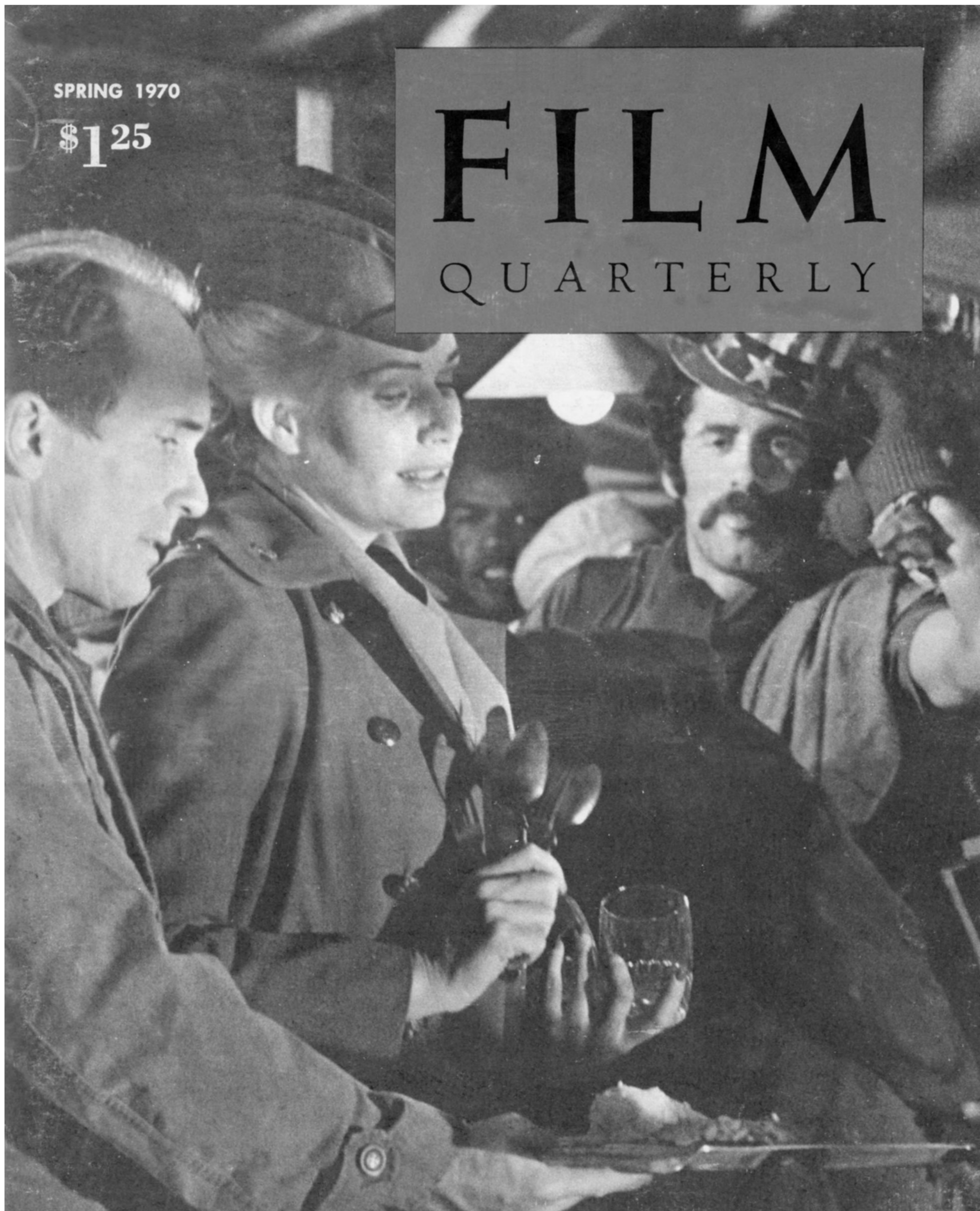
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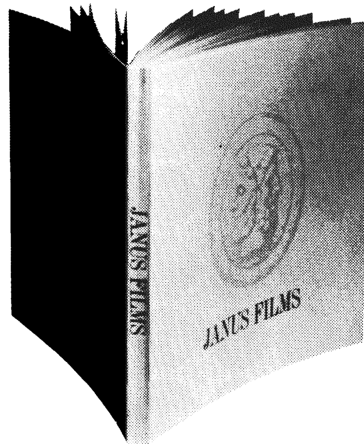

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PAUL SCHRADER

Poetry of Ideas: The Films of Charles Eames

Although many important artists have used film outside the usual theatrical-feature conventions, critics have too seldom found ways of discussing their work. Considering the great amount of creative energy going into short films of all kinds at present, this neglect needs to be remedied. The study below is an attempt to come to terms with the output of an immensely talented man whose films—which are only a part of his creative work—represent a peculiarly contemporary synthesis of film with science and technology.

They're not experimental films, they're not really films. They're just attempts to get across an idea. —CHARLES EAMES

Charles Eames was baffled by the fact that anyone would want to write an article about his films. "When asked a question like that, about 'my approach to film,'" Eames said, "I would almost reply, 'Who me, film?' I don't think of it that way. I view film a little bit as a cheat; I'm sort of using a tool someone else has developed."

Because of his casual attitude toward "Film"—his debunking of the romantic myth of the "artist personality" and his concept of film as a primarily informational medium—Charles Eames has been able, in his recent films, to give "Film" what it needs most: a new way of perceiving ideas. As films move away from a period in which they were content to only show what they felt, and attempt little by little to also tell what they think, many of the most talented film-makers, young and old, are trying to graft onto movies the cerebral sensibility they have so long resisted. Eames personifies this sensibility, a sensibility so synonymous with his life and work that he cannot conceive of himself as only a "film-maker."

There are many ways one can think about Charles Eames. He defies categorization; he is architect, inventor, designer, craftsman, scientist, film-maker, professor. Yet in all his diversity Eames is one creator, and his creation is not a series of separate achievements, but a unified aesthetic with many branch-like manifestations. Eames's films do not function independently, but like branches; they do not derive from film history or tradition, but from a culminant culture with roots in many fields. A capsulized biography can give, in the most vulgar way, the scope of his career; but, as always, Eames remains greater than the sum of his avocations.

Born in St. Louis in 1907, Eames studied architecture at Washington University, in 1930 started his own practice, and in 1940 married Ray Kaiser, a painter with whom he subsequently shared credit for all his work. In 1940 Eames and Eero Saarinen collaborated on designs for the Museum of Modern Art's Organic Furniture Competition. From these designs came a generation of Eames chairs: from the luxurious black leather Eames lounge chair to the omnipresent molded fiberglass stacking chairs, which, within twenty years, had re-

Charles and Ray Eames in their studio.

ceived such mass acceptance that Eames's way of sitting was, in a fundamental sense, everybody's way of sitting. In 1941, to encourage the wartime production of their first chair prototypes, Charles and Ray perfected an inexpensive lamination process for wood veneers, and in the same year Charles went to work, temporarily, for the art department of MGM. In between chairs, the Charles Eames Workshop produced toys, furniture, gliders, leg splints, and magazine covers. In 1949 Eames designed the Santa Monica House (where he still lives), which, like the chairs, was a model of simplicity and variety, and soon became a standard textbook illustration.

The Eames films commenced in 1950 and over the next fifteen years they won awards at Edinburgh, Melbourne, San Francisco, American, Mannheim, Montreal, and London film festivals. "A Rough Sketch for a Sample Lesson for a Hypothetical Course," presented by Charles and Ray (with George Nelson and Alexander Girard) in 1953 at the University of Georgia and UCLA, was the first public presentation of multi-media techniques. In 1960 Eames's rapid cutting experiments in the CBS "Fabulous Fifties" special won him an Emmy for graphic design. During this period Eames designed a series of World's Fair presentations: in 1959 the multi-screen presentation for the US exhibit at Moscow, in 1962 a multi-screen introduction to the US Science Exhibit at Seattle (where it is still shown), in 1964 the IBM Ovoid Pavilion and the film presentations in it, at the New York Fair. Over the years Eames has prepared courses and lectured across the world, and will this fall hold the Charles Eliot Norton Chair of Poetry at Harvard.

Charles Eames can weave in and out of these diverse occupations because he is not committed to any of them. He is, in the final account, committed to a way of life which encompasses them all. The toys, chairs, films are the available tools through which Eames can actualize his life-style. The common denominator of Eames's occupations is that he is, elementally, one thing: a problem-solver, with aesthetic and social considerations. He approaches life as a set of problems, each of which must be defined, delineated, abstracted, and solved. His architect's mind visualizes complex social patterns twisting and folding like a three-dimensional blueprint. He

respects the "problem" not only as a means to an end, but as an aesthetic pleasure in itself. Although Eames rarely rhapsodizes about anything, his most "emotional" prose is saved for a description of the problem-solving process:

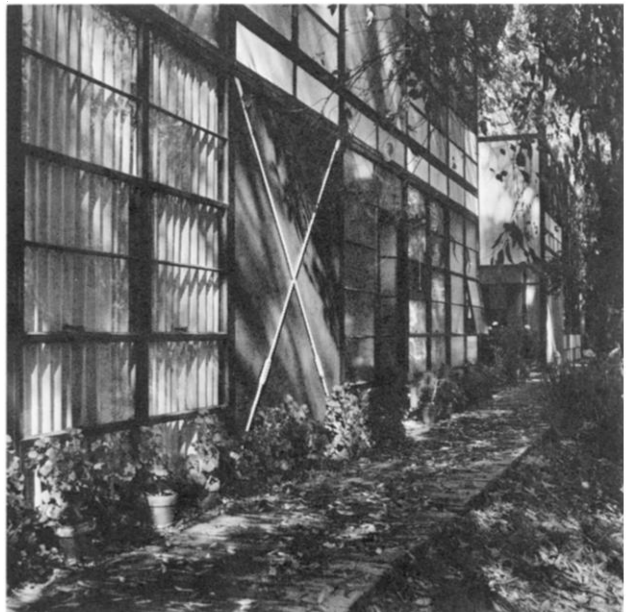
The ability to make decisions is a proper function of problem solving. Computer problems, philosophical problems, homely ones: the steps in solving each are essentially the same, some methods being elaborate variations of others. But homely or complex, the specific answers we get are not the only rewards or even the greatest. It is in preparing the problem for solution, in the necessary steps of simplification, that we often gain the richest rewards. It is in this process that we are apt to get a true insight into the nature of the problem. Such insight is of great and lasting value to us as individuals and to us as a society.

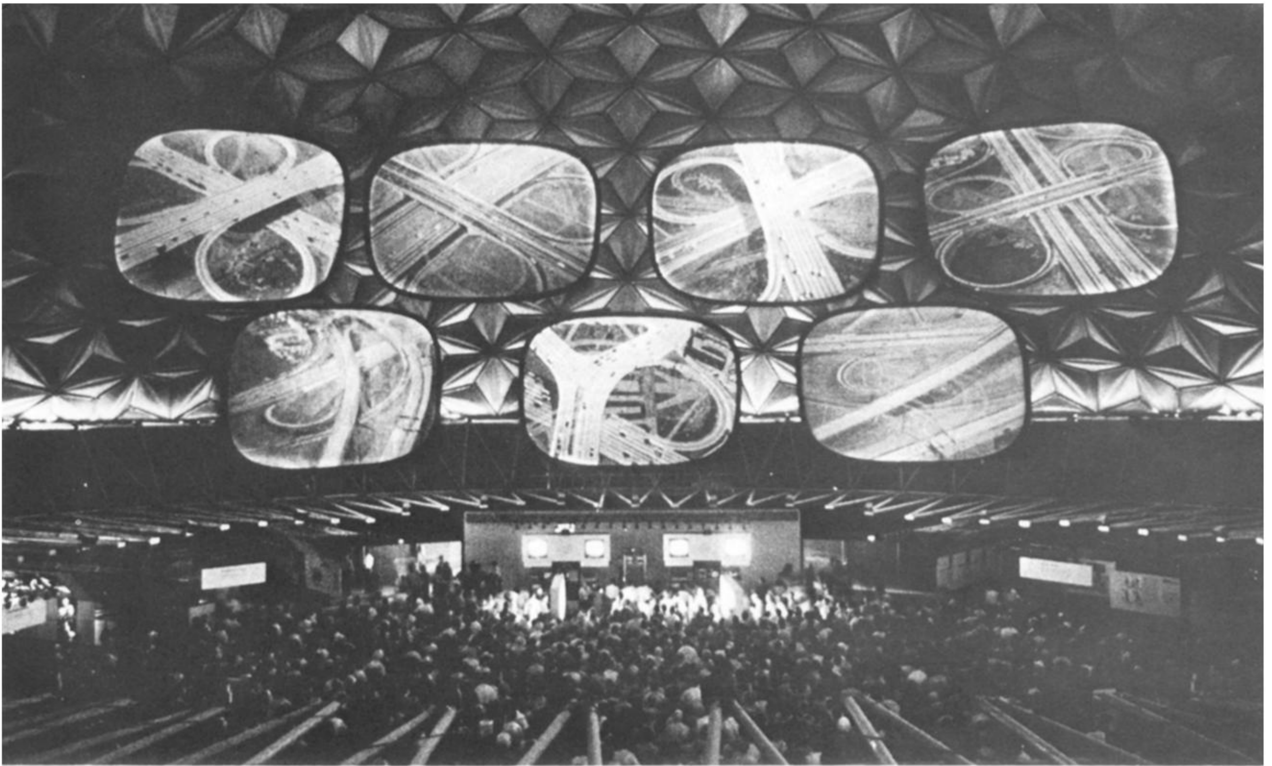
—from *Think*,
the IBM New York Fair presentation

For Eames, problem solving is one of the answers to the problem of contemporary civilization. Not only does his problem-solving process provide beauty and order, but it constitutes the only *optimistic* approach to the future. He is currently working for the Head Start program, a task he feels vital because "you have to teach children to have a genuine respect for a large number of events and objects which are not of immediate gain to them. It is the only thing which puts a human being in a situation where he can promptly assess the next step. Whether it is in the ghetto or Appalachia, kids get their beginning having respect only for things which have an immediate payoff, and this is no way to run a railroad, particularly when you don't know what the next problem will be." Eames will not indulge in the despair of a complete overview, not because it is illegitimate, but because it can't solve the problems. "You can't take too broad a perspective," he says, quoting Nobel Prize winning physicist Richard Feynman; "you have to find a corner and pick away at it."

Charles Eames is, in the broadest sense of the word, a scientist. In his film introduction to the US Science Exhibit at the Seattle Fair, Eames prescribed what that rare creature, the true scientist, should be, and it is a description of Charles Eames:

Science is essentially an artistic or philosophical enterprise carried on for its own sake.



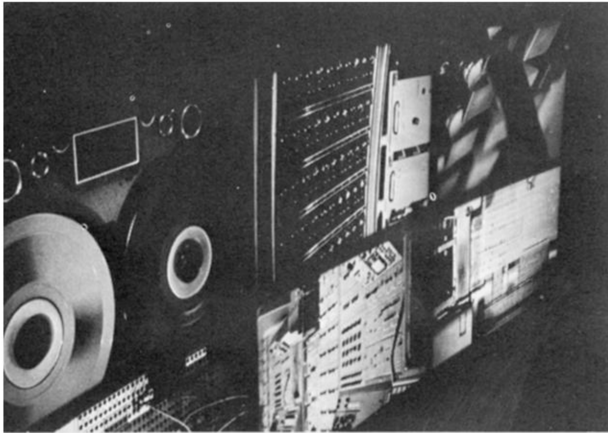


US Exhibit, Moscow World's Fair, 1959

In this it is more akin to play than to work. But it is quite a sophisticated play in which the scientist views nature as a system of interlocking puzzles. He assumes that the puzzles have a solution, that they will be fair. He holds to a faith in the underlying order of the universe. His motivation is his fascination with the puzzle itself—his method a curious interplay between idea and experiment. His pleasures are those of any artist. High on the list of prerequisites for being a scientist is a quality that defines the rich human being as much as it does the man of science, that is, his ability and his desire to reach out with his mind and his imagination to something outside himself.

—from *House of Science*

To counter that the puzzles don't have a solution and are not fair is to beg the question, because the scientist does not admit these possibilities into his working definition. Because his pleasures "are those of any artist" the scientist sustains his world not necessarily by empirical proof, but by his "faith in the underlying order of the universe." In this way Eames's scientist may seem similar to the scientists of the Enlightenment who constructed elaborate fictions of order, only to have them collapse with the next wave of data. But unlike the Newtonian cosmologist Eames does not state that the solvable problem is necessarily a microcosm for the universe, which may have no solution. Eames is describing a *Weltanschauung*, not the universe. A corollary argument leveled (often by artists) against Eames's scientist accuses him of being shallowly optimistic, unaware of man's condition. C. P. Snow defended scientists against this charge in his "Two Cultures" lecture: "Nearly all of them [the scientists]—and this is where the color of hope genuinely comes in—would see no reason why, just because the individual condition is tragic, so must the social condition be." It is a fallacy of men of letters to equate contemporaneity with pessimism—as if Beckett's "it" crawling in the mud was unavoidably the man of the future. One of the exciting



Multiscreen projection, House of Science, *1962*

things about Eames's film-maker, like his scientist, is that he challenges the hegemony of pessimism in the contemporary arts.

Although Eames's structuring of the problem may seem antiquated (and this is debatable), his solutions are undeniably modern. His statement about the designing of a chair is not only a remarkable account of the creative process, but also a pioneering approach to art in a society in which the individual has become progressively functionalized and collectivized:

"How do you design a chair for acceptance by another person? By not thinking of what the other guy wants, but by coming to terms with the fact that while we may think we are different from other people in some ways at some moments, the fact of the matter is that we're a hell of a lot more like each other than we're different, and that we're certainly more like each other than we're like a tree or a stone. So then you relax back into the position of trying to satisfy yourself—except for a real trap, that is, what part of yourself do you try to satisfy? The trap is that if you try to satisfy your idiosyncrasies, those little things on the surface, you're dead, because it is in those idiosyncrasies that you're different from other people. And in a sense what gives a work of craft its personal style is usually where it failed to solve the problem rather than where it solved it. That's what gives it the Noguchi touch, or whatever. What you try to do is satisfy your real gut instincts and work your way through your idiosyncrasies, as we have tried in the stuff we've done, the furniture or the ideas. You know it's tough enough just to make the first step of understanding without trying to introduce our personality or trying to outguess what the other guy's thinking."

