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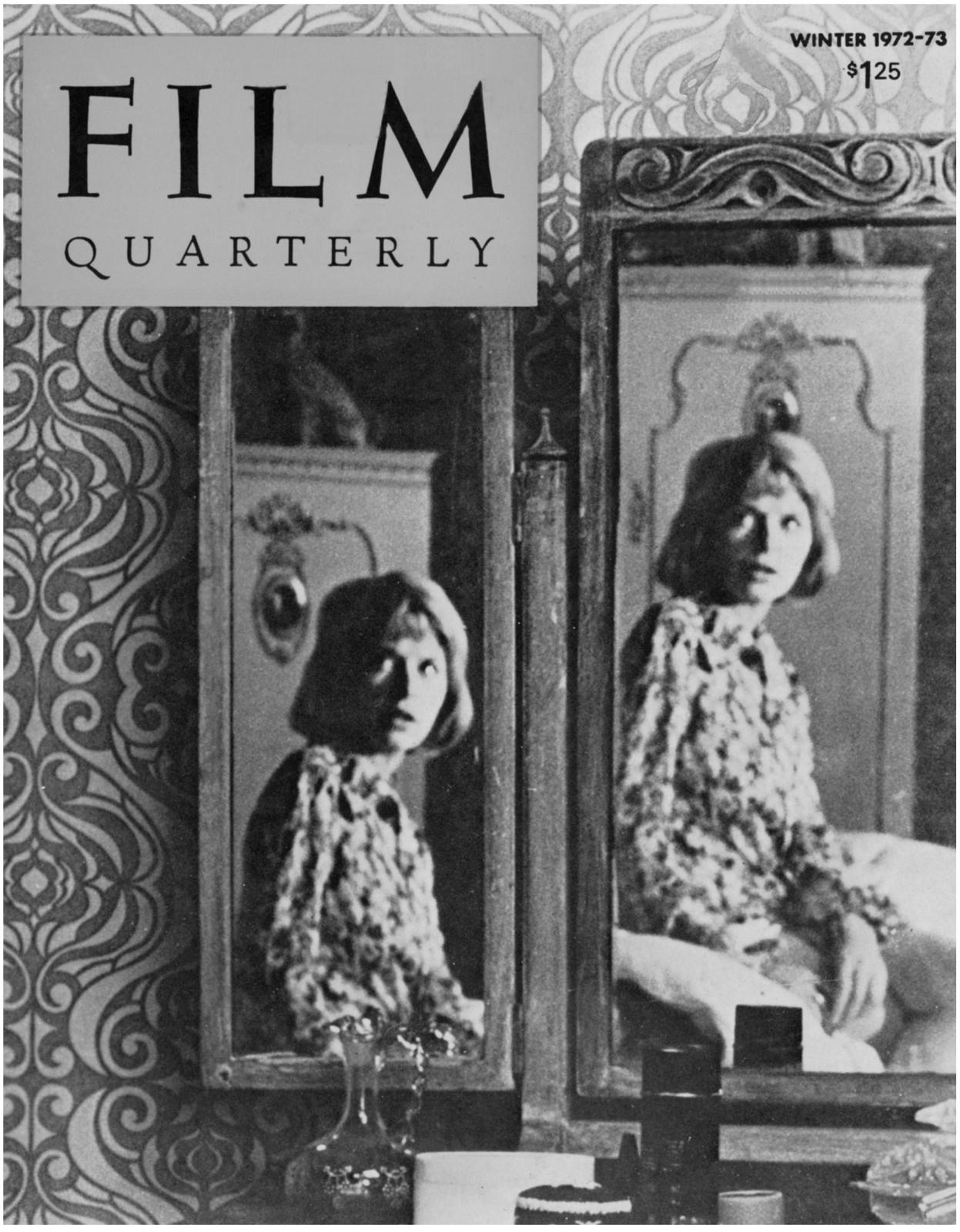

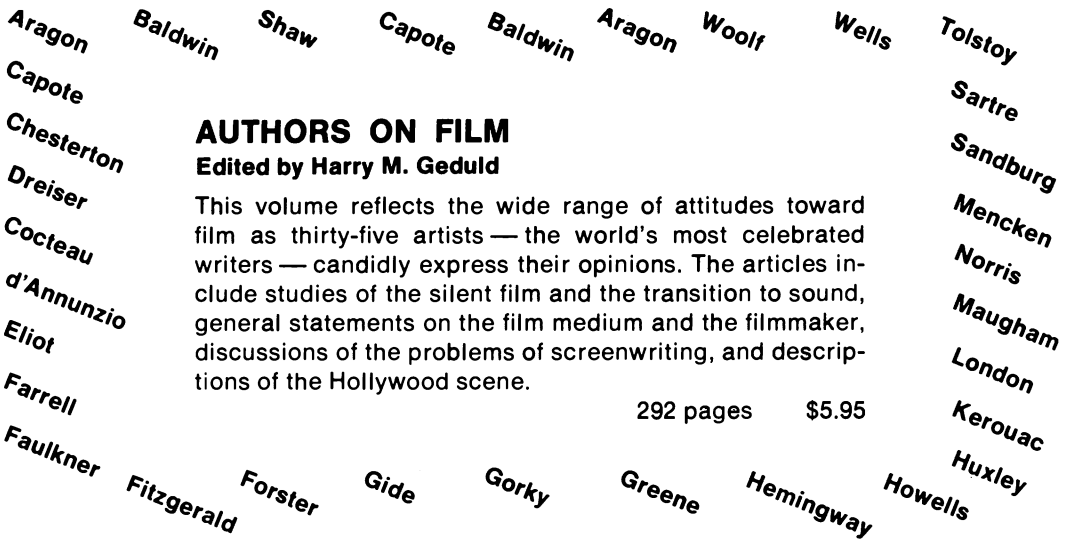

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VOLUME XXVI, No. 2 Winter 1972-1973

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COVER: From Robert Altman's *Images*.

Editor's Notebook

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superior officer). As a director St. John has to get over his tendency to push the camera into an actor's face and encourage him to overact. A scene between Lattimer and a retired Irish cop in an old age home ("Thirty-five years on the force and what do the sons-of-bitches give you? A wooden plaque") is particularly egregious—in addition to being shamefully similar to the confrontation between Gary Cooper and the former marshall in *High Noon*. In spite of its faults, *Top of the Heap* is, at least to a white observer, a step forward in the development of a viable black cinema. It is a flawed but interesting debut. —ROBERT MOSS

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gers. STEVEN KOVACS has studied at Harvard and is now living in Paris. HORACIO D. LOFREDO lives in Berkeley and is active in the Third World Cinema Group. R. O. MICHELS is a sociologist at Berkeley. ROBERT MOSS lives in New York. TIMOTHY PULLEINE lives in England. PAUL SCHRADER is author of *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu—Bresson—Dreyer* (UC Press) and Editor of *Cinema* (LA). BERNARD WEINER contributes regularly to *Take One, FQ, Sight & Sound, Nation,* and other periodicals.

LEE ATWELL

Two Studies in Space-Time

The spatialization of time is undoubtedly one of the most essential components of cinematic composition and became aesthetically significant, if not formally perfected, in the early films of Griffith—culminating in his bold synthesis of historical themes in *Intolerance*. In the realm of experimental film, where personal stylistic research has always taken precedence over anecdote, Space-Time has attained a delirium of expressive ends.* But commercial, narrative cinema, conservatively entrenched in classical forms of melodrama and the rudimentary psychology of the nineteenth-century novel, failed to expand its conception of Space-Time. It clung to an external, descriptive, omniscient view of the world; states of mind, fantasies, dreams, and remembrance of the past were viewed as special problems and interpreted through a set of established conventions (verbal or written explanations, opticals, music cues, photographic distortions) that neatly separated these subjective experiences into "sequences" apart from the main body of the film. This was true even of films that capitalized on time and memory as essential to their narrative pattern—the multiple perspectives of *Citizen Kane* and *Rashomon,* or the flashback structure of Ophuls's *Lola Montes*.

This traditional cinema—still very much alive and thriving—is grounded not only in a limited pattern of dramatic development, but is psychologically rooted in the old Cartesian concept of human conciousness that separates mind and body and keeps interior realities apart from the external, "real" world. Because the film spectator has been conditioned to perceive and think in terms of this kind of narrative logic, it is deemed essential that any detour or rupture in the external plot be signalled or explained so that the trajectory of the drama always remains clear and is rationally supported.

Out of this vast body of work has emerged a commonly understood set of formulas which a number of recent writers have begun to excavate in search of new *auteurs*. Indeed, an obsession with redeeming Hollywood professionals as "subversive" artists is currently leading many young British critics to the brink of sheer pedantry via structural analysis of their neglected heroes: Ullmer, Fuller, and especially Sirk. (See the recent issue of *Monogram* on Hollywood melodrama.) This reactionary movement, with its uncritical embrace of tradition, implicitly ignores more advanced and diverse cinematic forms.

Moving on to less homogenous, more adventurous and uncertain territory, we find the various options of the truly modern film-maker, exploring his own unique language for expressing his vision, his way of seeing the world. Here, conceptions of Space-Time are infinitely flexible and take many directions—as recent works by Godard, Antonioni, Bergman, Straub, and Morrissey attest. The particular kind of Space-Time concept I have in mind here, however, takes us back to Eisenstein, who, stimulated by Griffith's editing scheme, produced a montage aesthetic, reorganizing cinematic space and time to engage the intellect as well as the emotions of the spectator in a new film dynamic. This liberation of rhythm and combination of imagery from its subordination to ordinary plot and characterization was still too radical a form to be assimilated into bourgeois narrative cinema; it found a resting place in the avant-garde efforts of the twenties in France and the US.

The formulation of a modern phenomenologi-

*Although it is theoretically tenable to envision the formula of Time-Space, in which time is infinitely flexible, while space is stable and unchanging, the final form of a film reflects just the opposite. Time, however much it is expanded or contracted, is a fixed unit, while space, ordinarily thought of as constant, is physically mobilized; thus, I prefer the phrasing Space-Time.

cal aesthetic in which the separation of interior and exterior reality, subjective and objective experience is rendered obsolete, sprang full-blown into narrative film with Resnais's *Hiroshima, mon amour*. With the edifice of memory and its constant interplay with the present, Resnais reinvigorated Eisenstein's dialetical montage into a highly elliptical, fragmented, yet rigorous pattern in which narrative is transformed to a musical, poetic level. Space, however stable it may seem at times, constantly shifts as time fluctuates unpredictably and ambiguously with the movement of the heroine's consciousness. Resnais himself has noted the influence of Eisenstein through his association with French documentarist Nicole Vèdres, who was affected by the associational montage of *October* and who subsequently influenced the impressionistic film poems of Humphrey Jennings during her residence in England.

Although very few contemporary directors have approached the radical conception of Space-Time explored by Resnais, few have not been influenced by it, even if in a negative way (see Godard's remarks on Resnais). It is not at all uncommon today to find disjointed plots, fragmented flashbacks, and mental images in everything from routine television programming to more sophisticated commercial work. More often than not, these stylistic elaborations merely disguise what is basically traditional storytelling. Some examples, particularly in American and British cinema, of more successful accommodation of Space-Time spring to mind: Richard Lester's *Petulia* (scornfully labelled by one critic "Petulia, mon amour,") Stanley Donen's *Two for the Road,* and two underrated stylistic achievements—Minnelli's *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* and Kazan's *The Arrangement.* In England, recent films of Joseph Losey, particularly *Accident,* are successful as well as the more pyrotechnic but impressive *Performance* of Nicholas Roeg and Donald Cammell, and Roeg's *Walkabout.*

The recent George Roy Hill–Paul Monash production of *Slaughterhouse-Five* impressed me as one of the most advanced and systematic achievements in deployment of Space-Time and recalled especially the theme and style of Resnais's last film, *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968). Although Hill confirmed to me that he has never seen the Resnais film—while he does feel influenced by his work generally—the formal treatment of the story is structurally and thematically close to the earlier Resnais work. Since the Resnais film has had little exposure in this country, it is worth discussing in some detail.

The structure of *Je t'aime* is fascinating not only because it perfects some of the techniques utilized in *Hiroshima, mon amour,* but—as in Resnais's successive films, *Marienbad, Muriel,* and *La Guerre est finie*—the experimental aspect of Space-Time is given a slightly different emotional inflection. The framework for the story is, appropriately enough, a classic device of science fiction: an experiment in time in

Claude Ridder in JE T'AIME, JE T'AIME

which a man is projected into his past. It has of course been treated by Chris Marker in his celebrated short film *La Jetée* (a film which Resnais admires very much) but Resnais's treatment of it is uniquely his own.

Upon leaving a clinic in Brussels where he has just recovered from a suicide attempt, a young man named Claude Ridder is accosted by two strangers who persuade him to go to a place called Crespel in the countryside. Filmed in a rather straightforward manner, this curious journey is injected with a tone of lyricism and fantasy by the choral accompaniment of Krzysztof Penderecki's haunting score and by the lightness of the dialogue. The tone of a fairy-tale is struck when Ridder is told something extraordinary might happen to him. "Yes? Are you going to change the car into a pumpkin?" More importantly, it introduces the film's constant juxtaposition of mundane, ordinary-appearing people and places with extraordinary and fanciful occurrences.

Crespel, ostensibly an agricultural institute, is, as Ridder soon learns, devoted to research in time. Because he seems indifferent to the prospect of living and is in good health, he is asked to be their first human subject to be transported back into the past, following some successful work with mice. Seduced by the adventure and undaunted by its possible consequences, Ridder agrees to be plunged back one year in time for a duration of one minute, under the influence of a special drug, T-5. Inside a cavernous building, surrounded by some rather ordinary-looking machines, is the "Sphere" or time conductor, resembling a giant pumpkin-shaped simulacrum of a brain.

Inside the structure, Ridder—along with his control subject, a tiny white mouse—is gradually propelled to a point past while vacationing on the beach in the Midi region. He disappears from his divan in the Sphere and magically reappears swimming underwater. But he is unable to fully recapture the past—rejected by the drug or the machinery—and oscillates back and forth between Sphere and beach in attenuated flashes. A brief conversation with his girlfriend Catrine, concerning his swim and some creatures he has seen, is refracted into a series of repeated and overlapping phrases and images. Suddenly it becomes clear that the experiment has overshot its mark, as Ridder, via brief unexplained fragments, is progressing even further back into his past and is lost in time. Thus we are plunged, along with him, into the stream of Resnais's idiom in which ordinary conceptions of logic and sequence are cancelled out and the usual notion of "flashback" is rendered obsolete.

The genesis of the work offers much insight as to Resnais's methods of working with writers and his particular goal in this film. During the completion of *Muriel,* he approached novelist Jacques Sternberg—whose special kind of realistic fantasy attracted him—and asked him to develop an idea for the screen. Over a period of two years of consultation with Sternberg, collaboration was interrupted by the filming of *La Guerre est finie.* Later, Resnais constructed a shooting script from less than half of the writer's material, eliminating even more during shooting and editing. In an interview with *L'Avant-Scène du Cinéma,* Resnais defined in a preliminary way his aesthetic position: "I hope to arrive at a kind of dramatic vision, different from that of the chronological story. I want to say, along with my central character, 'Je m'embrouille.' I would like to create a dramatic development which is extremely clear and meaningful for the spectator, but does not sever the roots that I hope to maintain with surrealism and automatic writing." Thus, by a careful selection of material, Resnais imposes on it his own intuitive form and elliptical sensibility, free from ordinary constraints of Space-Time.

Out of the "confused" continuity there emerges a vivid portrait of a man's life seen through his own perspective, exposing all his weaknesses, fears, and obsessions, along with rare moments of joy and tenderness. A petty intellectual writer-editor, Ridder is bored by life, haunted by death and, ultimately disillusioned, tries to kill himself, convinced that he has caused the death of Catrine, whose enigmatic personality is a failing source of strength in his disordered world. Unfortunately, just before the scientists are able to extricate him from the past, he is

forced to relive his suicide attempt and returns not to the Sphere but outside the building, where he is discovered, perhaps too late.

As we fall, at random, into these moments of private revelation through a kind of mobile Cubist perspective, a subtle system of visual and verbal signs indicates the relative interpretation of any given shot. As Resnais describes it, "in the choice of moments that Ridder remembers, there is chance, certainly, but that is not all. For memory is a screen, and it is a question of knowing why certain things pass through the screen and others do not." Many scenes, for instance, occur in bedrooms or in beds, suggesting a proximity to sleep and dreams, and frequently Ridder remembers being awakened at night. There are recurrent motifs: a tramway in Brussels, which Ridder possibly takes to work; the sea in the south, reflecting the bright, happy times with Catrine; the sea in the north reflecting more somber moods identified with Catrine's placid charm and a premonition of death. Resnais repeats many scenes in a halting progression, so that the constellation of images and sounds, achieving a critical distance, take on an abstract musical pattern.

Some moments are suggested to be invention or fantasy. At one point on a train Claude tells a man of a recurring dream of a strange girl who seduces him into bathing her. Later, when this erotic reverie comes to consciousness, it is clearly a friend of Claude's lover and confidante, Wiana, who teases him by the illusion of appearing as two different women in a double-reflecting mirror. Similarly, the pivotal scene of Claude's dubious "confession" to Wiana about the death of Catrine in a Glasgow hotel—which emerges in fitful fragments throughout the film—is contradicted by the visual memory of the actual event, indicating a perpetual uncertainty about what actually happened.

Other moments resemble pieces of daydreams or (closer to the surrealist mode) reality deformed into a dream state. Ridder obsessively sees himself haunted by efficiency experts at work, reminding him of his idleness. Sometimes this is indicated in the framing or *mise-en-scène.* At a business meeting, where some literary agents are haggling over the price of a new edition in the background, Ridder in the extreme foreground sits writing distractedly, separated from the reality around him. A brief shot of his apartment, with furniture and books piled in the center of the room, is a plastic configuration of his penchant for confusion. More ambiguous is an anonymous encounter with a strange woman in a hotel bed, a fantasy of promiscuity.

Commenting on the original script, Resnais remarks: "It seems to me the ideal film would be one in which one takes the dream images for reality, and those of reality as a kind of confused nightmare." This is achieved, as suggested, not by a virtuoso camera or by spoken narration, but by simply adding notes of incongruity to otherwise serious moments. Occasionally it is in the form of a visual pun, as when Claude and Catrine are briefly interrupted by the appearance of the control mouse who ironically seems to have crossed paths in time with Claude. Many of the conversations between the lovers are little nonsensical *jeux des mots,* a kind of serious playfulness that one finds in the world of surrealist poetry, reflecting a taste for absurdity and rejection of traditional logic: e.g., Claude and Catrine's exchange about which is more useful, pencils without erasers, pencils with erasers, or erasers without pencils; or Claude's philosophical speculation on time at work as being elastic to others but a burden to him, extending back centuries to the evolution of living things, as opposed to time on the outside.

All these clues justify the form of *Je t'aime, je t'aime,* and like the central section of *Muriel,* it constitutes a unique cinematic construction. Unlike *Muriel* or *La Guerre est finie,* however, where the dramatic line is more linear, the film requires a double vision, an appreciation of individual parts as they appear, and a cumulative response to the orchestration in the total work. This manner of perceptual challenge is bound to alienate some unsympathetic viewers who prefer ordered, predigested filmic continuity; presumably this is why the film has hardly been exhibited in this country. Yet it is one of Resnais's richest creations, and the happy collaboration with Jacques Sternberg has resulted in a fine

blend of wit and seriousness.

Equally significant is Claude Rich's splendid characterization, miraculously full and defined throughout constant dislocations in time and space. Resnais is often thought of as a "cerebral" artist, but he has always been sensitive to the human side of his work, even when distanced by the form it takes, and never perhaps more than in *Je t'aime, je t'aime,* where Ridder's search and inability to find emotional commitment is at the center and reverberates in the very title. Though not humorless or unintelligent, and endowed with physical charm, both Ridder and Catrine (beautifully played by Olga Georges-Picot) are listless, unmotivated bohemian types, hoping somewhat like the lovers in *Elvira Madigan* to find meaning in love, yet never able to create anything realistic or substantial in their relationship. Ironically, as Claude is forced to relive the events leading to her death and his suicide attempt, his will to live becomes increasingly stronger, he passionately resists recalling the moment of self-destruction and, back in the Sphere, he is able to declare his love for Catrine, which he was unable to do in the past.

Anyone familiar with the nuances of Resnais's filmic expression will be prepared for *Je t'aime* and its constant detours in time. But to encounter a similar, integrated development of Space-Time in an American commercial film, by an established Hollywood director, is an aesthetic shock of the first order. When George Roy Hill read the galleys of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s *Slaughterhouse-Five*—still at work on *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*—his immediate reaction was positive, yet he viewed the time structure of the novel as insurmountable filmically. Hill was still thinking in terms of traditional norms, and it was not until he later read a first-draft screen version by Stephen Geller that he was able to grasp an "emotional thread" that would provide a central focus and make the fractured time concept viable.

Vonnegut's story was inspired by his searing memory of the firebombing of Dresden in World War II, and in order to comment on the present, he uses as his central character, Billy Pilgrim, a man who has, in his words, become "unstuck in time," having survived the Dresden holocaust during his youth. Vonnegut, however, tells the story as an omniscient observer in the third person, explaining in detail Billy's personal history and thus providing a rationale for Billy's time-tripping. The main body of the novel is flanked by two chapters in which Vonnegut explains his personal reasons for the narrative and creates an ironic contrast with the present bombing of Vietnam. While remaining true to the tone and spirit of Vonnegut, Geller and Hill have eliminated the author and the descriptive mode, restructuring the entire work, building up sketchy details, and making Billy the central consciousness of the film. As a result, virtually all the expository scenes in the novel are gone to make way for a direct yet startlingly elliptical dramatic development and a very flexible use of filmic Space-Time as we move through the disordered landscape of Billy's memory and fantasy life, with occasional stopovers in the "real" world. Thus our sense of a "free-fall" in time is much the same as in *Je t'aime;* but at least in one respect the Resnais film appears almost classic by comparison.

In *Je t'aime,* the idea of time-tripping is set up in no uncertain terms by the opening scenes, detailing the experiment, and though there is progressing ambiguity in the flow of consciousness, the rules of the game are established: there is a beginning, middle, and end, in that order. In *Slaughterhouse-Five,* however, our bearings from a narrative viewpoint are initially less certain, and the logic of the structure is suggested but never directly stated in the film.

The opening shots of the film, set in the present, immediately connote dislocation in perspective as the camera peers through the windows of Billy's suburban house to his daughter and her husband on the exterior, trying to locate Billy. When we finally see him, Billy is well past middle age and is engrossed in typing a response to his local newspaper, detailing his experience of being "unstuck in time," which he has recently revealed. Between paragraphs, Billy time-trips back to his youth on the snow-covered battlefield somewhere in Germany, where he is fiercely accosted by three GI's who suspect him to be an

enemy agent. The paranoid perversity and sadistic humor of Paul Lazzaro (Ron Liebman) is pitted against the meek, childlike, vulnerable innocence of Billy (Michael Saks), a lanky, awkward, frightened creature, who resembles nothing so much as a blond Harold Lloyd. The image-logic signals a "flashback," but an abrupt and unexpected cut to a shot of Montana Wildhack (Valerie Perrine)—to whom we are later introduced—thumbing through a magazine and responding, "Time-tripping again, Billy?" breaks up the connection. When we return to a shot of Billy at his typewriter 25 years later, then back to Germany, thence to Billy's wedding night after the war, an elliptical, achronological pattern establishes itself as part of a *mental continuum,* reflecting inner experience.

Just as in the Resnais film, the stylistic "playing with time," aside from its critical distancing of the spectator and its purely aesthetic appeal, expresses an existential portrait. Billy Pilgrim possesses none of the charm or intellectual self-awareness of Claude Ridder, nor is he trapped by the inexorable fate of a scientific experiment; but he is tragically a victim of his social environment. Because time in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is levelled off into relatively broad dramatic scenes, we can perceive Billy's situation, not only in terms of his private fantasy life, but in his alienated behavior, which the film is rich in detailing.

As a young man, Billy Pilgrim is revealed as ingenuous, passive, ineffectual, and totally incapable of taking a moral stance in his experience. His most common response under adverse conditions is: "I want to be left alone" and his psychic withdrawal becomes increasingly pronounced until he refuses to speak and is submitted to shock therapy after the war. The source of Billy's condition, however, goes much further back than the war. In one of the funniest and most cleverly staged scenes in the film, we are given a ripe insight into his formative relations. Doubled up in a foetal position under a blanket in a hospital bed, with only one eye exposed to the world, Billy observes his unctuous, cajoling, God-fearing, All-American Mom, who sweetly tells another patient about the terrible things that happened to Billy, who will soon

SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

speak again and make a good marriage into wealth. "Billy, darling, you can come out now," she says, "the war's over." Of course the war is never over for Billy, who has been robbed of any sense of selfhood and security by an over-protective mother, with only the trauma of war experience needed to demolish what little remained of his ego.* In examining the levels of transcendent experience, analyst R. D. Laing points out that "the 'ego' is the instrument for living in *this* world. If the 'ego' is broken up or destroyed (by the insurmountable contradictions of certain life situations, by toxins, chemical changes, etc.), then the person may be exposed to other worlds, 'real' in different ways from the more familiar territory of dreams, imagination, perception or phantasy." Laing cautions us, however, that what we may see as "madness" may or may not be a breakthrough. "It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death." As the film's final sequences reveal, in Billy Pilgrim's life it is unfortunately a kind of enslavement.

*Originally, Hill had envisioned and begun filming a sequence which, in a virtuoso manner, would have more cinematically expressed Billy's psychic withdrawal. Inspired by a passage in Vonnegut's novel in which Billy views a war movie in *reverse* motion, he planned to show highlights of Billy's life: his war experience, marriage, high school graduation, childhood, birth, and prenatal state, all in reverse motion and chronology. Unfortunately, the sequence was never completed, as it proved technically unworkable, though conceptually interesting.

Moving back and forth over wide expanses of time, we are able to compare Billy as a youth, then as a successful optometrist, enjoying all the pleasures of an upper-middle-class American life style. Much is left to the imagination or is superfluous, since Billy's life seems to be planned out in advance for him; he marries Valencia (Sharon Gans), an overweight, immature, but grateful daughter of an optician, then settles effortlessly into the roles of respectable businessman and father. But Billy evidences no sign of really *caring* for anyone or anything in the world, except his dog Spot, who grows old along with him and, significantly, is incorporated into Billy's time-tripping fantasy. This relationship is developed from the beginning with Billy training Spot to leap into a moving fire truck; Spot appears at significant moments—Billy's first hallucination of the "flying saucer," and his return home later after his near-fatal accident.

Only once does Billy's time-tripping extend further back than the war. At a POW camp, he is again verbally assaulted by Lazzaro, who has vowed revenge on him, and when Billy is ultimately pushed by the Germans under a cold shower, the impact parallels a childhood memory of being thrown naked by his father into the deep end of a swimming pool, with the order to "sink or swim." (True to form, Billy sinks.) Incidents of the war often contrast with more recent events: the mock photographed capture of Billy, staged by the Nazis, is intercut with an equally posed family scene before a photographer; and Billy's painful climb after an accident up a stairway, holding his aged dog, is paralleled with his ascent of the shelter steps to the burning ruins of Dresden 25 years earlier.

