating Skouras to the figurehead position of chairman of the board. There was still the matter of the new production chief. "D.Z. asked me who I thought was best qualified," Richard Zanuck recalls. "And I told him. Me."

Immediately after taking over as president, Darryl Zanuck shut the Studio down, fired most of its personnel, and threw out all the story properties bought by the previous management. The only production activity was one television show then in the dying days of its run. "It was desperate," Richard Zanuck said. There is a strained quality in his voice that becomes a slight rasp when he gets impatient. "There were only about fifty people here—everyone else had been canned—and we just sat around looking at each other. We closed down the commissary to save money, and everyone—secretaries, producers, carpenters—ate lunch in a little electricians' shed. It's an awful thing to say, but things were so tight, we were trying to figure out ways to get another janitor off the payroll."

Zanuck fingered one of the bronze baby shoes. There were charges when he took over the Studio that his appointment was due only to Hollywood's tribal law of primogeniture. The accusations of nepotism did not disturb him. "Quite frankly, naming me as production chief made a lot of sense," he said, draining the cup of coffee. "As the largest stockholders, my family stood to lose the most if the company went under. What nearly killed this company was the politics, the antagonism between the money people in the East and the picture people out here. With D.Z. in New York and me out here, that antagonism is gone now."

Like almost everyone brought up in the movie industry, Richard Zanuck is almost immune to the world outside. He reads voraciously, but mainly scripts, and his mind is a veritable encyclopedia of plots, gimmicks and story angles. No detail escapes his attention. "How about a midget for the shoeshine boy?" he asks the director of a thriller. "There's something insidious about a midget." A producer's suggestion that an actor in a Western wear a mustache gets a quick veto. "We had a picture here once, *The Gunfighter*, with Greg Peck, and it bombed out. You know why? Peck wore a mustache." (Zanuck was thirteen when *The Gunfighter* was released.) He mentions a Gary Cooper comedy shot at the Studio years before. "Good picture," he says, "but small hat. You could never put Coop in a small hat and get your money back."

The two Zanucks keep in close contact, communicating by telephone and teletype several times daily. "In the old days, my father could staff and cast a picture in minutes from the card file listing everyone under contract," Richard Zanuck said. "Nowadays, planning

picture takes longer than making one. Jesus, you spend hours fighting with agents over billing, salary, fringe benefits, start dates, stop dates, the works.” He leaned back in his chair and ran his finger across his hairline. “D.Z. doesn’t have the temperament for this sort of thing,” he said. “His inclination was always to throw an agent out of his office. Not me. I like to wheel and deal.”

Several days later, Richard Zanuck asked me to come by his office as he demonstrated his capacity for wheeling and dealing. He was slumped at his desk, picking at his fingernails with a letter opener. With him was Owen McLean, the studio’s executive casting director, a heavy-set, round-faced man whose lips are set firmly against his teeth. “Agents always travel in pairs,” Zanuck explained, nodding at McLean. “You can’t play a lone hand against them. You’ve got to have someone backing you up, taking notes.” His lips parted in a quick smile. “Just in case.”

His secretary buzzed and announced that agents Evarts Ziegler and Richard Shepherd were in the outer office. There was a minimum of small talk as the agents entered the office. The project under discussion involved Paul Newman, director Martin Ritt and the husband-wife writing team of Irving Ravetch and Harriet Frank, Jr., the quartet responsible for the hugely successful *Hud*. Their new project was a Western called *Hombre*, the story of a white man who preferred to live among the Indians and who against his will came out into the white man’s world. The meeting had certain ritual aspects. The game lay in not yielding a point too easily, in dreaming up new demands just as a detail appeared settled. No one seemed to think it extraordinary that the two agents began by demanding \$1.3 million for the four people and the package.

There was no argument over Newman: \$750,000 against 10 per cent of the gross until the picture showed a profit. After that, a piece of the profits.

Then the Ravetches. “They get \$150,000 a picture,” said Ziegler, a smooth, expensive-tailored man who doodled constantly with a gold pencil.

Zanuck agreed without comment.

“Irving is going to co-produce,” Ziegler said. “That’s fifty more.”

Zanuck looked up quickly. “It was twenty-five the other day,” he said. “You changed the figures.”

“Not changed,” Ziegler replied. He searched for the proper word. “Corrected.”

“No,” Zanuck said.

Ziegler doodled a row of zeros on a piece of paper and without looking up said, “Richard Zanuck is being cold to me.”

Zanuck shrugged. Ziegler did not argue the point.

The longest discussion was over Ritt. He had once been under contract to Fox and the Studio was now suing him for failure to live up to that contract’s provisions. All film companies file charges almost promiscuously, since a lawsuit is a potent bargaining tool in any subsequent negotiations. Few of the suits ever come to trial.

Painfully earnest, with furrowed brow, Shepherd opened for \$350,000 for Ritt. Zanuck laughed.

“He’s getting \$300,000 for his current picture,” Shepherd said.

Zanuck picked up the letter opener and laughed again. Shepherd agreed to cut Ritt’s price to \$250,000, if Fox dropped the lawsuit.

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