The Eameses have constructed structures—a house, chair, film—in which people can define themselves not by their idiosyncrasies but by their similarities. These structures permit problem-solving—and therefore give the scientist hope. To some these structures will seem artificial and solipsistic, but in an age which has so ruthlessly degraded man's individuality any attempt to restructure the concept of humanism will necessarily seem artificial.

From Eames's sensibility have come two contributions: one pertaining primarily to architecture and design, which has already been incorporated into the international cultural mainstream, and another most applicable to film, which is being developed and exists only as potential for mass audiences.

Eames's first contribution concerns what British critic Peter Smithson calls "object-integrity." The Eames aesthetic respects an object for what it is, whether machine-made or hand-crafted, and is based on "careful selection with extra-cultural surprise, rather than harmony of profile, as its criteria—a kind of wide-eyed wonder of seeing the culturally disparate together and so happy with each other." Smithson goes on, "This sounds like whimsy, but the vehicles are ordinary to culture." Eames's vehicles, his "structures," make it possible for an object to have integrity.

The Eames aesthetic brought art into the marketplace through the assembly line. There was neither fear of nor blind obedience toward the machine. The machine, like its heir the computer, are tools which must be used by the artist as well as the entrepreneur. It is proletarian art: "We want to get the most of the best to the most for the least," Eames has said; "in the final analysis I want to try to reach the greatest number of people." The Eames chair stands as a tribute to the universality of his aesthetic; at the same time beautiful and functional, it is being manufactured in every continent except Africa. "By the late 50's," writes

Smithson, "the Eames way of seeing things had in a sense become everybody's style."

Eames's aesthetic is in opposition to one of the older canons of art criticism, Ruskin's theory of "invention." In "The Nature of the Gothic" Ruskin instructed customers to purchase only goods which showed the hand of the inventor, rejecting anything copied or undistinctive, even to the point of preferring the rough to the smooth. The Eames aesthetic contends that the customer, who organizes the life context in which objects exist, is as much a creative agent as the artist, and that it is his creative imperative to organize and respect the "inventive" as well as the commonplace objects. "If people would only realize," Eames said, "that they have the real stuff in their hand, in their back yards, their lives could be richer. They are afraid to get involved."

The second Eames contribution results when the Eames aesthetic of object-integrity is carried into the electronic age. There are two reasons: first of all, a computer cannot have object-integrity the way a chair or a toy train does. A chair is essentially shape, color, and movement, but a computer is much more. To respect a computer one must understand how it thinks, must appreciate Boolean Logic. As Eames's objects became more complex, his approach necessarily became more cerebral.

Secondly, the object-integrity aesthetic is now confronted by an objectless society. "The conscious covetors are growing tremendously," Eames has said, "and the covetables in our society are shrinking tremendously. There's not much worth coveting. I feel that a lot of this vacuum is going to be beautifully filled by certain mastery of concepts, mastery of, say, the French or Russian language. And the beauty of this is that the coin of the realm is real. It means involvement on the part of the guy that's getting it. He's got it, all he has to do is give of himself. A lot of this is going to have to come through film."

Eames's second contribution, then, concerns the presentation of ideas through film. His method is information-overload. Eames's films give the viewer more data than he can possibly process. The host at the IBM Pavilion succinctly forwarned his audience:

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the IBM information machine. And the information machine is just that—a machine designed to help me give you a lot of information in a very short time. —from *Thing*

Eames's information machine dispenses a lot of data, but only one idea. All the data must pertain directly to the fundamental idea; the data are not superfluous, simply superabundant. Eames's innovation, it seems to me, is a hypothesis about audience perception which, so far, is only proved by the effectiveness of his films. His films pursue an Idea (Time, Space, Symmetry, Topology) which in the final accounting must stand alone, apart from any psychological, social, or moral implications. The viewer must rapidly sort out and prune the superabundant data if he is to follow the swift progression of thought. This process of elimination continues until the viewer has pruned away everything but the disembodied Idea. By giving the viewer more information than he can assimilate, information-overload short-circuits the normal conduits of inductive reasoning. The classic movie staple is the chase, and Eames's films present a new kind of chase, a chase through a set of information in search of an Idea.

To be most effective the information cannot be random, as in a multi-media light show, or simply "astounding," as in the multi-media displays at Expo '67 which Ray described as "rather frivolous." The Idea conveyed by the information must have integrity, as evidenced by its problem-solving potential, intellectual stimulation, and beauty of form. The multi-media "experience" is a corruption of information-overload in the same way that the Barbara Jones and Peter Blake "found-art" collages are corruptions of object-integrity—they present the innovation without the aesthetic. Through information-overload, the Idea becomes the new covetable, the object which has integrity in an objectless society. To paraphrase Eames, it is in the quest of the Idea that we often gain the richest rewards.

The films of Charles and Ray Eames fall into two categories. The first, the "Toy Films," primarily use the first Eames contribution, object-integrity; the second, the "Idea Films," use the second Eames contribution, information-overload.

Through precise, visual, non-narrative examination the toy films reveal the definitive characteristics of commonplace objects. The toy films were the natural place for the Eameses to begin in film, for they found in simple, photographed objects—soap-water running over blacktop, toy towns and soldiers, bread—the characteristics they were trying to bring out in the furniture design:

In a good old toy there is apt to be nothing self-conscious about the use of materials—what is wood is wood; what is tin is tin; and what is cast is beautifully cast.

—from *Toccata for Toy Trains*

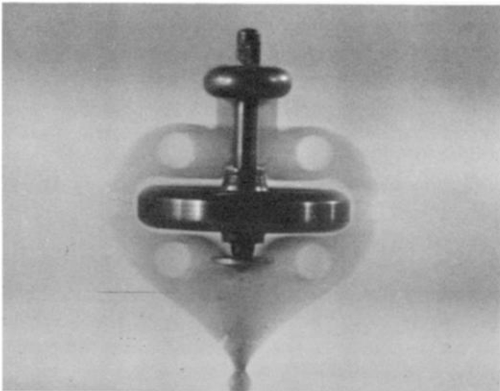
Eames's film career is often equated with his toy films. Because of this mistaken assumption, the Eames films have already seen a critical rise and fall. Eames's films received their initial recognition during the heyday of the Norman McLaren pixillation, the early fifties, when the Museum of Modern Art and the Edinburgh Film Festival acclaimed the early toy films, *Bread, Blacktop, Parade.* Eames's reputation rose with McLaren's, and fell with it. The Eameses became typed as the toy film-makers, and critical interest died off.

The Eameses continued to make films, toy films as well as idea films. The toy films have progressed throughout the intervening years, using "toys" of varied complexity, the Santa Monica House, baroque churches, toy trains, the Schuetz calculating machine, the Lick Observatory. Each toy film presents a structure in which objects can "be themselves," can act like "toys" in the same way that humans, given a certain structure, can act like children. The object need not be only functional; it can assume a number of positions. The Lick telescope is at one time practical, cumbersome, odd, and beautiful. One feels the same respect for the telescope that the Lick astronomer must feel after years of collaboration with the instrument. It cohabits the same structure, has meaning, both functional and aesthetic, and, in brief, has integrity.

The latest toy film, and the best, is *Tops,* a seven-minute study of just what the title says, tops. *Tops* is a refinement of the toy film technique. The structures are simplified: there is no narration, scantier backdrops, less plot; and the object assumes a greater importance within the structure. Tops of every variety are presented. The viewer studies the ethnic impulses, the form variations, the coloration, and the spinning methods of tops. The first half of *Tops* presents tops in all their diversity, gradually narrowing the scope of its investigation to simpler and simpler forms: a jack, a carrom, and, finally, a

spinning tack. This is a moment of object-integrity: all the complexity and variation of tops have resolved into the basic form of two planes, one of them suspended by the balanced forces of gravity and gyroscopic momentum. The unaware viewer realizes that he has never really understood even an insignificant creation like a top, never accepted it on its own terms, never *enjoyed* it. The second half of *Tops,* which depicts the "fall" of the tops, moves back to more complex tops, against blank backgrounds, giving the viewer a chance to see the same tops again, but with the new eyes of insight and sensitivity.

Eames feels that the toy films are as essential as the idea films. "I don't think it's an overstatement," he remarked "to say that without a film like *Tops* there would be no idea films. It's all part of the same process, and I think I could convince IBM of that, if necessary."



From the outset of their film-making, the Eameses were also making another sort of film, a film which dealt with objects with cerebral integrity. Eames's first idea film, *A Communications Primer,* resulted from a problem Eames realized he had to state before he could solve. He says, "I had the feeling that in the world of architecture they were going to get nowhere unless the process of information was going to come and enter city planning in general. You could not really anticipate a strategy that would solve the increase in population or the social changes which were going on unless you had some way of handling this information. And so help me, this was the reason for making the first film, because we looked for some material on communications. We went to Bell Labs and they showed us pictures of a man with a beard and somebody says, 'You will invent the telephone,' or something. And this is about all you get. So we made a film called *Communications Primer,* essentially for architects."

Innovation is often a by-product of Eames's problem solving, as when Charles and Ray developed a lamination process for wood veneers to permit mass manufacture of their chairs. Similarly, Eames, in his desire to solve the complex, non-immediate problems of the city, and in his desire to bring integrity to the computer, developed a revolutionary method of information presentation. In 1953 Charles and Ray presented "A Rough Sketch for a Sample Lesson for a Hypothetical Course," the first multimedia demonstration. "A Rough Sketch" not only featured three concurrent images, but also a live narrator, a long board of printed visual information, and complimentary smells piped through the ventilation system.

Eames's technique of information-overload has progressed just as his toy film technique has, and some of the first "revolutionary" films look rather primitive compared to his recent work. Eames has developed several methods of information overload. The most basic, of course,

is fast cutting (*Two Baroque Churches* has 296 still shots, roughly one every two seconds). He often has several screens (the most being twenty-two at the N.Y. Fair, although not all the images were projected simultaneously), but has realized that a multiplicity of action on one screen can often have more impact than a single action on several separate screens. He has often used animation to simplify data, so that it can be delivered faster with clarity. One of Eames's most successful techniques is to split the screen between live action and animation, each of which affects the mental process differently. Eames also counterpoints narration, sound effects, music, and images to present several related bits of data simultaneously.

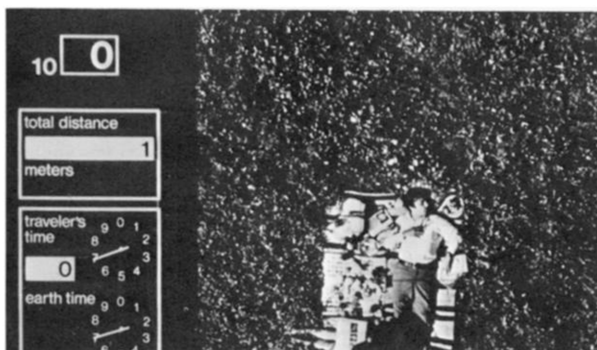
These techniques will certainly fade, just as did the McLaren aspects of his earlier films. Multi-media projections are a bit passé just now, and Eames isn't designing any at the moment. But, nonetheless, Eames's films hold up phenomenally well, because they are based on an aesthetic, not just an innovation. (Eames's specific techniques have several competent practitioners: Wheaton Galentine's 1954 *Treadle and Bobbin* corresponds to Eames's toy films, Don Levy's 1964 *Time Is* corresponds to Eames's idea films.) Even though the specific techniques and in some cases the very ideas of his earlier films may become antiquated, Eames's way of living seems as immediate today as ever. The solutions may no longer seem pressing, but his problem-solving process still offers beauty and intellectual stimulation.

Two of Eames's recent films, *Powers of Ten* and *National Aquarium Presentation,* are refinements of the idea-film technique just as *Tops* is a refinement of the toy films. These two films represent the two sorts of ideas Eames designs, the single or the environmental concept, and are more universal than Eames's earlier computer ideas. Because of the richness of the aesthetic Eames brings to these films, the ideas they portray inevitably strike deeper than originally intended.

Powers of Ten was a "sketch film" to be presented at an assembly of one thousand of America's top physicists. The sketch should, Eames decided, appeal to a ten-year-old as well as a physicist; it should contain a "gut feeling" about dimensions in time and space as well as a sound theoretical approach to those dimensions. The solution was a continuous zoom from the farthest known point in space to the nucleus of a carbon atom resting in a man's wrist lying on Miami Beach. The camera zooms from the man's wrist to a hypothetical point in space and zooms back again, going through the man's wrist to the frontier of the inner atom.

Going out, the speed of the trip was $10^{t/10}$ meters per second*—that is, in each 10 seconds of travel the imaginary voyager covered 10 times the distance he had traveled in the previous 10 seconds. In this schema a trip from the nucleus of the carbon atom to the farthest known reaches of the universe takes 350 seconds. This information is presented in several

* Time divided by 10 is the "power"—in other words, after 40 seconds, you are 10-to-the-fourth meters away, or one followed by four zeros (10,000).

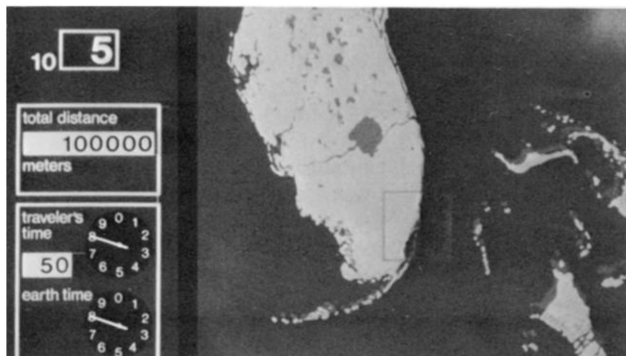


ways: the right central section of the screen pictures the actual zoom, at the left of the screen a dashboard with several clocks shows the total distance traveled, the power of ten achieved, the traveler's time, the earth time, and the percentage of the speed of light. A dispassionate female voice—a robot stewardess—describes every second of the journey in full, rapid detail. The narrator also supplies extraneous, unexpected information. "We have now reached the point where we can see the distance light travels in one minute," she says, and a short burst of light, one minute long, passes before our eyes. In addition, there is an eerie score supplied by Elmer Bernstein on a miniature Japanese organ.

Handling information in such a way, *Powers of Ten* is able to give more data more densely than a multi-screen presentation. The pictorial area of the screen in itself has more visual information than the mind can assimilate. Every spot on the image is a continuous transformation: skin becomes a wrist, wrist a man, man a beach, beach a peninsula, and so on, each change the square of the previous change, and each faster than the viewer can adjust his equilibrium. The zooming image, in itself, is only an "experience" and could easily be used in a light show (as it has been at the Whiskey A Go Go in Los Angeles). But the irony of *Powers of Ten* is that the narration and the dashboard demand exactly what the viewer is unable to do: make cerebral sense of the fantastic voyage. The monotone narration and animated dashboard affect the other side of perception; they use the conventional methods of appealing to reason. From the first frame of this eight-minute film the spectator is at a perceptual fail-safe point; both his mental and emotional facilities are over-taxed. As the viewer backs off from such a fail-safe point, as he has to, he takes with him certain souvenirs—individual data which in each case will be different, but mostly an Idea which in this case is about the dimensions of time and space.

The interstellar roller-coaster ride of *Powers of Ten* does what the analogous sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey* should have: it gives the full impact—instinctual as well as cerebral—of contemporary scientific theories. (In comparison *2001*, like Expo '67 seems "astounding.") It popularizes (in the best sense of the word) post-Einsteinian thought the way the telescope popularized Copernicus; and the effect is almost as upsetting. The spectator is in perspectiveless space; there is no one place where he can objectively judge another place. Just as the vacationing hayseed begins to think of himself as a citizen of the country rather than of just Sioux Center, and the jet-setter begins to think of himself as a citizen of the world rather than of just the United States, so the time-space traveler of *Powers of Ten* thinks of himself as a citizen of the universe, an unbounded territory.

Eames approached the problem in universal terms (to please the ten year-old as well as the nuclear physicist) and, as in designing a chair, sought to find what was most common to their experience. Sophisticated scientific data was not the denominator (although the film had to handle such matters with complete accuracy to maintain credibility), but it was that inchoate "gut feeling" of new physics which even the



most jaded scientist, as Eames says, "had never quite seen in this way before." Just as it took a more complex and intellectual structure to give a computer integrity than a toy train, so it took a more complex and intellectual structure to give the powers-of-ten-extended-through-space-and time-idea integrity than Boolean Logic. *Powers of Ten* goes beyond a simple explanation of the powers of ten (which Eames had done in his *IBM Mathematics Peep Show* by using the parable of the chess board and sacks of grain), and concretizes a concept of the universe true to contemporary experience. And that Idea is covetable.

National Aquarium Presentation resulted from a more earthly problem. *Aquarium* is, simply enough, a report to the Department of Interior on a proposed National Aquarium. After two years of research and design, the Eames office presented the Department of the Interior not a voluminous sheath of blueprints, but a ten-minute color film and an illustrative booklet. The problem was not only to develop the design and rationale for the Aquarium, but also to persuade an economy-minded Congress to lay out the cash for such a project. When dealing with the government, film is the petitioner's ideal medium: "I've discovered," says Eames, "that not even a senator dares to stand up and interrupt a film."

Again Eames had to state the problem before he could solve it: "*Aquarium* wasn't a selling job, it was a report. Mike Kerwin, a venerable member of Congress, was interested in this and this was to be Mike Kerwin's monument. But Mike Kerwin didn't have any idea really of what an aquarium should be. As he or someone else said, 'Anything to keep those little children from peeing in the Capitol.' This is about the level these projects get started. The only thing you can do is try to create a level someone else would be embarrassed to fall below."

National Aquarium Presentation constructs the Aquarium in ten minutes, from overall conception to minute detail. Step by rapid step the film discusses the rationale, decides on a location, landscapes the environment, constructs the building, details the departments, and takes the viewer on a guided tour of the finished institution. Diverse methods of information presentation are used: graphs, animation, models, live-action, narration, music.

The guiding principles of the Aquarium are not simply aquatic curiosity or research. Like all of Eames's creations, the Aquarium is founded on organization, practicality, intelligence, and enjoyment. *Aquarium* makes sure that the viewer doesn't mistake those fish for something inessential to man. One who wishes to attack the Aquarium must attack the principles it is based on. The true function of the Aquarium is stated in the concluding lines of narration:

Still the greatest souvenirs of the Aquarium may be the beauty and intellectual stimulation it holds. The principal goal is much the same as science, to give the visitor some understanding of the natural world. If the National Aquarium is as good as it can be, it will do just that.