We are asked to reject the usual roles of narrative suspense since events are mentioned *before* they actually occur in Billy's mind. Before we have even seen him, we learn of the death of Billy's wartime buddy, protector and father figure, Edgar Derby, whose sincere, sentimental patriotism, and WASPish mentality are sources of comfort to Billy. When Derby is chosen to be the spokesman for his company of POW's in Dresden, Billy recalls his future acceptance speech when he is elected president of the local Lions Club, with overlapping and merging of Billy and Derby's speech and image. Thus, we are more than prepared for Derby's abrupt execution by firing squad for an innocent bit of looting in Dresden.

Even more daring is the way Hill juxtaposes two sequences in exactly their reverse chronological order, like the musical effect of dropping from a *sfortzando* to *pianissimo* passage with exposition following development. Billy is the sole survivor of a plane crash in which he is critically injured and mumbles the address recited to him by a German officer in Dresden years earlier: "Schlachthof-funf, Schlachthof-funf." In a sequence of hair-raising intensity that could have been inspired by a Mack Sennett chase, Valencia hysterically flies from their home screaming, "Billy, I'm coming!" She tail-ends another car, rockets the wrong direction up a freeway exit, careens across hills and lanes to avoid police, in an absurd, frantic dash to the hospital, reducing the Cadillac to a pile of rubble as she crashes into the emergency entrance, ironically her final resting place. From the hospital, where Billy is undergoing surgery, Hill cuts to the morning of Valencia's previous birthday as Billy awakens her with a stretch of ribbon that she gleefully follows to the front lawn and her dream-come-true—the gleaming new El Dorado we have just seen demolished.

The climactic development of the film is centered around two themes: the tragic destruction of Dresden, and Billy's increasing regression into fantasy. The entrance to Dresden is a kind of travelogue extravaganza as seen by Billy; a "land of Oz" as he calls it, casting a spell of enchantment in its sculptured trellises and baroque architectural detail, as well as its smiling inhabitants, still unscarred by the war. A jubilant emotion is sustained by Glen Gould's inspired matching of two Brandenburg Concerti, with improvised modulations. This paradise with its happy atmosphere is soon transformed into a fiery hell which Hill and his cameraman Miroslav Ondricek capture in beautifully executed tracking shots, moving from the figure of a young German soldier traversing the landscape in an anguished attempt to find his family. The irony,

here, is that Billy's emotions are already so shattered at the time that he can only comprehend the horror of the event through memory, prompted by an arrogant military historian (who sees Dresden as a mere "tactical error" compared with Hiroshima) with a stoical resistance to moral assessment.

As Billy moves closer to an adult realization of this past experience, he becomes more detached from it, retreating more often into his fantasy of Tralfamadore and his idyllic life there with the sexy starlet Montana Wildhack. Vonnegut has to go to great pains in his book to establish the background of this fantasy, rooting it in the imagination of a science-fiction novelist Billy has read. The film, however, more satisfactorily establishes it through visual iconography. At one point, Billy discovers his son with a girlie magazine, cautions him against it, then smiles knowingly over a nude fold-out of Montana. At a drive-in movie, Valencia explodes into rage when Billy and her son greedily absorb the vision of Montana's exposed breasts on the silver screen. When we finally see Billy transported to the geodesic dome on Tralfamadore, along with Montana, surrounded by the luxury trappings of Sears Roebuck, the fantasy becomes an apotheosis.

Billy's time-tripping becomes a form of enslavement rather than liberation because, for him, fantasy becomes the only viable reality. He tries to explain (in the opening sequence, which is continued near the end of the film) to his daughter his life in the fourth dimension of time —just like the Tralfamadorians—but naturally Earthlings cannot understand and think him insane. He sees life as "a series of moments in random order," (also a perfect description of Resnais's aesthetic) a concept which the Tralfamadorians use to describe their books, in Vonnegut's novel, as "brief clumps of symbols." "There isn't any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects." Some people see Billy's fantasy-images in the film as inspired and poetic; in a sense, they *are,* but what they represent is something else. Although he is presented as a lovable sad sack, Billy's imaginative resources are very limited; they are shaped, more than anything, by the idealism of popular literature and films. In envisioning his future death, he sees himself as an eminent public figure assassinated by a fanatic in an immense convention hall; and in the final shots of Tralfamadore, against a background of fireworks and grandiose organ accompaniment, Billy and Montana acknowledge the applause of Tralfamadore after the birth of their son—a supreme parody of the sentimental Hollywood finale. Audiences automatically cheer at this "happy ending," but there is a critical dimension built in by the film-makers, by concluding on this fantasy. Billy's inspiration is only a hiatus, and existentially a sad one; he has transcended the real world but he is still the same placid, ineffectual self as in reality. He has failed to achieve any growth or self-identity.

When I mentioned the striking similarity in theme and style between this film and that of Resnais, George Roy Hill replied, "I don't want you to think I haven't been influenced by Resnais . . . but I wasn't interested in making an experimental film . . . that's not my bag." At the same time, he is greatly pleased with the film and is quite surprised that the distribution has been handled so well with enthusiastic reception, unusual for a film that boasts no celebrities and only Vonnegut's name and the jury prize at Cannes as selling points. Equally significant is the fact that Hill and writer Stephen Geller have successfully reorchestrated Vonnegut's material into a unique filmic structure (skillfully edited by Dede Allen) that questions most of the traditions of Space-Time adhered to in commercial cinema, and challenge the spectator to an effective participation in the experience at a time when Hollywood seems to be returning to traditional formulas and nostalgia for success. When most of the films of the seventies have become passé, *Slaughterhouse-Five* will, I think, remain durable and achieve its rank as an American masterpiece.

GIDEON BACHMANN

Reappraisals

A novel look at some uses of the cinematic past, and a report on the Newsreel Film Festival in Grado, Italy

If, at a distance of 35 years, we were to make a film about the relationship of the big fascist powers on the eve of World War II, what would we choose to include in such a film?

Perhaps, in order to be symbolic, we would pick on Mussolini's visit to Munich, or, better because less known, Hitler's visit to Florence. How would we construct such a film, imagining that we had the power to go back in history and shoot anything we might wish?

We might start with Hitler's arrival at the railroad station in Florence. Mussolini is waiting for him. He has had the entire station decked out in swastikas, interspersed with the Italian Tricolore. He has had reports that the Fiorentini aren't about to cheer the foreign dictator, so we show his worried face, his impatience with his officers, his stepping from one foot to another. Then the guest arrives. Fanfares, the invited blackshirts *do* cheer, and Mussolini's face brightens slightly as they march side by side down the platform. Hitler and his officers rather offhandedly salute the Italians they are presented to. The latter smile affably, then look at each other: small achievements shouldn't go unnoticed.

The drive through the town: the Fiorentini have not, in fact, hung out any swastikas—the few we see are on official buildings, whereas thousands of fleurs-de-lys (the traditional Florentine symbol) line the avenue through which Hitler and Mussolini pass in their open car. Mussolini's face is taut: he can see that his fears were well-founded. Fortunately he had ordered his *fasci* out in numbers—long lines of uniformed men line the streets. Hopefully, his face seems to say, Hitler won't see that behind them there is not much crowd.

He shows off the city—up the serpentine to Piazza Michelangelo, with the Dome's Brunnelleschi cupola in the background: the streets are empty, but Hitler likes the scenery: the small man with the aggressive lower lip is sheepish; it's as if he had built the town himself. But he knows that the major test will be in the Piazza della Signoria: from the town hall balcony he is to make a speech in the presence of Hitler, Himmler, and Hess. How will the people react?

The square is full when they arrive: full of the curious. A few shots of the crowd—it is not a happy people. They are poor, most of them; their faces show want. Baggy clothes, but sharp bone structures, deepset eyes, dark complexions, straight noses: it's the old Etruscan race, from which the Tuscans derive—a people that has never been conquered, never been spiritually downed. A people that has given great men to centuries of culture. You can see on their faces that this visiting idol is not one of their favorites. In the foreground, smiles and anticipation in the grimaces of the uniformed.

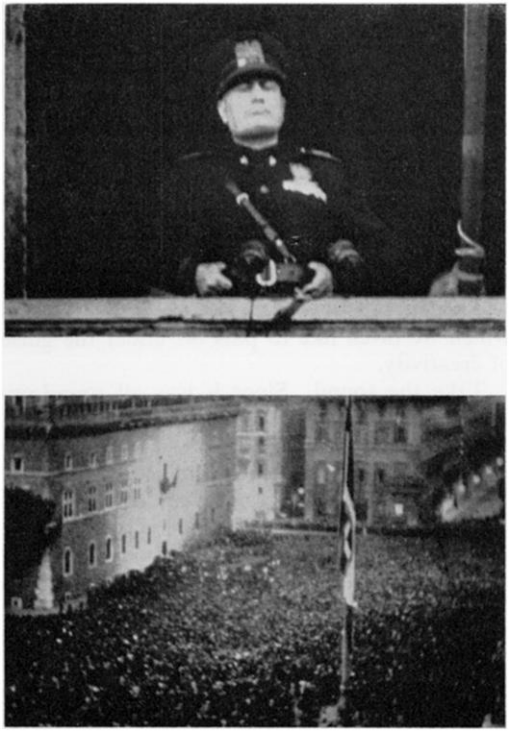
Cut to the balcony. The small group of Germans with the roundfaced Italian in the middle. His speech is short, aggressive, operatic, psychologically perfect in timing, in seeking effects of oratory. Bracing the banister, then hands back to the belt, seeking security, the jaw pushed out, the lower lip disappearing under the upper one, then a jab with the right arm in the air in salute, a push to the edge of the balcony demanding applause, and then, fast, thumbs on both sides back behind the broad black belt. And as an applause does, in fact, echo across the Piazza, a deep, relieved, and proud smile. Hess stands on his right: a denigrating, pitying smile quickly flashes across the tall man's face, as he sneaks a

look at the Duce a foot below him. A polite clapping of hands from Himmler, a quick, flat *Heil* from Hitler. The wind raises the decorative velvet that covers the balustrade.

This perhaps somewhat banal script is not science fiction. It is, instead, a scene breakdown of an eight-minute newsreel sequence, filmed in May 1938 by the state-employed cameramen of the "Luce," the official Italian state newsreel producer since 1922. It is eight minutes from among a total of 15 hours of such newsreel material screened recently in Grado, Northern Italy, during a one-week film festival of a unique nature: a festival, where every year only one single type of film is shown. In 1970 it was Italian silents, in 1971 Westerns. In 1972 it was old newsreels.

The surprising and exciting aspect of this material is its continuing immediacy. Some technical factors contribute to making it even more exciting today, than for example a classic documentary of the period: since there was no possibility, then, of recording sound separately from the image, nor of mixing it, these newsreels are always in synch and are always totally authentic, much more so than material shot with greater care and brought to the screen with all the skill of a Dziga Vertov or a Flaherty. Since works by the great masters of the classic documentary were shown in Grado in the afternoons, the comparison was easy to make, and (to use a phrase coined by Siegfried Kracauer), the "redemption of physical reality" was complete.

We tend to think of newsreels in a depreciating way, as mere "raw material" of truth, which cannot, surely, be as representative of the reality of a given moment as a well-thought-out documentary or a *cinéma-vérité* work about the same subject. How silly! It was Roger Manvell who recently drew my attention to the fact that artists have always fought against reality in the cinema by tearing it into small pieces, spicing it up with optics and covering it with music, talk, and dramatization. If this is true, isn't the reverse equally true—namely that reality tends to destroy art, and that thus an artfully constructed documentary could easily be outdistanced by a work of "direct reality" such as a newsreel?



Mussolini declaring war from his balcony in Palazzo Venezia, Piazza Venezia, Rome.

Ever since Eisenstein, Kuleshov, and Pudovkin taught us the marvels of montage and of the insertion of interpretation into the representation of truth, we have opted for Méliès instead of Lumière, if we accept these two pioneers as representing the antipodes of early cinema in crystallized form: *invention* as juxtaposed to *presentation*. Newsreels don't invent, but they certainly interpret. The surprise is that they are often less impersonal than "objective" documentaries.

The sequence of shots described above was obviously established without the intent of showing up the character of Mussolini in the way that it did. The cameramen of the period were all

but unconscious creators; they liked to get their job of reporting the events done as quickly and as painlessly as possible, from the shoulder, as it were, which was their simplest viewpoint and corresponds most to that of the normal human eye. They used no optical tricks, no fancy cutting, no juxtaposition of music and image—in short, no cinematics. But because they couldn't thus create their own reality, they couldn't distort, either, and what we get may be limited by their ability to see all angles of a happening, but we certainly do not get the deformation of events which we often like to pass off under the guise of creativity.

Take the sound. Since it was all sound-on-film, nothing could be cut out. Unless the editors were willing to lose the whole scene, they couldn't eliminate parts that they might not have liked on the track. Thus when Mussolini declares war from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia in Rome on June 10th, 1940, nobody could cut out the single, timid voice that came floating up from the crowd and cried "Stupido!" into all the applause. Nor could the image of Hess smiling in that ironic way at Mussolini be cut out without losing the whole scene of the Duce reaping his success. Today we would have mixed out the interference on the track and would have found a way to cut away from the smile, or the cameraman could have zoomed in close on Mussolini's face thus leaving out Hess. But there were no zooms then, and the change of lenses would have taken longer than the scene could be expected to last. The technical drawbacks, which we have eliminated by perfecting cinematic technique, caused the newsreels of those days to be even closer to reality than today's TV magazines.

Mussolini as he liked to see himself: heir to ancient imperial glory (here with Caesar Augustus).

Newsreels, for a period of at least 40 years (until the popularization of TV) represented the most direct way for most of the world to become acquainted with what was happening elsewhere. It took two or three days, and the news was edited, but if you went to the cinema three times a week (as you were supposed to), the chances were that you'd see three editions of news, all different. The newsreel, more than radio or the newspaper, filled a hunger for participation, which was often exploited by governments for propagandistic purposes. Into the heydays of the newsreel fall the beginnings of the three great fascist regimes in Italy, Germany, and Spain, and while it would be too much to see causality in this, it is interesting to follow the growth of these regimes in the documents that they themselves have produced, documents that inadvertently slipped by their own censors facts and impressions which their own film-makers of the same period tried hard to hide. If you compare the atmosphere, nothing more, of an afternoon at the 1936 Berlin Olympics as seen in the "Luce" newsreel, with the same shots of, say, Jesse Owens, seen the very same afternoon in Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* film, you begin to realize how the cinema is capable of falsifying, and how we love to swallow its falsifications.

The history of fascism in Italy is a fascinating odyssey when seen through the eyes of these newsreels. Mussolini brought the Istitute Luce under his personal control soon after he took power in 1922. Every Tuesday, at his Villa Torlonia, he had the week's newsreels screened before they were released. Such tight control was exercised over no other medium—both radio and newspapers came under the auspices of his ministries. Thus we may assume that the newsreels were the way he preferred to use to communicate directly to his people, and the image he arranged to give, through them, of himself and his regime, was closer to the one he considered the accurate one, than that given by

the other media. All his prancing and operatic gesturing, all his appearing as a peasant with peasants, pilot with pilots, horseman with horsemen, then, must be considered as having been willed by him, and when he allowed a nine-minute ballet of postures and histrionic effects, sounds and rhetoric, such as was filmed during his trip to the provinces in 1934, to be presented to the public, one must assume that his image of himself was indeed that of a comic opera star, and that he felt no compunctions in being represented in this ridiculous manner. Or else we must assume that he was incapable of recognizing the impression he was making. In fact, when we consider the fact that Italians for twenty long years swallowed his oratory and his clowning and lived by his maxims, we must begin to assume that at least a large percentage of the populace didn't recognize the impression both he and they were making, either.

Only by assuming this total oblivion of their own sense of perspective, can we take seriously sequences like the marriage of King Zog the First of Albania, then an Italian protectorate, in the presence of Italy's foreign minister Count Ciano and a few Fiat planes and limousines. Or the seriousness with which the creation of the "empire" is proclaimed after the "victories" in Abyssinia. People believed what they were told to believe, because that is what they *wanted* to believe. And in this simple statement lies, perhaps, the secret of the success of the fascist propaganda machine.

But today, with our increased awareness and especially our increased sense of perspective and history (but even this, tomorrow, may seem limited in the light of new awareness), we can look at those documents and receive from them the lesson they most obviously impart: the frightening specter of mass psychosis. If a whole people can be led around by the nose through nothing else than a deft way of presenting reality —a reality, furthermore, which was not very manipulated or "adjusted"; certainly less so than the realities we see on today's television—does not this mean then, that belief and objectivity are all too easily suspended when the emotional occasion arises? And isn't this proof of the fact that what we call reason is, at best, a very fleeting quality of the human mind, all too easily usurped by the powers that be and exploited, in fact, on their behalf?

The example of the Russian documentaries of the classic period which were shown in Grado (works by Vertov, Esther Shub, Kalatozov, and others) when considered, for once, objectively from this point of view, differ very little, in structure, from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* or Flaherty's *Man of Aran:* in all cases reality was bent in the direction that the moment seemed to require, and reason in its wake. And the question of the possibility of the presentation of truth again becomes central: is there such a thing as truth on the screen? Perhaps we must, finally, accept its impossibility and seek for new ways of utilizing the cinema in a political way: through subjectivity, through avowing one's partiality, through honesty in saying clearly that one's view is limited by one's ability (required by a particular moment) to see truth in a limited perspective. I wouldn't be surprised if more efficient political statements could be made in this way, as has, in fact, already been proven by works such as *The Hour of the Furnaces* and similarly editorialized films.

Because in any case, even where material is presented without ideology, as is the case with most of these old Italian newsreels, the spectator out of habit supplies the ideology himself. What to Italians of the period surely seemed a record of how Florence hailed Hitler, to us today seems a document of the opposite. And where in 1936 the fascist editors of the Luce newsreel used shots of the British police attacking opposers of British fascism during a rally near Trafalgar Square of followers of Oswald Mosley, we today see only the fact that the methods of the police have changed very little. Or where in the same year Mussolini's troops went to war in Abyssinia accompanied by priests in field churches, who read mass in the shadows of tanks and then marched triumphantly by the Colosseum in the victory parade, we see only the fact that the position of the Church on the side of colonial capitalism has remained the same over the decades. Not even the floods in London, or the

spirit with which Londoners face them, seem to have changed, nor the joy with which small boys receive marching troops, be they German steel helmets or whatever. We supply our contemporary 1972 ideology to go with the historical, 1936 material, but essentially the propaganda effect is the same—the fact remains that images of actuality are used by the mind for the construction of its own illusions.

It is the comprehension of this process, and the ability to steer it, which makes a master propagandist out of a film editor. Leni Riefenstahl knew and understood the process, and used it for a clear political purpose. Mussolini's men tried, but didn't master it, so they added heavy-handed narrations which often contradict the images as a banal way of saying with film that which they wanted to say. Thus, the narrator, despite the empty streets of Florence in view, talks of the multitudes that received Hitler, and despite the haggard and sullen face of Afanegus Atuofi, who in the absence of the escaped Hailie Selassie surrendered to Italy's Viceroy Graziani in October of 1936, the accompanying text speaks of the proud "joining of Abyssinia to the Italian Empire." It is fortunate for us that these newsreels were badly made—the juxtaposition of that which is shown and that which is maintained in the text gives us a new, third dimension of truth. What we must avoid doing, at all costs (and this is the lesson of these materials) is to think of our new comprehension as definitive.

Reviews

THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE

Director: Luis Bunuel. Script: Bunuel and Jean-Claude Carriere. Photography: Edmond Richard.

On the night of December 4, 1930, members of the League of Patriots and the Anti-Jewish League interrupted the projection of a new movie by hurling rocks and inkwells at the screen of Studio 28, the leading avant-garde movie theater of Paris. After this patriotic display they rushed into the lobby to tear up the paintings of the young artists who had chosen to exhibit there. Among them were some of the leading painters of the day, men like Joan Miró, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Salvador Dali. Curiously enough, the authorities were not so much intent on punishing the demonstrators as they were on imposing restrictions on the film itself. First, they merely demanded the removal of its explicitly sacrilegious passages, but when the outcry in the daily papers became too loud, they decided to ban the movie altogether. Indeed, the newspapers were right: the movie's anticlericalism was perhaps its least offensive feature. The movie was an all-out attack on bourgeois society, showing its very foundations being shaken simply by the violent love of a man and a woman. In the movie we see them roll around in the mud, their frenetic screams of delight disrupting the proceedings of a state ceremony conducted by high officials nearby. Separated from his love, the man lets loose his fury on a blind man and a dog by kicking them aside. The passion of the women is so strong that the toilet paper ignites when she sits on the john. Yes, such a movie was unfit for public consumption. The ban that the fascist disrupters succeeded in imposing on the film was not lifted until the end of the Nazi occupation of France. Even now, Luis Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or (The Golden Age)* is unknown in America to all but avid archivists of the cinema.

A lot of pictures have flickered on the screen since that memorable night in Studio 28. Yet over the years Buñuel's surrealistic vision and his concern with human nature in what is definitely not the best of all possible worlds have remained constant. To that his latest movie, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie,* bears witness.

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Buñuel has said that be bases his movies on a single image or idea that grabs hold of him. *Viridiana* developed from his vision of an old

man holding in his arms a young girl unable to resist him because she is under the influence of drugs. *Simon of the Desert* grew out of the image of a saint withdrawing from the world by living on top of a column—the story of Simon the Anchorite who did just that somewhere in Asia Minor in the fourth century. *The Exterminating Angel* was based upon the idea that a group of fashionable people gathered together are unable to leave the premises. And the central problem of *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* is that a group of people who are trying to get together for dinner are prevented from doing so by an extraordinary series of unforeseen circumstances. Buñuel himself has remarked upon the close relationship between these last two films. He sees them both as surrealistic creations—that is, movies based on a surrealistic premise as distinguished from the realistic vein of *Tristana* and the theological nature of *The Milky Way*.

The movie begins with two couples driving up to an elegant house in the Paris suburbs for the intended dinner. They are most cordially welcomed by the hostess, but they soon find out that their dinner invitation was for the following day. They graciously invite their hostess to accompany them to dinner and so the five of them drive to a nearby restaurant. They are allowed to enter after some mysterious hesitation on the part of the woman who opens the locked door. Although they find it somewhat unusual to be the only customers, they proceed to order from the elegant menu. Muffled sobs bring the women to their feet and into an adjacent room to investigate. The body of the owner is laid out on the funeral bier surrounded by the mourning family. The customers are informed that he passed away that very afternoon so there simply has not been enough time to remove his body. The women are intent on leaving, but now the previously hesitant waiter insists that the guests stay, assuring them of an excellent dinner. The waiter's warm assurances only serve to accentuate the black humor of the situation.

Gradually the plot is unfolded, but it really does not develop very far. That the three friends in question are the ambassador of a Latin Amer-

ican republic and his two partners in an international heroin ring is of little consequence: no gut-searing chase scenes here à la *French Connection,* no glimpse into the machinations of the Corsican mafia. Instead, the film becomes a series of loosely joined episodes, vaguely related to the initial impulse of the film. Buñuel's latest idea does not lend itself to a dense elaboration as was possible with his idea of people confined by an unknown force in *The Exterminating Angel.* In fact, his premise is its polar opposite—the problem of getting together instead of trying to separate. The loose structure of the film is inherent in that initial idea.

When an academic speaks of lack of structure, you can be sure that he is trying to pan a work. Years of apprenticeship at brightly lit stalls brings out a compulsive need to put a framework around everything. But Buñuel was forged on the anvil of anarchist Spain, only to be thrown into the cauldron of Parisian surrealism. "Today I feel happy because I achieved a certain physical victory over myself. But I would be just as happy if I had not shot the film. I am a little bit of a nihilist, I don't care much about what I do." Buñuel's anarchic spirit emerges in full force in this movie. It does so in spite of the fact (or is it because?) he has worked on it on and off for the last two and a half years, ever since he finished *Tristana.* Indeed, the film's lack of rigorous structure carries out the disparate spirit of the working premise.

Buñuel's very first film tried to create such ap-

parent incoherence. *Un Chien Andalou* was an attempt to express in a film the spontaneous illogic which the Surrealists had tried to embody on canvas and in verse. Yet they also knew that their fervent search for chaos would reveal a new, hitherto virtually unexplored realm of experience, the terrains of the unconscious. Echoing Freud, they drew deeply from their dream life in order to confront man with the frightening disorder that lurked in the shadows of his mind. Thus Buñuel, working with Dali, joined a number of dream images, systematically removing anything that they thought might have a symbolic meaning, and in this way arrived at *Un Chien Andalou.*

If all of this seems to be talking around Buñuel's latest film it is because the movie refuses to be put inside any kind of framework. After the initial premise is all too clearly stated Buñuel plunges into the dreamworld of his characters. Since they are unable to fulfill the most ordinary of social obligations their human drama is revealed through an ingenious display of their internal explosions. The Ambassador of Miranda, for example, dreams of being held up by bandits at dinner and escaping their machine gun fire by ducking underneath the table. He is noticed because, out of sheer gluttony, he reaches up with his hand to grab a piece of meat lying on a plate. As he is about to be shot, he wakes up alarmed—and goes out to the kitchen for a midnight snack to soothe his nerves. Towards the end when the three men are under arrest, the investigator has a nightmarish dream about a sergeant whose brutal methods of torture are celebrated by a special holiday given to all policemen so they may avoid his ghost which comes back to haunt the prison. The investigator is awakened from his catnap by no other than the vile sergeant who in reality is his obedient underling. In such flights of fantasy (which even include one dream-within-a-dream) Buñuel explores the inherent violence of his characters, which is subordinated in everyday life to the ludicrous social niceties of a bourgeois existence. But juxtaposed with the violence is helplessness when confronted by an impossible situation requiring those same niceties, as when the young couple feel forced to accept the bishop who volunteers to be their gardener. Buñuel reveals their latent brutality through their violent dreams. His portrayal is a fantastic but nonetheless accurate and even sympathetic treatment of the bourgeoisie—men trapped by their attempts to conform to a reality which is ultimately external to them.

Buñuel's presentation of the bourgeoisie's dilemma is nothing less than kaleidoscopic. He mirrors the strange yet familiar behavior of the middle classes in a number of different and suggestive fragments. After all, the middle class lies close to his heart; as he said in connection with the movie, the bourgeoisie lies much more in his realm than does the proletariat. He is and has always been intrigued by the contradictions which this class, this mentality is unable to resolve. Thus, he recognizes a certain charm that they possess, but this charm they themselves would like to qualify as being of a discreet nature. Buñuel incorporates their very own standards into the title of his film, but in doing so he imparts to it an immediate ironic sense. They cannot both fulfill their social obligations and be faithful to their natural impulses. As the guests are due to arrive the young couple begin to make love. The guests turn up; the couple escape out the window to consummate their passion behind some bushes; the Ambassador fears a police trap, and the guests leave, again without their dinner.

Scenes of people eating abound in Buñuel's movies because he is always interested in depicting the most ordinary of daily actions, incorporating them in the most unusual tales. Bourgeois life is characterized by the exaggerated celebration of fundamental human activities—such as the ritualized group meal. The bourgeois dinner is exposed, as it were, in one of the dreams when the partners have just seated themselves, finally, around the table. To their great surprise and embarrassment the curtains are raised and they find themselves seated on a stage, watched by a full house. It is again their sense of privacy and decorum that makes them hurry off.

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, more than any other recent Buñuel work, is surrealistic from its premise down to its smallest details. Dreams, for example, play an important part in

the movie as a whole: they help above all to reveal suppressed violent forces which inhabit the unconscious. But since the Surrealists considered dreams to be a part of everyday life, they sought to abolish the dividing line between the conscious and unconscious realms. In a similar vein, Buñuel's dream sequences here grow out of real situations and it is only when they end up in peculiar conclusions followed by the dreamer waking with a start that we realize these events were the product of human fantasy.