—from *National Aquarium Presentation*

Even though Congress has yet to give final approval, the National Aquarium exists. It exists not only to the architects, to whom it always exists, but also to those who have seen Eames's film. After seeing the film, viewers speak of the Aquarium in the present; the fact that they cannot go the Washington and experience the Aquarium tactilely is only a chronological misfortune. The viewer has already experienced the full delights of the Aquarium, its beauty and intellectual stimulation. When the Aquarium is finally built, it seems to me, it will not be because the government really felt that it was needed, but because the Aquarium has already existed in so many minds—Congressmen, scientists, bureaucrats—that a physical structure was necessary to concretize the cinematic experience. And, if the Aquarium is built, it will be a rare demonstration of the *Realpolitik* power of an idea.

The irony and power of *National Aquarium* is that it is greater than the Aquarium ever can be. In its finest form the Aquarium exists in the mind, and the physical structure can only be a pale imitation of the dream. Eames calls *National Aquarium* a "fiction of reality," and like

Ecological greenhouse, NATIONAL AQUARIUM, *1967*

the best fictions it is more meaningful than its reality. Eames has constructed the Aquarium like Borges constructed the Library of Babel, in his short story of that title. Like the Aquarium the Library is real because it is definitive, it can encompass all reality. Just as the writer of "Library of Babel" was able to define himself as a member of the Library, it is possible to define oneself as a member of the Aquarium. The Aquarium has all the virtues of a meaningful existence; it offers a way of perceiving the outside world, one's neighbor, and one's self. And even if one is only a visitor to the Aquarium, as we all must be, the Aquarium presents the virtues of beauty and intellectual stimulation that one would be embarrassed to fall below.

The radical, wonderful thing about Eames's Aquarium is that you *can* live there. One of the pleasures and limitations of Traditional cinema is that it is idiosyncratic: only Fellini can fully live in Fellini's world, Godard in Godard's, Hawks in Hawks's (great films transcend these limitations to varying degrees). Like an architect, Charles Eames builds film-structures in which many people can live, solve their problems, and respect their environment.

The three films discussed, *Tops, Powers of Ten,* and *National Aquarium Presentation,* total less than twenty-five minutes of screen time. To extrapolate an environmental aesthetic from a ten-minute sponsored film like *National Aquarium* may seem like the height of critical mannerism to some, and it is certainly possible that Eames's first films are not as important as I think they are. But in examining his films in detail, one finds the essential qualities of contemporary art. The Eames aesthetic personalizes assembly-line art, gives creator power to the consumer, permits individual integrity within a dehumanized collective, and allows the field to have as much value as the items within it.

In film, the Eames aesthetic introduces a new way of perceiving ideas into a medium which has been surprisingly anti-intellectual. Cinema threw every other art into the twentieth century, Wylie Cypher contends in *Rococo to Cubism,* and remained woefully in the nineteenth itself. Much of the upheaval in contemporary films has been the protest of the romantic-idiosyncratic tradition against itself. Even the best of recent

films, like *Persona, Belle de Jour, The Wild Bunch,* are too inherently a part of the tradition they protest to posit an alternative cinema. The few film-makers handling ideas today, Robbe-Grillet, Rohmer, Godard, Resnais, seem to fail because they cannot escape the romantic perspective. The French intellectual cinema (the *only* intellectual cinema) verges on bankruptcy; its failures are as disastrous as Godard's *One Plus One,* its successes as minimal as Robbe-Grillet's *Trans-Europe Express.* Because Eames comes from another discipline with a pre-existing aesthetic he is able to bring innovation to an art which in the area of ideas is only spinning its wheels. It is Eames's aesthetic which is ultimately the innovation.

Eames returns to film in a limited and exploratory manner what Cubism took from it in the early 1900's. What Sypher wrote of the cubist art of Cézanne, Eliot, Pirandello, and Gide is now true of Eames's films:

"Have we not been misled by the nineteenth-century romantic belief that the imagination means either emotional power or the concrete image, the metaphor alone. We have not supposed there is a poetry of ideas."

INTERVIEW

I spoke with Charles Eames on several occasions during January, 1970, and the quotes in the preceding article are excerpted from those conversations. Afterward, I posed written questions to Eames, intended to capsulize and explore many of the discussions we had had, to which he responded in writing.

Your career has seen many permutations. At times you have been an architect, furniture designer, a craftsman, an inventor, a film-maker, and a professor. Do you see a sense of design in your own career, or does it appear to be more accidental or haphazard?

Looking back on our work, I see no design—certainly nothing haphazard, and not much that could really be called accidental. What I think I see is a natural, though not predictable, growth toward a goal that has not ever been specified.

Given an empty blank, say, about the size of an IBM card, how would you characterize your current occupation?

I am occupied mostly by things that I have to fight my way through in order to get some work done.

How does an Eames film originate? What do the discussions with the producer(s) entail? What determines whether you and Ray will accept or reject a proposed film?

A film comes as a result of one of two situations. It is either a logical extension of some immediate problem we are working on, or it is something we have been wanting to do for a long time and can't put off any longer.

On several occasions you have stated that you regard film simply as the medium through which you solve problems and explain concepts. What, for you, has made film so uniquely suited to this task?

We have fallen for the illusion that film is a perfectly controlled medium; that after the mess of production, when it is all in the can, nothing can erode it—the image, the color, the timing, the sound, everything is under control. It is just an illusion— thoughtless reproduction, projection and presentation turn it into a mess again. Still, putting an idea on film provides the ideal discipline for whittling that idea down to size.

One of the most consistent techniques in your films is information-overload, that is, you habitually give more data than the mind can assimilate. What do you think is the effect of this cascading level of information on the viewer? Do you think this effect can be conditioning, that it can expand the ability to perceive? In other words, will a viewer learn more from the fifth Eames film he sees than the first, assuming they are of equal complexity?

I don't really believe we overload, but if that is what it is, we try to use it in a way that heightens the reality of the subject, and where, if the viewer is reduced to only a sampling, that sampling will be true to the spirit of the subject. Maybe after seeing one or two the viewer learns to relax.

Concerning Day of the Deed *and* Two Baroque Churches in Germany, *films which utilize*

a rapid succession of still views, Michael Brawne wrote in Architectual Design *that "the interesting point about this method of film making is not only that it is relatively simple to produce and that rather more information can be conveyed than when there is movement on the screen, but that it corresponds surprisingly closely with the way in which the brain normally records the images it receives." Do you feel this is actually the way the brain works, and is that why you used that technique?*

Because the viewer is being led at the cutter's pace, it can, over a long period, be exhausting. But this technique can deliver a great amount of information in much the same way we naturally perceive it—we did this pretty consciously.

Alison Smithson, another British critic, has written of your furniture, "The influence of the West Coast comes to us through Eames." To what extent do you think Mrs. Smithson is correct? This question may imply that Los Angeles is the prototype for America, as some city-planners have said, and I certainly wouldn't hold you responsible for that.

Los Angeles is the prototype for any city built by any people from anywhere, who have been removed from their native constraints. We have perhaps carried with us a few more constraints than most, and this may be what the Smithsons choose to recognize.

You have never handled a fictional situation in your films, and I assume this is by choice rather than accident. I would like to ask if there might arise a problem which you felt could best be solved in a fictional manner—but this is incumbent upon an understanding of what is "fiction." The IBM Puppet Shows *segment "Sherlock Holmes in 'The Singular Case of the Plural Green Mustache'" would seem to be a fiction in conventional terms, yet its plot is nothing but an exercise in Boolean Logic. The outstanding feature of* National Aquarium Presentation *is that it seems to be a fiction more real—more immediate—than the object it portrays. Perhaps it would be more accurate to ask what you would consider a "fiction" in the framework of your films, and if you feel or have felt any aspects of fictionality creeping into your work?*

I think the meaning of fiction that you ascribed to the Aquarium is quite accurate. Fiction in this case is used as a model or simulation against which to try out possible reactions. I suppose it is true that none of our films has had any trace of plot, in most of them it is structure that takes the place of plot.

One definition of fiction which might be applied to your films is anything which violates the scientific verities of the universe. Yet one of the thrusts of modern science is the truth that science considered from any one perspective is in itself a fiction. Would you consider making a fiction of science, that is, either criticizing a particular theory-fiction because it is too limited, or positing a multi-faceted conception of perceiving the universe, just as you posited the Aquarium?

I believe it would be possible to build in film a conception/a fiction of science—but it would probably be bound by the same constraints as any scientific hypothesis.

Relevant to this discussion is the fact that you have never explicated philosophical or psychological problems, only scientific ones. You have never attempted a film like, say, an adaptation of Cassirer's Philosophy of the Enlightenment, *although such a film made in your style could be extraordinary. A philosophical theory cannot be empirically limited in the way a scientific one can, yet I think your best "science" film,* Powers of Ten, *works in that area where modern science and philosophy converge in outer space. You once mentioned the possibility of making a film illustration of one of Richard Feynman's lectures. Would not such a project bring you even further away from the comfortable ground of computer logic and into the nebulous sphere of modern philosophy?*

I have never looked upon any of our films as being scientific, but at the same time I have never considered them less philosophical than scientific.

When dealing with some fairly elaborate problems, such as the computer, the city, the Aquarium, etc., we have usually tried to re-

duce the general problem to a series of small simple units that even we could really understand, and pass something of this particular understanding on. Some special combination of units may give the whole piece a smell of science or of philosophy.

Several years ago, C. P. Snow's Two Cultures *revived the science-art debate in England, and to a lesser extent in this country. Are there two cultures in the way Snow describes, and is this necessarily dangerous? Science and art seem to have merged completely in the lives of yourself and Ray, but others have a difficulty integrating these spheres.*

If there are two cultures, as Snow suggests, it is probably no more or less dangerous than the ignorance that goes with polarized training and thinking ever was—but, at this time in particular, it seems unnecessary.

You once expressed concern over Feynman's involvement with local artists. You said the tendency for a collision with a sculptor or a painter who is preoccupied with certain personality idiosyncrasies could derail him (Feynman) and you want to protect him because something great could happen. Is this statement simply altruistic, or perhaps are you reacting to a certain voguishness or lack of thought on the part of the artists, or even that scientists shouldn't truck with "idiosyncratic" methods of expression?

Naturally, I would not think that any exposure to the art types would really derail Feynman. I am super-impatient with those, who, with the object of somehow heightening the aesthetic values of the community, seek to bring painters and sculptors together with scientists in a conscious effort to affect the aesthetic climate.

I have a conviction, no matter how unlikely it sometimes seems, that somehow, sometime, out of the world engaged in problem-structuring and scientific pursuits, will come a sharpening and a new awareness of aesthetic values.

The danger is that this world can be prematurely contaminated by a virus that results in preoccupation with self-expression. When a scientist, engineer, mathematician (with natural resistance less than that of Feynman) collide with the painter, sculptor, they catch the bug to which the painter, sculptor have developed an immunity. Little moves toward self-expression, a self-conscious attitude toward "Art" and a numbing of the sense that would allow them to recognize aesthetics as an extension of their own discipline.

In House of Science, *the scientist is defined as one who "assumes that the puzzles have a solution, that they will be fair." What would your scientist say if someone countered that the puzzles had no solution, and weren't fair?*

He could give one scientist's reaction, Einstein's. When asked a question similar to that, he replied, "God may be subtle, but he's not malicious."

FILMOGRAPHY

This filmography was compiled with the assistance of the Charles Eames Workshop. Information about many of the films is sketchy, inadequate, or unknown. Eames has written descriptions of some of the films, and I have supplied others. All of the films were conceived and directed by Charles and Ray Eames, and photographed by Charles Eames.

Glen Fleck, a vital part of the Eames film-making process, is not mentioned in the filmography, primarily because his contribution to individual films is difficult to assess. "Up to very recently," Eames said, "he (Glen Fleck) is the only one in the office with whom we have talked about concept or form." Eames wrote the following description of Fleck's role and credits: "Glen came to the office during the development of the first Mathematica (1950). He did the drawings on three of the peep shows then later organized the material and did the animation on the proloque to the House of Science. *Recently, he also did the organization and animation on* Computer Glossary *and worked on the IBM Fair show. At the moment most of his work is computer concepts and he is masterminding that big history of data processing. Glen is one of the very few people who has a sense of what it is to communicate meaning. What is more, he has a sense of when he has not communicated it, and a sense of when he has not understood it in the first place—very rare."*

Films marked "(nl)" are not for loan under any circumstances. A few of Eames's films are distributed by IBM and the Museum of Modern Art. Most of the films, however, have no uniform distribution, although this matter is being given consideration. For further information write: Charles Eames Workshop, 901 Washington Boulevard, Venice, California, 90291.

Traveling Boy. 1950. Color. (nl). A journey through the world of toys, with a mechanical boy as tour guide.

Parade, or *Here They Come Down the Street.* 1952. 6 minutes. Color. "Filmed entirely with mechanical toys as actors moving against a background of children's drawing of a city street. Band

music, Sousa's *Stars and Stripes Forever*, accompanies the toy elephants and tigers and horses while brilliant Japanese paper flowers and balloons burst in the air over their heads. Drawings by Sansi Girard at age 5." Winner of Edinburgh Film Festival Award, 1954.

Blacktop. 1952. 11 minutes. Color. "An exercise in musical and visual Variations on a Theme, *Blacktop* is the image of water and foam generated in the washing of a blacktopped school yard viewed against the music of Landowska playing Bach's Goldberg Variations." Winner of Edinburgh International Film Festival Award, 1954.

Bread. 1953. 6 minutes, 30 seconds. Color. Study of Bread made for Eames's "A Rough Sketch for a Sample Lesson for a Hypothetical Course."

Calligraphy. 1953. Study of Calligraphy for "A Rough Sketch."

Communications Primer. 1953. 22 minutes, 30 seconds. Color. "An early attempt to make a popular presentation of communications theory—while a few of the techniques and words seem dated, most of it holds up quite well. The original motivation was to encourage such disciplines in the worlds of architecture and planning."

Sofa Compact. 1954. 11 minutes. Color. Traces the design and development of a product and its uses.

Two Baroque Churches in Germany. 1955. 10 minutes, 30 seconds. "These two churches, Viersehnciligen and Ottobeuren, are rich examples of mid-18th Century German Baroque, a time when music, literature, architecture and philosophy were unified. The film, rather than explaining the structure, attempts to give in one reel with 296 stills, the feeling of what German Baroque was and what gave it such great style. Music by George Muffat played by Walter Korner on the organ at Vierezehneiligen."

House. 1955. 11 minutes. Color. "Largely because of Elmer Bernstein's fine score this becomes a rather poetic view of the Eames house in Pacific Palisades, California. It is full of details of everything, but is now a bit dated except for those with a historical interest." Winner of Festival International du Film Montreal Award, 1961.

Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India. 1955. 11 minutes, 30 seconds. Color. Film record of an exhibition, designed and installed by Alexander Girard of material selected by Alexander Girard and Edgar Kaufman.

Eames Lounge Chair. 1956. 2 minutes, 15 seconds. B&W. "A stylized and sped-up scene of the assembling of the Eames leather lounge chair and ottoman, with music improvised by Elmer Bernstein."

Aerial sequences in *The Spirit of St. Louis*. 1956. Color. *St. Louis* was directed for Warner Brothers by Billy Wilder, a lifelong friend of the Eameses.

Day of the Dead. 1957. Color. A portrayal of the Mexican Day of the Dead consisting of still shots and narration. Winner of San Francisco International Film Festival Award, 1958.

Toccata for Toy Trains. 1957. 14 minutes. Color. "Toy trains in toccata form is a nostalgic and historical record of great old toys from the world of trains. The characters, the architecture, the objects with which the scenes were built, were all somewhere, at sometime, manufactured and sold. Music score by Elmer Bernstein." Winner of Edinburgh International Film Festival Award, 1957. Seventh Melbourne Film Festival Award, 1958. American Film Festival Award, 1959. Scholastic Teachers' 11th Annual Film Award, 1960.

The Information Machine. 1957. 10 minutes. Color. "An animated film made in 1957 for use in the IBM Pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair. Because it deals mostly in the general principles surrounding man's problems and the electronic computer, the points made in the film do not yet seem too dated. Music by Elmer Bernstein. Drawings by Dolores Cannata." Winner of Edinburgh International Film Festival Award, 1958, Melbourne Film Festival Award, 1963.

The Expanding Airport. 1958. 10 minutes. Color. Presents Eero Saarinen's concept for Dulles Airport.

Herman Miller at the Brussels Fair. 1958. 4 minutes, 30 seconds. Color. A film for the American Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair.

De Gaulle Sketch. 1959. 1 minute, 30 seconds. B&W. "An at-the-moment attempt to put together all the images that appeared in the press on the de Gaulle crisis in a one-and-one-half-minute resume. Later in January of 1960, Eric Severeid used it on CBS in his recapping of events of the fifties."

Glimpses of USA. 1959. 12 minutes. Color. *Glimpses of USA* was commissioned by the State Department to introduce the United States Exhibit at the Moscow World's Fair. A rapid succession of still photos depicting various aspects of American life were projected on seven 32-foot screens inclosed within a geodesic dome designed by Buckminster Fuller. *Glimpses of USA* was never shown in its original form outside of the Moscow Fair presentations.

Jazz Chair (nl). 1960. 6 minutes, 30 seconds.

Introduction to Feedback. 1960. 11 minutes. Color. "By using a large variety of familiar examples that all have the feedback principle in common, this film presents a broad view of the phenomena present in control mechanism and social situations. Musical score by Elmer Bernstein." Winner of Festival International du Film de Montreal Award, 1961, Internationale Filmwoche, Mannheim, Germany, Award, 1961, Melbourne Film Festival Award, 1963.

Sequences in the CBS special *Fabulous Fifties*, including *Music Sequence, Dead Sequence, De Gaulle, Gift From the Sea* (nl), *The Comics* (nl), *Where Did You Go—Out?* (nl). 1960. B&W. Eames described the *Music Sequence:* "This introduced what later became a fashionable quick-cut technique in television. It

was a resume of the popular music of the fifties, for Leland Hayward's 'Fabulous Fifties'." Winner of Emmy Award for Graphics, 1960.

IBM Mathematics Peep Show. 1961. 11 minutes. Color. "Produced originally to support the mathematical exhibition designed for IBM, this film is composed of five individual segments—each about 2 minutes long and each demonstrating a particular mathematical concept. Music by Elmer Bernstein." Winner of Festival International du Film de Montreal Award, 1961, London Film Festival Award, 1963.

Kaleidoscope. (nl) 1961.

Kaleidoscope Shop. (nl) 1961. 3 minutes, 30 seconds. A tour around the Eames Workshop through a Kaleidoscope.

ECS (Eames Contract Storage). 1962. 7 minutes. Color. A training and sales film for Herman Miller.

House of Science. 1962. 15 minutes, 30 seconds. Color. Six-screen presentation commissioned by the US Government for Seattle World's Fair. It has become a permanent exhibit called *Eames Theatre.* Eames has described a single-screen version: "A single-screen version of the multi-screen introduction to the United States Science Exhibit in Seattle. The 'House of Science' draws attention to the role of men, their environment, ideas and achievements in our world--a view of science and how it got that way."

Before the Fair. 1962. 8 minutes. Color. "This film, made for Herman Miller, shows the very last-minute hustle, bustle, painting and clean up on the days just before opening the 1962 Seattle World's Fair—also some Herman Miller furniture."

IBM Fair Presentation Film I and II. (nl). 1962, revised 1963. Made for the IBM presentation at the Seattle Fair, and later revised for the New York World's Fair.

Sequences in the CBS special *The Good Years,* including *Meet Me in St. Louis, San Francisco Fire,* (nl), *Panic on Wall Street* (nl). 1962. B&W.

Think. 1964, revised 1965. 13 minutes, 30 seconds. Color. A multi-screen presentation at the Ovoid Theater of the IBM Pavilion of the New York World's Fair. *Think* was projected on 22 separate screens (shaped in circles, squares, triangles, and rectangles), and included a live host. The 22 images were not projected simultaneously, and included live and still motion and animation. The IBM Pavilion, including the Ovoid Theater, was designed by Eames. *Think* is available in a single screen version titled *View From the People Wall:* A single screen condensation of the elaborate multi-image show at the IBM Pavilion in New York, aimed at showing that the complex problems of our times are solved in the same way as the simple problems, they are just more complicated. Musical score by Elmer Bernstein.

IBM Puppet Shows. 1965. 9 minutes. Color. Two puppet shows titled "Sherlock Holmes in 'The Singular Case of the Plural Green Mustache' " and "Computer Day at Midvale." "A film version of two electronically controlled puppet shows on display at the IBM Pavilion at the New York World's Fair. In one, Sherlock Holmes solves a crime by his usual method (and the computer method)—Boolean Algebra. In the second, then, the town of Midvale celebrates the installation of its first computer. The mayor jumps to some conclusions which the computer expert has a difficult time correcting."

IBM at the Fair. 1965. 7 minutes, 30 seconds. A fast-paced montage of the IBM Pavilion. Music by Elmer Bernstein.

Westinghouse A.B.C. 1965. 12 minutes. Color. Pictures some quick glimpses of current Westinghouse products—in alphabetical order. Music by Elmer Bernstein.

The Smithsonian Institution. 1965. 36 minutes. B&W. "A film produced at the time of the 200th anniversary of Smithsonian's birth. It describes events leading up to the founding of the Institution and the work of those men that set the character of the Smithsonian. Music by Elmer Bernstein."

The Smithsonian Newsreel. (nl) 1965. 20 minutes.

Horizontes. 1966. Opening and end titles for a series of Latin-American films for USIA.

Boeing the Leading Edge. 1966. 11 minutes. Color. "A film designed to illustrate the degree to which computer control is used to support, insure and extend development, design and production in a modern aero-space manufacturing facility."

IBM Museum. (nl). 1967. 10 minutes.

A Computer Glossary. 1967. 10 minutes, 47 seconds. Color. "With a live-action prologue that gives an intimate view of a computer data path, this animated film presents, through computer terminology, some revealing and characteristic aspects of the electronic problem-solving art. Used in the IBM Pavilion at the San Antonio World's Fair. Music by Elmer Bernstein."

National Aquarium Presentation. 1967. 10 minutes, 34 seconds. Color. "A film report to the Secretary of the Interior showing what the architecture and the program of the new National Aquarium will be, something of what it would contain and general philosophies and discipline that would be involved. Musical score by Buddy Collette."

Schuetz Machine. 1967. 7 minutes, 15 seconds. Color. Visual study of the Schuetz calculating machine.

Lick Observatory. 1968. 10 minutes. Color. "A somewhat nostalgic view of an astronomer's environment in an observatory on a mountain—made to give students who have not seen a large instrument something of the smell and sentiment of these surroundings."

Babbage. 1968. 3 min, 50 seconds. A visual study of the calculating machine or difference engine.

Powers of Ten. 1968. 7 minutes, 53 seconds. Color. "A linear view of our universe from the human scale to the sea of galaxies,

then directly down to the nucleus of a carbom atom. With an image, a narration and a dashboard, it gives a clue to the relative size of things and what it means to add another zero to any number."

Photography and the City. 1969. 15 minutes. Color. "A film about the influence photography has had in the shaping of cities and the solving of urban problems. The first part is a historic review of some of the photographs that for the most part, by intent, have had an influence on the city. The last part is essentially a catalogue of those images from which a wide variety of information about the city can be derived."

Tops. 1969. 7 minutes, 15 seconds. Color. A visual study of tops.

Films in Progress

The UN Information Center. Another "fiction of reality," proposing a communications hub for the United Nations. "In this film we really go beyond ourselves," Eames said; "what we really end up doing is making a case for the UN."

Man's View of Himself. A study of "man's changing notion of what makes him unique, and a realization that only when man stops worrying about what makes him unique can he solve the problems his uniqueness poses." Commissioned by IBM.

Memory. Commissioned by IBM.
The Perry Expedition. Commodore Perry's 1853 "Opening of Asia," as seen through Japanese documents of the times. Commissioned by the Smithsonian Institute.

Two films for the National Aquarium. One on shellfish, and another on the introduction of exotic species into an environment. The latter will consist of 25 rapid, consecutive examples.

JOSEPH MCBRIDE

Welles Before Kane

Orson Welles has never mentioned to interviewers that he did any experimentation in film prior to his coming to Hollywood—undoubtedly preferring the world to think that he burst full-blown on the scene with *Citizen Kane*. To an interviewer who asked him recently how he arrived at *Kane's* "cinematic innovations," he replied airily, "I owe it to my ignorance. If this word seems inadequate to you, replace it with innocence." But Welles was far from being a filmic innocent. There have been a few furtive mentions, largely unheeded by film historians, of a film he shot in 1938 for use in a Mercury Theatre stage production, William Gillette's farce *Too Much Johnson*, which ran for two weeks at the Stony Creek Summer Theatre in New York before Welles decided not to bring it to Broadway. He reportedly shot a twenty-minute silent prologue to the play, and ten-minute films to introduce the second and third acts. Included in the cast were Joseph Cotten, Edgar Barrier, Marc Blitzstein and Virginia Nicholson, Welles's first wife. I have not been able to see a print of *Too Much Johnson*. Welles has one, but he says that it is not worth seeing without the play. He also shot a film as prologue to his 1939 vaudeville show, *The Green Goddess*, "depicting an air crash in the Himalayas," according to his associate Richard Wilson. This also has so far proved impossible to locate.

But I have been able to unearth an extremely interesting little silent film called *The Hearts of Age*, preserved in a private collection, which apparently was Welles's first venture into film. It runs about four minutes and stars Welles and Virginia Nicholson. The copy I saw, until recently probably the only one extant, was the original 16mm print. It was donated, as part of the Vance collection, to the Greenwich (Conn.) Public Library. The sound of the splices clicking through the projector was nerve-wracking—though the film is in remarkably good condition

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—but my apprehension about projecting it was more than assuaged by the excitement of discovery. It was like finding a youthful play by Shakespeare. Access to the film has now been given to the American Film Institute, and a duplicate negative for preservation is lodged in the Library of Congress, which has also made a study copy that can be viewed by scholars on Library premises. (A study copy can likewise be seen at the Greenwich Library.) It will probably also be included in the AFI Welles retrospective in Washington this spring.

The credit cards list only the title and the actors, but they are in Welles's handwriting. Another person who has seen *The Hearts of Age* called Welles when he was in Hollywood recently and asked him about it. At first he didn't remember it, but when assured that he appears in the film, he recalled that, yes, it had been made in the summer of 1934, when he was nineteen, at the drama festival he sponsored at the Todd School in Woodstock, Illinois, from which he had been graduated three years before. He denied that he directed or edited it, claiming that it was just a "home movie." The Vance collection records, however, state that Welles co-directed the film with William Vance (who produced it and makes a brief appearance), and there is much internal evidence to support this.

The late Mr. Vance was a college student when he met Welles; he later went on to produce and direct television commercials. I saw a ten-minute adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, made in 1932, which he stars in and directed. It is nothing more than a crude and rather risible student movie. *The Hearts of Age* is something more, however. Though it is afflicted with facile symbolism and flippant obscurity, there are many directorial and photographic flourishes which point unmistakably to Welles's later work. A few of the shots are eerily prophetic of *Kane*, and the film shows even more than *Kane* the extent to which Welles was influenced by German theatrical and cinematic expressionism, particularly by F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*. And if some of the camerawork is perfunctory (especially when Welles is not on the screen), many of the shots are beautifully lit and composed, and the general lack of coherence is almost offset by the humor of Welles's performance.

At first the film seems hopelessly obscure, one of those bastard children of 1920's French avant-gardism that still afflict us today, but a pattern gradually emerges. It becomes clear that the film is an allegory of death. The first shot is of a spinning Christmas tree ball, later repeated and echoed again when a white-robed figure walks past stroking a globe; *Kane* of course. After the opening shot, we see a quick montage (much too quick for comfort, with that projector churning away) of bells ringing, some of the shots in negative. Then we see an old lady—Virginia Nicholson in grotesque make-up—rocking back and forth. The camera, smoothly hand-held in contrast to the jerky camerawork in *Dr. Jekyll*, pulls slowly back to show that she is suggestively straddling a ringing bell. The next shots reveal a man in black-face, wigged and dressed in lacy little boy's costume incongruously completed by football knickers, pulling the bell rope, with the old lady on the roof above him. After the second shot of the spinning ball, we see a tilted shot of a grave stone with three elongated shadows moving slowly on the ground behind it, and then a grave marker tilted in the opposite direction with a hand grasping around it.

A shadow hand rings a shadow bell, hazy latticework lighting all around it; we are reminded that Welles, by the age of nineteen, had already directed and lit more than a score of plays, both with the Todd School's student company and in Dublin, where he had been an actor with the Gate and Abbey Players and a director at the Gate Studio. There is nothing in *Dr. Jekyll* to compare with the suppleness of this film's lighting. The hand bell falls harshly to the ground in the next shot, no longer a shadow now, and we return to the old lady riding the bell with an obscenely pained expression as the black-faced man tugs spiritedly away. She opens an umbrella over her head (Welles was also fond of Keaton, who liked to fool around with umbrellas when it wasn't rain-

ing). We see a hand spinning a globe in close-up, and then a striking shot, worthy of Murnau: a gray tombstone, dizzily tilted, with a shadow hand creeping up it (a *white* shadow, because the shot is in negative) and beckoning with a long finger, while a corporeal hand crawls along the edge of the stone. We see a piano keyboard —a flash-forward, as it turns out—and then Orson Welles opening a door over a rickety flight of stairs.

It is always a strange experience to stumble back upon the first screen appearance of one of the *monstres sacrés*. The shock of that first entrance is not only the shock of recognition, it is like a glimpse of a platonic form. We are watching a privileged drama; every step, every gesture is hazardous and exciting, because what is at stake is the formation of a legend. Sometimes we are startled, as when we see Chaplin without tramp's costume as a suave, top-hatted villain. Does he know what we know? Or are we witness to the very moments in which the great secret makes itself known? Enchanting to see Katharine Hepburn sweep down a staircase in *A Bill of Divorcement*, Cukor's camera whipping across an entire room to intercept her flight; but how would we react if we could see Garbo in the advertising film she made for a department store, demonstrating how not to dress? With a bravura that will come to be known as his, Welles the director delays Welles the actor from appearing until we are sufficiently expectant of a grand entrance, an apparition that will transfix our attention and conjure up our unquestioning awe.

Whatever doubts we might have as to Welles's self-awareness are immediately dispelled by his appearance, mincing and leering, in a sort of comic Irishman costume, his face grotesquely aged like the lady's, his hairline masked and a wispy clown wig protruding from his temples. He starts down the stairs, bowing to the old lady. He carries a top-hat and a cane —later to be the talisman of other Wellesian characters, from Bannister in *The Lady from Shanghai* to Mr. Clay in *The Immortal Story*. He descends the stairs, seen from a variety of angles, intercut with the old lady watching warily. Then Welles shows the character walking down the steps three times in succession, a common enough avant-garde affectation but appropriate here to underscore the fateful nature of the character's arrival. Presently we are treated to quick appearances of Miss Nicholson as a Keystone Kop and Mr. Vance as an Indian wrapped in a blanket (making a face into the camera as he passes), neither of which has much connection with the already rather tenuous story.

It seems that Welles's character is a figure of death, for he disturbs the indefatigably rocking old lady by appearing all over the rooftop of an adjoining building—and making a choking gesture with his cane for the man in black-face, a gesture echoed twenty-five years later by Quinlan in *Touch of Evil*. One of those quaint inserts dear to Griffith and Stroheim interrupts the action: a hand pouring coins from a shell, and a broom sweeping the money away. (Later we will see a hand dropping a crumpled five-dollar bill to the floor, but nothing else will come of it.) Death appears at the window, leering coyly and dangling two heart-shaped lollipops, tortuously wrapped around each other. These especially infuriate the old lady, who accelerates her rocking. From the smiling Death, Welles cuts to a skull, to a yanking rope, to a pair of feet hanging in mid-air, and to the head of the black-faced bellringer, dangling in a noose. Then we see a drawing of the hanged bellringer, and soon a hand enters the frame and draws a little bell as signature in the corner.

There is a startling transition to Death walking into a darkened room (the underworld?) carrying a candelabrum. He places it on a piano and starts to play, the camera tilted wildly to the right as he pounds furiously away: very much *The Phantom of the Opera*. We see his fingers coming closer and closer to the camera. Abruptly the pianist hits a wrong note and stops. He plunks at the keys, bending his head owlishly to test the sound (a good job of miming by Welles). He gets up and discovers that the old lady is lying dead inside the piano. Death

opens the piano bench and takes out, instead of sheet music, a pile of thin slabs, shaped like tombstones. He shuffles through them: "Sleeping," "At Rest," "In Peace," "With the Lord," and "The End," leaving the last behind. He sits down again to play, undulating deliriously. We see the bell again, and then his hands playing the piano. Then the slab, "The End."

It would be pompous to claim that we can look at *The Hearts of Age* and see that its maker must have become a great director, just as it would be extrapolate Chaplin's greatness out of *Making a Living.* But we can see, through the young man's melange of styles, the conglomeration of postures both congenial and unassimilated, a vigorous, unguarded, *personal* approach to even the most second-hand of ideas and motifs. It would be foolish to try to justify *The Hearts of Age* as a self-sufficient work. It is juvenilia, and Welles might be rather embarrassed by it today. But *Citizen Kane,* we should remember, is also the product of youthful eclecticism. That is part of its charm; its strength, like that of the first *nouvelle vague* films, comes from the integration of these divergent styles into a coherent framework, each part appropriate to the drama. We can see in *The Hearts of Age that* Welles, like all young artists, had to work a penchant for gratuitous allusion and self-indulgence out of his system before being able to create a unified work.

JOHN L. FELL

Dissolves by Gaslight

ANTECEDENTS TO THE MOTION PICTURE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY MELODRAMA

Drama is the necessary product of the age in which it lives, and of which it is the moral, social, and physical expression. The contemporaneous drama possesses an archaeological value. It is the only faithful record of its age. In it the features, expressions, manners, thoughts and passions of its period are reflected and retained.

—Dion Boucicault, 1877

INTRODUCTION

By 1911, the narrative structure of film had more or less established itself. The devices of any television thriller today are little different in essence from those of the one and two-reelers that came from the old Biograph studio just off New York's Union Square.

For story, early films largely cannibalized the substance of the last century's theatrical melodrama. The process seems almost pat evidence for Marshall McLuhan's proposition that a new medium devours as content the medium it seeks to replace.

However, the similarities of expository form between movies and melodrama are striking too. Clearly both often responded to the same shaping forces. Melodrama often colored and defined—and sometimes anticipated with its own tools—the later film techniques. Then, except as it survived in the movies, melodrama died. As a profitable venture it disappeared by World War I. New styles of acting and writing had evolved. Theater had captured a more so-

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phisticated audience. The urban, artisan spectators drifted into the music halls and storefront nickelodeons.

One serious study has defined relationships and similarities between nineteenth-century theater and twentieth-century film. This is A. Nicholas Vardac's *Stage To Screen.*[1] Thoroughly documented, Vardac's work concludes that motion pictures were the more successful medium in reconciling these trends of realism and romanticism which prevailed in the period. Further, photography captured with little effort the qualities of spectacle, fantasy, naturalism, and mime that had required unbelievably complicated and unwieldy stage machinery and designs. Vardac is particularly rich in his analysis of stage construction and those transitional techniques which were developed to smooth relations between stage scenes. His book is essential to an understanding of the problem.

I would like to deal only with melodrama, seeking to isolate an aspect of popular culture whose neglected counterparts today are quite as active and as interwoven in the social fabric as was the earlier theatrical form. Moreover, I want to stress the *functions* of formal elements in melodrama. It is a matter of historical interest that D. W. Griffith used—say—theatrical lighting in his early films. But it is a matter of aesthetic concern that what the lighting did it did better in film, so that film commandeered an approach which had theretofore worked its greatest successes on the stage.

The usual argument of motion picture histories traces storytelling techniques from the one-shot accomplishments of Edison and the Lumière brothers through Méliès and Edwin S. Porter to Griffith. While Griffith's indebtedness to Dickens was both acknowledged by himself [2] and discussed by S.M. Eisenstein in a noteworthy essay, [3] the general tenor of movie historians has been self-protectingly provincial —understandably so if one realizes the strenuous efforts of film-makers, critics, and theorists to define their craft as unique and therefore unbeholden.