It also happens that a totally incredible situation ends without such a clear explanation. The bishop who has become the young couple's gardener is called to administer a dying man's last rites. The man confesses that he had once poisoned a young boy's parents with arsenic. The clergyman realizes the victims in question were his own parents. With a certain professional integrity he administers the last rites, then slowly walks over to the side of the barn, picks up a gun and blows the dying man's brains out. Whether dream or reality, the event shakes us with its extreme violence, yet its incongruity evokes a certain laugh from deep within us.

The images that unfold often remain without explanation, and that is precisely how they were intended to strike us—immediately, deeply, without reference to a framework. A striking recurring image of the film, which becomes its final scene, is that of the six characters walking down a road. In talking about the meaning of this scene Buñuel explains the way he uses images:

> I immediately thought of a road—which reappears in the film as a leitmotif. And I thought that one could show these bourgeois first normal, a second time bored, a third time tired and wounded. Then I felt that it was necessary to conserve the image as is, in its innocence, in order not to elicit a symbolic interpretation, so that it could not be said: this is the end of the bourgeoisie, this is society which does not know where it's going. But symbols will certainly be found in this film, as always. I have never expressly used symbols. Here, there is neither good, nor evil, only people who walk on a road.

That almost obsessive image reinforces the theme in a visual way. It is surrealistic because of its specific meaninglessness, and its general impact.

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie is Buñuel's funniest film: its humor is totally surrealist in nature. The Ambassador of Miranda is being watched by a young revolutionary in front of his office. To get rid of her he shoots with a high-power rifle the walking toy dog she pretends to be selling. A puffy-cheeked peasant woman runs up to the bishop, as he is going to see a dying man, and confesses to him that she has always detested Jesus Christ. The military friends of the dope smugglers drop in on them at dinnertime when their maneuvres take them to the house. They light up joints but the smugglers embarrassedly admit they've never touched the stuff. When they admonish the colonel not to smoke he retorts, "The whole American army in Vietnam is doing it."

"That's why they end up bombing their own troops," cautions the smuggler.

"So much the better," gleams the colonel.

We are really taken aback to find a Buñuel movie which makes us laugh from beginning to end. But Buñuel has always created a jolting kind of humor. The bizarre sight of a man drawing a piano with donkey carcasses on top and two priests trailing behind in *Un Chien Andalou* may indeed symbolize the inhibitions society places on the love act, but it is also a terribly funny image. In *Los Olvidados* when Jaibo is about to kill a boy we see a tall skeleton of a building in the background. Only the producer's objections prevented Buñuel from placing a full orchestra on its steel beams. Black humor, the irrational, comedy in its most jarring form have always been a staple of the surrealist diet. In *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* Buñuel has given us a work in which his surrealistic sense of humor emerges more fully than in any of his films since *L'Age d'Or*.

—STEPHEN KOVACS

BAD COMPANY

Director: Robert Benton. Script by Benton and David Newman. Photography: Gordon Willis. Paramount.

Of Peter Bogdanovich, David Newman once remarked: "Everyone else in Hollywood wants to be Fellini. Peter wants to win the Irving J. Thalberg Award." Thalberg, of course, was the MGM producer who was notorious for having a scenarist's work rewritten by successive teams of equally powerless hacks. And Bogdanovich's handling of the original David Newman–Robert Benton script of *What's Up, Doc?* proved to be a frustrating experience for all concerned.

But Bogdanovich should be seen simply as the *point* of Newman's lovely one-liner, and not as the butt. Newman and Benton may not want to be Thalbergian moguls, but I suspect they don't want to be Europeanized icons in the Fellini mold either. Their goal, which they have reached with surprising surefootedness, is to make good *American* films that both celebrate and scrutinize the values of the genres their films inhabit.

Newman and Benton are certified movie nuts. This is obvious from looking at their films *(Bonnie and Clyde, There Was a Crooked Man,* and their latest, quite glorious exhibit, *Bad Company).* It was evident in their work for *Esquire* magazine, and it is immediately manifest in any conversation with them lasting longer than thirty seconds. They love movies of all kinds and all countries. But, to their credit, they know they're neither Soho structuralists nor *Cahier*ist surfers on the New Wave.

Thus, they have chosen to work from within traditional Hollywood genres, bending them ever so slightly to an angle that accommodates their own modern perspective. The contemporary audience's response to senile genre conventions is often one of impatience, suspicion, contempt. So Newman and Benton create characters who *fail* trying to "live" (or relive) those conventions.

In *Bonnie and Clyde,* the Barrow Gang followed a scenario that Cagney and Robinson had walked through dozens of times on the Warner Brothers back lot—only to discover that the police weren't following the script. *Bonnie and Clyde* was a kind of essay, in narrative form, on the limitations of movie clichés as models for life; and *There Was a Crooked Man* revealed the same preoccupations. Refreshingly cynical, that film nonetheless had a real affection for its devious, eccentric characters, and a respect for that elastic, almost elegiac genre, the Western.

Their decision, to be faithful to the demands of realistic (if circumstantial) plots and naturalistic (if colorful) dialogue, places a difficult restriction on the writers' work. Their characters must at all times be believable as people—not as paper symbols of, say, Universal Brotherhood, and not as human stick-men standing this way or that to balance the Panavision image. Each scene must "work" as both experience and, if possible, a comment on that experience.

To accomplish this, Newman and Benton must work harder. I doubt that, if someone were to tell them a certain sequence falls flat, they would say, "Well, of course, it was *meant* to fall flat." It's pleasantly perverse of them to decide to write sonnets in an age when poetry reads like prose; it's also rather audacious. Their modest ambition—to recapture, and then recast, the spirit of the great American movies—seems nothing less than heroic.

Bad Company fits snugly into two traditions: the "Westward Ho!" theme mined so richly by such films as *Red River, Stagecoach,* and *Bend of the River,* and the "likable losers" theme of the earlier Newman and Benton films. Jake Rumsey (Jeff Bridges) and Drew Dixon (Barry Brown) lead a gaggle of ragtail youths across the American plains of the Civil War years armed only with big dreams in their heads and petty larceny in their hearts. As with the Barrow Gang, Jake & Drew & Co. are not exactly equal to the task. What was planned as a boys' adventure straight out of nineteenth-century romantic fiction—"huntin', fishin', livin' off the land," as Jake describes it—turns into a maturing lesson in disillusionment for Jake and Drew, and an American Gothic nightmare for the others. The urge for some ultimate destiny has been frustrated by their need for immediate survival, and movement toward some divine potential boomerangs into movement away from a demonic

posse. But our heroes are still alive; they're still together; and they're still moving West!

Jake Rumsey is a prime example of the Newman–Benton con-artist who's forever spoiling to match wits with the local Establishment—like Warren Beatty in *Bonnie and Clyde,* Kirk Douglas in *Crooked Man,* and even Barbra Streisand in *What's Up, Doc?* And Drew Dixon is his willing adversary-accomplice—like Faye Dunaway's Bonnie, Henry Fonda's crooked sheriff, and Ryan O'Neal's bewildered anthropologist. All the usual polarities in such relationships (teacher-student, active-passive, protective-possessive, masculine-feminine) apply to *Bad Company*—including the subterranean antagonisms of sexual role-playing.

With his blustering manner and frank, smiling eyes, Jake is playing the take-charge, frontier male to Drew's virginal female. Where Jake will bluff and bully, Drew will flirt and whine. The film is full of whispered confidences, threats of desertion, even a "lovers' quarrel" when Jake enthusiastically engages a travelling whore as Drew watches with resentment and envy.

In this light, *Bad Company* can be seen less as a *Wild Boys of the Road* than as an *It Happened One Night.* And the "walls of Jericho" in *Bad Company* don't fall until the climactic moment when Drew realizes that he and Jake share parts of the same mendacious soul. A virgin dies; a scoundrel is born; a partnership is made.

It's hard not to see Newman and Benton in these roles. It's part of the fun in watching their movies: the spectacle of two street-smart Manhattanites immersing themselves in rural, past-tense arcana, and bringing it off. Of course, they can't *be* Jake and Drew any more than Jake and Drew can *be* Western desperadoes; and their films can't be duplicates of the old movies they cherish any more than, say, Peter Fonda can be Henry Fonda. But they can translate their affectionate respect for the great Westerns into respect for the characters in their own films. *Bad Company* proves that they are able to demythologize a genre without debunking it—to transform eccentricity into elegy.

As director, Benton has realized this. His stylistic homages to other directors—for example, a dazzling three-minute tracking shot down a Western street that recalls similar shots from Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend* and Samuel Fuller's *Forty Guns*—never break the mood-spell he is trying to create. And he handles both actors and images with a relaxed assurance worthy of the best American directors at their very *American* best.

At the end of *Bad Company,* Jake and Drew walk nervously into a Wells Fargo office, gulp down their apprehensions, and blurt out: "Stick 'em up!" There must be times when Newman and Benton suspect that what they're doing—getting paid for writing (and now directing) the kind of movies they've always enjoyed watching—is pure highway robbery. Not true. Any plot turns or character-types they may have pilfered from the bank of Hollywood clichés are more than repaid by the understated richness of *Bad Company.* —RICHARD CORLISS

THE SALAMANDER

Director: Alain Tanner. Script: Tanner and John Berger. Photography: Renato Berta and Sandro Bernardoni. New Yorker Films.

The Salamander, despite the somewhat precious allusion of its title, is that rarity, a film that actually deals with human beings in modern industrial society: its characters *work,* and we see them at it. Like Eric Rohmer, director Alain Tanner (a Swiss) displays a judicious sympathy for his talky characters, who all have their reasons, and both his quiet ironies and his generally

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straightforward cinematic style also remind you of Rohmer. The script, which Tanner wrote with the English Marxist art critic John Berger, is witty, delicate, and politically aware yet undogmatic; it lets what people say (and don't say) carry plenty of weight, and makes it acutely interesting. The story follows what happens when a TV writer named Pierre gets a commission to do a script about a girl who allegedly shot her uncle with his own army rifle; she denied it, and the case was dismissed. Burdened with an interminable article about Brazil's economy, Pierre calls in his friend Paul, a novelist, to help out; they set to work, but their approaches are diametrically opposite. Pierre goes out with his tape recorder and talks to the uncle; he tracks down the girl, Rosemonde, at her sausage-factory job, and bribes her into cooperating in the inquiry. Paul on the other hand works from imagination: given the newspaper facts, he will reconstruct the girl and her story. The complicated yet warm camaraderie of the men is shown in detail as they attempt to get to grips with the mystery of Rosemonde—who appears to us, in her encounters with Pierre, as a solitary, sullen, subterraneously rebellious, and occasionally sexy girl of modest introspective gifts and ordinary intelligence. Soon Rosemonde quits her job—not because of Pierre's attention changing anything, but just as she has quit many jobs before, in a rage against a supervisor's nagging. She turns up at Pierre's house, installs herself on his bed, waits till he finishes a draft, and sleeps with him. Paul arrives next day, and discovers her asleep in Pierre's bedroom; everything escalates except Rosemonde, who remains stubbornly herself, and soon sleeps with Paul too. They all drive to her village and meet her family, which really clarifies nothing; the writers begin to realize that not only have they eaten up their advance, they are at an impasse with the story. Their different approaches to Rosemonde have both passed her by without making significant contact. They would have to throw everything out and start over. The facts of her life, and her dense, stubborn, erratic strength, are ultimately opaque, even when she confesses that (as Paul had indeed reconstructed it) she *did* try to shoot her uncle. But her rebelliousness becomes more conscious. Running out of money too, she gets a job in a shoe store and begins to act there like a human being—talking back, caressing customers' feet—for which she is of course soon fired. Paul tries to salvage something by getting Rosemonde to see, at least, who her enemies are—the shopkeepers who tyrannize her, the industrialists who exploit her—and the film leaves her smiling with some new understanding and grace at the end, though nothing else has changed. (Not the least of the film's ironies is that very likely she is the least defeated of the characters—who must all go on struggling in their different ways.) Tanner has obtained utterly convincing, wry, restrained performances from his principals; but what is most pleasing about *The Salamander* is that Berger and Tanner have come bravely to grips with something more particular and more awful than the upper-middle-class alienation we know from Antonioni: nothing less than "the way we live now," throughout industrial society (of which Switzerland is, needless to say, not atypical). It is a film of great inventiveness, humor, clarity, and promise; and like its characters, it will endure.

—ERNEST CALLENBACH

SALOME

Directed by Carmelo Bene. Based on the play by Oscar Wilde. Photography: Mario Masini.

I have never liked Carmelo Bene. He is ugly, arrogant, self-centered, politically neutral—and genial. His work in the theater, where he began his *enfant-terrible* career, was flamboyant, formalistic, drooling, and often naive. His stock-in-trade is *epater l'intellectuel!*, and both on stage and on the screen his works are beset by ostentation. Unfortunately, while rejecting him as a person I am forced to appreciate him as an artist.

The Venice Film Festival was boycotted this year by practically all the important Italian directors. Antonioni, Ferreri, Bertolucci, Bellocchio, Maselli, Pirro, Loy, Lorenzini, and their collaborators, friends, and followers attended a

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parallel festival organized in Venice in protest against the statute which dates from Mussolini's time and still controls the functioning of the Biennale. The one notable exception in this front of solidarity was Carmelo Bene. As a result, his *Salome* was the only important Italian film seen in the Venice Festival this year. At best, a doubtful achievement. Bene's position is that of the one-eyed king in the land of the blind in a year in which Italy has not, in any case, produced cinematic masterpieces—despite its increasing production figures (230 films a year), or perhaps because of them.

Carmelo Bene is 35, and has been involved in theater since the age of 22, in cinema since the age of 31. In four years he has made four films: *Our Lady of the Turks,* based on his own novel of the same name, *Capricci, Don Giovanni,* and now *Salomé,* based on Oscar Wilde's play. He started without money or help, shooting in 16mm (which he still employs, but now blows up to 35mm) and with scraps of cheap film stock, and has worked himself into a position of power within a traditionally commercial industrial structure, commanding sums of money that would suffice to create ten independent productions in England or the US, using Cinecittà studios for interiors, and preselling his films for commercial distribution before he makes them. He is an independent, autodidactic megalomaniac, who has made it on his own terms.

The films of Carmelo Bene are by definition frustrating. Such is their form and such is, most of the time, their theme. Frustrating, too, is any attempt at explaining his success, in a country notoriously nonintellectual, where cinema, especially, is still very much a popular entertainment, and where a familiarity with foreign authors like Wilde, Mayakovski, Camus, Lorca, and others of his favorites, can only be sporadic. I tend to believe that Bene attracts the Italian mind and spirit because he has been able to depict a microcosm of their own frustrations—religious, moral, social and intellectual—in a concretized, fleshy, emotional, hitting-below-the-belt fashion, and that he is not liked for what he says but for how he says it. Despite all his ideological pretense, his works are not ideological, but they allow for snob appeal while speaking to the people directly through the gut.

Exposing oneself to a work by Carmelo Bene, whether on stage or in the cinema, one is constantly sandwiched between fatigue of the eye and frustration of the soul. One's best intentions of objectivity are quickly destroyed by the constant aggression to the senses and the mind: every time that the mind tends to synthesize, his images disrupt. He constantly and consciously tears apart our habits of conceiving visual and aural stimuli, by fracturing reality into a million shiny pieces, converting it into style without allowing it to become idea. His meanings are like the eternally elusive rabbit leading astray the panting greyhound critic. He demands attention while refusing collaboration. He is camp, sterile, asexual, but also symbolic, flowing, and erotic. To stay through to the end of one of his films takes patience, but I find that the second time through, at least, the experience is worthwhile.

His theatrical presentations already advanced along this dual track of attraction and refusal. It has always been futile to look for Shakespeare or Cervantes in his plays; one must be able to forget his source. Since he acts and directs, designs and orchestrates, the plays are all Bene. He may steal the stories, but he provides his own flavor. Whatever *Don Quixote, Hamlet* or *Faust* may have meant to their authors, to Bene they mean Bene, and it is through this total narcissism that he manages to derive from them a new meaning: it is no longer the individual in conflict with society, but the cerebral in conflict with the flesh. It was easy, he seems to say, with your 19th-century romantic Marxism, when the fight was between man and the obstacles around him. Today the fight is within, and I am my own worst enemy because I am full of pity for myself, full of the need to own, to be powerful, to excel. Your dialectic has obscured my real battle, the one for my soul. This, probably, is why Carmelo Bene has never engaged himself in a political way, and why like Fellini, Dali, Arrabal, and Bergman, he continues to seek thematically in the vicinity of Jesus Christ.

What Bene did on stage in terms of form, to

express these concerns, was to decry the loss of paradise, depicting its various incarnations and their *disfacimento* in staccato visuals and sounds. His stage is always all color, all flowing scintillation, all scraps of whispers and screams, fragmented lines, repetitions, visual and aural superimpositions, veils, reflections, smoke and intimacy. The word, if indeed it is the basic unit of the theater, has been used by Bene in two diametrically opposed ways: reduced to its essential as pure sound, and raised to peaks of complexity by juxtaposition, orchestration, and counterpoint. The total effect of a Bene play is a bombardment of the senses, fertilizing the mind by illogical osmosis, so that only later, working hard, the spirit rises up from under the debris. You can walk away from one of his plays disgusted or elated, but the final impression does not materialize until later, below the surface of one's mind, when the waves have calmed.

In trying to transfer his talents to the cinema, Bene encountered a much more elaborate tradition. His plays have been called cinematic, but in cinema the kind of form he employs is not particularly new. The *avant-garde* of the 1920's, people like Hans Richter, Germaine Dulac, and Jean Epstein, and some of the more recent New American Cinema creators of the 1950's, have all used film in a similar manner, and often better. In cinema one is eternally stuck with the photographic image, which means that the significance of an object precedes its use in the film. To destroy the meaning that an object has before it is photographed has been the main concern of those who think of film as art, since without this destruction the creative process can never be fully controlled. In this sense Bene continues the research of his predecessors, inasmuch as his images have no "pre-filmic" life, and thus evade our efforts of identification. But like many before him, he tends to let this formal concern predominate.

I tend to be sympathetic to the thought that to use film in this pure manner may have had its justifications in the twenties when the cinema's vocabulary was still being elaborated, but that today's pressing social and political concerns practically impose themselves on those who have mastered this language that can speak to so many at a time. In short, I believe that reality exists before the intervention of the artist, and that one cannot, at the moment, limit oneself to the creation of one's own version. It is, perhaps, a dangerous position, but one born, I feel, of necessity. It is not an easy position to hold, certainly, when judging a work such as the Carmelo Bene version of *Salome*. Wilde's ideas, for Bene, are, in a sense, as "pre-filmic" as the usual significance of the objects he photographs. Just as he might rob a table of its "tablishness" by filming it in a certain manner and then inserting it into the web of his work in another, he pillages Wilde: robbed of their original context, Wilde's ideas become vehicles for Bene's obsessions.

And yet Bene has tampered surprisingly little with the play, which Wilde wrote in French as a series of simple sentences. (It was then put into English by Lord Alfred Douglas, and Bene has apparently translated that into Italian. The text also formed the basis of the Hofmannsthal opera.) There are some additions, notably from Wilde's poems, spoken by Bene in soliloquy form, and some ad-libbing he did during the dubbing sessions (Bene, like most Italian directors, shoots his films practically silent, for later dubbing), things that spontaneously gurgitated out of him when Wilde's text slipped his mind and he wouldn't stop the expensive (and unusually long—10 minutes at a time as against the ½ minute duration of normal "loops") recording sessions. He has also used a live recording of dialect lines for Jokanaan's part, employing an obscenity of language very foreign to the original. But the laments and the impotence are all there, and the weariness. What makes the film totally Bene's is the delivery of the lines and their juxtaposition to the images.

Bene is on screen (in the part of Herod) practically the whole time. His favorite form of delivery is to slobber the words across dripping lips, not always intelligibly, to repeat them, to have a second voice speak them simultaneously, and to writhe pitifully the while, in close-up before the camera, which lovingly caresses his tonsils,

larnyx, tongue, and every drop of saliva that these organs produce. While talking, he eats, slurps wine and gulps black, wet grapes off slippery gold spoons, and Jokanaan at his side burps up his laments from between the thighs of a naked slave of uncertain sex, whose crotch he licks between mouthfuls of slobbered sweets. All this is cut a few frames at a time at a frenetic rhythm, which further alienates the eye and uproots it from its sockets of logic. If you can find Wilde in this orgy, he emerges remarkably unscathed, which speaks more for Wilde's strength than for Bene's deference. But not many can be expected to make the archaeological effort, and thus the literary origin remains largely a sophisticated alibi, and Bene must stand and be judged naked.

What remains? A Christian artist, intuitively in conflict, wild in guilt and in attacking its foundations, desperate at the loss of his and His central position. He has taken from Wilde the apostle's group-cry of "Me, me!" when Christ, luring, says his "One of you will betray me," piles abuse in Sicilian through the mouth of The Baptist at all that is either holy or female, and in the figure of a man who tries (and fails) to nail himself to a cross has painted an alarmingly banal image of the prophet-artist-intellectual who in the guise of concern for mankind bemoans only the loss of his sway over them. Martyrdom as an achievement, and the possibility of it as the lost paradise—that seems the extent of Bene's concern for our days and their soul-killing texture. In trying for the rehabilitation of the idea of central position, what he puts forward as the fight of man for his soul, becomes only the fight for recognition, and in this way Bene's way of life and his aggressive stance mold well with the thematic structure of his work.

But his intuitions, as an artist, even if basically incestuous, are often magnificent. Obviously Wilde's play is an ideal vehicle for Bene's breastbeating, but I feel that in using it to put himself on the screen he got too caught up in his own breastbeating cinematographic act to rise totally above the material to a level of true authenticity, where he would become autonomous. Selfsure, he trusts his intuition beyond the safety limit, and although he works with a script he relies almost entirely, for the final effect, on what he can do in the cutting room. As a result, his flashes of genius reach us re-cut and re-mixed, often fragmentarily. The rhythm of camera movement within the shots is totally different from the rhythm of the sequences into which the shots have been pressed; often he cuts in the middle of fast zooms or swish pans; often the plethora of visual fireworks obscures the sequence of his ideas.

Magnificently photographed by Mario Masini (who has done all of Bene's films), the film consists almost entirely of close and medium shots, reflections in water, in blood and in mirrors, refracting plastic materials predominating in decor and costumes, and always veils, smoke, and a variety of colored moistures interfere between the camera and its prey. One feels an emotional need to cry stop, to put the film on a moviola in order to see the composition of the individual shots, and one feels that Bene is constantly working against himself in obscuring the process of perception. But again this is totally consistent with his essential being: his aggressiveness and impatience seem to say, as do his heroes in his films: why don't you bastards crucify me, then?

So far, nobody seems willing to do him this favor. Italian critics, when they do not reject him on political grounds (the easiest attack), being themselves a sort of *nouveaux-intelligents,* accept his literary and formal alibis, and probably find their deepest Jesuit duplicates echoed in his self-berating, phoenix-like, rising, pseudo-engaged obsessions. His escape hatches seem all the more sincere to them, since he is the first to admit his weakness when he quotes from Wilde: "Loosen the nails—we shall come down I know . . . "

Perhaps, if someone took the hammer from his hand and finished the job for him, he would grow up. —GIDEON BACHMANN

TWO ENGLISH GIRLS

(Deux Anglaises et le Continent) Director: Francois Truffaut. Script: Truffaut and Jean Gruault. Photography: Nestor Almendros. Music: Georges Delerue. Janus Films.

Truffaut's latest film is set in Paris and the green Welsh countryside in the period before the first world war. Based on a novel by Henri Pierre Roche, the film complements *Jules and Jim:* in fact Roche deals in both novels with essentially the same experience. Claude's relationships with Anne and Muriel echo Catherine's prologue to *Jules and Jim:* "You said to me: I love you. I said to you: wait. I was going to say: take me. You said to me: go away." Whole phrases—"happiness passes unnoticed"—and scenes are repeated from *Jules and Jim.* For example Anne raises her veil when she first tells Claude of her sister Muriel, and Muriel lifts her blindfold (she has weak eyesight) when she is introduced to Claude at the dinner table; Catherine raised her veil when she first met Jules and Jim at the café table. Claude is banished to a cottage near the main family house while he ponders upon his attitude towards Muriel; Jim stayed in a nearby cottage until Catherine and Jules invited him into the main house to share her room. However despite these similarities the films are distinct. The differences are an index of a change in Truffaut's attitude, approach, and style.

The story of *Two English Girls* is very simple. Claude meets Anne Brown, the daughter of a friend of his mother, who is in Paris on a family visit. Anne invites Claude to visit her family in Wales, and to meet her sister Muriel. Anne, Muriel, and Claude form an innocent ménage-à-trois, speaking French and playing tennis on the lawn near the sea. Claude falls in love with Muriel. She is reluctant at first, but finally agrees to marry him. Claude's mother disapproves. They agree to separate for a year, and, as in a fairy tale, not to communicate during that time. Meanwhile Claude, in Paris, becomes a figure in the art world, has various lovers, and then breaks with Muriel, who is heart-broken. Her eyesight worsens and she lives as a virtual recluse with her mother. Later Claude has an affair with Anne Brown. Time passes. Muriel gets in touch with Claude, but the meeting is not satisfactory and she returns to Wales, horrified at discovering that Claude has had an affair with her sister. Time passes. Claude writes an autobiographical novel, obviously *Jules and Jim.* Anne dies of consumption. Claude and Muriel meet and are lovers for a night, then separate. The film concludes with an epilogue: Claude, now middle-aged, wanders in a Rodin exhibition (Rodin, once scandalous, is now accepted) wondering whether one of the English schoolgirls at the show might be Muriel's daughter.

Nature in *Two English Girls* is an important expressive element. There are several long-shots of the three playing tennis on the green lawn with the sea in the background. Later when Claude and Muriel talk by the sea of her changing feelings toward him, she says "I'm like a river that rises and falls. That is why I said no." Taken out of context it sounds forced, but within the film Truffaut renders romantic moments like this with extraordinary understatement and feeling. And insight—for from this point in the film the characters are incapable of intense emotional expression (verbal not physical) to each other, unless it is from a distance by letters and in diaries, or through uneasy romantic metaphors.

This outline does not convey the sadness and feeling of realism of the film. However it may give a sense of its hypotactic narrative and symbolic structure—which even has an epilogue. (The terms "hypotactic" and "paratactic," from stylistics, are indexes of a shift in Truffaut's style —the former meaning that spatial and causal connections are carefully delineated, the latter indicating that on the contrary the sequence of events is fragmented in a temporal and visual sense.) *Jules and Jim,* in contrast, continually shifted moods and genres, was dislocative to the rhetorical end of buffeting the spectator into adopting Truffaut's vision. Several years ago I wrote an article praising Truffaut's rhetoric in *Jules and Jim.* Since then I have modified my opinion about the value of ironic and dislocative rhetoric (though not of the film). Apparently so has Truffaut. One of his last films in the old style —*Siren of the Mississippi*—was almost an exercise in rhetorical technique. Then, however, Truffaut attempted to regain the innocent direct-

TWO ENGLISH GIRLS

ness of his first film, *400 Blows,* in *L'Enfant Sauvage,* a story of the gradual socialization of a child found after years in the wilderness. Truffaut shot the film in black and white, and directed with Flaherty-like simplicity. It was a film that in its directness and lack of distance embarrassed several critics. Unlike *L'Enfant Sauvage, Two English Girls* is situated in a cultured and historic context which gives it a certain distance—and it exists in general isolation from the social brutalities of its epoch. But it retains the realism and feeling of its predecessor.