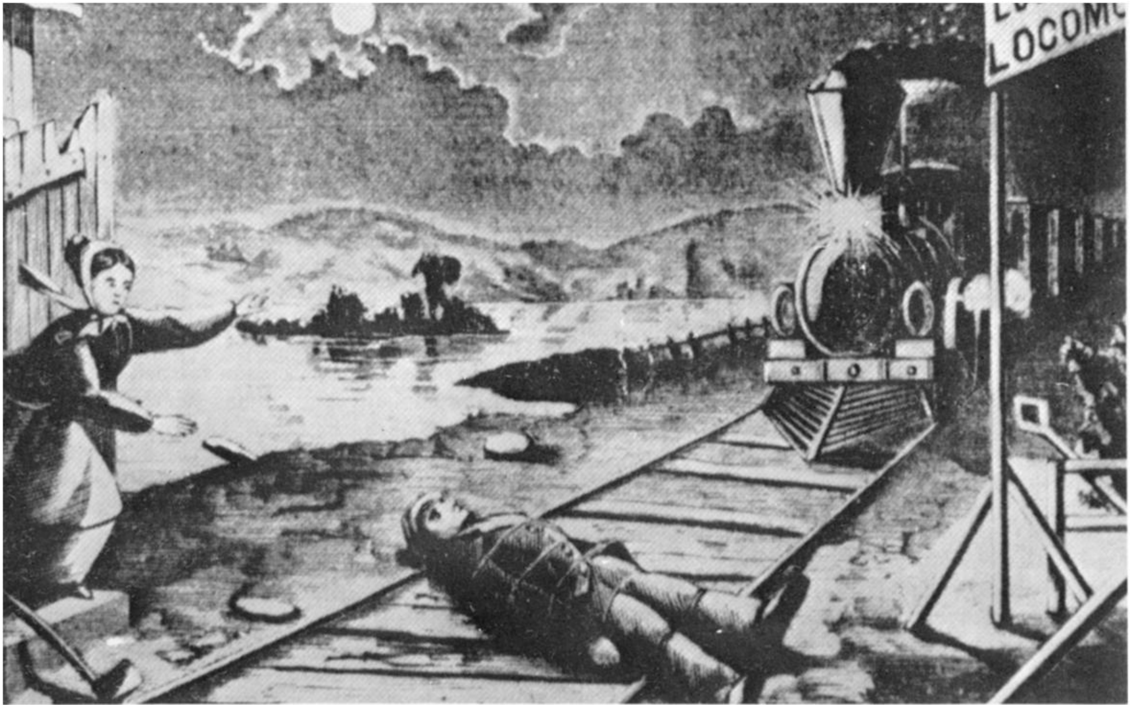
I want to propose a view which is more general, yet also more concrete. Not only Victorian theater, but its contemporary photography, graphics, prose, even the comic strip and music all seem to share common impulses toward the solution of similar narrative problems. Many of these concerns centered on how to render time and space. Others were responses to technological change and chose expressive directions unique to each form. I mean to spell out theatrical devices and conventions which had direct counterparts in early films. Clearly many of these relations were causal. Boucicault to Belasco to Griffith is an obvious example. However, I intend here only to identify parallel solutions to shared problems.

HISTORY

Melodrama was the product of an industrial society, the urban working class, and the topical excitements of its period—crime, military adventure, wilderness exploration. It developed out of morality plays and sentimental plays as well as from the Gothic novels of Walpole, Mrs. Radcliffe (herself influenced by Schiller's *Die Raüber*), and Monk Lewis. French melodrama flourished after the revolution. The English picked it up (a euphemism for what was often downright theft from Pixérécourt) in the early nineteenth century. Because speech and mime were accompanied by or interspersed with music, the form enjoyed latitudes under the 1737 Licensing Act which were less available to dramas *per se.*

By 1830, English rural populations were moving to the cities and class-based antagonisms on the stage readjusted their context to worker-factory owner conditions. Audience participation was strong. The people who attended this theater and later its film equivalent shared a desire to see dramatized allegories of human experience. The presentations were simplified to trivial ethical dimensions. Where any efforts at characterization existed, they were externalized into visible evidence.

Speech, behavior, and settings were instantly recognizable. Justice was the inevitable consequence of struggle and torment. Thus melodrama guised fantasy in the costume of Naturalism. As a theatrical form, melodrama developed



Daly's UNDER THE GASLIGHT, *1868*

into a conventionalized entertainment whose qualities were determined both by the sensibilities and the perceptions of its audience. It presented a world with problems and characters made fraudulently comprehensible, then costumed with palatable thrills, climaxed in reassuring resolutions. The narrative form developed to guarantee unflagging interest by omitting the "dead spots" of other drama, guaranteeing identifications with the performers, and refining the resources of suspense.

In the *Oxford Companion to the Theatre,* Disher proposes that melodrama was finally outmoded by two developments: the success of plays by women novelists, and the development of copyright laws which discouraged the free "adaptations" which had made inexpensive scripts so accessible. Certainly by the end of the century, last-minute stage rescues had diminished. They survived mostly among the road companies and in the theaters which catered to working-class spectators. Through much of the century, genteel audiences had tended more toward the novel and poetry, drawing conceptual talents away from the stage. But by the last decades, a city like New York was able to support several new theaters built to attract the middle class.

Melodrama was also diminished by the rise of the music halls after mid-century. There, any appeal to strong feeling or anxiety was bypassed. In a compromise at the expense of the older form, the increasingly popular vaudeville houses condensed melodramas into thirty-minute segments of their program. When motion pictures appeared in the nineties in the same setting, often at the bottom of the bill to clear the house, they displaced their live counterparts.

In the same decade there was one mercantile effort to revive the older form—the Ten-Twenty-Thirty Melodrama, a theatrical equivalent to attempts by other salesmen of popular culture to profit from the leisure and increased salaries of the metropolitan worker. (The same impulse shows itself in the evolution of the nationally circulated magazine and in the newspapers of Pulitzer and Hearst.) A new symbiosis—intellectual hack and artisan customer—is evidenced in such an observation as the following by a

Harvard-educated melodramatist who started his career in 1902.

> One of the first tricks I learned was that my plays must be written for an audience who, owing to the huge, uncarpeted, noisy theaters, couldn't always hear the words, and who, a large percentage of them having only recently landed in America, couldn't have understood them in any case. I therefore wrote for the eye rather than the ear and played out each emotion in action, depending on my dialogue only for the noble sentiments so dear to audiences of that class. [4]

STRUCTURE

The concept of "writing for the eye" was not altogether a product of language barriers. Because of the Licensing Act, Gothic dramas were presented early in the century as dumbshows, mimed to music. Later they survived in the melodrama's non-dialogued action scenes, and this element translated easily into the silent film. Indeed, mimed parts parts continued almost intact in such roles as the Frankenstein monster (early adapted to the stage from Mary Shelley's novel). Vampires, too, were popular in early melodrama; *viz.*, Planche's *The Vampire* (1820), George Blink's *The Vampire Bride* (1834) and Boucicault's *The Vampire* (1852), which he reworked as *The Phantom* (1862).

Where explanations were in order during mimed performances, placards were displayed, not unlike the intercutting of titles in the silent films. A common practice was to counterpose ripostes by heroes and villains against the mimed action of later, spoken melodrama—in the manner of Batman and The Joker.

> *Hawkshaw.* Now, Jem Dalton! It's my turn!
> *Dalton.* Hawkshaw!
> *They struggle.*
> *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*
> Act IV Scene III

Undoubtedly the matter of visual climaxes was in part a response to theater posters and other sorts of nineteenth-century illustration, themselves the product of modern lithographing techniques. The new printing process fostered showers of gaudy colored posters. Melodrama was especially rich in moments of lurid incident and ennobling or pathetic sentiment.

> Once he had a title, he'd discuss scenes that would make good lithographs—things like the burning of Brooklyn Bridge or the blowing up of the Capitol. Even before I'd begin to write a play, Al Woods would have the lithographs illustrating it ready for the billboards, sometimes twenty or thirty thousand dollars worth. [5]

This sense of scene as illustration underlines melodrama's affiliation with popular graphics. In the first half of the nineteenth century, George Dibdin Pitt wrote several plays whose structure provided sequential pictures of a personality or a career in the manner of cartoon series. One play in fact, *The Drunkard's Children,* derived from a series of plates by Cruikshank. Similarly, a version of the life of Napoleon devoted itself to such "moments" as crossing the Alps, the escape from Elba, the last campaign, and the General meditating on a setting sun at Saint Helena (an editorial cartoon if there ever was one!). Catalogues of early film distributors title and describe each motion picture scene in quite the same vein. [6] The device of "historical reconstruction," which resulted in hundreds of early short films—sometimes masquerading as newsreels— reappears in *The Birth of a Nation* with Lincoln signing a proclamation, with Lee's surrender at Appomattox, and in the assassination.

From a Boucicault poster.

Melodrama plots soon resolved into identifiable sub-species. Each reappeared in the motion picture form. Film often revived the same theatrical properties. Melodramas could be military, horror, nautical, crime, or the perils of city life. Some plays later filmed also exemplify the mystery (*Sherlock Holmes*), the frontier (*Billy the Kid, The Westerner*), slavery (*Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Clansman* which became *The Birth of a Nation*), the historical spectacle (*Ben Hur*), romance (*Camille*), the romantic adventure (*The Prisoner of Zenda, The Corsican Brothers, The Count of Monte Cristo*), and religion (*The Sign of the Cross*).

One popular form was the animal drama. In Frederic Reynold's *The Caravan, or The Driver and his Dog* (1803), a dog named Carlo saves a girl from the sea. Carlo's movie counterpart showed up first in *Rescued By Rover* (1905). In mid-century at the Bower Saloon in Lambeth, one dog shared Hamlet's conversation with the ghost, watched Claudius at the play, supervised the duel with Laertes, and killed the king on his master's voice. [7] Late in the century animal melodramas were part of the New York revival. In *Deadwood Dick's Last Shot*, a horse raised an American flag to signal the attack which saves the hero about to be burned at the stake. Soon Tom Mix had an equally resourceful horse.

Many plot devices in early films are directly appropriated from earlier plays. Rescue by telegraph (*The Lonedale Operator*, 1911) appears in *The Long Strike* (1866) by Boucicault. The climax to *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) is the relief of a besieged party whose women are about to be shot and clubbed rather than face a fate far worse than the plot. It appeared in *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, an 1893 frontier play by Belasco and Franklin Fyles, drama critic of the *New York Sun.* Indians substituted for crazed black militia in the former play, and the Ku Klux Klan was the US Cavalry.

The essence of much melodrama was speed and mounting tension, qualities that required rapid transitions between scenes as well as spatial juxtapositions and skills in movement and change on stage. Echoing related preoccupations with time and space in other narrative forms, the nineteenth-century theater explored transitional devices which clearly anticipate the techniques of the motion picture. Many of the new effects derived from technical innovations in lighting and projection as well as changes in theater architecture (see below). Previous to the 1880's a curtain was rarely introduced between scenes but only as a frame to each act. Scenes were changed in view of the audience. Melodrama sems to have indulged two impulses: one, to introduce the scene curtain in order to make drastic changes in its increasingly realistic decor, [8] the other to create a sense of movement in space as a transitional technique which maintained temporal continuity rather than interrupting the action. This accounts for such a "trucking camera" shot as the following.

> The interior of a prison; large window R., an old fireplace, R.C., small window, C., door, L. Through window R. is seen exterior and courtyard. The scene moves—pivots on a point at the back. The prison moves off, and shows the exterior of tower, with *Conn* clinging to the walls, and *Robert* creeping through the orifice. The walls of the yard appear to occupy three-fourths of the stage.
>
> *The Shaughraun* (Drury Lane, 1875), Dion Boucicault. Act II Scene V. [9]

Similarly, one finds this involved visual descent in another Boucicault play; it sounds very like a camera tilt.

> The scene changes in the exterior of the same tower; the outside of the cell is seen, and the window by which he has just escaped. *Shaun* is seen clinging to the face of the wall; he climbs the ivy. The tower sinks as he climbs; the guard room windows lighted within are seen descending, and above them a rampart and sentry on guard . . . As *Shaun* climbs past the window the ivy above his head gives away and a large mass falls carrying him with it; the leaves and matted branches cover him. His descent is checked by some roots on the ivy which hold fast. An alarm . . . he eludes the sentry and disappears round the corner of the tower, still ascending. The scene still descends, showing the several stages of the keep, until it sinks to the platform, in which *Arrah* is discovered, seated and leaning over the

abyss, still singing the song. Beyond, there is seen the lake and the tops of the castle.

Arrah-na-Pogue[10]

The panorama was used, too, as a method to simulate movement of a shoreline as seen from a moving ship.[11]

Perhaps the most striking of all the mobile-camera-affecting stagings occurs in the Prologue to *The Girl of the Golden West*. Belasco rolls a painted backdrop in a lengthy "pan" down from a peak in the Sierras, from mountain slope to a cabin, down a footpath to a miner's camp, then "trucks" into the exterior of the Polka Saloon. Here the sounds of a banjo, singing, and gambling are introduced. The stage then fades to black. With the fade-in, the set is the Saloon's interior, and action commences. Belasco's stage directions to what he calls "first picture" and "second picture" note "the scene represents a little world by itself, drawn in a few crude strokes, to explain more than the author could tell in a thousand pages." In 1911 a novel was published, credited to Belasco and based on the play. It neither begins nor ends with the stage settings.[12]

The same impulse toward fast transitions in space, visible to the audience or not (i.e., a pan or a cut), is found in Steele MacKaye's invention of the "sliding stage" and the "double elevator stage," wherein one scene could be raised or lowered into view.

The other main structural problem confronted by melodrama was that of simultaneity. The stories turned so often on coincidental appearances of characters at unexpected times and on rescues in the face of imminent danger that staging had to facilitate two or more playing areas at the same time. Monk Lewis's *Venoni* (Drury Lane, 1808), used two cells separated by a partition. In Fitzball's *Jonathan Bradford* (Surrey, 1833) four apartments are organized on two floors: two bedrooms above, the windows opening on a tile floor. Below, a back parlor and a bar are separated by a hallway, giving on the stage through a front door. The play's action progresses from one apartment to another or sometimes occurs simultaneously. Another instance of multiple staging takes place in *Lady Audley's Secret* (Royal Victoria, 1864). Act II Scene III is introduced as follows.

> A divided scene of two rooms; in R. a table, chairs and flight of steps, supposed to lead to a hayloft, in C. flat; a door piece, R., and key in in it; in L., room, table, chair, and window in flat showing moonlight perspective.

The action moves from one room to the next while parties in adjacent quarters either sleep or listen. Thus, the exposition depends on an audience vantage which has an omniscience unknown to the players—a device of film and of the nineteenth-century novel.

Another advantage of multiple staging was the ease with which action could be shifted in space without the interruptions of scene changes. Vardac notes an involved double-set staging for *A Race for Life* (1883), followed in a later act by a double set and revolving light house![13]

Sensation scenes, of course, often required that two story lines, separately situated but simultaneous, meet at the climax. The archetypal rescue is from a railroad track, and it may have appeared first in Augustin Daly's *Under the Gaslight* (1867).[14] Boucicault appropriated it for his 1868 production of *After Dark*. In both cases a character has to break out of an enclosure to untie the ropes. Daly staged track and ticket office on one set. Boucicault's procedure is more elaborate. In Scene I the victim is captured. Scene II finds the rescuer (Old Tom) in his enclosure (a dark cellar; he burrows through a wall to reach the London underground). In Scene III, Tom breaks through and makes the rescue. The staging is such that the most likely technique for its execution would appear to be that of successively lighting the cellar and then the railroad track with the broken wall as a connecting device. It would be rewarding to locate further evidence on the performance at the Princess's Theatre.

Griffith's narrative solution to the sensation scene embodied what has come to be known as parallel editing, a strategy of intercutting from one locale to the other at increasing tempo until the two story lines are joined. The film's

equivalent to multiple staging first appeared in double-exposed or optically printed "split screens." Kirk Bond remarks on an early version of this in Cecil B. DeMille's 1915 *Carmen*, mentioning

> . . . a shot that has at the top of the screen a small rectangle looking out of the tent to show action in the smuggler's camp. The effect is literally that of an experimental film of today with its small frame within the large frame. [15]

In the realm of of fantasy where special staging is less needful of being "explained" by reality, the use of a split screen by Méliès is described by Kemp Niver (*The Damnation of Faust*, 1903). The employment of optical projection and mattes to achieve a similar effect is found in another Méliès production a year later, *Au Clair de la Lune*. [16]

Sensation scenes in the last half of the century became so ambitious (with smashing locomotives, military battles, sinking ships) that their execution often became the point of the performance. Outdoor spectacles date as far back as *A Time of Mystery* (1802). *The Siege of Gibraltar* (Sadler's Wells, 1804) has men of war and floating batteries in a tank with 8,000 cubic feet of real water. Moncrieff introduced a diorama in *Zoroaster* (1824). Fitzball's *Paul Clifford* (1835) had a stage coach and six real horses.

The translation of the sensation scene into motion pictures is self-apparent. [17] What has been less remarked is the melodrama as a training ground for the nineteenth-century novelist. Dickens, for example, staged *The Miller and His Men* as a schoolboy, exploding the robbers' den with firecrackers. [18] Jacques Barzun speaks of the "esthetic melodrama" of "modern prose fiction, from Richardson to Balzac and Lawrence" and later remarks on the deep influence of Daly and Boucicault on Henry James. [19]

ACTING

The "modernized revivals" of melodrama at the turn of the century were training grounds for several young Biograph stars in the Griffith troupe. This movement resuscitated the stock company and the salaried "staff author," although by now performances were limited largely to local theaters rather than to the road show. [20] Authors wrote to the talents of their players, and each player devoted his energies to one or two stereotyped roles; the parallel to the later Hollywood star system is clear. Mary Pickford starred in the second company (this one on the road) of *The Fatal Wedding* by Theodore Kremer in 1902, and in Hal Reid's *The Gypsy Girl* (1905). [21] Lillian Gish debuted at five as the product of *Her First False Step*, by Lillian Mortimer, an authoress-actress who specialized in working girls victimized by sophisticated wealth. Dorothy Gish played *East Lynne*. In *Convict Stripes*, Lillian Gish was saved from dynamite by a hero who swung across the stage on a rope. Perhaps it is significant that the first picture in which the Gish sisters worked for Griffith was *The Unseen Enemy* (1912). Dorothy and Lillian try to telephone the police while burglars shoot at them through a stove-pipe hole.

Griffith combined penchants for both popular melodrama and the New Drama of Henry Arthur Jones and Pinero which was replacing it. When he pursued nonmelodramatic subject matter, he is said to have been criticized by the Biograph producers.

Additionally, Griffith brought to the motion picture the abilities of a theatrical stage manager, a role which had been developing since the 1880's, both as a coordinating agent dealing with the minutest particulars of the overall production and as supervisor to the performances of the actors. [22]

Griffith is also respected for his efforts to encourage the new screen actors to minimize exaggerated expressions and gestures associated with the stage. But this impulse was not unique to film; it can also be seen in the efforts of David Belasco during his Broadway period. Belasco tried to diminish acting extravagances and to seek effect through minimal means with a quieter colloquial style.[23]

THEATERS

As stage presentations began to regain the monied audiences which had forsaken them,

and as the constituency of drama became increasingly a homogeneous middle class, theaters grew in size and in the elaborateness of their decor. The disappearance of the apron which had pressed into the auditorium since Elizabethan times established the idea of a "picture frame" stage that in turn became another argument for Naturalism. Pits were replaced with reserved stalls of cushioned seats or else they were pushed back under the dress circle. The effect was to give a better vantage to audiences more attentive to the performance. [24] A better view (there were more box seats as well) for more patrons also argued for greater emphasis on visual detail and for more considered, less stylized, uses of expression.