When Truffaut directs well his films have a strong sense of reality and convey his characters' feelings with intensity. In recent years (to indulge in a generalization) many films have had a surprising lack of success in portraying personal relations and expressing common feelings (I don't mean Hollywood sentiment). I have also found a similar resistance in my film classes —films such as *L'Atalante, Children of Paradise,* or *Dark Passage* are seen as camp, or tucked into little genre categories such as "melodrama" or "nostaglia."

Delmer Daves's *Dark Passage* is a particularly good example, being based on a novel by David Goodis, who also provided the source for Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player. Dark Passage* is hardly a perfect film, being marred at times by clichés and melodrama. But on the whole it is an effective portrayal of the development of a relationship based upon trust and interdependence. Bogart escapes from prison, is helped by Bacall (at some risk) to clear himself: in the process he grows beyond cynicism and individualism. The scenes involving Bogart and Bacall are very direct and emotional, yet retain an inner strength and discipline. There are few changes of mode—the film is consistent in its tone and its use of conventions.

Truffaut filmed Goodis's *Shoot the Piano Player* in a very different style. Assuming that a possibly jaded modern audience might be suspicious of certain feelings and themes, Truffaut juxtaposed different conventions and genres in order to dislocate the spectator: the spectator is unable to force the film into a narrow conventional system of classification and has to take it on its own terms. Truffaut's complex ironic method was a way to guide us back to responses that a less blasé or "sophisticated" audience would have had no difficulty with.

For example the flashback scenes—a parody of the Horatio Alger rags-to-riches myth. A young boy, whose brothers are gangsters, is sent

to study with a big-time pianist, is discovered by chance and becomes a celebrity. However fame and fortune break up his marriage. After his wife confesses she slept with the producer to get him discovered, she jumps out of the window. Truffaut directs the scene as a parody. But the suicide gives us a jolt (we see her body in the street) and we suddenly regard the problems raised as serious. Thus Truffaut has rendered a cliché by parodying it.

He employs a similar indirect method at the end of the film, ironically undercutting the gun battle and making it slapstick in order to render it as serious. The bad guys sniff their pistols and twirl the guns, and appear absurd. The cutting is dislocative and fragmentary. We see Lena (Charlie's girlfriend) running. They shoot. She falls down the hill. We see Charlie by her corpse in the snow, and suddenly the mood changes and we share his sense of loss and emptiness.

The end of *Shoot the Piano Player* is a far cry from its probable source—the final chase scene of Raoul Walsh's *High Sierra.* There the scene is presented hypotactically—the camera pans around the bend to trace Bogart's car racing up the mountain, then carefully repeats the shot to show the cops pursuing him. The tone of the conclusion is consistent—Bogart's death is tragic, and a condemnation of a society which lacks his generosity. Charlie, in contrast, shares Bogart's stoicism, but not his heroic stature. He is an anti-hero in an absurd and ambiguous world, of which Truffaut's cutting and shifting of genres in an expression.

In *L'Enfant Sauvage* and *Two English Girls* Truffaut turns away from a modernist view of life and consequently from his indirect ironic rhetoric. This is especially striking in *Two English Girls* for it is obviously intended to be viewed with *Jules and Jim* in mind. There are few sudden shifts of mood; the editing is hypotactic and attempts to show all the connections between events.

For example, *Two English Girls* opens with a short pan from Claude's mother to Claude on a swing being watched by a group of children. There is a brief close-up of his fall, then a long shot in which we see his mother running up to him. In the next scene Claude on crutches (the consequence of the fall) comes down the stairs of his house, sees his mother, and continues through a door to meet Anne Brown for the first time. The camera carefully follows him: there are no jump cuts; there is no paratactic condensation. This is very unlike the comic opening of *Jules and Jim*—the quick cutting and shifting between the early encounter of the characters, disjointed further by the interposition of the credits.

A consistency of tone is maintained in *Two English Girls,* in contrast to *Jules and Jim* in which genres (tragedy and comedy) were mixed and juxtaposed with ambiguity. For example, compare two café scenes. When in *Jules and Jim* Marie Dubois leaves Jules and goes off with a man who comes up to her in the café, the scene is stylized and seemingly comic (the pan of her doing a cigarette routine, the pianola music); later Jim consoles Jules by attempting to buy the table on which Jules has drawn a picture of his ideal woman. In *Two English Girls* the café scene is preceded by a phrase from the latter somber part of *Jules and Jim*—"happiness passes unnoticed." Diurka propositions Anne, who then departs with him leaving Claude. Later Claude goes to Anne's room, knocks, gets no reply, and walks away knowing that Diurka is inside with her.

Whereas Catherine was the prime mover of *Jules and Jim,* in *Two English Girls* a vague determinism pervades the film and affects all the characters who, in spite of their intelligence and material security, have no idea what will befall them in the future. The film sometimes suggests underlying social causes—the repressiveness of society, especially an intellectual and physical oppression of women, and later the destructive effect of the first world war; more often the determinism is gently mystified as fate. When Muriel first meets Claude she sits blindfolded at the table and says grace: "for what we are about to receive may the Lord make us thankful."

Whereas in *Jules and Jim* meanings were implicit, often rendered by a change of genre of the ironic relation of an image to the music,

themes and emotions in *Two English Girls* are much more directly stated. There are three narrative points-of-view: an omniscient speaker; Claude's thoughts and letters; and Muriel's letter and notebook. They complement and extend each other, are a source of depth and clarity, not of ambiguity.

As in *Jules and Jim* there are cultural symbols drawn from the arts—Picasso, a photograph of one of the Bronte sisters, and perhaps most of all Rodin's Balzac, who broods over the film's ending.

However the most crucial moments of the film are starkly direct. By this I mean not only the scene in which Muriel vomits upon hearing of her sister's affair with Claude, or the shot of blood upon the bed after her loss of virginity, but the continuing presentation of Muriel's character and of her feelings. There is a physical level: as she is affected by loneliness and guilt her eyesight begins to fail; once she abuses her sister (she fears the dominance of Anne and Claude, thus steels herself when she emerges in their presence) then runs to a mirror and exclaims "anger makes me ugly." Her confession of childhood sexual inclinations and experiences and of the guilt she felt is stated directly to the audience —a close-up of Muriel speaking her diary at times superimposed over the image of Claude reading it.

Shortly after Claude proposes to Muriel and she (at first) demurs, we see her walking in a clearing near the woods in the rain. It is a short scene. The camera is fixed. The music is intense. It is a Brontesque scene. Muriel speaks: "Claude, I love you. Everything I have is yours except what you ask of me." She walks in the rain in an arc from the right to the left of the screen. Before she completes the semicircular motion, and just as she finishes speaking, the shot is abruptly cut—this, almost in a physical sense, renders her incompleteness and communicates her pain and ambiguity.

Later after Claude writes to her from Paris, Muriel's reaction is presented directly to the audience. We hear her thinking and writing her diary: "I do not understand what you seek in other women . . . whether you want it or not I am your wife . . . your sister, your friend . . . exactly what you want." Then a shot of Muriel from outside her window—the window-frames, like bars, shutting her in.

Truffaut's exposition of Muriel's character is very unlike the clues we get in *Jules and Jim* about Catherine. Catherine gets into a boy tramp's outfit and races Jules and Jim across a bridge. The music is gay and they are laughing. But the music is a bit overstated, the cutting too abandoned. We become suspicious and pay close attention. Catherine jumps the gun in order to win, her face is contorted with effort and she gives an ecstatic cry of victory. She must cheat to win and exert power (or is it competence?). We are horrified—our pastoral expectations are destroyed. Yet the music is gay. All three are happy. The scene is both an idyll and an ironic rendering of a psychological truth.

In *Two English Girls* realistic events and naturalistic symbols also serve a truth-telling function—however, without the pervasive irony and ambiguity that characterizes the earlier film. This is especially true of several games. Soon after he arrives in Wales Claude plays charades. When Anne guesses what he is awkwardly portraying, Claude has to pay a forfeit. He has to kiss Anne through the bars of a chair in front of the family and guests. Just before they kiss we get a glimpse of Muriel watching: the fire from the coal stove is reflected in her dark glasses as she looks on in jealous anger.

Later Claude, Anne, Muriel and their mother go for a walk in the hills. They stop and the three play a game in the shelter of a cliff while the mother watches. Anne and Muriel are seated with Claude in between. They rock to and fro together while the narrator observes that Claude "is like a pawn in a strange game."

The conclusions of the two films also differ greatly in style. Catherine and Jim's deaths are somewhat slapstick and are preceded by scenes of erratic cutting, mixtures of genre, and comic coincidences that distance us from the film. Then we see them cremated, the coffins sliding into the furnace, and their bones broken into ashes. This is unexpected; it has an intense impact. Then trite, gay music is heard on the sound track. The

music is inappropriate: we attempt to deny it and thus become involved and respond within the film, experiencing grief and empathy. Yet the music and narrator cannot be completely ignored and gradually we, like Jules, become more distanced from the past experience and the film.

Two English Girls does not conclude with a complex rhetorical scene, but with an old-fashioned epilogue which tells us what has become of the various characters during the 15 years following Anne's death and Claude's final brief encounter with Muriel. Claude is wandering in an exhibition held after the first world war, of Rodin's sculpture—past the statue of Balzac, past a sculpture of two lovers. The exhibition is being attended by a group of visiting English schoolgirls. Claude wonders if one of the girls could be Muriel's daughter. Then seeing his reflection in the window of a taxi he thinks "What is wrong with me today? I suddenly look old," and walks away through a door.

It has been more than a decade since Truffaut made *400 Blows* and *Jules and Jim.* Is he now trying to get back to his roots? *Two English Girls* is the work of an older, somewhat weary but more confident and humane director. Unlike *Jules and Jim* it is not a seminal film, but it may be a sign of a shift toward more direct film statement. —MICHAEL KLEIN

THE EMIGRANTS

(Utvandrarna) Director: Jan Troell. Script: Bengt Forslund, Jan Troell, based on the novel by Vilhelm Moberg. Photography: Jan Troell. Music: Erik Nordgren.

The stone cottage sat atop a barren hill. Twelve olive trees stood below. This was all that remained of my mother's dowry now nearly 50 years after she had left her native Crete in 1920 to come to America. Lost in the Mediterranean, that strange, unimaginable island haunted me all through childhood (and was the source of embarrassment in school when prying students who discovered my foreign ancestry mocked me with "cretin").

Theo Papadakis, an old schoolteacher from my father's village, who lived in our house for a time in order to teach us Greek (a prevailing custom with prospering Greek-emigrant families) had filled our heads with extravagant legends about the family's lineage. "Your father is a descendant of El Greco," he told us, though our name translated humbly as "Shoemaker." I had never known my grandparents. El Greco seemed a long way off.

My mother had often tried to recall for me her youth in Crete and her emigration to this country. But her fading memory produced only vivid fragments that remained fitfully confused. After more than 40 years in America she had finally been able to return to Crete one summer, to find her aged father, bent and dying, resting on a boulder in his fields. For a long time he could not recognize or remember her.

Years later when I visited Crete, my grandfather and every other close relative had died. Only an aunt survived, and it was she, Thea, who led me one hot day to the cottage where my grandparents spent the harvest seasons. Approaching it, I was shocked by its abandoned condition. I asked why it had been so carelessly neglected. Thea, who had never left the island in her life, shrugged indifferently and silently mocked my fascination. The rough stone hearth was still cluttered with cooking utensils; one wall held the large oval portrait of a stern matron in a black babushka, and at her side, a thickly whiskered old man, with equally harsh, piercing eyes. I recognized them immediately, and in the dust and ruin of this dim little hut that was a precious repository for me, I felt I would never come closer to touching my own past.

I doubt that I will ever be able to piece together the early lives of my parents in their homeland, or their journey to this country and what they faced here. As a first-generation American I am more obsessed with the past than most, but the desire to trace one's origins seems indigenous to all Americans. American literature from Hawthorne to James Faulkner and Bellow has explored the relationship of Americans to their European heritage, yet American film has curiously ignored any intensive examination of the immigrant. Elia Kazan's somber epic, *America America,* one of the few notable exceptions,

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met disaster in this country. Set primarily in Turkey, this stark odyssey—a bitter account of the destructive changes the young hero undergoes in his desperation to reach America—may have been too exotic, too cynical and melodramatic to work an identification with American audiences.

But an unusual Swedish film has unexpectedly illuminated this obsession and satisfied much of my own inquiry. Jan Troell's magnificent epic *The Emigrants,* the first of a two-part monumental study by Troell (derived like its forthcoming sequel, *The Settlers,* from Vilhelm Moberg's quartet of novels on the Swedish emigrations of the nineteenth century), seems to speak more directly to Americans than to Europeans. In an ambitious, imaginative reconstruction of our fragmented origins from the Old World to the new, the film achieves a universality that Americans whatever their foreign ancestry can respond to.

Judged solely by conventional standards, *The Emigrants* might be dismissed as a minor work for its lack of character complexity or dramatic climax. But we would be ignoring its greatest strength—the emotionally dynamic *vicarious* experience it provides. *The Emigrants* has a primitive, kinesthetic power. Its richly detailed evocation of the past stirs the fantasies of our alien beginnings, and despite how far removed we have become from this central American experience, links us to it in a vital, immediate way. (Originally a formidable three hours—a length crucial to our sense of personal participation in this pioneer odyssey—*The Emigrants* has suffered clumsy re-editing by the studio which has reduced its epic scope and left gaps in the continuity.)

Structured in three major movements, the film painstakingly details the emigrants' pitiless existence in Sweden, the nightmarish terrors of their ocean voyage, and the conflicting exhilaration and bewilderment of their arrival in America and their search for a new home. *The Emigrants* opens on Swedish soil and catapults us back into the mid-1800's, chronicling the day-to-day life of a young farmer, Karl Oskar, and his wife Kristina (played with an amazingly youthful urgency and simple eloquence by Max von Sydow and Liv Ullmann) on remote rock-ridden farmlands.

This is no patronizing celebration of the simple peasant life. From the beginning Troell makes us aware of the pervasive, near-maddening solitude that a life lived close to the soil imposes—the long tedious days spent in isolation, where only the sounds of labor punctuate the stillness. By turns sensuously lyrical and brutally cruel, this segment gives us a perceptive awareness of the vulnerability of the peasant who must touch all of life and death: the grueling labor on unyielding land that rewards Karl Oskar with a bare existence and burnt-out crops, a flash fire that destroys his barn, the sudden death of his child from a ruptured stomach, and a final, chilling vision of the grieving young farmer hammering the coffin for his own dead child.

Embittered and unable to resign himself to this tenuous life, Karl Oskar discovers that, like him, his younger brother has been secretly obsessed with America as an escape from his abusive farm indenture. But in the village are other signs of malaise and discontent. A group of religious zealots persecuted by local authorities have decided to abandon Sweden for America. Troell undercuts our traditional patriotic sentimentalizing of those oppressed religious groups who sought refuge in the land of the free. Unlike the dreary, self-righteous portraits that appeared in our school textbooks, Troell's vivid rebels are touchingly venal, comically eccentric village misfits. But Karl Oskar's brother, impetuous young Robert (Eddie Axberg), the whistling dreamer, embodies the most appealing qualities of the early immigrant. His blinding idealization

THE EMIGRANTS ▸

of America, his irrepressible curiosity about the world, and his imagination (fired by a quaint American almanac which boasts of the excellent opportunities even the Southern slaves enjoy) represent the romantic spirit of the adventurer. Haunted by new horizons, Robert no sooner reaches Minnesota, the group's destination, than he craves the distant California frontier.

The vivid texture of this earlier segment gives way to an even more impressive authenticity and urgency in the emigrants' arduous transatlantic voyage to America. This dramatic portion is purposely prolonged, its grim details deliberately dwelt upon to create the suffocating squalor that imprisons us as well. We are meant to feel the shipboard degradation and torment in precise, disturbing images that reiterate the film's visceral power: the claustrophobic conditions of the filthy quarters in the hold, whose walls run with slime; the hordes of lice that shame these proud people, the sight of Kristina's blood-soaked body as she lies hemorrhaging and near death, and the relentless storm that batters the frail boat make us literally reel from this turbulent experience. After so much squalid misery there is a brief moment of exhilaration as the survivors crowd together at the prow to catch their first sight of land—an image that builds an anticipation for the purity of the new country that lies before them, magnificent and mysterious.

With the emigrants' first bewildering, disorienting impressions of America, however, the film plays against the fervent idealization of the new land young Robert has doggedly preached. Disembarking at the port of New York, they confront masses of sullen, squatting blacks, ragged and in chains. A rigidly segregated steamboat (a mockery of Robert's boast of America's classless society) later carries the ill-fed emigrants on its lower decks, while above stroll elegant, fastidious Americans who peer down at them with detached amusement, entertained by this spectacle of desperation. Helpless and frightened, the emigrants meet indifferent Americans everywhere; except for a saintly preacher who offers them an evening's food and shelter, they struggle on alone.

In more subtle ways than these, the film questions whether there is a difference between the Old World and this distorted Eden. Ironically, the melancholy solitude of Karl Oskar's days of labor in his homeland seem as much a part of his new life in America. At the conclusion, he has at last discovered a vast field of rich farmland he feels worthy enough reward for his arduous journey. Pausing to rest beneath the tree he has carved for claim, he is a solitary, insignificant figure in this silent and immense paradise.

Like *America America, The Emigrants* acknowledges some of the darker truths and social hypocrisies about this country. But in contrast to Kazan's pervasively bleak exploration (which ends with a brief impression of New York, already a soiled metropolis by the turn of the century), Troell's rare portrait of a still youthful America is so compelling that it overwhelms any social comment. In sweeping scenes seen through the voyager's eye of wonder, a pristine continent slowly unfolds before us, so strange and untainted that we share the emigrants' excitement in its discovery.

What emerges is a slightly idealized America, mirroring the fantasies of hopeful pilgrims escaping harsher worlds, and at the same time flattering our own American fantasies of our beginnings as we would like to imagine them. More than a simple nostalgia for the past, the film's visual eloquence expresses our intense desire for the pioneer experience that the modern world denies us. In its transmutation of the oral tales of our ancestors into art, *The Emigrants* fulfills the most essential tenet of a creative work —it allows us to experience what we cannot know, it preserves our link to the past that time is rapidly dissolving. —ESTELLE CHANGAS

TWO NEW TATIS

Playtime, 1965-67. Traffic, 1970. Columbia.

Word comes along the grapevine that American distribution has finally been arranged for Jacques Tati's *Traffic; Playtime* still awaits a taker. Ironically, *Traffic* is Tati's weakest picture to date, while *Playtime* is his strongest, and easily one of the genuinely great films of the sixties.

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Jacques Tati in PLAYTIME

Viewers who remember the Tati of *Jour de Fête, Mon Oncle,* and *Les Vacances de M. Hulot* may think back on these pleasant *amusettes* that predate *Playtime* and wonder at the likeliness of such an assertion. I can only reply that I went to see the picture expecting to be mildly amused by Tati's persistently idiosyncratic world, to be instructed on a few points of modern civilization, and to enjoy his endearingly perverse manner of controlling his work. Well, Tati handed me a big surprise with *Playtime.* Musset speaks of a night he went to see a Molière comedy: he went to laugh and came out crying. That's roughly what happened to me; I went to be amused and came out bursting with admiration and enthusiasm.

Playtime opens with a long shot—long both in terms of its duration as a take and in its camera position—of a mammoth reception hall peopled only by a middle-aged couple speaking in hushed whispers, much of their conversation inaudible or incomprehensible. Their whispers and the extraordinarily antiseptic qualities of the vast hall suggest that we are in the lobby of a huge brand-new hospital. After a considerable while another figure peeks out from behind a partition, looks around slowly, and gradually emerges to mop the floor in that erratic, jumpy mannerism that Tati somehow manages to convey to his actors.

Eventually, after Tati has made it perfectly clear that this is his movie, and that he's running it in his own way, on his own terms, and that it's important that we retain its opening shot, he begins the action proper. It quickly becomes obvious that this isn't a hospital at all, but rather an airport lobby, suddenly full of American tourists, almost all middle-aged women of the sort that can only be described as middle-aged American women tourists. They ah and ooh, gabble and complain, wonder where the Eiffel tower is and talk about how cute the Frenchmen are, gossip and chatter, and in general demonstrate an utter incapacity of absorption, of understanding anything at all, particularly the new culture they are about to encounter. Tati caricatures them (as he does everybody in the film) swiftly, deftly, surely, and entirely without malice. Along with them, and prominent by her difference from them, walks a good-looking quiet girl in her middle twenties, Barbara, who peacefully and happily observes and absorbs everything new around her.

On an elliptical course that occasionally intersects hers, M. Hulot wanders a curious path towards some sort of unspecified appointment. Tati's major character purpose in the picture is to bring Barbara and Hulot together despite the horrific labyrinth of modern Paris, thereby making the thematic point that human contact, while very difficult, is not completely impossible in today's cities. By starting off in the antiseptic waiting room and then transferring us to a ghastly example of contemporary architecture, stark, empty, frigid, and sterile—the building in which Hulot tries to connect with his appointment—Tati establishes the modern city as a place of buildings that are simply too big for their inhabitants, buildings run by machines, in which man can do little but get in the way of the machines and the architecture. If Tati were less of an optimist, he might very well have carried out the environmental doom vision that Fritz Lang has dwelled on so long and so brilliantly.

But Tati *is* an optimist, and he's also a sentimentalist—a rather guarded sentimentalist. Who, like Hawks, lets us perceive what touches him if we're *good enough* to see it, rather than verbalizing it explicitly for us. One of the things that touches him is the vanishing city, the Paris that was. We see none of it directly. Not a stick, not a stone. The entire physical environment looms in massive new glass and steel (almost all of it built for the film). But every now and then

Hulot and/or Barbara will catch a glimpse of some lovely old Paris landmark reflected in a glass door or windowpane. It's still there if you have time to notice it, but it takes luck, a little magic, and undoubtedly the right sort of character. Few share those gifts.

Reality, in other words, is in the eye of the beholder. Reality may be in the reflection, or it may be caught in some plane behind the glass, and those planes may very well contain another dozen panes of glass, each capable of producing its own peculiar reflection. Tati insists very strongly on the concept throughout the film, so strongly that the concept forms the picture's main visual theme. Although the character configuration and ideological theme I've already mentioned contribute strongly to the film's conceptual integrity, its executional integrity comes through most resoundingly in its use of the visual theme, which operates in a fashion analogous to a fugue. Tati begins with a long chord (the waiting room take) that conveys the notion of aloneness, of people engulfed by impersonal, sterile, and gigantic architecture. He holds the chord for a long time to establish the film's key, its center of resonance. Then he introduces the Barbara theme of the visitor come to be enchanted yet alone in the crowd, and then the second theme, that of Hulot, or the old-fashioned Frenchman lost in the new city. It's as simple as that; the rest of the film elaborates the two themes, now separately, now juxtapositionally, now intertwined, increasing the intensity and pace of its visual music to a climactic pitch in a magnificent sequence set in a newly built night club, where Hulot and Barbara finally come together and share a few hilarious hours—and where Tati's bold and yet modest attempt to "democratize" comedy (giving no character any more comic centrality than any other) comes to a culmination.

Beginning with that long static shot in the empty waiting room, we have somehow quite imperceptibly made our way into a crowded night club, so crowded that we can't even tell what's going on most of the time. The cutting has increased in its pace, but most of the effect of intensity and motion is gained through the camera. Now the frame is jammed with perhaps a hundred people crammed into many of the shots, almost all of them fitted out with quirky tics and disastrous little problems. There's much more than one can possibly watch, and that's the particularly delightful thing about the film at this point. We'll be watching a magnificent gag in the right foreground when, in the very second it reaches its payoff, we realize that another gag is well underway top center. This fantastic bag of surprises seems to compress five hundred gags into perhaps twenty-five minutes. That's just a guess, of course, but it should help to convey the intensity of the film's drive and visual richness during this climactic passage. It might help to compare Tati's visual pacing here with Hawks's verbal pacing in *His Girl Friday,* where Grant and Russell keep it coming so fast that we can't really soak it all up. Tati and Hawks work in precisely the same manner in that regard, overlapping converging but apparently disconnected "chaotic" material in a single shot, whereas Clair, the only other comic director whose pacing equals theirs, works essentially as an editor, relying on his splices to build up the momentum he creates through his strings of gags. And speaking of Clair, I might say that *Playtime* seems to me to contain the most perfect and hilarious example of comic visual building since *Le Million.* While I very much appreciate *Playtime* for its philosophical warmth and its fairy-tale generosity, my tremendous enthusiasm for it springs overwhelmingly from its brilliant creation of a completely idiosyncratic and organic visual fugue.

Traffic, regrettably, is as much a failure as *Playtime* is a success. Meant to be a Tatian *Weekend* without politics, it fails to develop the horrors of traffic's tribulations very well, it fails to develop any interesting human relationships, and it fails to attain any sort of rhythm. It fails, in other words, to do everything it sets out to do, thereby leaving us with little more than a few nice surprises, some very funny comments on automobilia, and several choice bits of Tati's compelling and curious arching style.

Setting the two films side by side, one emerges with the feeling that *Traffic* was hastily contrived

almost from day to day during shooting, and that Tati is a director who needs a great deal of preparatory time to ripen and perfect each shot in complete detail. Concomitantly, one has precisely that feeling about *Playtime:* the fruit of long patient, deep contemplation, a beautifully formed, perfectly ripened peach of a film.

—R. C. DALE

QUE HACER?

Directors: Saul Landau, Raul Ruiz, Nina Serrano. Script: Saul Landau. Music: Country Joe McDonald. Editor: Bill Yahraus.

Que Hacer: the Spanish title of Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* (1902)—a basic landmark of revolutionary thinking. To adopt the title is to accept the problems of making the revolution which Lenin was concerned with, or (at the least!) to acknowledge the bearings Lenin gave those problems.

But the film *Que Hacer?* does neither. It fails on so many levels that it is representative of the aesthetic confusion of the Movement rather than of the chaos of some 20 people, both Chilean and American, who contributed to its problems.

Ninety minutes in color, Spanish and English, the film combines two casts and two directors. Saul Landau represented the American team and Raul Ruiz the Chilean team. The results look like the Chileans won. What the film shows us is a silly story about two Americans (one an ugly CIA man and one a Peace Corps woman), a visiting Chilean from Cuba, Hugo the son of a CP deputy, a priest who is politically tangential to the Allende campaign, and a U.S. film-making team trying to shoot a color spectacular. The fact that the most important elections in the Western hemisphere for the past 50 years are taking place is treated almost as casually as the background to the story in a Hollywood musical.

What is so colossally irritating is that the original plan to make a film during the elections has become totally obscured by a contrived "drama." Here is some dialogue:

CIA man talking to Susanne Peace Corps Girl on a white-convertible-seacoast ride to Copiapo:

CIA (Martin Bradford): You're right in a lot of what you've been saying. People in Chile are really beautiful.

SUSANNE (Peace Corps girl): Then you really do have something to give them. But we have always shoved things down their throats like the Peace Corps does, like the US Marines do, and like you do in your way.

CIA: Well. Maybe you're right but I have something to offer. I have skills to offer. But these people are not set up to take advantage of them.

SUSANNE: Oh god! Martin, you're an imperialist down to the core.

CIA: Conquistador in a button-down collar, huh?

SUSANNE: Yea, except that you manage to hide it behind a liberal facade.

CIA: Oh for Christ's sake shut up, will ya, Susanne, I mean, I never gave you the right to insult me. You're working for the US Government, your righteousness is a little heavy.

SUSANNE: I *am* sorry.

CIA: That's not good enough.

The real drama in Chile is of course the Unidad Popular and the election of a Marxist president. An election! Something the Old Left Commie Party members advocated and all the New Left, street radicals, hipsters, mad bombers, Maoists and Fidelistas didn't, couldn't, and wouldn't believe in. That is the story and everything else is fluff.

Why present fluff? Why show only 10 minutes of the big story and 80 minutes of the little? Why, confronted with an unprecedented situation in the real political world, did the group opt for a form more cautious even than Z? Why did they attempt what a publicity note calls "a musical spy thriller about the elections"?

Gresham's Law says that "Bad money drives out good." In *Que Hacer?* we see that a similar process occurs in art: good material is fatally undermined by trash. The "entertainment" material oppresses the serious material not only because of the bulk it is given but because it trivializes the entire work.

Political film-making has become a complicated genre. Threading ones way through the facile statements of international origin is not easy. Eisenstein is bourgeois to the Godard-Gorin group, Glauba Rocha is an aesthetician

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compared to Gitano and Solanas *(La Hora de los Hornos)*, and Santiago Alvarez of Cuba is at least inventive whereas Newsreel is more interesting in its effect on other film-makers than its films.

Confusion mounts on complexity when commercial films like *Zabriski Point, Revolution,* and *Medium Cool* utilize actual political events for support in their structuring of superficial tales while political films use footage of political events and make-believe political events to analyze political realities. It is nearly impossible to utilize commercial entertainment (bourgeois) forms to sustain an analytically important sensuous message. *Que Hacer?* is a *Medium Cool* film with political pretensions; Haskell Wexler's tale with the 1968 Democratic Convention as background and Landau's tale with its "hidden" revolutionary message come out the same. Intent does not make content. Content shapes form and form has a political Rh factor. The minus in this film is the use of Brechtian dramatic technique in the film medium. The dialectical interaction of content/form must be observed in its historical environment. Landau takes half-understood Brecht, pulls it out of historical context and puts it into film, a technologically objectifying medium. Any utilization of the principles of B. Brecht, poet, playwright and dramaturge, in a medium within which he did not historically labor is to apply undialectically a theory of stage behavior to film production. Bertolt Brecht has been used by so many people on the left in so many areas it's about time we found another brave thinker to beat to death. Brecht was a poet and playwright and his major work was devoted to the theater; it's not that we can't use his ideas elsewhere, only that they should be understood historically.

Que Hacer? is confusing, but there are a number of constant elements. Joe McDonald is heard and seen in the role of a singer or Brechtianesque interloper. His songs are satirical of the movie, of the situations, and even of himself. Five songs in all—he also plays some back-up music for dinner and club. He becomes the major portion of the sound track.

The use of both languages, although complicated, is rather inventive. Trouble comes when an English-speaking dinner scene comprised of silly "spic" jokes is interlopped (the overlap is poor and intercut badly, *lopped* fits the case) with a serious discussion in (subtitled) Spanish between communist father and militant son. It is not a matter of essential scenes dovetailing. Rather we want to reject one and understand the other. So too with an actual speech by Allende, annoyingly interrupted by shots of the Peace Corps girl asking questions of Hugo the activist. This happens time and time again. Important scenes or what appear to be ideological discussions are interrupted by the plot and the already trivialized Peace Corps problem or the outsider Chilean/Cuban (something of *Memories of Underdevelopment* running through his character).

The worst case and most self-deprecating is the interview with a real revolutionary, a MIR leader in jail who tells the camera that the scene we, the audience, just saw, i.e., the attempted kidnap of a CIA man by Hugo and his student friends, is a terrible suggestion for Chile. He points out that the Chilean political climate is not the same as that in Tupamaros Uruguay.

The *Que Hacer?* group is by no means as simplistic as the Yippies who make Greek-dancing-girl-1920's-Zeitgeist-political films, oh, no, these people know Brecht (B. B. the poet) and they use him. First images of film (all synch sound):

1. Soldiers marching
2. Allesandri supporters
3. Tomic supporters
4. Allende supporters
5. CIA Man/Chilean/Cuban/Susanne
6. Rides/conversations/Embassy Peace Corps
7. Telephone split screen, Martin/Susanne

Interruption (musical Brechtianesque character, we hear only music)—Joe McDonald, in twangy bounce tempo:

"Put on your new sombrero
From Rio di Janero
And the Poncho you got in Guayaquil . . . "

The title of the song tells it all: "Making a Movie in Chile, Having a Wonderful Time." This song, we assume, is to break our emotional attachment to the event of seeing a movie about Chile—a

"Brechtian" device. What it does in fact do is slap us in the face for becoming interested in the subject. We have not gotten absorbed in any emotionally prurient personal event, the first five minutes of film is social document and exposition. We are however required to take notice of the film-makers' intentions: we hear their satire of self before they have made any statements. They insist we see and hear their motives as pure before we look further. By explicitly informing us that they are not impressed with their work in Chile they insist we look at *them* rather than the film. We are pushed away from the film. Alienation turns into embarrassment. Once having thus hidden themselves and their political affiliations the effect of their manipulation of alienation technique, spy thriller sequences, character types and postcard images of Chile is to trivialize the important and make psychologically narrow the politically expansive.

For example: The song "Making a Movie in Chile" is spoken as if the film-makers were a Dennis Hopper crew raping Peru or the entourage that accompanies Elizabeth the Taylor and Richard the Burton. No such thing: these people are really all friends of people who read *Film Quarterly,* common decent types. Interspersing actual speeches by Allende within the context of Susanne the Peace Corps girl's problems reduces everything that Allende says (and we *are* interested) to mere "dialogue." He becomes an actor in this film. The ride of Martin and Susanne, and a previous scene in which they walk through Santiago and travel on the cable cars, is made into a split-screen image of little postcards. Throughout the postcard parade Susanne converses with the CIA man, with fatuous and irrelevant dialogue. Mixed in with images of our two actors are Chilean miners, laborers, peasants —ordinary sights, perhaps those we would see if walking. These interruptions however are of a different quality and meaning than the trivial conversation between a bad-looking CIA man and an actress who shouldn't have played a 23-year-old character. And once again, by the law of bad driving out good, the Chilean peasants become *tourista* postcards rather than subjects for concern and understanding.

This inversion or rather perversion should be understood as the unfortunate interchange of predicate into subject. What the film-makers intended to satirize becomes their position. That which they tried to avoid they commit. As a Marxist friend of mine commented after screening the film: "If this is a map of our politics we want a new country!"

The group appears to have a secret program or to operate in secret as if they needed to hide their political point of view, as if they were revolutionary communists. We don't care if they are, it matters not. What they present is an objectivity that comes off as false. They hide where they should show and they show us their manipulation which turns out to be the worst of liberal art conceptions.

Was the motive for all this confusion to sneak a bit of Marxist rhetoric into the dank house of United Artists, Warner Brothers, or Columbia Pictures? A self-defeating as well as self-deprecating strategy; for in any case the images and the ideas must be sound. As it is, Regis Debray's conversations with Allende will have a larger circulation in book form (Vintage Books) than *Que Hacer?* The Debray interview is a precise Marxist investigation of Allende. Regis ain't kiddin' no one, we know who he is and are the better for it. Landau tries to hide himself and his Left identity.

This is a problem for the Movement and Saul Landau is a good example. In his book *New Radicals* (Random House, 1966), a report with documents of the New Left with Paul Jacobs, they both look at the New Left like objective bird watchers. Jacobs and Landau "suggest that you support *them*" [sic—those new radicals out there]. Curiously Landau and Jacobs put a finger on their own problem: "But the real issue is that the new radicals are searching for a theory that will combine their individual, existential view of politics with the ability to carry out mass activities. We think that search is a healthy one, one that should be encouraged." (p. 83)

Both Jacobs and Landau have roots in the Old Left and are constantly intervening in the New Left. Landau was an editor of the magazine *Studies on the Left,* had various roles with

the S. F. Mime Troupe, was producer-director of *Fidel* and has been involved in a host of other activities, while Paul Jacobs who has as lengthy a record as Landau's gets up to talk on Left subjects anytime anyone asks him. Their false objectivity in *New Radicals* is carried further in the next book *To Serve the Devil* (1971), where they wrote of the minorities in a sentimental, tragic, passionately depressing way: the section on the blacks ends up in black, the section on the Chicanos ends up on a bad funeral poem.

This maudlin attitude toward the Left is related to what Enzensberger has pointed out as an "absolutely correct view that the means of production are in the hands of the enemy (capitalists *et al.* and family). But to react to this state of affairs with moral indignation is naive.

"There is in general an undertone of lamentation when people speak of manipulation of the media which points to idealistic expectations—as if the class enemy had ever stuck to the promises of fair play it occasionally utters."* In the lamentations for the minority groups of America, the "we and them" schism of identity, and the covert leftism in *Que Hacer?,* we find a strain of aesthetic—and political—regression that is often apparent in the Movement. Saul Landau has made films for the last five years with a background in traditional political work. The Yippies thought they could shortcut the dull chores of organizing and political activity, and this Yippie myopia has now become evident in the *Que Hacer?* group. The use of commercial spy-thriller techniques to carry important and ultimately more essential (and thus dramatic) material is not possible. People want to know why and what is to be done, they don't want to be tricked or manipulated. We cannot use trite forms to carry important images. That is why Godard flaps, farts, and flounders trying to divest his slick mind of the trashy images in the cinema he sees. Godard and Gorin at least recognize their environment (bourgeois upper-middle class) and they try to supercede it. By using slick commercial forms one reduces the political material to slick commercial slogans, *viz:* advertisements.

Profound disrespect for self, craft, and activity was a good part of the New Left aesthetic. In the late sixties we despised our craft. It wasn't politically relevant. It couldn't and didn't match the headlines of the Black Panthers, trials and guns, nor the terror in the media produced by the Weathermen. We were outmediaed. Even the Yippies turned pale in the face of IBM and Chase Manhattan bombings.

In the mid-sixties some of us affected by hippie life expansion dropped our guilt trips and went on to take up the struggle for life. In the seventies with the break-up of the Movement some parts of it have returned to guilt tripping that turns up in all phases of liberal art. And Enzensberger characterizes a related defensiveness:

"The liberal superstition that in political and social questions there is such a thing as pure, unmanipulated truth, seems to enjoy remarkable currency among the socialist Left. It is the unspoken basic premise of the manipulation thesis. This thesis provides no incentives to push ahead." (The manipulation thesis criticized here by Enzensberger is that the media manipulate "pure truth" and this truth is merely distorted by the media, therefore it follows that "objective analysis" can sift out the truth from the media presentation.)

Once stymied by one's own analysis only self-deprecation and concurrent mildew is likely. Yet still there is a blue lining in the Silver Clouds. "The manipulation thesis also serves to exculpate oneself. To cast the enemy in the role of the devil is to conceal the weakness and lack of perspective in one's own agitation. If the latter leads to self-isolation instead of mobilizing the masses, then its failure is attributed holusbolus to the overwhelming power of the media."

For the cultural activist it is not easy to stay clean in the midst of corrosive corruption. Nevertheless US imperialism is not a nursery game. Personal purity becomes a privilege. Enzensberger blurts out, "The temptation to withdraw is great. But fear of handling shit is a luxury a sewer-man cannot necessarily afford." Even

*Enzensberger, Hans Magnus, "Constituents of a Theory of Media," *New Left Review,* #64.

though the splintering of self from any radical group or political perspective is as damaging to self as to anybody, taking a revolutionary title and turning it into a commercial liberal film is even more damaging.

Lenin in fact decries what we now call (à la Mao) liberalism. In Lenin's day it was called "freedom of criticism." The ultimate trivialization (not popularization) of Lenin's important work, and I don't mean to appear religious, is the placing of the line "Que Hacer mi amigo" in the mouth of Susanne Peace Corps McCloud, who, after seeing the dead Catholic priest, leaves the Peace Corps and meets the Chilean/Cuban whom she asks, "What is to be done, now, today?" Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* is diametrically opposed to the kind of spontaneous revolutionary activity implicit in the above question; more important, Lenin insists that "without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary practice." Cultural activists today need the same advice he gave political organizers in 1902. We need to study before we run out again and waste our time and spirit.

—R. G. DAVIS WITH M. H. HOWARD

FELLINI ROMA

Script: Fellini, Bernardino Zapponi. Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno. Music: Nino Rota.

There are some fantastic sequences in Fellini's new film. There is an evocation of a traffic jam on a Roman highway in which a film crew, purportedly Fellini's own, gets caught in a rainstorm, amid dying cows, swearing cardinals, burning cars, and stranded commuters. It is one of those ever-more-rare sequences in Fellini's work which treat a simple, daily matter in an abstracted, symbolic way, but still so beguilingly realistic as to become prototypes of the matter portrayed.

This ability to make one see that which one should really have seen all along but somehow hasn't seen, has been Fellini's major force. Because of it, his films have a haunting quality between realism and stylization even when they are (or rather, were) about everyday things.

In *Roma,* there are many examples of this ability. I am told, by critics over 50, that the evocation of the fascist era is more credible than memory. Perhaps, in taking elements of reality, separating them from the social flow, from history's deformations, his evocations replace memory. And his evocations, reality.

There is a sequence in *Roma,* an ecclesiastical fashion parade, invented but almost believable. Fantastic and increasingly morbid religious costumes pass, like floats in an eerie parade, before an audience composed half of cardinals with their ladies and half of Potemkinian puppets. As the costumes become bigger and bigger, their carriers' protruding heads become smaller and smaller, until in the end Paco Rabanne-type chain-mirror and neon-tube flashy popes' robes fly by in a wave of cold smoke, totally empty. Each model has its particular, secular characteristics: a model for the tropics demonstrated by a couple of embracing nuns in tropical helmets; a model for provincial towns with bicycles; finally, flaunted by a camp pair of monks on roller skates, a model called *Au Paradis Plus Vite!*

The mixture of fantasy and reality in all aspects of this sequence is so strong, that you are almost goaded into believing what you see. This mixture is still the thing Fellini does best. In fact, sometimes the suspicion grows that he may be on the road to losing the capacity for distinguishing the difference.

Thus for those to whom a certain tie to reality is not one of cinema's essentials, this must appear to be Fellini's best film since *8½*. It is certainly the most formally cohesive. And if self-expression at the expense of engagement is a choice you are willing to make, Fellini provides marvellous alibis for renouncing social and political concerns. *To paradise, faster,* is in fact where he is probably going, having acquired the Jesuit talent to garb his Catholicism in intellect and form.

In this vein, his self-deprecation, or the surface appearance of it, has become a major confessional tool: the film is permeated by breast-beating cameos of people who berate him. Anna Magnani, at the end, is made to say to him: "Oh, go to sleep, Federico! I don't trust you!" And

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students are made to ask him about his lack of social involvement (his answer: "I believe everybody should do only that which is congenial to him").

But there is no absolution and the self-criticism falls flat, because what he makes Romans say about him is not invented: it is what they actually say about him, and with good reason. They don't trust him, and they are right not to. This is no longer the real Rome. His reality-fantasy pendulum has swung all the way. This is a Rome of dreams and illusions. He is doing what he set out to do when he said: "Reality doesn't exist. The artist invents it."

On the other hand, it is an admitted subjectivity. It would be wrong to tag as simple presumptuousness Fellini's habit of calling his films by his own name or by opus number (*8½, Fellini Satyricon* and now *Fellini Roma* are the original Italian titles; *Juliet* is his wife's name). Foreign, more modest renaming may not do them justice, because in fact these titles accurately describe the contents of the films.

Unfortunately, they also raise our hopes, inasmuch as we expect to encounter a personality of some universal meaning, or at least a continually changing one, a character, as it were, who walks with the times.

In *Roma,* his most avowedly autobiographical work to date, Fellini does in fact seem to try to do that. But the result can only be defined as sad. Against a backdrop of *carabinieri* beating up a contingent of demonstrators, a fake TV crew interviews tourists and snob personalities. "The stink you complain of," a blasé Mastroianni says to his current, pretty foreign girlfriend, "is the smell of the centuries." But if Rome hasn't changed for Fellini's characters, Fellini himself hasn't either, and the gauche insertion of a political banality has a similar effect to the one the centuries seem to have on Rome.

The whole film is in fact overlaid with this vague underarm odor. Interminable scenes are culled from Fellini's memory: his arrival in Rome in 1939 as a boy fresh from the provinces (incongruously long-haired, bellbottom-trousered and played by a one-face Texan); a twenty-minute pasta-eating open-air sequence of milked folkloristic effects; the standby brothel, inhabited by magnificent, fat-assed, warm-hearted mother images; the provincial cabaret, redolent with more heavy ladies, scatological humor and jovial vulgarity; the eternal Catholic *colleggio* and its biographical boys (even into this scene a heavy-hipped half-nude manages to creep—this time projected by mistake during a lecture on other, more traditionally architectural monuments); and all his other obsessions: priests, nuns, madams, hippies, monsters, and fair, remote ladies.

FELLINI ROMA: *A brothel scene in the fascist era.*

Add to this the strictly additive style of cutting, the musical underscoring for effect, fabulous decor often wasted by careless camera use, the lack of dramatic development, of character exploration, of viewer identification elements, of subtlety, of social consciousness, of storyline, involvement or even just plain compassion, and you begin to realize that the antiquity aspect, the faint mustiness, permeates not just the subject matter but the form of the work as well. It is the nostalgic odor of an aging talent.

But in all honesty, the space of a review does not allow one to do justice to a work which in essence is like the top tip of an iceberg. In terms of Fellini's life and career, every sequence has a meaning that goes beyond what we see at the top, and has a value in these terms. The question is, how relevant is this to the rest of us?

Also, why be harsh on a man who has achieved so much? To review a film that one doesn't like, one could argue, is a waste of space. But Fellini has such a following, not only among Anglo-Saxon and French critics, but especially among young people, that his disconnectedness from reality must be pointed out. We live in an epoch rife with trends away from responsibility. Involvement with the self is often used as a justification for our inability to cope with actuality. Films like this one provide alibis for those who refuse to try, by raising self-involvement to a pretended podium of art.

But finally, one finds oneself with a certain compassion towards this man who in his time has well-nigh revolutionized film language, and who for a period was perhaps a dying craft's major exponent. That is why the adjective that springs to mind is *sad;* nothing really critical, really destructive, because somehow one is left with the feeling that to attack Fellini on a serious level, to demand responsibility or realism, becomes irrelevant in face of his patent inability to go beyond himself. So one criticizes the pretense, the presumptuousness, the diminishing art, the unconsciousness of the possible effects, the banalizations, but all this with a certain ambivalent affection. Perhaps his last, yet-to-be-made conquest, after dropping the mantle of the neo-realist, the social observer, and the intuitive genius, will be that of not being concerned with criticism. Then, when his works become entirely hermetic, he will perhaps be happy. In paradise.

—GIDEON BACHMANN

DELIVERANCE

Director: John Boorman. Photography: Vilmos Sgismond. Script: James Dickey, from his own novel. Warners.

When keeping in step with their finest traditions, the strongest adventure movies implicitly double as moral fables. *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* serves as a good example of this principle as does this year's sleeper western, *The Culpepper Cattle Co. Deliverance,* directed by John Boorman, should have no trouble assuming a position of equal stature with the best of these films.

Deliverance presents itself as the chronicle of a rugged contest between a quartet of city folk and the white water rapids of the Cahulawassee River. The men have been drawn to canoeing down the gorge because the recent completion of a power dam portends the drowning of the entire valley and this is their last chance to pit themselves against the wild river. Shot on location in Georgia, the film effectively fulfills the promise of the scenario. The action is harsh, uncertain to the end, and loaded with unexpected dangers.

But delicately woven into the coarse fabric of this story is a complex web of multiple themes which are presented more through visible demonstration than the easy and less interesting vehicle of dialogue. Unencumbered by the drag of intellectual reflection, the film encourages a direct involvement with the plot while letting the messages slip through subliminally. The mixed blessings of nature and civilization and man's hidden survival abilities are the primary concerns—though subthemes do exist—but afterthought is required to make them visible. The complementary qualities of the adventure and the philosophy form a full and exciting experience.

The boatmen consist of Lewis (Burt Reynolds), a man self-consciously compelled to

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The boatmen consist of Lewis (Burt Reynolds), a man self-consciously compelled to

Jon Voight shooting the rapids.

prove himself through feats of daring, violence, and endurance; Ed (Jon Voight), a family man inexplicably attracted to Lewis's compulsions; Bobby (Ned Beatty), a portly bachelor who seems mismatched to the forthcoming task; and Drew (Ronny Cox), a mild-mannered husband with no particularly distinguishing characteristics. Key supporting roles are filled by Bill McKinney and Herbert "Cowboy" Coward as seamy, seedy mountain men, and James Dickey, who also wrote the film's script and the novel on which it is based, as a sheriff whose stubborn scepticism is crucial to the epilogue. All are able actors. Of the leads, Voight and Beatty show stronger talents though Reynolds and Cox do not lack competence.

Until midway through the film, Lewis dominates the group with his swaggering bravado setting a standard against which all the men's performances are gauged. There is much to suggest that he has gathered his three companions as foils for his ego. In a campfire scene in which he disappears into the night forest after having heard "something or someone," his actions appear to be visibly contrived to make his friends nervous while he savors his own steely calm. Regardless, he is a tough character: physically strong, a good bowman, and able, if necessary, to kill man and beast alike. No attempt is made in the film to imply that his blustering covers deeper fears of questionable masculinity or other such doubts. Events do prove, however, that words are not the measure of men.

As the quartet wends its way through the white water rapids, it becomes increasingly clear that little difference exists between Lewis's physical abilities and those of his reserved companions. The point is proven gradually. There are no singular instances of personal discovery or heroic metamorphosis. In fact, each trial is met with bitter frustration and distaste. But as a hostile environment throws ever greater challenges at Ed and Bobby, the duo rise to the tasks with gritty determination and unexpected aptitude.

Two incidents wrench the weight of the journey off Lewis's brawny shoulders and force Ed and Bobby to carry the load. Paddling in an advance canoe, the pair make shore and are accosted by two armed mountain men, one of whom rapes Bobby. A few long minutes pass until Lewis and Drew drift quietly upon the scene. Lewis slays one villain with a bow and arrow, the only weapon the adventurers possess, but the other escapes into the woods. Later, when Drew mysteriously tumbles from the canoe, Lewis thinks the mountain man has shot him from the high ridge above the river. In the ensuing chaos, the canoes crash in the rapids, leaving their occupants to the mercy of the swift water and numerous boulders. Lewis suffers a broken leg and is unable to continue serving as the group's protector.

Despite their understatement, the subsequent transformations of Ed and Bobby are astounding. In a herculean labor, Ed scales a near perpendicular cliff with the bow strapped upon his back, overcomes his shakes and kills their skulking enemy. Bobby soaks in the river all night, weathering the experience well, and continues to provide whatever assistance Ed needs. Salvaging one canoe, the men ferry themselves and Lewis to safety, with the portly bachelor displaying unexpected power as he shoots rapids with steady skill and a broken paddle. When the trio reaches calm water, one point is clear: visible or invisible, tapped or latent, all men possess the courage and strength necessary for their own survival,

though that survival may come at a heavy moral price.

The parallel themes affect the film's aesthetic style more than the plot. In an early scene Drew, who has brought his guitar along for the trip, joins in a duet with a banjo-playing idiot-savant, a distorted product of backwoods inbreedings. The genius-retard easily takes the lead and the pleasure which shines from his face temporarily transcends his infirmity. Such simultaneous couplings of attraction and revulsion are repeated by Boorman throughout the movie. Nature is arrayed in great splendor but her leafy boughs shelter numerous horrors. Civilization has its advantages but they are paid for by separation from the better aspects of the wilds. Neither is perfect in itself, both are mixtures of good and bad.

The battle for survival is not seen purely in terms of brawn. The film's lengthy epilogue forces Ed and Bobby to match their wits against the rightfully suspicious small-town law enforcement officials who would legally prosecute the trio for the murders of the mountain men, regardless of extenuating circumstances, what with blood bonds being stronger than legalities in this neck of the woods.

Between director Boorman and cameraman Vilmos Zsigmond exists an understanding that film is a visual experience. The imagery in this film is spectacular and the worthy result of the delicate interplay of natural setting, sensitive composition, sophisticated work with telephoto lenses, and eerie filter or solarization effects.

If the film can be faulted at all, it would be for losing its subtlety in a few heady moments and being a little too short. The action is clipped and hurried in many scenes, possibly the result of studio cuts. These are, however, minor considerations. *Deliverance* is an engaging experience with considerable impact on a multiplicity of levels. —HAL AIGNER

UNHOLY ROLLERS

Director: Vernon Zimmerman. Script: Zimmerman and Howard Conin. Photography: Mike Shea. AIP.

Unholy Rollers originated as an attempt by American International Pictures to beat MGM's *Kansas City Bomber* to the anticipated roller derby box-office bonanza. "But can we get it out before *Kansas City Bomber?*" executive producer Roger Corman reportedly asked writer-director Vernon Zimmerman—and this after *K. C. Bomber* had already been in production six months. "Sure," Zimmerman replied. And a film was born.

Unholy Rollers didn't make its deadline—*K. C. Bomber* came out several months ago—but it still shows the marks of haste and slapdashery. And that may be one of the reasons it's so much better than MGM's multimillion dollar turkey.

Unholy Rollers is so bad it's good. The film flaunts its uninhibited love for everything decent folk call Bad Taste: traveling salesmen jokes, tufted velvet sofas, STP decals, greaser rock, suede hot pants, vinyl boots—and roller derbies. Zimmerman's treatment of the derby subculture is realistic is spirit and zest—but not in detail. *Unholy Rollers* is an exuberant, rococo, preposterous exaggeration of the skating lifestyle. "Reality was an inspiration to be tampered with," Zimmerman said in a recent interview.

The exaggeration isn't surreal, but it isn't subtle either. *Unholy Rollers* follows the fortunes of Karen Walker (Claudia Jennings), a ballbusting (literally), gun-toting young lady ready to

Claudia Jennings in Vernon Zimmerman's UNHOLY ROLLERS.

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trample over everything that stands between herself and glory—even if she has to go out of her way to do it. Her life is one extended hyperactive frenzy; she clobbers employers, insults strangers, abandonedly vandalizes and carouses. Karen soon gets her Rise in the thrill-oriented world of the roller derby—and her all-too-predictable Fall.

Every bit character is a freak, and every freak tells a story. Like the early *Dragnet* shows, *Unholy Roller* is populated with odd types, each more eccentric than the last: a crackbrained team physician, an eye-popping used car salesman (a Cal Worthington take-off), an ex-high school basketballer now sporting a shriveled arm, and so on.

The dialogue, sound track and photography are similarly excessive. The sportscaster's commentary is riddled with little jokes about the beer that's "ecologically correct" and the TV camera lens "specially treated to ward off insects." The music is provided by an oldies group called Louie and the Rockets—all leather, rivets, and white socks—who would make ShaNaNa wince, and who sing delightfully bad renditions of Fifties hits like "Sincerely" and "Sweet Little Sixteen." And the colors! Zimmerman, formerly a painter, has photographed the film in garish, bright colors—all of which clash with each other. If a character is wearing an outfit, odds are none of the pieces match; and one character, a bearded black heavy, wears a pink T-shirt, lavender scarf, and yellow mask.