With the disappearance of the apron and its stage doors, a frame was introduced around the stage. This created an effect strikingly like that of the motion picture theater screen.

> A rich and elaborate gold border, about two feet broad, after the pattern of a picture frame, is continued all around the proscenium, and carried even below the actors' feet—There can be no doubt the sense of illusion is increased, and for the reason just given: the actors seem to be cut off from the domain of prose; there is no borderland or platform in front; and, stranger still, the whole has the air of a picture projected on a surface. [25]

Similarly, the early film screens were fancy-bordered; e.g., the gold-framed screen at Koster & Bial's Music Hall on Herald Square where Edison's first public performance took place on April 23, 1896. The same tendencies toward size and elaborateness in stage architecture reappeared with the movie palaces of the 1920's when Hollywood began to lust after its own middle-class clientele.

SCENERY

In the course of the nineteenth century, melodrama sets increasingly used elaborate carpentry and painting as more effort was made to integrate their function with the plot. Back drops, for example, were sometimes painted in part with transparent dye which looked like the surrounding areas from the front. When

"The Vitascope in the Promenade" (note gold-bordered screen).

lights were turned on behind, the painted front would either fade out or be replaced by what had been designed on the back of the sheet: an effect especially useful for fires and sunsets.

However, the last quarter of the century found audiences increasingly dissatisfied with cut cloths and painted flats. The new direction, accelerated by photography's abilities to report the epidermis of reality, was toward box sets with three solid walls and a ceiling—something not introduced into movie carpentry until *Citizen Kane.* [26]

The execution of painted exteriors was heavily influenced by the naturalism of nineteenth-century salon painting. As with the Dioramas, lighting was commonly used to simulate changes of daylight, and Griffith carried the same techniques to the movies. Compare the following report on an amateur melodrama at the home of Charles Dickens with Mrs. Griffith's memory of her husband's lighting effects.

> As the light fades with the advancing evening a grey tone comes over the landscape with the most natural effect. . . . The warm red hues of the west pale into the grey and spectral moonshine (an effect marvelously achieved . . .) [27]

> He figured on cutting a little rectangular place in the back wall of Pippa's room, about three feet by one, and arranging a sliding board to fit the aperture much like the cover of a box sliding in and out of groove. The board was to be gradually lowered and beams of light from a powerful

> kleig shining through would thus appear as the first rays of the rising sun striking the wall of the room. Other lights stationed outside Pippa's window would give the effect of soft morning light. Then the lights full up, the mercury tubes a-sizzling, the room fully lighted, the back wall would have become regular back wall again, with no little hole in it. [28]

Mrs. Griffith then quotes a review which says in part

> As for Pippa without words, the first films show the sunlight waking Pippa for her holiday with light and shade effects like those obtained by the Secessionist Photographers. [29]

Clearly, these lighting techniques also echo the painters' capacities to direct a viewer's attention and to manipulate tempo by the visual evidence of time change. In these respects, a projected image is not only easier to control than a stage set, it is easier to create. Further, the omnipotent director can the more easily indulge his audience's (false) sense of omniscience.

LIGHTING

By the 1820's, candles had been replaced by gas. After mid-century, auditorium chandeliers and wall brackets were no longer kept burning during a performance but dimmed. Gas not only gave brighter light, but could be controlled on cue from a single source. This allowed light to be written into the script as an element functional to the story. Such effects as the following from *Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* could not have occurred in earlier theater.

> The fierce glare of a furnace . . .
> Act II Scene IV
> The beams of the moon play with a bluish tinge on [*Mark's*] face, which is deadly pale; his hair is dishevelled and his clothes soaked with blood. *Sweeney* starts as if he looked upon an apparition. Picture.
> Act III Scene I
> A gas light burns at the gauze window, and the form of *Mark Ingestrie* appears for an instant.
> Act III Scene IV

Additionally, gas might be used for spectacular effects; e.g., "red fire," an apparently safe simulation of large-scale conflagration. In the ending to one version of *Sweeney Todd,* large amounts of red fire in the wings seemed to suggest that all the performers had gone up in smoke.

The technique of fading into or out from a darkened stage was a consequence of the unilateral control of gas lighting. With careful planning it became possible to "dissolve" from one scene to the next. Vardac speaks of scenes dissolving into one another in the DeWitt version of *Arrah-na-Pogue* (1864). [30] He describes a slow dissolve done without lights in an 1887 *David Copperfield.* [31] As early as 1874, one New York reviewer was sick of it and objecting to "a display of dissolving views." [32]

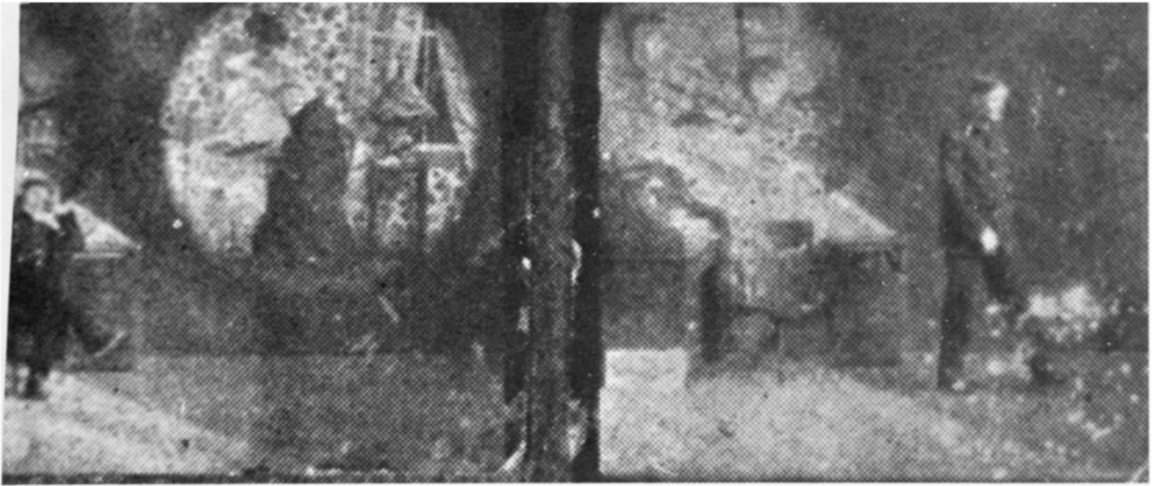
Contemporary with gas but longer lived, lime or calcium light provided a brilliant white, especially useful in simulating twilight, moonlight, rippling water, clouds, etc. Because limelight had a small area of intense brightness it could be focused with lenses and used to spotlight and to follow actors. [33]

Modern theatrical lighting developed from Edison's invention of the incandescent-filament lamp in 1879. While it was low in efficiency and its spectrum leaned to the reds, electric light was safe and could be reliably dimmed from full light to out. Edison personally installed the overhead lighting in the Madison Square Theatre, New York City, in 1879 when Steele MacKaye gained control of the auditorium and remodeled it in accordance with new concepts of technical equipment. [34]

Belasco, especially, recognized the potential of electric lighting, introducing a portable light bridge above the proscenium, a portable switchboard, and a staff of electricians expanded from the usual two or three to twenty-four. [35]

SPECIAL EFFECTS

A combination of controlled light sources, lenses, and stage machinery encouraged the development of metaphysical elements in the plots. Given the new resources, playwrights introduced to the melodrama a battery of visual



THE LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN: *"The fire chief is dreaming and the vision of his dream appears in a circular portrait on the wall. It is a mother putting her baby to bed and the impression is that he dreams of his own wife and child."* (1903 Edison Catalog)

effects which doubtless suggested many of film's later accomplishments. Figures could be "dissolved" into a scene by way of elaborate combinations of glass, mirrors, light, and cloth. [36] Traps in the floor, known backstage by such fanciful terms as the Vamp Trap, the Star Trap, the Corsican Trap, and the Ghost Glide, eased ghostly entrances and exits.[39]

Vision scenes seem to have developed out of magic lantern projections and other devices of rear projection in the second half of the century. Vision scenes usually indicated premonitions, hallucinations, or dreams and were represented at the rear of the stage behind gauze or else "thrown" above and behind the actors. An early example occurs in the Dickens-Collins collaboration *The Frozen Deep* (1857) in which a tired traveller sees in his campfire at the North Pole a glimpse of the girl he left behind. [38]

In *The Bells* by Leopold Lewis (1871) an undiscovered murderer (Mathias) is sleeping at an Alsatian village inn whereupon the curtain behind a backdrop of muslin rises to disclose a trial set, with an effect rather like that of a film cut. The action proceeds with Mathias's dream, during which a hypnotist leads the guilty man to incriminate himself. The rear curtain then descends, Mathias is wakened, and the story is resolved. [39] Here the vision scene serves too as a transitional device. Fifty-odd years later, the Lewis play reappeared in a film version starring Lionel Barrymore as the innkeeper and Boris Karloff playing the hypnotist in a style and costume designed by Barrymore and straight out of *Dr. Caligari (The Bells,* 1926*)*. By this time, dissolves have replaced the "projected" devices of the vision scene, so that the dreaming Mathias is never visible simultaneous with his trial. However, double exposures are repeatedly used to evidence both Barrymore's obsession with bells and his hallucinated image of the murdered Jew.

Besides indulging supernatural characters in the plot (angels, ghosts) vision scenes externalized thoughts, fears, wishes and impulses. In these respects as well as often in the mechanics of their actual execution, the vision scene re-appears in early film. The magician-film-maker Méliès brought such stage devices directly to the studio. Edwin S. Porter's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903) shows an angel taking Little Eva to Heaven and an angel beckoning to Uncle Tom to make the same trip. Finally, projected onto a slot above and screen right of Tom's body, a symbolic tableau of Lincoln and slaves promises freedom for the oppressed.

Another practice of the melodramatist was to prolong moments of uncommon excitement or of special visual significance by "freezing" moments of action. The customary stage direction is *Picture, Living Picture,* or *Tableau.* Often it

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN: *Little Eva beckons Uncle Tom to heaven.*

anticipates a curtain, but the *picture* may equally well mark a moment within a scene.

> With a violent effort of strength, the old man suddenly turns upon *Wolf* and tears open his vest, beneath which he appears armed. *Wolf,* at the same instant, dashes *Kelmar* from him, who is caught by the *Count*—the *Count* draws his sword —*Wolf* draws pistols in each hand from his belt, and his hat falls off at the same instant—tableau —appropriate music.
>
> *The Miller and His Men*
> Act II Scene IV

> Music—*Sambo* and *Quimbo* seize *Tom* and drag him upstage. *Legree* seizes *Meeline* and throws her round to R.H.—she falls on her knees with hands lifted in supplication.—*Legree* raises his whip, as if to strike *Tom*—Picture—Closed in.
>
> *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* dramatized by George L. Aiken [40]

As a posed still, the "freeze frame" occurs in films as early as Griffith's 1909 *A Corner in Wheat.* Griffith used it to great effect in the war-dead shots of *The Birth of a Nation.* Vertov used the technique of optically arrested motion with consummate skill in *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929). Since *The Four Hundred Blows,* it has been increasingly common in contemporary films.

MUSIC

By its very definition, melodrama used music in tandem with stage action from its inception. Indeed one likely proposal is that the form originated in the eighteenth-century practice of commissioning composers to write incidental music to accompany spoken scenes with passages that would underline the emotion—rather as screen musical scores later came to do.

As with the silent motion picture, the size of the orchestration increased with the elegance of the setting. In working-class theaters, instrumentation was minimal though always present. [41]

There are contrary stage directions as to where musicians should be placed: in front of or behind the stage. It seems likely that this matter was resolved at the discretion of the author or stage manager. [42]

Music cues accompany the stage directions of most published melodramas. From the earliest period, the character of these cues has a quality very like the indexing vocabularies of a film music library. In *A Tale of Mystery,* an 1802 adaptation of *Coelina* by Holcraft, the descriptions include *alarming, confused, music to express chattering contention, pain and disorder, doubt and terror, pain and alarm, and hurrying.* [43]

The music is customarily interspersed with the action or else it tries to establish a general mood behind the spoken play. However, there are occasions when its rhythm and intent is clearly synchronized to stage movement, much in the synchronized manner common to film animation.

> The combatants, each armed with a short, blunt, basket-hilted sword, timed every blow with the orchestra. Sometimes, each note had its corresponding clash, at others, the combatants had to rest their "minim rest" and engage only upon the beat of the bar. [44]

CONCLUSION

There appears to be ample evidence of striking similarities between theatrical and filmed melodrama in terms of structure, techniques, and the aesthetic implicit to both. This is expectable—

indeed perhaps inevitable. Many theater people on the fringes of the New York scene drifted into film in the early years of this century purely as an expedient. Often they must have brought the experiences and traditions of melodrama in the baggage of their theatrical skills.

Beyond this, narrative film and nineteenth-century theater share certain preoccupations and tastes which had ramifications in many cultural areas. Writing about Marx as a stylist, Stanley Edgar Hyman follows a cue from Bernard Shaw in suggesting that the dramatic form of *Capital* is Victorian melodrama.[45] By the same token, it could be proposed that *The Birth of a Nation* pressed the Civil War and the Reconstruction period into melodrama, or that Eisenstein accomplished much the same thing in *The Battleship Potemkin.*

The motion picture was the logical extension of theater's inclination to place real objects on its stage. More important than the location of the performance (as we have seen, theaters and movie houses become very much alike in any case), was the reading audiences gave to this "reality," which in practice clothed the most bizarre sort of fantasy. The deformed evil of Frankenstein's monster pursued by a lynch mob, the sinking of a battleship with all hands rallied around the flag, a poor girl victimized by wealth and cynicism: these are images which press upon our perceptions and bequeath to our privacies special demands on feelings. Melodrama allows us to carry emotions to their extremes. (The lyrics, duple rhythm, and blues changes of rock music may be doing quite the same thing for young people now.)

Yet at the same time, the relevance of any piece of popular culture (rock, comics, posters, melodrama) is an impending victim of rapid stylistic transience. What appears on the surface to be "real" has always be reconstituted into an extremely artificial collection of abbreviated forms and shorthand messages skillfully combined to do their job on our emotions. Their efficacy is short-lived, and outdated ephemera turns quickly into something else again. American films of the fifties, for example, now strike us like cultural artifacts—the Orphan Annie mugs of the Eisenhower years. James Bond soon becomes Hawkshaw the detective. Outdated ephemera is ridiculous.

This built-in cultural obsolescence poses special problems to a society that seems to need a constant replenishment of vicarious thrills. If we can come to laugh so quickly at what we indulged only months before, then certain strains are bound to be imposed on the resilience and the longevity of our feelings. For one thing, we are continually called on to rediscover that we were foolish when we were younger, and our children are reminded of it too. Furthermore, we have to stay in touch with the new popular culture (directed at our kids) because the old won't hold up. We can't grow old (in the Elizabeth Barrett sense) with our own melodrama because it can't grow old with us. The flats keep dating on the sets of our cultural scene.

NOTES

1. Vardac, *Stage To Screen: Theatrical Method From Garrick to Griffith,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949) *passim.*
2. Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), p. 103.
3. Sergei M. Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today," *Film Form* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942). See also S. M. Eisenstein, "Form and Content: Practice," *The Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942), pp. 165-6.
4. Owen Davis, "I'd Do It Again." Quoted in Frank Rayhill, *The World of Melodrama,* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1947), p. 278.
5. Vardac traces the development of *The Colleen Bawn* from steel engravings, p. 43.
6. Jacobs, *op. cit.,* 38-41, 43-6. (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965.)
7. Michael Booth, *English Melodrama,* pp. 86-7.
8. As sets grew larger and machinery more cumbersome and complicated, intervals for scene changes increased. Booth quotes a note on *The World* (Drury Lane, 1880) whose effects included a boat adrift on a great sea. "In consequence of the elaborate scenic effects it will be necessary to have an interval of five or six minutes between heaviest sets." Act intervals began to take from a half hour to an hour. Plays started to run as long as five hours.
9. Quoted in Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama* 1600-1900, *v. V,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, *2nd ed.,* 1959) p. 45 and accompanied by a diagram of the stage machinery on p. 44.
10. Quoted in Booth, pp. 167-7. A similar staging of the same play is described by Vardac, p. 26.
11. The idea of a panoramic scene in the theater is antedated by the development of the Panorama and the Diorama, creations of the last decades of the eighteenth century, which remained popular through the next hundred years. The Panorama exhibited paintings on curved surfaces to centrally seated audiences, thus accenting

the illusion of reality. Introduced by Louis Daguerre to Paris in 1822, the Diorama affected paintings and "views" with projected optical and lighting effects to produce an illusion of change. Daguerre's Diorama at the Rue Sanson involved the transportation of his audience on a platform moving around the presentation. The visible portion was masked by a proscenium-like border, thus giving the impression of scenic movement. Later versions of the Diorama in England sought a like effect at less expense by manipulating screens and shutters. For illustrations, see Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace*, (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1969) p. 17.

12. David Belasco, *The Girl of the Golden West* (New York: A. L. Burt, 1911). Vardac quotes another description of the Belasco play which emphasizes the tight-scheduled lighting cues which establish the time as sunset to coincide with the activity in the saloon.

13. Vardac, pp. 20-24.

14. Vardac quotes a contemporary review that may document an earlier train-on-the-stage in *London By Night* (1844), p. 50.

15. Kirk Bond, "Eastman House Journal," *Film Culture* n. 47, Summer, 1969, p. 45.

16. Kemp River, *Motion Pictures from the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection* 1894-1912 (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 178, 340.

17. As well as thoroughly documented in Vardac, Ch. 3 and 10.

18. Edgar and Eleanor Johnson, *The Dickens Theatrical Reader*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964) p. 9.

19. Jacques Barzun, "Henry James the Melodramatist," *The Energies of Art*. (New York: Harper, 1956), p. 237.

20. Early film equivalents to the stock companies were the traveling exhibitors who played fairs and small towns with motion pictures plus live entertainment. See Sharp, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-48.

21. The father of Wallace Reid, Hal was a prolific author, also responsible for "The Little Red Schoolhouse" in which both Pickford and Lillian Gish worked.

22. Early stage-manager types were Boucicault, W. S. Gilbert and Tom Robertson, a playwright and actor who tried to deemphasize star performances and to require ensemble work through detailed directions. Gilbert praised him for showing "how to give life and variety and nature to the scene by breaking it up with all sorts of little incidents and delicate by-play." (Sidney Dark and Rowland Grey, *W. S. Gilbert: His Life and Letters*, (1923), p. 59. Quoted in Nicoll, *op. cit.*, p. 32. For Griffith, "breaking it up with all sorts of little incidents" meant analyzing a single sequence into a succession of segments.

23. Rayhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-8. The close scrutiny of the camera had its earlier equivalent in post-gas illumination on the stage. New lighting devices threw the performers into a sort of visibility which hadn't existed under gas, oil, and candlelight. Rahill credits Brander Matthews and Daniel Frohman with proposing that lighting accounted for the disappearance of theatrical "asides" except of course in the revivals.

24. See illustration of the *New Booth's Theater*, opened in New York in 1869 in Glenn Hughes, *A History of the American Theatre* 1700-1950, (New York: French, 1951) p. 194.

25. The description is of the new *Haymarket Theatre*. From Perry Fitzgerald, *The World Behind the Scenes* (1881), pp. 20-1. In Nicoll, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

26. Edison films like *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) revert to earlier melodramatic decor in their interiors; *cf.*, the painted pot-bellied stove in the square-dance scene or the combination of painted mountains, toy steamboats, and real water in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903). For illustrations see Richard Griffith and Arthur Mayer, *The Movies* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 11.

27. *The Leader*, Jan. 10, 1857, pp. 44-5. Cited in Robert Louis Brannan, *Under the Management of Mr. Charles Dickens*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966) pp. 76-7.

28. Linda Arvidson, *When the Movies Were Young*, (New York: Dutton, 1925), p. 128.

29. *The New York Times*, October 10, 1909.

30. Vardac, p. 27.

31. *ibid.*, p. 32.

32. *ibid.*, p. 34.

33. Limelight was portable to the extent that cylinders were strapped to the backs of operators who would move about above the stage, directing their illumination as needed. See Theodore Fuchs, *Stage Lighting* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929), p. 43.

34. Various electrical spectaculars were staged in the theaters in the 1890's, including the Spectatorium, New York City, 1893, and E. L. Bruce's "aerial graphoscope" at Kensington, 1896. Projected effects (like clouds) were attempted by Professor Herkomer at about the same time. See Nicoll, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

35. Rayhill, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

36. See "Peppers Ghost" in the *Oxford Companion to the Theatre* (Phyllis Hartnell, *ed.*, London: Oxford University Press, 3*rd ed.*, 1967), p. 726. See also illustrations of exhibitions at the Boulevard du Temple in Sharp, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

37. A famous one was the barber chair of Sweeney Todd, who would seat his customers and then pitch them into an assassin's pit below. Sometimes the victims would emerge again, bloody and dazed. More often they were served to the unwary customers of a nearby bake shop in the form of meat pies.

38. Dickens liked to use apparitions in his public readings of *The Haunted Man*.

39. Act IV Scene IV.

40. From the stage manager's prompt book p. 47. Quoted in Leverton, *The Production of Later Nineteenth Century American Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, Teachers College, 1936), p. 96. Many other examples of pictures are located in this book, pp. 95-104.

41. Booth, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-8.

42. Leverton, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

43. Rayhill, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

44. *Maid of Genoa*, 1820. Reviewed by H. Barton Baker, *The Old Melodrama*, p. 335. Cited in Booth, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

45. Stanley Edgar Hyman, *The Tangled Bank* (New York: Atheneum, 1962).

For representative melodramas, the reader is referred to the following anthologies:

J. O. Bailey, *British Plays of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1966).

Michael R. Booth, *ed.*, *Hiss the Villain* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964).

David Belasco, *Six Plays* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929).

Garrett H. Leverton, *Plays for the College Theater* (New York: French, 1948).

Montrose J. Moses, *ed.*, *Representative British Dramas Victorian and Modern* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1927).

George Dibdin Pitt, *Sweeney Todd The Demon Barber of Fleet Street (ed.*, Montagu Slater) (London: John Lane, 2*nd ed.*, 1934).

George Rowell, *Nineteenth Century Plays* (London: Oxford, 1936).

Reviews

ZABRISKIE POINT

Director: Michelangelo Antonioni. A Carlo Ponti Production. Script: Antonioni, Fred Gardner, Sam Shepard, Tonino Guerra, Clare Peploe. Photography: Alfio Contini. Music: Various groups. MGM.

Antonioni is the only major director who ever made a film in an alien culture with complete success. Renoir and Clair and the great Germans, when they got to Hollywood, never achieved the density of meaning and the surety of surface detail (especially of character) that we find in their best earlier work; but Antonioni in London somehow managed it with *Blow-Up*. He has not been able to repeat the achievement in *Zabriskie Point*. Nonetheless, I want to defend the film, so let's get out of the way its obvious and crushing weakness: the dialogue is miserable. Some of it sounds badly post-dubbed, some of it just sounds awkwardly spoken; virtually all of it is unsatisfactory. The film might even be improved through a wholesale redubbing using new voices—according to the Italian system in which Antonioni originally worked—aided by someone who has a true ear for American speech. Daria Halprin and Mark Frechette are so visually apt that we can see why Antonioni, seeking to come to terms with American youth, decided to use them. But where in *Blow-Up* he was dealing with highly trained English performers, capable of very subtle effects, verbal and otherwise, here he is both using and portraying inexperienced young people for whom the entire verbal tradition is suspect and underdeveloped—and who use words in a limited shorthand way. Hopper and Fonda mostly brought this kind of thing off in *Easy Rider*, but Antonioni and his writers haven't. Perhaps he needs experienced actors more than he admits. Almost every scene in which more than one line is spoken becomes embarrassing. I believe that Antonioni intends us to be somewhat uncomfortable in the presence of his young people, but this implicates him and the film as a whole in our discomfort.

You can't understand *Zabriskie Point* if you assume Antonioni is straight-forwardly sympathetic to American youth. On several informal occasions when he discussed politics and political attitudes, in Berkeley, before shooting the film, it's been clear that his basic reaction is in fact quite skeptical. *Zabriskie Point* is far from being an attempted celebration of the youth culture. And thus people who find the film inconclusive may simply not be prepared to consider what Antonioni's "conclusion" is. How can a critic of decadent capitalism, a supposed Marxist, offer such a weird, almost surrealist, diffident portrait of young hip Americans?

Expectably, *Zabriskie Point* has little ordinary complication of plot. What Antonioni has distilled out of his difficult years in America is almost a snapshot episode. Mark becomes actively radicalized when he tries to bail out a friend and is mistreated by the cops; observing a cop kill a black militant surrendering from an occupied building, he pulls his own gun just as someone else shoots the cop; escaping, he steals a light plane, flies out over the desert, and makes an aerial pick-up of Daria, who's driving to an assignation with her real-estate boss. They wander around a desolate area called Zabriskie Point, make love, and paint the plane psychedelic. Then Mark flies back to Los Angeles and is killed by police when he won't stop the plane. Filtered through Antonioni's foreign sensibility, the characters come out strange, like familiar objects seen in negative color; we grasp their general shapes, but the insides never become defined. The American milieu, conveyed through cars, signs, modern buildings, and an astonishing comic conceit of a TV real-estate commercial whose people are *really* plastic, comes out as the modern-weird that Antonioni has given us in *Deserto Rosso*, only here it's ugly and exploitative as well. The total is disconnecting, hallucinatory; even some direct-reportage footage of the San Francisco State strike, whose bloody realism might be expected to disrupt Antonioni's more abstract tone, slips into place.

Antonioni's usual dramatic method involves a certain deliberate misdirection of interest—as if,

like a night eye that has to look slightly beside a star to see it clearly, Antonioni wants us to use somewhat off-center vision to see his meaning. Anna disappears in *L'Avventura;* in *Blow-Up* a man is murdered in the park. But the real concerns of the films lie elsewhere: in the readjustment and confusion that follow Anna's disappearance, in the photographer's unsettled attempt to discover what has happened. Except perhaps in *Deserto Rosso*, Antonioni's recent films have focused on the moral consequences of happenings, rather than on the ostensibly eventful happenings themselves. Apparently impressed by the disjunctures (and the distances) of American life, Antonioni spins out the aftermath of Mark's implication in the shooting with cross-cutting that's laboriously Griffithian—we follow Mark and Daria alternately, a few shots on one, a few shots on the other, etc. But in a sense the real consequences are compressed into the brief and rather inscrutable ending: after hearing of Mark's death, Daria turns away from the real-estate man; then, in her imagination, she blows up his sumptuous desert house along with all its gaudy, chrome-plated, plastic, high-living contents (including books). She smiles, and drives away, and to hard rock the huge desert sun goes down. There is no subtle, ambiguous readjustment of relationships, no lingering on moral equivocations. That is, not within the film. But it's possible that Antonioni may have changed the nature of his game—intending the consequences to occur, this time, outside the film and after it. Daria, who is devoured by the camera as Vitti used to be—and with justification, ah yes!—becomes at the end the moral center for the film. In short, *Zabriskie Point* is Antonioni's *La Chinoise;* Daria's imaginary house-demolition is like Véronique's assassination; and the chastened silence with which young audiences react to the ending may be a sign that Antonioni's meaning is perhaps getting through.

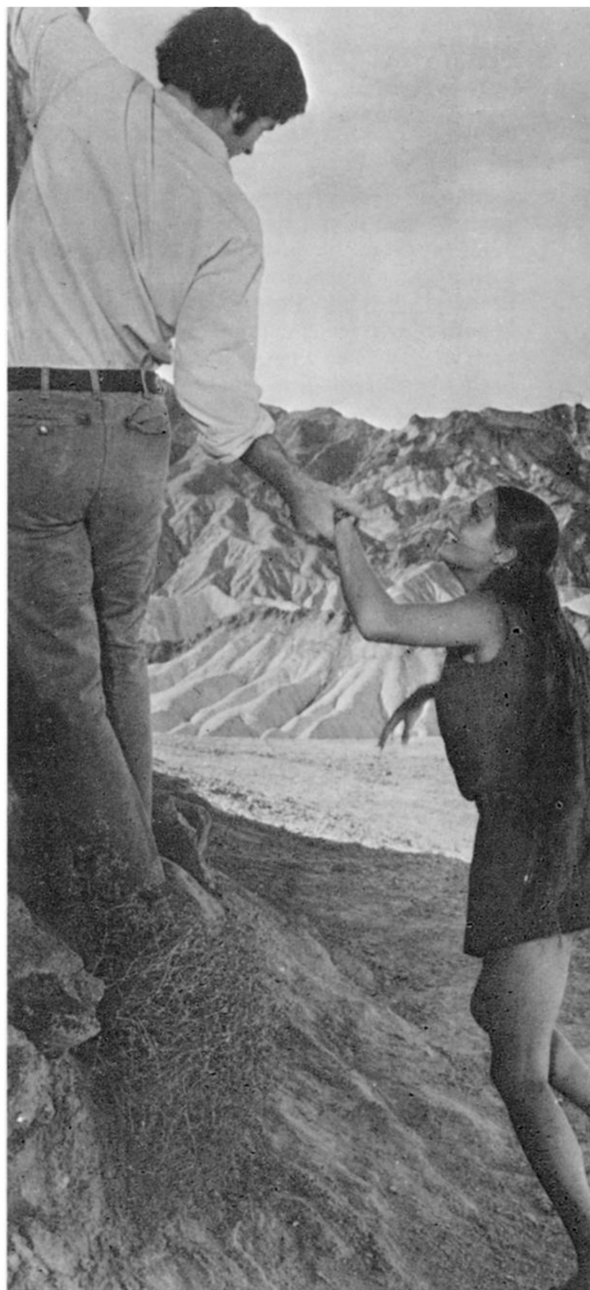
Godard showed us his student Maoists educating each other, expelling their friendly revisionist, and finally taking one tiny step—evidently a play step—on the long march toward revolution. Godard portrayed his young people rather abstractly, but with affection and respect despite his criticisms of them. (A few months later, the Paris students proved to be more advanced than he thought: they seized the Sorbonne, and precipitated a national general strike that almost brought down the Gaullist regime.) In *Zabriskie Point* (which seems unlikely to be belied by any such dramatic events), Antonioni is sketching two central tendencies in American youth. The film begins with real, explicit politics: black militants and white radicals are seen, in a c-v style scene, debating strategy in a student strike. The rest of the film concerns the reactions to this political event within Mark, who is impatient with all the slow work of political organization and has an endearing kind of wild, almost crazy rebelliousness, and within Daria, a gorgeous apolitical head who prefers rock music to the news and maintains that "*Nothing's* terrible." Both of them are appealing young people and Antonioni obviously likes them; he is impressed by their liveliness, their directness, their impulsiveness, and the film is clearly not even faintly satirical of them. Nonetheless, I think *Zabriskie Point* only makes sense if we're willing to admit that Antonioni finds both aspects of the youth scene somewhat frivolous. The movement of the picture is *away from* Mark and Daria's original states: toward death in his case, and toward involvement, or at any rate a recognition that some things may be terrible after all, in hers.

From his European Marxist perspective, Antonioni sees too many young middleclass dissidents (Mark comes from Beverly Hills) as isolated from any mass base, and in particular from the working class; in the film he shows that they are facing, with their romantic gestures and theatrical, planless militancy, a fascist-minded police increasingly eager to gun them down. Despite the arguments of an experienced political hand at the meeting (whom Antonioni has taken pains to enlarge optically in the middle of a shot, but at whom young audiences laugh) Mark disdains organization and talk; he just wants to do his own thing, so his political acts are impulsive, infantile, and finally suicidal. The vision he and Daria seem to share, when they

make love in the desert, is of a horizon-to-horizon love-in: beautiful in its dusty way, but also reminiscent of painterly visions of damnation. It's small wonder, then, that unsuspecting viewers find such a portrait of supposedly swinging American youth dissatisfying. "Where's the *action?*"

Well, the action seems to be, in the usual Antonioni method, in the abortive ways in which people try to cope. There are problems in the execution, yet Antonioni's general intentions seem relatively clear. Daria isn't exactly a gas-hound, but she's a free spirit whom almost anything will turn on, including the creepy real-estate tycoon played by Rod Taylor. She plays her abundant sexuality on the world like a floodlight. Mark, though he claims to be in a group which is on a "reality trip" and won't turn on with grass ("What a drag!" says Daria) elevates risk-taking into a principle of life; he talks about John Brown, but what he does is return the stolen plane to Los Angeles. I think Antonioni finds the sexual relationship between Mark and Daria affecting and genuine; he has remarked that in making *Zabriskie Point* he learned that eroticism isn't the disease of our era after all, and I suppose we should be glad. But what Antonioni actually makes happen, despite the reality of this sexual contact, is that Mark's tentative request for her to come with him is dropped—probably on both sides; all Daria's animal energy and loveliness, all Mark's fanciful rebelliousness, come down to a radio announcement of his death—and a girl who may now know what she has to do.

This may be, partly, just Antonioni's perennial pessimism; and some people feel that it's irrelevant and immaterial in the American context—that his depressive, surreal vision doesn't fit the reality. The artistic criterion, of course, is whether that vision is a coherent and interesting one, with important relevance to the human condition; but even on the political criterion alone, it is certainly at least possible that Antonioni is right: that many young people do have fatally limited perspectives, and that their different kinds of impulsive romanticism are unreal, disconnected, alienated elements of a society already beyond human understanding. And we hardly need Antonioni to make us a little skeptical of the staying power of the love generation's love.



Antonioni's work, I think, can be regarded as a desperate rearguard defense of traditional

humanism. He's been trying to defend men and women against the dissolving power of the acids produced by advanced industrial society: a courageous drawn-out losing fight. Against the dreadful silences, the sealing-off glass, the beautiful overwhelming machinery, the commercial chicanery, he tries to mobilize some basic almost biological resources: the sensibleness of Monica Vitti, the curiosity of the photographer in *Blow-Up*, and here what we might call the animal magnetism of Daria Halprin, who is utterly lovely whenever she doesn't have to talk. Antonioni is sane enough to be able to sustain both confidence and doubt as to whether the energy and spirit of young Americans will prove reliable in the long-run struggle. (And in terms of the development of world culture, that *is* indeed where the action is.)

After *La Chinoise*, perhaps affected by leftist criticism which held it irresponsible, Godard has taken a sharp turn toward a cinema of open, direct ideological conflict. He seems to be moving outside the commercial story cinema entirely, toward 16mm films; *One Plus One* may turn out to be his last "normally" distributed film. But Antonioni is not logical like Godard, who will follow ideas anywhere, even out the window. In all his films, Antonioni assimilates his subjects to the service of a particular, highly emotional vision; despite their intellectual side, in Antonioni pictures feeling is everything. His experiences in America evidently proved recalcitrant to this assimilation, and *Zabriskie Point* has a certain diffidence, a certain hesitation about it. But then what can *anyone* make of the weird combinations of euphoria and paranoia, reformism and imperialism, rhetoric and disorganization, fury and laxness, liberation and brutality, which constitute our present national life? We come out, perhaps, a little better off than in *L'Eclisse*, which ended with the people vanished and the camera, in an uncanny silence, staring at a street lamp. Daria and the Indian maid have exchanged some kind of wordless support and understanding; it is the sun we see glowing at the end of *Zabriskie Point*, and Daria smiles at the demolished house before she drives off. Doubtless, whatever direction Antonioni takes next, it's not likely to be exactly cheery. But he is not giving up his struggle. —ERNEST CALLENBACH

M*A*S*H

Director: Robert Altman. Script: Ring Lardner, Jr. Photogaphy: Haold E. Stine. Music: Johnny Mandel.

Mash (as I'll call it for short) is a comedy at which you may very well do not just a double but a quadruple take.

At the first take, it comes across as a hilarious antimilitary satire. Three miles behind the front line in the Korean War, the acronymic Mobile Army Surgical Hospital copes with a continual supply of shattered bodies being ferried in by helicopter. Most of the personnel—and particularly the surgeons played by Donald Sutherland and Elliot Gould—have no respect for military and other pieties. A devout major who objects to his colleagues' roistering ways is baited to a self-destroying fury. The only event which inflames the Mash personnel with lust for battle is a football game with another unit, and then several thousand bucks are at stake.

On closer inspection, however, the satire begins to crumble. Mash is a self-contained unit, going its own way on the margin of military regulations and attitudes. Its commanding officer not only fails to notice most of his subordinates' shenanigans but is himself discovered at one point in bed with a nurse. The higher authorities are clearly willing to turn a blind eye on Mash so long as it does its surgical duty—and on the evidence of the film's recurrent, casually gory operating theater scenes, Mash works hard and well.