Zimmerman's approach is that of a physician giving electroshock treatments to a cadaver. He keeps hyping the trite and familiar exploitation plot with jolts of gratuitous sex and violence, vulgar wisecracking, incongruous actions, riotous sounds and colors. And in the end Zimmerman's shock treatments are much more exciting than the forgettable story line, and, in fact, give the film a unique personality.

Unholy Rollers stands in the tradition of Hollywood B pictures of the late forties and early fifties. It was made for under $500,000 on a 20-day shooting schedule, and, like B films, compensates for a tired storyline with a flashy and energetic style. The manner in which Zimmerman turns every bit character into a freak is reminiscent of Robert Aldrich's 1953 *Kiss Me Deadly,* a film where if a new face appeared on the screen, you knew you were going to get a new schtick. Claudia Jennings's character in *Unholy Rollers* is a psychopathic exaggeration of an already psychopathic character—Peggy Cummins's murderess in the 1949 *Gun Crazy.* (I'm not just imagining these similarities. Zimmerman recently said the inspiration for much of *Unholy Rollers* came from a *film noir* series shown at Filmex last year—a series which included both *Kiss Me Deadly* and *Gun Crazy.* "What I really wanted to make," Zimmerman went on, "was *Gun Crazy* on wheels.") Of all the B gangster crime films, *Unholy Rollers* reminds me most of Phil Karlson's 1955 *Five Against the House,* a film whose cheapness, expediency, and bluntness had a similar charm.

If Zimmerman's film is not as good as the B films it emulates, it is not only because of the overintellectualized nature of his concept, but also because of the nature of the beast it is dealing with, that is, Roger Corman—but first I'd like to say something good about Zimmerman's dealings with Corman. Over the years Corman has employed many of the best young directors (Monte Hellman, Martin Scorsese, Andy Meyer, Curtis Harrington, Peter Bogdanovich), yet somehow their films usually come out looking like Roger Corman films. His influence is absolutely pervasive; he could make *Aida* look sleazy. Zimmerman, I think, has found the most successful way to deal with Corman. Instead of trying to defeat vulgarity with sincerity (as Martin Scorsese disastrously attempted in *Box Car Bertha*), Zimmerman out-vulgarizes the Master himself. *Unholy Rollers* regularly features the flaunting of nubile breasts—which, as any AIP director will tell you, is a Roger Corman trademark. But Corman didn't even have to require Zimmerman to inject any gratuitous nipples in *Unholy Rollers,* because Zimmerman had already injected them. Where Corman is crass, Zimmerman becomes crasser; where Corman is cheap, Zimmerman becomes El Cheapo. By pushing Corman an inch further than even Mr. Pop-Schlock Taste would normally go, Zimmer-

man manages to create a film world apart from his producer—a very rare achievement.

But, in the end, it is the Cormanesque exploitation elements which do Zimmerman in. There is just some kitsch you cannot redeem, Pauline Kael to the contrary. The mandatory Corman exploitation scenes, the cheap AIP look are almost impossible to transcend. Try as you might, it's hard to beat the Devil at his own game.

For example, Zimmerman's treatment of women—and *Unholy Rollers* is a film about women—is absolutely dense, worthy of such other Corman exploiters as *Women in Cages*. When a crude exploitation scene such as the poolroom stripdown comes on screen one realizes that the film is not only a clever artistic mannerism, but is also a vulgar film which exploits its female lead character—something *Gun Crazy* never did.

Nevertheless, *Unholy Rollers* is a delightful antidote to the artsy-fartsy lap dissolves and soft-focus photography of *Kansas City Bomber*. It's hard, fast, and vulgar, full of life and personality. It will be loved by the very people it exaggerates, and by those others who realize that its exaggeration is based on love rather than contempt. —PAUL SCHRADER

MALCOLM X

Produced by Marvin Worth and Arnold Perl, with the assistance of Betty Shabazz. Warners.

In a way, it's sad to realize that people need heroes for inspiration. Ideally, one would like to believe that people can find all the inspiration they need within themselves, in nature, in love, in art, or wherever the inner drive is most stimulated. But man always has wanted to transcend his sense of limitedness, and thus projects his desires onto larger-than-life-heroes.

For people of minority cultures in America—blacks, Native Americans, Chicanos, etc.—finding heroes has not been an easy task. White American culture has in its racism—sometimes consciously, but mostly unconsciously—wiped out and distorted the histories and cultures of these peoples, and thus their heroes, legends, arts, and myths.

A people deprived of these requirements of civilization tends to lose a sense of group, and often personal, identity. They are easy prey for either the ignominy of assimilation or the despair of drugs and alcohol, all of which ultimately are control-mechanisms of the majority culture.

American black people, for example, have a wealth of heroes from which to choose but which have been denied them by a white society anxious to lionize only the Booker T. Washingtons and the George Washington Carvers—the "good niggers." But suddenly a more militant black mood demands that other heroes be recognized and honored as well: men like Frederick Douglass, Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey, and Muhammad Ali.

One black leader, perhaps more than any other in modern times, was responsible for developing a black consciousness that could reject the white interpretation of history and the white heroes, in search of its own past and glory—Malcolm X.

Martin Luther King, Jr. helped give black people their courage back and helped them develop a sense of peoplehood and political savvy—but his leadership was almost always within a generally Establishment orientation. It was Malcolm who inspired in black people a sense of militancy, a sense of purpose, a sense of herohood. Because both he and King were assassinated, they found themselves added to the list of black heroes—victims of violence designed to cut black leaders down.

Last year, Warner Brothers, of all people, released a film biography of Malcolm X. (Well, perhaps not so surprising after all. *Malcolm X* was designed to ride the current black wave of film interest into the shores of box-office profits.) The film was produced by Marvin Worth and Arnold Perl with the assistance, the credits point out, of Malcolm's widow, Betty Shabazz. It is based, of course, on Malcolm's famous *Autobiography*, written with the assistance of Alex Haley.

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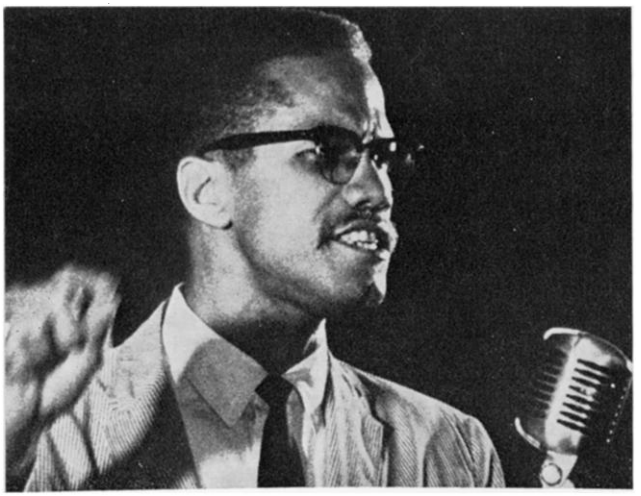

MALCOLM X.

the Last Poets reciting "Niggers Are Scared of Revolution," and old movie footage of rural black life and Harlem scenes of the thirties and forties, editor Mick Benderoth creates a biographical collage which gets us quickly into the heart of Malcolm's life.

We see footage depicting his poor childhood in Michigan and his days as a pimp and drug dealer in Harlem (complete with his famous conk). Then the voice of James Earl Jones reads from the *Autobiography*, telling us of Malcolm's conversion in prison to the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. We begin to see footage of a tall, gangly Malcolm emerging as a spokesman for the Black Muslim line, with a total hatred for anything and anyone non-black.

We see Malcolm on stages, and on street corners, delivering the message of Elijah Muhammad to the oppressed black masses. As the years go by, Malcolm comes more and more to shine in his own light as the most dynamic black organizer and speaker in the militant segment of the non-white community.

Factions begin forming in the Black Muslim movement and, after an easily misinterpreted remark of Malcolm's following President Kennedy's assassination (the famous "chickens-coming-home-to-roost" remark), Elijah Muhammad excommunicates Malcolm from the Muslim leadership.

Malcolm then makes his "hajj" to the holy city of Mecca in 1964 (we see him riding a camel) and, while there, marvels at the fact that white people, too, can be his religious brothers even though they are not brothers by skin pigmentation and culture. He begins to change his views concerning the parameters of the struggle, and his vision becomes more global, more incisive, more Third World and socialist-oriented.

He founds his own Afro-American society and begins—as Martin Luther King, Jr. was to do later—to branch out from his original concerns to talk now in terms of *class* oppression and imperialistic wars. Thus, he becomes a threat to the white American power structure. However, at the same time, he also is seen as a threat by the Black Muslims of Elijah Muhammad.

While addressing a crowd in Harlem in 1965, he is gunned down and killed by several black assassins.

Who did it? The evidence seems to point to the Black Muslims, but Malcolm's followers seem quite willing to believe that the CIA or some other white police group put the black assassins up to it. The film doesn't pretend to resolve the question, since, in terms of who Malcolm X was and what he stood for, either conspiracy explanation makes sense.

Malcolm X was the most articulate, heavy black leader to come out of the modern black experience into the light of Third World militancy. The film is a testament to his courage, his vision, his righteousness, his power to capture the minds of many blacks and sympathetic whites—and, not least of all, his stature of a true revolutionary, since he demonstrated the capacity to grow and alter his views.

In the main, it is not a maudlin film and though it builds to, it does not exploit, the assassination and resultant grief.

Malcolm X—at least from the picture that emerges here in the assembled movie and TV clips from his public speeches and interviews—was not a highly emotional person, but rather was possessed by a coolly rational and political mind. (His smile, however, is infectious, and it's obvious he had fun, especially fencing with white interviewers.)

Would that producers Worth and Perl could have found footage of Malcolm outside his public role, to get behind the mask of the public person. To present such material would have made the film all the more engrossing. But, alas, either there is no such footage available or they chose not to use it so as to preserve the pure image of the revolutionary martyr. In any case, the film is a brilliant, if incomplete biography of one of the most dedicated and skillful political figures in modern America, truly a hero of our time.

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Books

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(Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972. $12.50)

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If there is any justice (which, to be sure, their author strongly doubts) these books will put Vernon Young where he belongs, in the first rank of film critics writing in English. Heretofore he has tended to keep his light under a bushel—writing mostly in literary quarterlies where people interested in film only occasionally read him, but feeling more at home in that general cultural milieu than among the specialized film critics he generally despises. (Not that editors have not tried to lure him into the film journals.) Now, in *Cinema Borealis*, he deals subtly, complexly, and at length not only with Bergman's films but also his dramatic work and scripts filmed by other directors; and in *Vernon Young on Film* he collects essays written from the mid-fifties onward which stand up very well indeed.

Young was born in England, lived for some time in America, but has spent the past decade in Stockholm, with occasional forays to the continent. The *venue* is important, for his attitude toward Sweden is an intimate if puzzling part of his critical being. He loathes Sweden: its climate ("too far north to be lived in happily by man"), its politics ("the most colossal hoax of our time"), its ethics ("Sweden is a prohibitive society"), its speech ("everyday Swedish is a language for ravens"), its ethnic tone ("Sweden, having no self-knowledge, hence has no shame"), Swedish personality ("Swedes know nothing about love"). On the one hand Swedes "cannot compete"; on the other they display "unsleeping malice" within "competitive circles." I gather that Young has upper-middle-class origins, but as a refugee from England and America he ekes out a living by devoted and ill-paid intellectual endeavors which he can carry out as well from Stockholm as anywhere; judging by the jacket photograph, at least, he manages to live poor with style—perhaps as much thanks to the Swedish welfare state as despite it. At any rate there seems to be something about Swedes and Sweden which challenges and intrigues him. Maybe he needs surroundings he can condescend to; they pique something aristocratic in him. In the Bergman book he devotes an entire chapter to a measured discourse on Swedish national character and its climatic, historical, and cultural sources—asserting among other interesting claims that Sweden "missed the middle ages"; it is a quite imposing piece of cultural psychoanalysis. And perhaps it is easier for him to stand Sweden because he is nobody's optimist. After recounting his troubles in finding and seeing films, he ruminates: "Life under any circumstances is filled with idiotic excursions, false goals, prodigal waste, disappointed loves, galling personal insufficiencies, half-witted associations."

Young puts his consciousness of disparities between cultures to good and repeated critical use. "All art is a game played with ethnic rules," he declares in the first essay; and he is excellent at relating directors to the cultural motifs which both imprison them and offer them the themes for their art. It is no news that reliance on such distinctions is often the mark of a fundamentally conservative mind; and the label, I gather, would by no means dismay Young, who is probably even willing to risk being called an old fogey, if it came to that: he scolds "a new generation which, in most countries, has given up dialogue for moral blackmail, hedonism, or criminal assault." But he also refers approvingly to the liberal traditions of Europe, and clearly would *not* enjoy being called reactionary. My impression is that he would concur with Eliot on many questions—and in particular that the great poet's mind (and the critic's) should be so fine as to be inviolable by any idea. Such minds may not be, in fact, the kind we most need at present, when our problem is to see where we are going, or should go. But we must recognize that Young's position is a principled one: he thinks there is nowhere specifiable that artists *should* go (except perhaps into their own souls) and to him looking backward is a chief responsibility of the critic, and ought to be a chief exercise of the citizenry.

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interest. To most of us, *The Third Man* has shrunk badly with the years (though I was in Europe myself when it appeared, and spent scarce money on the zither-music record); Young however is still entranced after nine viewings—for him it "enshrines the end of Europe more indelibly than any film I know." He defends *Red Beard* valiantly, and notes that "Kurosawa's best films . . . do what serious art has always done when engaged with the human condition. They challenge us to live authentically." Well, yes, but what does that *mean?* The idea recurs many times, in both volumes; but its meaning is assumed rather than explicated, and thus it hangs in some kind of social and indeed artistic vacuum. Elsewhere he remarks that Jancsó "is an *artist* (whose job is to organize incongruities)." And still elsewhere he lays down that "the values by which cinema is best articulated . . . are essentially musical values." We must, I fear, conclude that while Young is an acute, intelligent, sensitive, and delightfully opinionated man, he has a sensibility but not a philosophy. He is always delightful to "listen to," as one might in person, and the essays, in particular, transmit a distinct sense of his personality; they are like letters from some far and rather vexing country, written by a favorite and elegantly aesthetic uncle. But it is hard to see what his reactions add up to on any other level; the opinions, collected and read *seriatim*, come to seem scrappy. He dislikes Flaherty, which is anybody's right, but on very dubious grounds: he sees nothing "faked" in *Louisiana Story*, and nothing poetic except occasional "touches" in the rest. Like Pauline Kael, he senses no resonance in *Seven Samurai:* "Nothing is at stake here except survival." During his stay in America he concluded that American films are "worse than incompetent and lower than juvenile; they are meretricious where they're not massively vulgar; they serve beauty or use as little as any popular art in the history of mankind." He spent some time in the Southwest, however, which gives him an unusual perspective on *The Searchers*, whose racist and sexist biases stand out clearly to him, and lead him into an impassioned attack on John Ford—still, to my mind, the clearest and most cogent Nay vote ever registered. (I think, myself, that Young somewhat underestimates the artistic force of Ford's "low-brow conservatism.") In the essays he roams over the Italian film, the German film, the French film, and the Japanese, coming back to his abominated "home" to touch base with Bergman and other Swedes. From the vantage point of his ethnic-social interpretations of the products of these relatively coherent cultures, he tosses an occasional shaft back at England or America: "[Anglo-American films] never express, with any artistry, an inborn collective principle . . . they cannot define the cultural gamut within the shape and span of a single situation." He is willing to look at Cuban films, with skepticism but without malice, and generally displays a great *curiosity*, which is a critical virtue too little honored; indeed, sometimes one wonders whether his aesthetics is really that important to him; almost more than art, he is interested in "the telltale nuances of creed and behavior that make people interesting." Yet he professes to find these only in fiction—not in Zavattini's documentary, not in *cinéma-vérité*, and above all not in a hybrid form like *I Am Curious.* It is no surprise that he hates the early Godard—but it is not for political reasons: "Film is not his medium," because of his "antagonism toward form." It *is* perhaps surprising that, after Young's emphasis on musical values in film form, he actually pays more (and better) attention to painterly parallels than to musical.

Although the attempt to distill a "position" from Young's essays is doomed, just as it is for most of our critics, he has a rich sensibility, bespeaking an impressive personal culture that is all the more impressive for being, in its Europeanness, in part a product of will. He is full of intelligent and subtle reactions to particular films. But he has no ideas that are capable of standing erect on their own. If we ask whether he can advance us beyond the fatal stasis where Bazin's death left film thought, the answer must clearly be negative.

This does not, however, lessen the value of his Bergman book, which is extraordinarily good. Living in Stockholm for Young, as it was for Jorn Donner, is to live next to the mountain named Bergman. For Donner, Bergman was a glacier, sliding down to crush him. For Young, Bergman is more an erratic volcano, hopelessly near extinction under the geologic weight of Swedish culture. Young's book, though it is far less sympathetic to the director's work than most director studies (or for that matter studies of novelists), completely outclasses Donner's, and is a useful companion to Robin Wood's brilliant work, which focuses more closely on the films.

The organization is firm and orderly. Young begins with the known biographical beginnings, and presents a compact survey of the Swedish film world into which Bergman came. After reading the essays, one may find the tone here more businesslike, less concerned to shine and more to penetrate; Young seldom lapses into the chatty exclamations of the essays, but moves on strongly into an analysis of Bergman which is somewhat psychoanalytic, yet not clinical. In most cases, this kind of approach fully meets the human questions that Bergman's films pose. It is less apt for discussion of Bergman as artist. Young can, for instance, discuss *Wild Strawberries* for almost ten pages, mainly on the theme of Sjostrom not being the chilly character he is announced as, and entirely neglect the astonishing *tour de force* of the scenes in which past and present co-exist on the screen. (Is it because Young is so convinced that Bergman is "anti-intellectual" that he slights his stylistic achievements?) Young properly notes how close to

chaos and madness Bergman dares to work—especially in the films from the trilogy onward, and most notably in *Hour of the Wolf;* he is almost always sensitive to the pain in Bergman's work, and also to the intricate nuances. As he says early on, "We find parenthesis within parenthesis"—which he parses in all their complexity. Yet he disdains to sniff out obvious Freudian mechanisms. While he does not share Bergman's "obsessive concern for the question of God's existence," he takes it seriously, and shows its workings even in films where its presence may seem diluted.

As far as ratings go (which is not very far), Young ranks *Summer with Monika* rather high, *Seventh Seal* low, *Virgin Spring* very high—because it manifests a cultural and poetic force that modern Sweden represses. He is chilled and depressed by the trilogy, though he considers *Winter Light* a masterpiece; and he goes so recklessly far as to allege that "it is hate that provides any dynamic principle to [Bergman's] films of the last decade." He sees that *The Silence* and *Persona* are densely compacted vehicles for Bergman's main themes, but he cannot accept them. Toward the end of the book, indeed, Young's earlier reservations about Bergman redouble and deepen, so that we wonder how he can bear to write about the man at all—is there some obscure puritan ethic grinding away here too, just as in Bergman's films?

No matter. Young judges the films harshly when he thinks necessary, and Bergman is no lamb requiring shelter from critical blasts. The opposition between author and subject, moreover, may be less than it seems. At one point Young argues that Bergman's spirit, which owes so much to Strindberg and Sweden's cultural isolation, may be a generation behind. If so, it might be almost fitting that his best critic should be an aesthetic gentleman who is squeamish about the smell of hippies and "petit bourgeois collectivism"—on which he blames the awful things happening to London's skyline, along with much else. In Bergman, after all, Young is dealing with an artist who, unlike Watkins, Rogosin, and other "dunderheaded liberals," does not find it "inconceivable that existence is contradictory," and whose films treat "pragmatists" to tortures well beyond anything that Young might prescribe for them. —ERNEST CALLENBACH

SCREENING THE SEXES
Homosexuality in the Movies

By Parker Tyler. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972. $10.00)

Screening the Sexes is a jolly and a healthy book. Verbally and intellectually limber, Parker Tyler puts on a strutting, joking, camping whale of a show: with a little gossip and lots of spice, he meets his subject with unfailing high spirits and passionate engagement. Though Tyler never exactly says look, I'm gay, all right?—never uses direct personal references—his study is nonetheless wonderfully open, its basic argument a plea for the unleashed libido and the joyous acceptance of human sexuality.

Ostensibly a work of film criticism, being after all an investigation of homosexuality *in the movies,* the book is nonetheless concerned primarily with establishing the moral and physical naturalness of homosexuality: Tyler insists that gay is not sick, that it is not an affliction, but is simply one of the many instinctual possibilities of sexual identity. To substantiate his claims, Tyler frequently calls upon the ancients—prominent among his dramatis personae are the gay gods and emperors of the pagan Greeks and Romans. Playfully but earnestly, Tyler even creates a god of his own: Homeros, patron saint of the homosexes. Tyler's point is that gay is not only noble, it is natural—unless we remain stubbornly rooted to the Establishment notion that sex is designed exclusively for procreation, never mind pleasure, and unless we insist on the traditional family unit as the only sensible or dignified mini-community.

Tyler rejects the definition of sexuality on the basis of sex organs and suggests instead that we are all a composite of masculine and feminine traits. In the kind of pansexualized society which Tyler plumps for, we would be entirely free to select our sexual beings from among the many possible varieties. Though Tyler's argument has something of the gay's fanciful notion that all the world is really gay, if only everyone would admit it, his plea for sexual freedom as well as sexual pleasure is eminently sane and friendly.

Screening the Sexes is thus several things at once: moral tract, social document, psychoanalysis, and yes, legitimate film criticism too. Tyler's proselytizing for the Cause often coincides with—is integral to—his film analysis, but I do feel that Tyler considers the films decidedly secondary to the sexual politics; the films serve as launching pads for the working out of his sexual theories—and isn't this perhaps just as it should be, sex in the final analysis being more important than movies?

To present his account of movie homosexuality—its manifold permutations, transformations, and masquerades—Tyler invokes that body of magic and myth which has provided the groundwork as well as the grace notes for all of his film writing. Tyler's terminology moves from the primitive rite to the analyst's couch; his diction and references are occasionally difficult, sometimes clinical, almost always overelaborate. There is plenty of high-toned academicism here: archetypal patterns, myths, ritual. Tyler knows his ancient gods and legends, and he sure enough knows Sir James Frazer, his Jung and his Freud. But he also knows his *Modern Screen* and he sure as hell knows the lay of the land on 42nd Street. The scope of Tyler's "knowing" is tossed helter-skelter into this showy, sometimes show-offy ver-

chaos and madness Bergman dares to work—especially in the films from the trilogy onward, and most notably in *Hour of the Wolf;* he is almost always sensitive to the pain in Bergman's work, and also to the intricate nuances. As he says early on, "We find parenthesis within parenthesis"—which he parses in all their complexity. Yet he disdains to sniff out obvious Freudian mechanisms. While he does not share Bergman's "obsessive concern for the question of God's existence," he takes it seriously, and shows its workings even in films where its presence may seem diluted.

As far as ratings go (which is not very far), Young ranks *Summer with Monika* rather high, *Seventh Seal* low, *Virgin Spring* very high—because it manifests a cultural and poetic force that modern Sweden represses. He is chilled and depressed by the trilogy, though he considers *Winter Light* a masterpiece; and he goes so recklessly far as to allege that "it is hate that provides any dynamic principle to [Bergman's] films of the last decade." He sees that *The Silence* and *Persona* are densely compacted vehicles for Bergman's main themes, but he cannot accept them. Toward the end of the book, indeed, Young's earlier reservations about Bergman redouble and deepen, so that we wonder how he can bear to write about the man at all—is there some obscure puritan ethic grinding away here too, just as in Bergman's films?

No matter. Young judges the films harshly when he thinks necessary, and Bergman is no lamb requiring shelter from critical blasts. The opposition between author and subject, moreover, may be less than it seems. At one point Young argues that Bergman's spirit, which owes so much to Strindberg and Sweden's cultural isolation, may be a generation behind. If so, it might be almost fitting that his best critic should be an aesthetic gentleman who is squeamish about the smell of hippies and "petit bourgeois collectivism"—on which he blames the awful things happening to London's skyline, along with much else. In Bergman, after all, Young is dealing with an artist who, unlike Watkins, Rogosin, and other "dunderheaded liberals," does not find it "inconceivable that existence is contradictory," and whose films treat "pragmatists" to tortures well beyond anything that Young might prescribe for them. —ERNEST CALLENBACH

SCREENING THE SEXES
Homosexuality in the Movies

By Parker Tyler. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972. $10.00)

Screening the Sexes is a jolly and a healthy book. Verbally and intellectually limber, Parker Tyler puts on a strutting, joking, camping whale of a show: with a little gossip and lots of spice, he meets his subject with unfailing high spirits and passionate engagement. Though Tyler never exactly says look, I'm gay, all right?—never uses direct personal references—his study is nonetheless wonderfully open, its basic argument a plea for the unleashed libido and the joyous acceptance of human sexuality.

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bal omelet, which is replete with those wild disjunctive leaps of fancy and those super-intellectualized feats of juggling which have characterized his past work.

Screening the Sexes, then, is a verbal potpourri; the gossip column hobnobs with the classics, the street exchanges information with the library. Alongside accounts of the Greek gods are speculations on the order of the following: Was Ramon Novarro bisexual?; Eisenstein, you know, was "privately homosexual"; do you know what Mae West (Mother Superior of the Faggots and, along with Homeros, patron saint of the book) was recently overheard saying in a nightclub?; were any of those actors in *Boys in the Band* really homosexual, or were they simply enacting a charade?

The gay jargon keeps pace with the psychoanalytic; Tyler's writing is juiced up with nelly fags and diesel dykes, groovy guys parading their baskets and tough-titty tantes secretly camping it up. Tyler is the jaunty MC, chortlingly, gleefully nudging and poking us into the world of kittenish werewolves, high-fashion tantes (low-fashion ones, too), courtly cupids, transsexual playactresses, turnabout supernaturals, draft-board daisies, kink-katerers, song-of-the-looners, and Adam-into-Eve perfect mixers. Nobody can accuse Tyler of lacking a sense of humor—at the same time that he's dead serious about his subject, he's having a good time and he wants us to kick up our heels too.

If *Screening the Sexes* doesn't fully represent a personal coming out, it certainly is a *critical* coming out: here, at last, Tyler is talking directly about a subject which has always been lurking shyly in the corners and around the edges of his criticism. Though I've always enjoyed reading Tyler ("an interesting, unusual writer," a non-film-buff friend commented, "though he's a little nuts, isn't he?"), I must admit that he sometimes lost me—that tortuous syntax, those arcane references, those sometimes circumlocutory and impenetrable "in-depth" critical readings. But here, though he's no rhetorician—his arguments are untidily developed, he is continually detained by nervous tics in the form of parenthetical asides—he is always clear. Tyler writes, as always, idiosyncratically, but he also writes more popularly and accessibly than in the past. And the reason, I think, is precisely this opening of the closet, this 358-page outpouring on a subject which has half-hidden palpitatingly underneath all those elaborate Tyleresque critical strategies. Tyler always looked at movie plots and movie actors as conductors of elaborate charades. The basis of his symbol-mongering has been his interest in variations on the theme of the double—the Oscar Wilde Jack in town, Ernest in the country set-up. Actors are masks, plots contain unconscious symbols, films are daylight dreams, surfaces for the transmission of the popular unconscious. Tyler's excavation of popular movies for concealed Freudianisms, unconscious motivations, suppressed and frustrated sexuality: what is this critical method but an elaborate symptom of the traditional (if waning) double life of the homosexual, his "secret sex" concealed under the postures demanded by a conventionalizing society? Tyler's main critical belief has always been that at the movies things are *not* what they seem.

Many of the films Tyler discusses here deal overtly with homosexuality, and he is not therefore required to discover implicit signs and tokens or to undress masquerades as he had to do for those skittish movies in eras less liberated than the present. *Screening the Sexes* is not as much as one might expect it to be a study of *hidden* homosexuality. Its main concern is with recent films. Tyler only occasionally uses examples prior to 1960; the book, then, is not so much a history of homosexual motifs, conscious or otherwise, from the beginning of movies to the present day, as it is a consideration of the ways in which recent movies have used the new sexual freedom to deal with the subject.

In films like *Boys in the Band, Fellini Satyricon, Death in Venice, The Killing of Sister George, Midnight Cowboy, Performance, The Sergeant, Teorema, Staircase*—films which Tyler returns to again and again—homosexuality is hardly disguised under another name. Still and all, Tyler's most brilliant performances here are those in which he's busily engaged in the discovery and elucidation of *unconscious* motifs in films which are not overtly about gays: *The Great Escape* as homosexual "mystery?" The men seem to pair off, and they're strangely silent on the subject of women, and is their tunneling their way out of the prison a metaphor (hold your hats) for anal intercourse? (Any film with an all-male cast is of course susceptible to this sort of interpretation—Tyler, in fact, devotes an entire chapter to Homeros in Uniform, the enforced segregation of men and women in schools or the military igniting the omnipresent homeroic deity.) Cassavetes's *Husbands* as a determinedly hetero charade which nonetheless contains homosexual resonances, the husbands being much happier among themselves than with their spouses? And what about that sexual fizzle at the end of *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice?* I'm surprised that Tyler didn't do more with that Hawksian ethic of male friendship and with the standard motif of the buddies-in-adventure films on the plan of, say, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.*

Tyler is on home ground, too, in his discussion of the gay as chameleon, not only in the disguised Oscar Wilde manner, but in the reverse instance of the straight masquerading as gay: the Charley's Aunt routine and the college revue are invoked as classic examples of what Tyler takes to be the heterosexual's predilection for drag.

Another masquerade, the theme of the exchange of identity between male and female, provokes some of Tyler's fanciest critical footwork. He arrives at the surprising conclusion that, in the most intense sexual

"conjugation," hetero variety, male and female become one, losing their separate sexual identities in the high fever of desire: we're all transsexuals, or at least capable of transsexuality.

In dealing with films with explicit homosexual themes and characters, Tyler both confirms and challenges stereotypes. The gay worship of youth *(Death in Venice, Fellini Satyricon)* and belief in the power of youth *(Teorema, Something for Everyone, Billy Budd)* come through loud and clear. As does the gay fear of and distaste for age, the lines and sags of which signal sexual ineligibility (*Staircase, Dorian Gray,* of course). Though some of what he writes supports stereotypes, Tyler is careful to remind us from time to time that there are many different kinds of homosexuals; he himself seems to dislike effeminate gays in favor of young, slim, hippie-haired, manly gays.

It's not invariably the case, but Tyler usually implies a close connection between a film's quality and its attitudes toward homosexuality, and this leads him to some peculiar judgments: relative coolness toward *Psycho,* approbation of a programmer like *The Detective.* He won't tolerate movies which blindly assume that being gay means being wildly neurotic or morbid or hypersensitive; he dismisses films like *The Sergeant, Children's Hour, Tea and Sympathy* which offer such stereotypes as the gay as a nervous wreck of a closet queen who kills himself in the last reel or the gay who isn't really a gay at all. He's on the lookout for films like *Compulsion* and *In Cold Blood* which, however furtively, suggest a link between criminal tendencies and "twisted" sexuality: the gay as homicidal maniac. And he goes after the midnight cowboy for beating up the defenseless older man who's willing to empty his wallet for services not rendered. He's also unhappy with that passé movie image of the homo as clown or sissy or asexual (Franklin Pangborn).

Tyler lets off *The Damned* rather lightly, however, considering that film's foggy equation between a society in an advanced stage of moral and political decay and the proliferation of homosexuality, and he's easy on *Boys in the Band,* too, because, despite its cornucopia of stereotypes, it is a landmark film which pointed the way toward more enlightened treatments of the subject.

Tyler is cool to the porn flicks; they're really anti-sex, he writes. The "bed activity" is too often simulated (though here Tyler's data is already obsolete), the encounters without humor or joy. For someone like Tyler, committed to open and hearty sex, the grim, concealed atmosphere of the porn theaters goes against the grain.

Vaudevillian, by turns esoteric and "popular," a tantalizing mixture of the gossip column and *The Golden Bough,* this sex-singing book is wise in the ways of films and even wiser in the ways of life. A pleasure and a boon.

—FOSTER HIRSCH

MOVIE JOURNAL
The Rise of a New American Cinema, 1959-1971

By Jonas Mekas. New York: Macmillan, 1972. $8.95

Mekas's publishers quote his self-description on the jacket blurb: "a raving maniac of the cinema." It's not unjust, and not terribly immodest either. For more than a decade, Mekas used his column in the *Village Voice* as a megaphone, trumpeting the new glories of the American underground film to a world that seemed, and was, almost entirely indifferent. He may have made a basic strategic error: by an enthusiasm that easily seemed overgenerous, his praise came to be felt as faint even when it was most meant, and even when it was precisely accurate. But Mekas knew perfectly well that he thus risked seeming foolish. What almost always saved him from being a clown was his very real and deep love of film-makers—a profounder love, I suspect, than the passing infatuations he has with actual films. The real drama in *Movie Journal* stems from this: it covers a period in which underground hopes for recognition and even commercial success rose high (especially with Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*) and then lapsed back into the state normal for seriously innovative art: rapid alternation between euphoria and despair.

Mekas soon perceived that by writing in the *Voice* he had taken on a role rather different from his fathership of *Film Culture* magazine and his role in the Film-Makers' Coop distribution center. He began to conceive himself, instead, as part minister of defense and part midwife. He was candid enough to realize that this required a "temporary surrender of the ego," and self-dramatizing enough to make a bold effort to portray it as a cardinal virtue. It was, in any event, a hard life, and one that few film critics would be up to. *Movie Journal* ends with a taped conversation with Harry Smith, in which Mekas promises to "borrow" $200 from a friend who has just come in from Cincinnati. After five drinks at the Chelsea Hotel, the friend comes across, and Smith is another thousand feet ahead on his magnum opus, which involves endless delicate footage of cherry blossoms. Marie Menken, who used to sing old Lithuanian songs with Mekas, and was an exile compatriot of his, died near the end of the book's period; and Mekas wrote a tender elegy for her (and for Willard Mass, who died a few days after her). Now I once had

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to defend my ancient projector against enraged viewers of Menken's films (though I also found them vacuous); but even so, I was touched—for art is not, after all, everything there is to life. Mekas snarls and threatens bodily injury upon projectionists who babble in the booth. One evening, after stopping by a highbrow theater and finding it only a third full, he happens to pass a church, follows some people inside, and is deeply moved by finding the church full, and the people singing; he wanders out again into the gritty Manhattan night.

In short, Mekas carried on his struggle with boldness and energy, and on terms purely of his own selection. Mostly he wrote only about films that he liked, but he went to *everything* (another beautiful quality in a critic, though requiring inhuman strength and a near-total absence of private life) and usually came away only with the occasion for a little public lamentation: "Oh, terrible! What came over me! Why did I decide to attend press screenings? Why am I punishing myself?"

But there are other, more important grounds for lament. Mekas has undoubtedly written more about underground films than any other person in the world, and he is generally thought of as the spokesman for at least the New York branch of the "New American Cinema." Still, if we look at *Movie Journal* in cold blood—which of course he would find immoral—we must admit that it contains not a single lasting piece of film criticism, if by that we mean a clear description, coherent analysis, and cogent evaluation of a film. He likes to talk about thousand-year-old aesthetic rules, but when it comes to explicating how VanDerBeek, for instance, achieves his remarkably powerful effects in *Feedback No. I: A Movie Mural,* all Mekas can say is that it can't be "described nor explained. It acted upon us with its multiplicity of images, associations, memories, eyes. . . . [the impact] came from the organization of visual, kinesthetic materials—and that's where art comes in." Nobody wishes critics to write cookbooks. On the other hand, this is really only yum-yum writing, like saying a fancy dish's impact comes from the mysterious blending of ingredients. Yes, we say to ourselves, but isn't there something more to say than *that?* When an idea about structure or form pops up in the columns, it is usually from the film-maker. Bill Vehr talks about his notion of making film like an endless tapestry; Tony Conrad talks about *The Flicker,* but Mekas only manages a feeble joke about somebody throwing up, and is not curious about the strange quasi-art, quasi-physiological-manipulation ramifications that Conrad was opening up. Film art in Mekas's columns is always spurting, blossoming, expanding, bubbling, or running through the streets like a bull. The old cinema was collapsing, he saw (and I think correctly); but it is hard to see, rereading the columns now, what the new cinema was doing. Mekas is scornful of ordinary leftwing politics, and of European leftwing film-makers who find the New American Cinema decadent or at least apolitical; he really does pin his faith right bang on the silver screen. (When confronted with a political film of a novel type —Godard's *Pravda*—he decides it is "Godard's most romantic film.") He believes in film-makers: Brakhage, Smith, Baillie, Warhol, Markopoulos, Anger, Jacobs. What they were doing, he thinks, was regenerating the soul of mankind. Maybe they were; but there must be more to say than that.

As Mekas points out, writing about nonfictional films is much harder than writing about story films. Almost bitterly, he notes that Andrew Sarris must have been born under a better star: he can write a third of his *Topaz* review about the plot, another third about the performances, and finish up with ruminations about the social and political implications. To write about Brananan or Brakhage is to Mekas—as it is to all of us—a baffling challenge. Indeed he oscillates between making a new year's resolution to do better, and giving up entirely: "It will be up to the new generation of film critics to work out the proper language, terminology, and method of discussing the nonnarrative film."

Well, if Jonas Mekas with his great fund of love for film-makers cannot do it, who will? Mekas properly laments the profound ignorance and inattention displayed by both the conventional and underground press toward underground movies. He would like to pass on the torch. And this magazine, doubtless among others, would like to publish more on nonfiction films of all kinds. I do not myself believe the difficulty is really one of vocabulary or method. The problems may perhaps be grouped as follows. (1) We do not know which films are really powerful and worth scrutiny—partly because they are so hard to see, partly because the audience reactions are badly complicated by ingroup feeling, backscratching, etc. We need more dedicated critics who see more films, care more passionately about the few that they like best, and can write about them convincingly. (2) We do not know what questions we really wish to ask of and about the new films. Some of the possible questions are relatively answerable—those having to do with forms, structures, points of view, techniques, influences, in short *style.* Some questions, about politics, the role of visual culture in our society, about the kind of vision film-makers are creating for us, are harder to address but still workable. And some, of course, about meaning, will remain ineffable—but not nearly as many as Mekas implies. For film, whatever its forms, is still a matter of discrete "works" produced by discrete artists,

taking the concrete form of celluloid in a can (which may be to say that it is still a bourgeois art, born of the age of production); it is susceptible to rational analysis, which is more than we can say of the electronic image which, one day soon, will gobble it all up.

—ERNEST CALLENBACH

IL CINEMA ITALIANO: SERVI E PADRONI

(The Italian Cinema: Lackeys and Bosses) by Goffredo Fofi. (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1971. 1,300 lire.)

Goffredo Fofi's *Il cinema italiano: servi e padroni* is an intentionally provocative book. It is, at first, a study of the state of the Italian film industry, but it is also, as Fofi clearly indicates, a pamphlet and a pamphlet that takes at its subject "the opportunism and evasions of directors and the conditions of the "world of cinema."

Such criticism of the way films are made and the way they turn out is not, of course, new nor is it, in itself, very important. What is important and interesting about Fofi's book is the documentation he offers, for he is both a political and aesthetic critic. The divisions of his book reveal the double aspect of his interests, for while it is clear that the last section, dealing with what he calls "possible cinema," is both the logical and ideological climax to his arguments, what he tells us in the earlier passages about the complications of the film world and the texture of Italian movies is seen as providing almost as many lessons as the statement of the program.

Fofi is not, as far as I am aware, a film-maker himself, but he is associated with the film magazines *Ombre rosse* and *Quaderni Piacentini* and he has contributed to the French journal *Positif*. He is also a Marxist, but this is less special an ideological posture than it would be with any other of the arts: in a sense we are all Marxists when it comes to film, for almost everyone agrees that the film, more than any other art, can be suitably subjected to an analysis concerned with the relationship between the forms ideas take and what Engels called "the material condition of their existence." However difficult it is to define the relationship that exists between the corporate complexities of production, the demands of the market place, and the expression of ideas, few critics ignore this relationship and they do so very selfconsciously. To anyone like Fofi, the workings of the commercial cinema are interesting at many levels. There is enough to deplore in the operations and pressures of the commercial cinema but the aim of the self-respecting producer, to put out a financially successful film, is perhaps the equivalent, in somewhat grotesquely modern terms, of what is other periods passed under other names. When French critics praise the "clarity" of Hitchcock, they are commenting on a quality in the imagery of his work that, in earlier aesthetic terminology, was described as "expression" or the like—that is, the quality of realism combined with what was often an extreme emotional authority. It is, of course, the very qualities of clarity and expression that encourage Fofi to conceive of a revolutionary role for cinema—a role that he would hardly ask of painting. He comes to the commercial films of Italy not to deprecate them, but to learn from them.

He begins with this analysis of the industry. The work of Antonioni, Visconti, and Fellini—the three "canons" as he calls them—is well known throughout the world, but in a real sense their work is individualistic and irrelevant for Fofi's purpose. Entirely more characteristic are the 200-300 films put out by the more national industry, the comedies (Tognazzi, Manfredi), the horror films (Bava) and the westerns (Leone). The audience for these is one of the most responsive and profitable audiences in Europe. It is, like all audiences in Europe, declining; Italy has lost 250 million admissions in the last 13 years, but this should be compared with the 375 million lost in Germany, or the 750 million lost in Great Britain in the corresponding period. As in France and as in England, the Italian film industry depends on and is controlled by American capital, especially in the distribution of films. Such distributing companies as Paramount, a division of Gulf and Western, are as profitable as they were in the United States in the golden days of the thirties and forties, when Americans went to the cinema as frequently as Italians do and as black Americans still do. The results of this American investment, here as in France, is a drift toward centralization. Over half of the profits that accrue from the distribution of films in Italy, according to Fofi, are removed from the country; less than 5% of the profits remain in the local regions where such films are shown. Attempts to change this, and to change the centralization of production and distribution have come to very little. In 1965, the socialists passed a law establishing a fund to support financially unstable films and in 1970 the socialists and the communists put forward a law to encourage the local production of films. The first proposal ended up, as had a similar one in France, helping larger producers; the second was lost in the political chaos of 1970.

The drift towards a greater and greater centralization seems inevitable. But before every film and every cinema is part of the same financial network, there is something that can comfort the radical and, on the

taking the concrete form of celluloid in a can (which may be to say that it is still a bourgeois art, born of the age of production); it is susceptible to rational analysis, which is more than we can say of the electronic image which, one day soon, will gobble it all up.

—ERNEST CALLENBACH

IL CINEMA ITALIANO: SERVI E PADRONI

(The Italian Cinema: Lackeys and Bosses) by Goffredo Fofi. (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1971. 1,300 lire.)

Goffredo Fofi's *Il cinema italiano: servi e padroni* is an intentionally provocative book. It is, at first, a study of the state of the Italian film industry, but it is also, as Fofi clearly indicates, a pamphlet and a pamphlet that takes at its subject "the opportunism and evasions of directors and the conditions of the "world of cinema."

Such criticism of the way films are made and the way they turn out is not, of course, new nor is it, in itself, very important. What is important and interesting about Fofi's book is the documentation he offers, for he is both a political and aesthetic critic. The divisions of his book reveal the double aspect of his interests, for while it is clear that the last section, dealing with what he calls "possible cinema," is both the logical and ideological climax to his arguments, what he tells us in the earlier passages about the complications of the film world and the texture of Italian movies is seen as providing almost as many lessons as the statement of the program.

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The drift towards a greater and greater centralization seems inevitable. But before every film and every cinema is part of the same financial network, there is something that can comfort the radical and, on the

other side, the producer—namely what we can call the receptivity of the audience. A most interesting passage in Fofi's book describes the habits of European audiences and, inevitably, the social organization from which such audiences appear. In both Great Britain and West Germany, the comparatively advanced social integration and the comprehensive control over the distribution and production of films has led to a uniform, dull, irrelevant, and uninteresting pattern of production and, as far as England is concerned, a not unsatisfactory television network. In France where the society is less integrated we have a clear reflection of the contrasts between the cultured center of Paris and the provinces in the division between the popular comedies and costume dramas and the internationally known work of Truffaut, Godard, and Chabrol. In Italy the situation is somewhat different. The general poverty and the tradition of extreme local organization in politics have served to perpetuate a regionalism that has so far softened the tendencies towards centralization and has engendered the large, open audiences that make Italy so successful for the great producers.

The receptivity of audiences in Italy towards visual material and the traditions of local but public organization are, as Fofi recognizes, crucial. In many situations, the political films that have been shown merely reinforce the general policies of the central government and are, of course, designed to do nothing else but that. In Italy, of course, as in many other countries, networks of distribution exist among intellectuals and students that show films the empires of Ponti, Grimaldi, and Gulf and Western never present. It is obviously more important to find such organizations among the other audiences, and, in Italy, such organizations exist. One such is Unitalia films, an organization sponsored by the communists; whatever reservations we might have about the conditions of orthodoxy required by such sponsorship, the fact that such an organization exists, and the fact that there is a demand for it, contrast remarkably with what we find in the US.

The last part of Fofi's book deals with the films that a new and ideal network would distribute; in this section he deals, in 15 numbered sections, with the possibilities for the production of films, inside and outside the system. The part dealing with the work produced within the system is somewhat longer than that which concerns itself with radical film, but this is not to say that Fofi feels any confidence that it is in such an area that we can expect the proper films to be made. Indeed, quite rightly, he sees the success of a figure like Fellini as a perfect characterization of the conceptions of the film industry. Of the three leading Italian film-makers, he is Fofi's favorite, but his imagery—sentimental, neurotic, egocentric, and clown-like—is the perfect material, to quote Fofi, for the bourgeoisie that wants "magic deceits and strange juggling." The lackey's pabulum, to use the terminology of the title. Clearly what Fofi says about the possibilities outside the system is more hopeful, not only because of the principles that can be used as guides but also, for reasons mentioned already, because of the quality of the potential audience. It is at this point that I have my only serious criticism of Fofi's book, for it seems that he neglects to describe in sufficient detail the manner of the new films. Perhaps that is the scope of another book. He defines the aim of such cinema, quoting the PCI, as "information, formation and proposals" or, and here he quotes Newsreel, "information, education and tactics." It is not enough, he feels, to record, it is necessary to clarify. In a sense, unless we turn to a kind of Warholian comprehensiveness, it would be impossible to record without clarifying. It is far harder to know where the positive qualities of clarification begin and where the negative nature of indoctrination, if that is what we can call it, takes over. Fofi is no doubt sure in his own mind about this. It is the ideal of the serious political film to present facts that almost in themselves can present the cause and the courses, for all else is unlikely to get any broad base of support in a conflicting society. The only appropriate method, both morally and actively, is, as Solanas said, quoting Che, "to respect the people and give it things of quality." This is, in its turn, quoted by Fofi. Perhaps he could have given us some examples of how he sees this in practice.

Fofi's book reveals much, not only about the role of film in Italy, but also, by necessary implication, about Italy itself. The character of the film industry in any country large enough to possess one depends on a whole series of attitudes and facts in the intellectual and social life of that country. What is written about the Italian film industry, by analogy, becomes something written about the American industry and thence about the US. What is, I think, striking about the tone of Fofi's book is its easy assumption of hopefulness, a hopefulness that does not extend to the situation of Italy at the moment, but a hopefulness about the possibility that whatever comes about in Italy will come about with the influence and activity of people with the power and reason that Fofi enjoys. I do not think I am doing any injustice to Fofi's basic position when I refer so much to his concern with the activities of commercial cinema and the qualities of the films put out—aesthetic qualities, it should be noted, as well as what we might call unconscious political ones. It is, I think, true that such ease depends on

the assumption, and the fair assumption, that political and cultural activity in Italy are more open than we can find them in this country. It is the despair, at moments, of anyone concerned with these questions in the US that we are confronted either with the somewhat self-conscious concern of the cultural audiences or the visibly lulled responses of the audiences for what passes as political discourse. If I have turned this review into a tract, it is, I claim, largely the fault of Fofi, for what he writes has a double value. It is not only a rich account of the programs and activities of film-makers in Italy, and all that follows from that. It is also a very suggestive book for anyone considering the comparative situation in this country today. —DAVID CAST

MOVIES AND SOCIETY

By Ian C. Jarvie. (New York: Basic Books, 1970. $10.00)

"The four parts of this book," explains its author, "could be looked upon as providing four superficial maps of the same territory." Although sociologists have been famed and defamed for their imperialistic forays into fields that rival academics had staked out as their own, they have still not invaded the area of film in any substantial number. Jarvie's purpose is therefore admittedly exploratory. The *aficionado* may be disappointed, not for the unsurprising results of his survey but for his sanguine delivery of them. His subsuming of cinema literature, listed in an excellent bibliography, under the headings of industry, audience, content, and evaluation is useful, but his practice of summarizing it in descriptive rather than analytical statements decreases the book's potential from inspirational text to reference work. Such categories need to be systematically and historically connected, as Jarvie himself recognizes, but his enthusiasm for McLuhan and midcult prevents him from interrelating them by acting as a surrogate for instead of a stimulus to elaboration. While critical of the realist tradition in both film and film study, Jarvie partakes of its premises in seeming to consider movies equally in terms of the information they impart as well as the experience they engender. That his execution turns out to be less impressive than his conception should not be attributed to Jarvie's or even sociology's limitations but to the arduousness of arriving at reasonable propositions about the most public, and yet the most mysterious, of the arts. —ROBERT G. MICHELS

D. W. Griffith's The Battle at Elderbush Gulch. By Kemp R. Niver. (Historical Films, Box 46505, Los Angeles, Cal. 90046, $5.95.) A reconstruction from frame enlargements of the 1913 film Griffith considered to rank among his best—a fine example of the parallel-action structure which Griffith, as Niver has shown elsewhere, had constantly in mind from 1908 onward.

The American Newsreel, 1911-1967. By Raymond Fielding. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972. $9.95) A minutely detailed history of the newsreels, from their primitive beginnings, through the period of faked "reconstructions," to their peak just before World War II, and up to their recent total demise. A pleasantly jaundiced view, and includes some fascinating material on the suppression of "inflammatory" events like labor disputes and "the horrors of war."

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Short Notices

As Long As the Rivers Run was made by Carol Burns, with the collaboration of an Indian group involved in the salmon-fishing disputes near Seattle. It is a leisurely chronicle of Indian life and Indian involvement with the complex ramifications of the fisheries: breached treaties, "conservation" regulations, commercial fishing interests, legal and political struggles, and the slow ecological death of the rivers brought on by the white man's dredging and dam-building. The film climaxes with Indian occupation of a neglected federal enclave in downtown Tacoma, where the Indians set up an armed fishing camp. Warning shots, arrests the Indians consider illegal, and the burning of a railway bridge followed. (In the truce that has ensued, the Indians are being allowed to fish.) Source: Route 6, Box 356, Olympia, Oregon 98502. —E. C.

Ben and Stanley. In the thirties and forties, there were many sunny escapist films in which men were devoted to horses and dogs. These days, since films about depravity and violence are in vogue, we get stories about creepy relationships between men and sinister creatures like rodents and reptiles. In these gruesome movies, the audience is flagrantly maneuvered into empathizing with the animals. In *Ben,* we find ourselves rooting for rats. In *Stanley,* we side with snakes. Aligning ourselves with the animals is easy since nearly all of the humans in these pictures are evil, while the animals are depicted as a maligned minority. The essence of the films is the attack sequences, which exploit our fear of these creatures. Most of us are terrified of snakes and sewer rats and cringe at the thought of touching any. There are few film-goers who would not be unsettled by the sequences in which some poor soul is gnawed or nipped to death. The attack sequences are imaginatively photographed and effectively edited; unfortunately, they comprise just a small part of each film. The bulk of both movies is atrociously written, directed and acted. *Ben,* which was written by Gilbert Ralston and directed by Phil Karlson, picks up where last year's smash hit, *Willard,* left off. The sequel, which is even worse than the original, begins just after the death of Willard, the deranged young lad who trained Ben, the brilliant, loveable rodent leader. Thousands of marauding rats stage night raids on a supermarket and a candy store and send a whole town into a tizzy. But we feel kindly toward them because they are just looking for food and chew on people only when attacked. Besides, Ben befriends Danny (Lee Harcourt Montgomery), a cherubic little boy with a heart condition. In one sequence, they rescue him from a bully. How can you hate rats who protect a sick little boy? Danny helps the rat army elude the police who, in this film, are not very bright. Led by a grim lieutenant (Joseph Campanella), they are baffled by the rat raids. The most logical hideout for a few thousand fugitive rodents is the sewer. This, however, does not dawn upon the lieutenant until the film is half over. For all its shortcomings, *Ben* is superior to *Stanley,* which was written by Gary Crutcher and directed by William Grefe. Stanley is a clever, moral, loyal rattlesnake who injects his venom only into villains. His master Tim (Chris Robinson), is a sour young Seminole who lives in the Florida Everglades and supports himself by capturing snakes and selling their venom to a scientist. He is unusual in that he hates people and loves snakes. In a bizarrely comic sequence, he dines with Stanley and his mate Hazel. Tim eats a conventional breakfast while they sat on the table and feast on a grisly entree of live rat under glass. Through most of the film, Tim is plagued by an evil clothing manufacturer (Alex Rocco) and his henchmen, who kill snakes for the vile purpose of making snakeskin clothes. There are several hair-raising sequences in which Tim sics snakes on these thugs. At the end, due to the effects of some war injury, Tim goes berserk, kicks around a couple of snakes and tries to goad Stanley into biting an innocent girl. Stanley, being a champion of justice and fair play, instead turns upon his master. In the final scene, Stanley crawls sadly away. But we probably have not seen the last of this noble rattler. Soon, in some sleazy sequel, he will slither back into our hearts.
—Dennis Hunt

The Candidate. The shallowness of *The Candidate* wouldn't matter so much if it were a funnier movie. But for much of the film, Redford is only a straight man in a situational comedy of ineptitude. And though Redford may be sympathetic to the audience, he isn't very funny. What bothered me was that his inarticulateness and ineptitude was supposed to make him sympathetic. But Redford isn't Brando and for me an actor needs to suggest some unexpressed depth of feeling and thought to make the inarticulateness sympathetic. In the more demanding second half of the film, Redford is very good in one scene, the TV debate, in which he keeps his eyes down sheepishly like Bobby Kennedy, while he is hedging on all his previously held positions. The very fact that Redford is now thoroughly professional in his delivery is meant to be emblematic of his inner corruption. But would we really want to have as a senator a politician as inept as McKay (Redford) is in the earlier part

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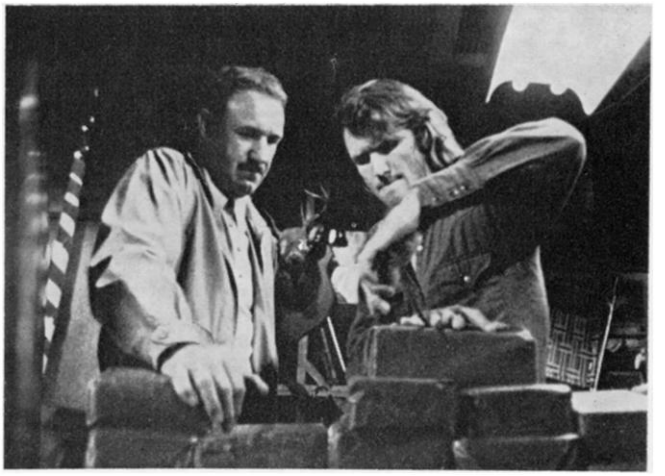
Short Notices

As Long As the Rivers Run was made by Carol Burns, with the collaboration of an Indian group involved in the salmon-fishing disputes near Seattle. It is a leisurely chronicle of Indian life and Indian involvement with the complex ramifications of the fisheries: breached treaties, "conservation" regulations, commercial fishing interests, legal and political struggles, and the slow ecological death of the rivers brought on by the white man's dredging and dam-building. The film climaxes with Indian occupation of a neglected federal enclave in downtown Tacoma, where the Indians set up an armed fishing camp. Warning shots, arrests the Indians consider illegal, and the burning of a railway bridge followed. (In the truce that has ensued, the Indians are being allowed to fish.) Source: Route 6, Box 356, Olympia, Oregon 98502. —E. C.

Ben and Stanley. In the thirties and forties, there were many sunny escapist films in which men were devoted to horses and dogs. These days, since films about depravity and violence are in vogue, we get stories about creepy relationships between men and sinister creatures like rodents and reptiles. In these gruesome movies, the audience is flagrantly maneuvered into empathizing with the animals. In *Ben,* we find ourselves rooting for rats. In *Stanley,* we side with snakes. Aligning ourselves with the animals is easy since nearly all of the humans in these pictures are evil, while the animals are depicted as a maligned minority. The essence of the films is the attack sequences, which exploit our fear of these creatures. Most of us are terrified of snakes and sewer rats and cringe at the thought of touching any. There are few film-goers who would not be unsettled by the sequences in which some poor soul is gnawed or nipped to death. The attack sequences are imaginatively photographed and effectively edited; unfortunately, they comprise just a small part of each film. The bulk of both movies is atrociously written, directed and acted. *Ben,* which was written by Gilbert Ralston and directed by Phil Karlson, picks up where last year's smash hit, *Willard,* left off. The sequel, which is even worse than the original, begins just after the death of Willard, the deranged young lad who trained Ben, the brilliant, loveable rodent leader. Thousands of marauding rats stage night raids on a supermarket and a candy store and send a whole town into a tizzy. But we feel kindly toward them because they are just looking for food and chew on people only when attacked. Besides, Ben befriends Danny (Lee Harcourt Montgomery), a cherubic little boy with a heart condition. In one sequence, they rescue him from a bully. How can you hate rats who protect a sick little boy? Danny helps the rat army elude the police who, in this film, are not very bright. Led by a grim lieutenant (Joseph Campanella), they are baffled by the rat raids. The most logical hideout for a few thousand fugitive rodents is the sewer. This, however, does not dawn upon the lieutenant until the film is half over. For all its shortcomings, *Ben* is superior to *Stanley,* which was written by Gary Crutcher and directed by William Grefe. Stanley is a clever, moral, loyal rattlesnake who injects his venom only into villains. His master Tim (Chris Robinson), is a sour young Seminole who lives in the Florida Everglades and supports himself by capturing snakes and selling their venom to a scientist. He is unusual in that he hates people and loves snakes. In a bizarrely comic sequence, he dines with Stanley and his mate Hazel. Tim eats a conventional breakfast while they sat on the table and feast on a grisly entree of live rat under glass. Through most of the film, Tim is plagued by an evil clothing manufacturer (Alex Rocco) and his henchmen, who kill snakes for the vile purpose of making snakeskin clothes. There are several hair-raising sequences in which Tim sics snakes on these thugs. At the end, due to the effects of some war injury, Tim goes berserk, kicks around a couple of snakes and tries to goad Stanley into biting an innocent girl. Stanley, being a champion of justice and fair play, instead turns upon his master. In the final scene, Stanley crawls sadly away. But we probably have not seen the last of this noble rattler. Soon, in some sleazy sequel, he will slither back into our hearts.
—Dennis Hunt

The Candidate. The shallowness of *The Candidate* wouldn't matter so much if it were a funnier movie. But for much of the film, Redford is only a straight man in a situational comedy of ineptitude. And though Redford may be sympathetic to the audience, he isn't very funny. What bothered me was that his inarticulateness and ineptitude was supposed to make him sympathetic. But Redford isn't Brando and for me an actor needs to suggest some unexpressed depth of feeling and thought to make the inarticulateness sympathetic. In the more demanding second half of the film, Redford is very good in one scene, the TV debate, in which he keeps his eyes down sheepishly like Bobby Kennedy, while he is hedging on all his previously held positions. The very fact that Redford is now thoroughly professional in his delivery is meant to be emblematic of his inner corruption. But would we really want to have as a senator a politician as inept as McKay (Redford) is in the earlier part

of the film? Some of the later comic scenes like the one in which he scrambles catch-phrases from his speeches seem beyond Redford's range. The idea is passably funny, but Redford never brings it to life; we never *feel* his need to let off steam. Similarly, in the taping of a spot interview, Redford is supposed to break up hysterically before the TV cameras, yet Redford never really lets go convincingly. His natural reserve may limit his ability to do comedy, but one wonders what he would have done with a better director than Michael Ritchie. A more serious problem is that Redford does poorly with the central dramatic element in the film: the changeover from being a reluctant candidate to wanting so badly to win that he is willing to compromise himself. Redford never conveys any real desire to win. And though *The Candidate* has been compared to *The Downhill Racer*—a film in which he did convey a fierce and restless desire to win—it is in one respect more like *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here.* For Redford seems to be re-enacting the role of Coop: a man going through the motions of doing what he is doing without any inner conviction. It may be that given Redford's style of underacting, McKay is necessarily colored by his own personality. And Redford is just too apolitical a person to play convincingly someone who after initial reluctance *wants* to be a successful politician. But there is an even more basic reason that the character Redford plays is so empty: it was conceived that way. One gathers from Bahrenburg's *Filming "The Candidate"* that the scriptwriter, Jeremy Larner, was less interested in creating a character than making a point: that the political process does in even an idealist candidate, that given the politics of accommodation and compromise, he must end up sounding—and being—just like his opponent. This simplistic point, however, was undermined by the necessities of the star system. Because Redford wanted to make sure the audience had sympathy for him, not his opponent (played in a light farcical vein by Don Porter) Crocker Jarmon is made an out-and-out reactionary. And thus even after McKay has hedged on all his positions, he is still 90 degrees to the left of Jarmon. The film does have some virtues, however, those of the new journalism: limited ones. Though the opening sequences are over-fragmented, Ritchie is good at giving a documentary feel to the film, in at least superficially capturing the life style of the new media politics. It is Peter Boyle as Lucas, the campaign manager, who gives the most interesting performance in the film. When a young man wisecracks that politics is bullshit, Boyle does a slow burn but manages to contain his anger and after a long pause, he breaks into overhearty laughter, "Well, I've always wondered what it was"—as if to suggest that false heartiness is all that the wisecrack (or the message of the film) is worth. But, just as the new journalists sometimes do, the film misuses the novelistic device of the composite character. The film draws, for example, on Bobby Kennedy's mannerisms—but in externals only. McKay is without Bobby Kennedy's toughness or intelligence. The composite character of McKay is a composite that tends to cancel itself out. If you add Gene McCarthy to the contrasting personality of Bobby Kennedy . . . to John Lindsay and John Tunney—what you get is not a richer, more complex character, what you get is nothing. —ROBERT CHAPPETTA



Gene Hackman and Kris Kristofferson: CISCO PIKE.

Cisco Pike got the dumping treatment which too often passes for "distribution" these days, but it is turning up occasionally on re-runs and is worth watching for. It's not arty and it's not sensation-mongering—only a modest chronicle of life in the dope world of Los Angeles, shot without pretensions—but it is brought continuously alive by the performance of Kris Kristofferson as the ex-dealer pressed into dealing again by a borderline-psycho cop (Gene Hackman, naturally). Unlike James Taylor, whose woodenness almost wrecked *Two-Lane Blacktop,* Kristofferson is a singer with screen presence; he's interesting no matter what he's doing, despite a rather unprepossessing, puffy, beady-eyed appearance. His country-rock songs, with their slightly too-neat rhymes and their slightly too-slick orchestration, happen to appeal to the country boy in me, and they're prominently featured on the sound track. (I'm also glad they left in an appallingly off-key scene of him horsing around with a guitar.) The film is "post-druggie" in its approach: Kristofferson is trying to live a straight life, amid a visitation from an old musician friend who is an appallingly strung-out speed freak. The wages of the story's sins are death, desertion, and

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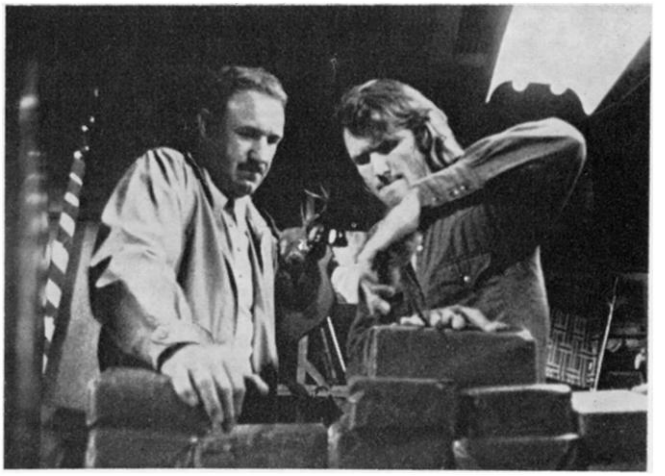

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despair; yet Cisco himself, at the end, gets by—on the road again. It will be interesting to see what director Bill Norton does next. —E. C.

Kes. Kenneth Loach has gone on record that "the only purpose of film and TV is to speak directly to ordinary folk" and his work has shown a constant concern to examine critically aspects of British society. But while *Cathy Come Home,* the TV film on homeless families that established his reputation, was a highly effective example of what John Grierson called the "grim and desperate education of propaganda," his work in the cinema, with *Poor Cow* and *Kes,* though still clearly educative, shows the director articulating his material in terms of a personal style. The subject-matter of the films is that of the liberal journalist—introducing *Kes* at the London Festival, Loach said it was a film about the waste he perceived in British secondary schools, "not waste in terms of productivity, but waste in terms of human spirit"—but their stylistic density belongs to art. Just as the central tension in Loach's films lies between a celebration of man's spontaneity and the recognition that adverse social conditioning tends to produce an environment reflecting only his most destructive impulses (the drinking club sequence of *Kes* offers a precise expression of this duality), there is a corresponding stylistic balance between Loach's verisimilitude and immediacy of method and his rigorous construction. *Poor Cow,* an undervalued movie, was made within the commercial system, and was promoted in falsely sensational terms. But with *Kes* Loach and his producer, Tony Garnett, took on an apparently quite uncommercial project, and not only had to struggle to obtain backing, but then saw the completed film kept in cold storage for over a year by its distributors before it received a British release—when, happily, it proved something of a sleeper. The movie, shot on location in the English mining town of Barnsley, has for protagonist 15-year-old Billy, little cared for by his feckless mother (his father has disappeared) and about to finish school with nothing much ahead of him but a job in the mine, the one thing he doesn't want: a quintessential (though highly individualized) victim of processes of social waste disposal. There is little conventional plot; the film becomes almost a series of sketches built around Billy: paper delivery round, school football game, interview with an employment officer (this concentration directly expresses Loach's espousal of a cinema dedicated to the importance of "ordinary folk"). Linking and counterpointing these sequences are those of the boy with the kestrel hawk which he finds and trains and which at the film's end is wantonly killed by his elder brother, an incarnation of the latently destructive whose very youthfulness (one takes him to be about 20) makes him the more frightening.

The film's visual design parallels Billy's experience: close shooting and staccato cutting in the sequences where he confronts society (we never see establishing shots of his home or school) contrasting with long fluid takes in the woodland sequences with the bird. This dichotomy reappears in the film's juxtaposed images of the role of education: on one hand, the English class run by a sympathetic teacher where Billy tells of training the hawk; on the other, the mechanical repression of the assembly and the sarcastically brutal headmaster. The resonances of this contrast as they spread into society as a whole are in play behind the movie's most complex sequence, which invites comparison with Humphrey Jennings. As Jud walks to the pit and chats with his mates before starting work, the sound track gives us the singing of a hymn at Billy's school assembly prior to a cut to this joyless ritual with a brief view of Billy, confined in the crowd to mid-frame as if imprisoned. Then Loach cuts again to shots of Billy walking through the busy streets with the hawk and being accosted by a friendly old man who asks him eccentric questions; then back again to the assembly. The film presents us with a dialectic of social freedom and specifically makes us aware that, while there is a kind of fulfillment for Billy in the woods, his social situation means this must be split off; when we see Jud walk through the woods, at the start of the sequence just described, it is blindly, on his way to the mindless routine of work. By creating characters who might easily have been clichés as rounded human beings, however unsympathetic, Loach involves us in the action on the screen and thus makes us confront its implications. In this his work relates to that of Arthur Penn. There is also a more specific correspondence: in *Alice's Restaurant,* Penn endeavors to break down the barrier between life and film by using not only Arlo Guthrie but also the judge and policeman to re-enact their roles in the events. In *Kes,* Loach uses several people from Barnsley in roles corresponding to their real lives—the girl librarian and, startlingly, the headmaster, had such occupations in fact. Most remarkably, David Bradley (Billy) and the other children in the movie were all found in Barnsley schools. The results Loach gets from them offer in themselves a proof of that potential which, the film shows, can so easily be negelected; the film, in fact, *demonstrates* its humanist commitment.

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was produced in 1968 in Cuba by the Instituto Cubano de Arte y Cinematografía, ICAIC. The film is a study of the alienation of a bourgeois intellectual caught in the midst of a rapidly changing social reality. Sergio, a landlord and a writer, understands intellectually the ongoing transformation of Cuban society but is unable to act upon his understanding and to join the revolutionary process. Sergio however is not just any intellectual, he is an intellectual from a dependent country. His preoccupations, interpretations, and behavior reflect the deep infiltration of foreign values into the cultural formation of the wealthy educated classes of the colonized, neocolonized, or dependent nations of Latin America in particular, and, by extension, of all the neocolonized nations of the Third World. Sergio is set apart from the masses of Cuban people both as a result of his class, and by the foreign influence in his education and ideology. The presentation is by no means a simplistic caricature of bourgeois decadence, rather it is a complex portrayal of the existential contradictions of a man separated from the social reality of which he is both a cause and a consequence. The film does not limit itself to Sergio's individual contradictions; it reaches further into the Cuban and world situations in the early sixties by allowing us to witness through Sergio's voyeuristic perception the events of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the oppression of Afro-Americans during the civil rights struggle, the missile crisis, and the immediate response of the Cuban people to survive and to overcome the effects of centuries of colonialism and neocolonialism. Gutierrez Alea achieves a most effective synthesis of documentary/didatic and the fictional/dramatic modes which makes the film accessible both to the "art film" buff as well as to those people more interested in the Cuban Revolution as a political phenomenon. *Memories of Underdevelopment* was scheduled to participate in the first New York Festival of Cuban Films earlier this year which, after the unforgettable success of the opening night, was stopped by the Treasury Department. It is the first and only postrevolutionary Cuban feature film available in the United States. Tricontinental Film Center (244 West 27th St. in New York City 10001, and at P.O. Box 4430 Berkeley, California 94704) has 16 and 35mm prints available, and will make arrangements to provide speakers to accompany the film, and also has shorts and printed material on Cuba and Cuban cinema.

—HORACIO D. LOFREDO

Play It Again, Sam. Woody Allen's movies have been so disorganized as to defy description and so hilarious as to merit them. The link between his free-associational wit and his casual manner of presentation has not been adventitious, as *Play It Again, Sam,* his extended excursion into nostalgia, conclusively demonstrates. Although Allen again stars in his own scenario, in leaving the directing to Herbert Ross he has chosen the wrong man at the wrong timing. Ross cannot capture Allen's humor. He can only contain it. Consequently, *Play It Again, Sam,* a smoother production than either of its predecessors, is not a better one. In *Take the Money and Run* Allen was still the stand-up comic, handling the camera like a microphone, to amplify his jokes, not to create them. In *Bananas* with its unfinished look he experimented with a throw-away style that befitted the impression of unpredictability he wished to convey. Had adjectives like "wild" and "zany" not been appropriated by partisans of such textbook exercises as *The Producers* or *M*A*S*H,* they would have been, for these two films, entirely apropos. In *Play It Again, Sam* Allen has returned to gag writing. He has transferred rather than translated his play to the screen. The one-liners are integrated into a coherent story, but it suffers by comparison with the previous films, which became mired in *non sequiturs* whose very randomness evinced a certain fatalism. *Play It Again, Sam* begins with the conclusion of *Casablanca,* which Allen, a movie critic (for *Film Quarterly* in the stage version!), views with the rapt attention of one for whom motion pictures do not constitute an escape from reality but offer a guide to it. Bogart himself soon appears in his fantasies to advise him on his love life, which, having never begun, must start anew after his wife abandons him for more adventuresome companions. He wins the disrespect of every girl he meets by disastrously trying to fake the savoir-faire that he lacks. The single success he attains is with his best friend's wife, with whom familiarity has bred attempt. Guilt-stricken, he renounces his love for her as she does the same, in a parting scene that parodies the Bogart-Bergman original. With each successive film Allen has insisted upon specifying the ramifications of sexual frustration at the expense of developing his initial theme of social inadequacy. By doing so, he inevitably turns from contemplation of society to self, thus widening his appeal (*Play It Again, Sam* opened at Radio City Music Hall) while limiting his scope. Allen has not lost his comic vision, but he has blurred it perceptibly. The character he has created always was numbered among the walking wounded. In *Play It Again, Sam* the injuries seem to be self-inflicted. Of course, they remain incurable. Yet the antinomy between the ingenuousness of Allen's hero and the nihilism implicit in the scripts in which he figures conceivably might be effaced were the change from innocence to experience, imagined or actualized, to become permanent. This contrast between helplessness and hopelessness has sus-

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—ROBERT G. MICHELS

Solaris is a Russian sicence fiction film shown at the San Francisco Film Festival. (Solaris is the name of a planet possessing an ocean which acts like a brain and is capable of materializing the memories of human beings who come near.) But the science fiction element does not dominate the movie; Andrei Tarkovskii, the director, is not fascinated by gadgets and has no interest in the mechanics of space travel. For him the science fiction format is merely a vehicle for dealing with the subject which really interests him: man facing his past.

Tarkovskii is the most promising young Soviet film director. His previous film, *Andrei Rublev,* created a sensation in France as well as in Russia. Therefore one should not dismiss his new film lightly but attempt to place it in the Soviet context, to which it obviously belongs. This is not to say that *Solaris* is like other Soviet movies. In fact, in a country where both good and bad films are equally literal-minded, Tarkovskii's impressionism and jumps in time and place are such departures that one could venture to guess that Soviet audiences have trouble understanding his work. And for us, the film must be understood in the Soviet context because Tarkovskii's works are contributions to Soviet debates. Although *Solaris* has no explicit political content the daring of its director is remarkable. The action takes place on a space station and on a part of earth which is not identified, but is obviously not the Soviet Union. (The one city sequence was photographed in Tokyo.) The characters do not have Soviet names (except one, a minor figure, who is an Armenian.) By the very fact of not taking sides between "socialism" and "imperialism" Tarkovskii shows some political courage. It is also noteworthy that the German scientist, very much contrary to official and popular stereotypes, is a positive character. Tarkovskii is not interested in criticizing some features of Soviet society but his film is an attack on its most basic assumptions. The film unequivocally says that when the requirements of "science" and human decency come into conflict one must always choose decency. This is a point likely to be misunderstood by an American audience. Americans, brought up on Jekyll and Hyde and Frankenstein, think of science in science fiction movies as the evil power of evil men. Understood this way, Tarkovskii's message is obviously hackneyed. The Russians, however, hear Marxism's claim to be a "scientific" doctrine daily and therefore for them science, as it is described in *Solaris,* must have strong connotations of social engineering. In this context insisting on decency as the highest requirement may be seen as a rejection of the entire Soviet experiment. (The stories of the well-known Russian satirist, Bulgakov, come to mind. In his *Heart of a Dog* and *Fatal Eggs* in the twenties he spoofed the claims of Marxist "science" and for his daring suffered oblivion.)

The other major theme of *Solaris* is the importance of love. Hari, the long-dead wife of the hero of the film, lives a shadowy existence on the space station, since she is only a copy of a human being and not a genuine one. But in the course of the film, through her

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love for her husband, she becomes a real woman. Love, then, is part of the very definition of being human. This is a doctrine closer to Christianity than to Marxism. Tarkovskii believes that we must all face our pasts and insists on the importance of conscience. The most amusing bit of irony in the film is the anti-hero, a scientist, working on an anti-immortality device. He hopes to get rid of the "guests" from our past by the aid of science. It is hardly necessary to point out that the idea that the past lives on has a special meaning in the Soviet Union. Tarkovskii suggests that no anti-immortality device is going to do away with the moral problems created by the Stalinist crimes. It is necessary to come to terms with our memories.

Despite the international characters, there is something very Russian about the film's depiction of nature. Life without nature is hardly worth living. In the space station the scientists artificially produce the noise of rustling leaves and this noise is considered essential for the preservation of sanity. This love of earth and overriding concern with nature has a long tradition in Russian art. At the beginning of the film, as at the end, the camera lingers lovingly on a lake with its plant life and surrounding trees—though the very last shot suggests that all this exists floating on the brain of Solaris!

The film is longer than it should be, not only because of the slow tempo, but also because it is a little repetitious. (We find out several times that Hari is immortal: first she is sent away in a rocket, then she is cut up so badly that no human being could survive it, and then she poisons herself in vain.) Still, I found the film thoroughly engrossing and it is certainly a novelty in the general Russian film output. —PETER KENEZ

Top of the Heap. The era of black participation at the creative end of the movies was long overdue. It has now arrived and apparently given way, without noticeable transition, to the era of aspiring black super-talents, men who see themselves as Atlas-like figures out of the Chaplin-Welles mould, shouldering the whole artistic burden of their movies all alone. Melvin Van Peebles *(Sweet Sweetback's Baadass Song)* was the first of these black writer-director-stars and Christopher St. John, the sole creative force in *Top of the Heap,* is close behind. The current boom in black films, dating from the success of Ossie Davis's *Cotton Comes to Harlem,* has evoked an extraordinary number of articles (even an editorial in the *New York Times*). Most of them have tramped monotonously over the same ground: black film-makers are being financed by white producers who at last perceive the commercial possibilities of the black audience; seeking to indulge this audience, the films are almost uniformly insulting to whites and flattering to blacks; ironically, the scripts are mostly crumbling old white melodramas which have been hastily renovated and reassigned to black actors. Recent examples of this new genre include the two *Shaft* pictures, *The Final Comedown, Come Back Charleston Blue,* and *Super Fly.* These crude appeals to black chauvinism have succeeded the former "guilty white liberal" treatment of race relations, in which blacks were smothered in piety (e.g., *The Well, The Defiant Ones, Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*). It is difficult to say whether the new tradition is worse than the one it replaced—or only equally bad. The two traditions have in common a tendency to argue in an almost forensic manner for the black man's humanity instead of presenting this humanity in dramatically convincing terms. (The modest *Nothing But a Man,* produced by whites and totally outside the mainstream of black American films, came closest to success in this regard.) By contrast, St. John's movie, about a tough black cop, is immensely more sophisticated—at least conceptually. He has tackled an interesting subject, the problems faced by the black policeman, and in many respects has left it gratifyingly unsimplified. George Lattimer (St. John) is a hero to nobody—neither the white nor the black community, neither his family nor his friends. A patrolman for ten years, his possibilities for promotion are effectively blocked by a white-oriented exam policy. As a result, he takes refuge in Mittyesque dreams of grandeur where, casting himself as the first black astronaut, he wallows in his country's adulation. The main line of the plot and the dream sequences are made to run along parallel tracks; the crossties that connect them are day-to-day events in Lattimer's life. To be sure, St. John has not arrived at anything original in this intercutting of fantasy and reality; René Clair *(Beauties of the Night),* George Axelrod *(The Seven Year Itch),* and John Scheslinger *(Billy Liar)*—not to mention James Thurber—were there long before him. What is impressive about *Top of the Heap* is its avoidance of both the simple-mindedly anti-white stance of Van Peebles and the sentimentally pro-black posture of, say, Stanley Kramer. There are as many sympathetic whites in the movie as unsympathetic blacks, and St. John adopts a markedly critical attitude toward his hero, who is depicted as self-indulgent and escapist, a man who is as immature in his personal life as he is on the beat. The relatively complex conception behind *Top* is its greatest virtue. Sad to say, however, St. John's scripting and directorial abilities have not yet caught up with his ideas. The dialogue is pretty stale and, with the exception of Lattimer, the characters who speak it aren't much fresher (the long-suffering wife, the sexy mistress, the fatuous

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superior officer). As a director St. John has to get over his tendency to push the camera into an actor's face and encourage him to overact. A scene between Lattimer and a retired Irish cop in an old age home ("Thirty-five years on the force and what do the sons-of-bitches give you? A wooden plaque") is particularly egregious—in addition to being shamefully similar to the confrontation between Gary Cooper and the former marshall in *High Noon*. In spite of its faults, *Top of the Heap* is, at least to a white observer, a step forward in the development of a viable black cinema. It is a flawed but interesting debut. —ROBERT MOSS

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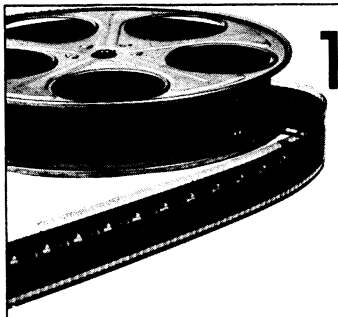
gers. STEVEN KOVACS has studied at Harvard and is now living in Paris. HORACIO D. LOFREDO lives in Berkeley and is active in the Third World Cinema Group. R. O. MICHELS is a sociologist at Berkeley. ROBERT MOSS lives in New York. TIMOTHY PULLEINE lives in England. PAUL SCHRADER is author of *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu—Bresson—Dreyer* (UC Press) and Editor of *Cinema* (LA). BERNARD WEINER contributes regularly to *Take One, FQ, Sight & Sound, Nation,* and other periodicals.



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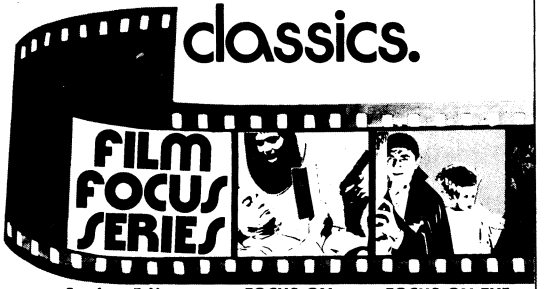

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