It's true that the devout major and a new head nurse try to impose some discipline and decorum on Mash; but a series of humiliations planned by Sutherland, Gould *et al.* easily disposes of the major and converts the head nurse into "one of the girls." In any case, neither of them could be taken to represent Military Authority or Bureaucracy. The major, for example, is disliked simply because he's a bore (reciting

humanism. He's been trying to defend men and women against the dissolving power of the acids produced by advanced industrial society: a courageous drawn-out losing fight. Against the dreadful silences, the sealing-off glass, the beautiful overwhelming machinery, the commercial chicanery, he tries to mobilize some basic almost biological resources: the sensibleness of Monica Vitti, the curiosity of the photographer in *Blow-Up,* and here what we might call the animal magnetism of Daria Halprin, who is utterly lovely whenever she doesn't have to talk. Antonioni is sane enough to be able to sustain both confidence and doubt as to whether the energy and spirit of young Americans will prove reliable in the long-run struggle. (And in terms of the development of world culture, that *is* indeed where the action is.)

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the Lord's Prayer when his tent-mates are having their cocktail hour) and a boor (losing his temper with an orderly and blaming him unjustly for a patient's death).

There are other officious military men—from a transportation corporal to a general—who intrude from time to time on the Mash personnel, and they are invariably shown in an idiotic light. But if poking fun at officialdom were the chief criterion of satire, nearly all the comedies ever made would qualify. In any case, the most explicit and succinct condemnation of military life comes when Sutherland and Gould are flown to Japan to treat a Congressman's son. "Goddam army!" exclaims their driver, shaking his head over the steering wheel: "Goddam army!" Sutherland and Gould are standing in the jeep dressed for golf and chatting to each other in a parody of Japanese. From the driver's viewpoint, *they* are the bores and boors.

All this leads to a third view of the film: that it has no moral purpose except to make one laugh deeply and often. It belongs to the tradition of the wacky comedy, using present-day iconoclastic attitudes and elliptic narrative techniques to intensify the humor in the same way as its thirties predecessors used wisecracking sophistication and chic settings.

Like the wacky comedies, *Mash* squeezes a lot of humor out of humiliation. The scene in which the surgeons expose the head nurse as she's taking a shower is an updated equivalent of Katherine Hepburn with half her dress torn off in *Bringing Up Baby*. Sutherland's baiting of the devout major, whose lovemaking with the head nurse has been amplified over the PA system, has much the same cheerful viciousness as Barbara Stanwyck's revenge on Henry Fonda in *The Lady Eve*. Like the wacky comedies, too, *Mash* from time to time spins off into sheer farce. One extended sequence concerns the unit's virile dentist, who becomes convinced that he's a latent homosexual and decides to commit suicide. The rest of the Mash personnel give him an impressive sendoff, administering a supposedly lethal pill which merely puts him to sleep long enough for an attractive nurse to join him on his bier and reassure him of his virility. This sequence has as little to do with the rest of the film as the race to the hospital at the end of *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break* has to do with the studio scenes that precede it.

As a matter of fact, the fake suicide sequence is also considerably less comic than the rest of the film. At first viewing, one's interest is held by the preposterousness of the incidents; but at a second viewing the sequence seems hollow and contrived, and satisfying humor returns only with the casual "morning after" scene in which the dentist behaves as if nothing unusual has happened. There is a similar lowering of the comic pressure in the sequence where Sutherland and Gould go to Japan, again largely because plotting takes precedence over the film's more vital qualities.

What makes *Mash* outstanding—and as something more than a wacky comedy—is the richness of its texture. The characters stroll, run, interweave among the tents of their unit; dust swirls around them; the camera pans and cuts to seemingly random details. Meanwhile, on the sound track, lines of dialogue overlap or are casually tossed away; the PA system continually breaks in with an odd announcement or the Japanese version of an American popular song. Many films these days impose quick cuts and overlapping dialogue on what are basically four-square, linear scripts, and thus produce an irritating effect of contrivance. *Mash* stands out because—with the exception of the fake suicide and Japanese sequences mentioned above—the incidents and dialogue in Lardner's script are ideally suited to the dense, elliptical style with which Altman has put them on film.

As an example of the script's density of incident, there is the scene which occurs after the devout major has accused the orderly of killing a patient. Gould, having witnessed the accusation, asks the major to step into a storage room. Meanwhile the new head nurse has just arrived, and the CO is taking her around to meet the personnel. As Gould inquires whether the major will be on duty again that day, and the major says no, the CO and head nurse are seen approaching outside the half-open door. The CO starts to make introductions at the same moment

that Gould punches the major on the jaw. The major collapses but gets up again at once; Gould collapses, clutching his bruised knuckles; the head nurse stares aghast; the CO fussily tells Gould that he's under arrest, and Gould tells him to come off it. All these different actions and reactions happen so quickly that Altman is easily able to include them in a single camera setup.

The dialogue has an almost Proustian richness, with asides and fragmentary exchanges which may easily be missed at a first viewing. In a rapid throwaway line, the general refers to "the dark days before Pearl Harbor." When Sutherland first arrives at Mash and the other officers all introduce themselves at the same time, it's just possible to hear one of them say "I pass gas"—a line which the viewer, if he catches it at all, may not at once connect with the administering of anesthetics. Some lines may not convey their full sense at a first viewing: for example, when a nurse says to the CO that he's wearing a nice jacket, and he replies, "Yes, my — It was sent to me," this anacoluthic line merely seems typical of his somewhat bumbling manner of speech. Only later does the film reveal that the CO and the nurse are lovers, thus enabling one to infer that he had actually been avoiding the word "wife."

As this last example suggests, the richness found in the incident and dialogue also extends to the characters. The CO is not just a bumbling buffoon: he comes across as a likable man struggling to fill a post for which he is unsuited. With one or two exceptions, even the most broadly conceived characters are something more than stereotypes, and they create a sense of living their own lives beyond the context of the film. There is still more richness of variety among the characters as a group, and the fact that most of the cast is new to the screen—in addition to the excellence of their acting—helps to make this richness stand out with unusual acuity.

There is another reason for this acuity—a reason which, I think, finally touches the source of the film's strength. The Mash personnel are seen in special, once-in-a-lifetime circumstances. They are in the army, yet insulated from the full rigor of its discipline. At the same time, thanks to the army, they are freed of their everyday responsibilities. They are not husbands, wives, neighbors, citizens, or career-builders but simply human beings. They are free to enjoy not merely sex and booze and rowdiness but the euphoria of being youthful and of doing a job they want to do in the way they want to do it. To the extent that military bureaucracy impinges on Mash, it only heightens the enchantment, creating an Alice in Wonderland setting in which there are continual cries of "Off with their heads!" but no executions.

The fragile uniqueness of these circumstances is reflected in Mash's physical setting: tents and huts which could be dismantled in a few hours, dusty tracks which a few days of wind and rain could obliterate. (The solidity of the hospital building in which most of the Japanese scenes take place may be another reason why that sequence is unsatisfying.) It is also reflected in the continual ferrying in and out of casualties; the to and fro of the Mash personnel themselves amid the tents and huts; and even in the fact that nobody can go to bed with anybody else without a strong risk of interruption.

Not surprisingly, even the most iconoclastic of the Mash personnel have a mixed attitude toward being in the army. At the end, when Sutherland unexpectedly receives his discharge papers, his first reaction is delight; but then he sobers up, realizing that his carefree Mash life is over.

Underlying the film is the awareness that time changes all things. One of the Mash officers, a white Southerner, has become accustomed to living and working with a black surgeon; on being discharged he says goodbye with the casual words, "See you around," and the black replies, "It's possible." The exchange makes one realize that, in fact, they are unlikely ever to meet again. During one of the operating theater scenes, the PA system breaks in with the announcement that "The American Medical Association has just declared marijuana to be a dangerous drug." Again, one is reminded of change—of the possibility that in a few years' time the Mash surgeons may have turned into

staunch supporters of the AMA and its views on grass.

In short, *Mash* is not really about army life or rebellion or any of its other ostensible topics: it is about the human condition. And that's why it is such an exciting comedy.

—WILLIAM JOHNSON

TOPAZ

Direction: Alfred Hitchcock. Screenplay: Samuel Taylor, from the novel by Leon Uris. Photography: Jack Hildyard (Technicolor). Editor: William Ziegler. Art direction: John Austin. Music: Maurice Jarre. Distribution: Universal. 1969, 125 minutes.

There's an *auteur* proposition that the best American directors keep improving throughout their careers until, in their sixties and seventies, these artists deliver their film testaments. But this romantic formulation doesn't hold up if you take a long, painful look at the final movies of Andrew Sarris's Pantheon directors: Charles Chaplin's *The Countess from Hong Kong,* a sadder and more misdirected jape than his *Monsieur Verdoux*, without even that film's saving venom; John Ford's *Seven Women,* in which the director tries to camouflage a limp, *Painted-Veil* woman's story with scenes of gratuitous violence; D. W. Griffith's *The Struggle,* a strongly felt but ineptly made anti-drink tract, powerfully pathetic in its directness; Howard Hawks's *El Dorado,* a relaxed and superficial restatement of *Rio Bravo;* Fritz Lang's *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*, an aimless, commissioned repetition of his early classic; Ernst Lubitsch's *Cluny Brown,* an impeccable trifle (well, no theory can be all wrong); Josef von Sternberg's *Anatahan*, personal and pure, but as dull as his wartime documentaries—and, until the recent release of *Topaz,* Alfred Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain:* the Master of Suspense's fiftieth completed feature, as slick, manipulating and lifeless as a vibrator.

If not viewed through the misty-eyed mystique of the *auteurs*, these testaments more closely resemble last gasps. Contrast these films with *Citizen Kane, Sherlock Jr., Stella Maris, Singin' in the Rain, The Iron Horse, The Miracle Worker, Easy Street, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, or, from Europe, *L'Age d'Or, Les Bonnes Femmes, The Italian Straw Hat, Potemkin, Breathless, Knife in the Water, Triumph of the Will, Zéro de Conduite*—all made by film-makers in their twenties. We can be charitable and say that the *auteuristes* prefer the modulated melancholy of *A Winter's Tale* to the smart-ass pun-foolery of *Love's Labour's Lost* (but what Hollywood, or cinema, equivalent have we for Shakespeare?). We can sentimentalize our aesthetic prejudices and choose the reflective grace of the moving camera over the youthful vigor of montage: the young man's eye blinks frequently, to catch as many glimpses as possible of a strange new world, each glimpse provoking a moral judgment; but the old man has seen it all, knows too much to argue or to judge, and is content, in Adlai Stevenson's last and lasting phrase, "to sit in the shade with a glass of wine, and watch the people dance."

This attractive thesis works with a number of poets, painters, novelists and even film-makers, whose life is a *via crucis* leading through ridicule and self-doubt to a Calvary-Resurrection in the works of wisdom they produce in their twilight years. But it's difficult to work up sympathy for Chaplin, or Ford, or Hawks, or Hitchcock, when critical cool greets their last films, or, like these directors' devotees, cluck in smug misery over all those masterpieces that remain unrealized only because of "the system." Each of these men, and Hitchcock more than the rest, has enough millions on hand to finance War and Peace—not the movie, but the real thing—so they could certainly afford the money to make new films. What they lack is the energy, the will, the ideas: Buñuel has "retired" oftener than Fred Astaire, but for him film-making is more than a profession; it's a compulsion. But then Buñuel, at seventy, is in his lucid, mature prime. While we eagerly anticipate Howard Hawks's new movie, *Rio Lobos*, or even the release of John Ford's USIA assignment on Vietnam, the final films of these collaborative craftsmen are more likely to be repetitive than definitive. Even smaller is the possibility that such veterans might revitalize themselves by working with modern themes—

staunch supporters of the AMA and its views on grass.

In short, *Mash* is not really about army life or rebellion or any of its other ostensible topics: it is about the human condition. And that's why it is such an exciting comedy.

—WILLIAM JOHNSON

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as fascinating as it would be to see what Ford would do with neo-*Grapes of Wrath* material like *Easy Rider,* or how Hawks would apply his "men in groups" psychology to the nirvana and neurosis of the contemporary commune. These directors are politically and creatively too conservative to modernize—"mongrelize," they might say—their way of working and of seeing things.

Of all the Old American Masters, Alfred Hitchcock is the one whose sensibility— cynical if not nihilistic, mordant if not misanthropic—is most adaptable to the new commercial cinema. Hitchcock alone has the economic autonomy, technical facility, and moral ambivalence to keep working (and promoting his work) regularly into the seventies. The steady employment suggests his limitations as well as his artistic resilience, for Hitchcock will often settle for a mediocre script and indifferent actors simply to play with the emotions of an audience. At his best, Hitchcock is very good—not great. When a director like Jean Renoir makes a great picture like *La Règle du Jeu,* we feel that the film represents the fullest expression of his art and craft, his genius and talent. When Hitchcock made *his* great film, *Psycho,* we felt a communion of forces not completely under his control or within his sphere of interest: the superb ensemble acting, the power of metaphysical suggestion in the old-dark-house genre, the complex weave of story and character, of Grand Guignol and Grand Motel, of horror and compassion. But Hitchcock, or at least the phlegmatic Hitchcock persona, refused to acknowledge the very factors that lifted *Psycho* into the rarefied realm of transcendent cinema. "I don't care about the subject matter; I don't care about the acting," he said to Truffaut. "The subject was horrible, the people were small, there were no characters in it." For Hitchcock, the challenge of film-making is that "the Japanese audience should scream at the same time as the Italian audience"—hardly the most exalted of cinematic ambitions. It's no wonder that John Ford wins our respect when he refuses to direct any Hollywood project but his own, highly unlikely *O.S.S.* But we might also respect Hitchcock for making a best-seller adaptation and again exposing himself to criticism, instead of lounging in the slightly unearthly light of his canonizers' gaze.

I've gone on about the reputations and achievements of prominent directors, especially Hitchcock, in their chair days because this question tinges so much of the criticism of his films. There's a chasm between the claims of his admirers and the shouts of his detractors, but it's in this chasm that the rarely heard, balanced view of the man's films lies. Hitchcock, as Sarris has said of Nicholas Ray, "is not the greatest director who ever lived; nor is he a Hollywood hack." He is neither the Shakespeare of film, as Sarris and Robin Wood state, nor its Shadwell, as Pauline Kael might want us to believe. And *Topaz* is neither the quintessence of Hitchcockian cinema, nor an aimless, repetitive exercise. Its delights and disappointments are more worthy of analysis than of hagiographies or captious dismissals. *Topaz* does lack, say, the cohesion and sustained suspense—and, frankly, the performances—of last year's NBA Championship series between that aging but proud, quite Hawksian group, The Boston Celtics, and the Los Angeles Lakers, an aggressive, fiercely talented quintet of individuals. But the movie has moments—minutes, sequences—that snap with a special excitement that comes from the perfact convergence of character, situation, acting, camera placement and cutting.

The film is Hitchcock's twenty-eighth in America and his twelfth in the spy genre. A recent look at most of his espionage efforts reveals a vague consistency in the charm of their villains (Paul Lukas, Herbert Marshall, Claude Rains, James Mason) and in the complementary blandness of their heroes (Robert Donat, Joel McCrea, the Cary Grant of *Notorious,* Paul Newman). But this is hardly due to any puckish sense of irony on the director's part: the former is a convention of the genre (how develop suspense if the villain acts villainous from the start?) and the latter is a consequence of Hitchcock's acquiescence in accepting, and lack of interest in reshaping, unsuitable actors. As with

Psycho, Hitchcock's best spy films seem to transcend their maker's intentions—whether by a witty script (like the one by Charles Bennett, Joan Harrison, James Hilton, and Robert Benchley for *Foreign Correspondent*) or by an actor's extra, usually independent effort (Michael Redgrave)—while, in his worst, Hitchcock's concentration on technique seems empty when there's an absence of dense detail (as in *Notorious*) or involving, living characters (as in *Torn Curtain*).

Topaz is fascinating partly as an anthology of these insights and excesses. For example, the technical side of the film is occasionally so dreadful—with mismatched movements and lighting, clumsily speeded-up motion for no reason except to get a bit of exposition over with more quickly, poor dubbing, peripatetic matte shots, too-long dissolves, unnecessary crescendoes in the score—that Robin Wood should have a more difficult time than usual defending these inept process shots as Hitchcock's jaundiced comment on the Industrial Age's planned obsolescence. But, just as it isn't pertinent to judge a Hitchcock film as a unified work of art (the success of his movies, like musical comedies and pornographic novels, depends on the success of certain production numbers or set pieces), it's also unrealistic to confuse his reputation as the ultimate technician with the traditional idea of an artist whose work has stylistic cohesion: Hitchcock's "arias"—the shower scene, the chase across Mount Rushmore, the birds' attack on the school children—are constructed with care and executed with flair, but most everything else is so much recitative.

Not only does *Topaz* have too much operatic small talk, and not only does the opening aria—the smuggling of a Russian defector out of Denmark—seem needlessly distended, but the lead singer is about as capable in his role as Mrs. Miller would be in *La Traviata*. Frederick Stafford, an actor of indeterminate nationality and few movie credits (he starred in André Hunebelle's *O S S 117—Mission for a Killer,* released here in 1966), has what purports to be the leading role, that of a French intelligence agent stationed in Washington, with a branch office in Cuba. Stafford is terrible. He's posey, wooden, smug, pausing over a brandy snifter like an early-talkie actor reading his lines into a hidden mike. In fact, Stafford's badness is so consistent, almost stylized, that he is suggestive not of the individual bad actors one encounters in most movies, but of whole genres of bad actors: those Broadway stars of the coming-of-sound period, like Glenn Tryon, who came on so strong or tried to act so cool that they often looked effeminate, or the strong but oafish talkie-serial stars like Don Terry. Stafford is handsome, but his good looks turn whorish when you discover that he doesn't have any character (what's the sense of picking a *male* performer for looks alone?), a Cary Grant profile without Grant's grace, humor, vanity and vulnerability. A good actor makes you feel he's been inhabiting a character for years, and each nuance evokes a lifetime of experiences, choices and emotions. Stafford, and Dany Robin as his frigid wife, convey to the viewer nothing but the nervousness they feel in characters they don't understand.

It soon becomes obvious that Stafford is *Topaz's* MacGuffin, or perhaps its Bunbury. It's not Stafford, the stolid maypole, that is the film's emotion center, but the spies, diplomats and *femmes fatales* waltzing, lurching, or racing around him. Though *Topaz* is a leading man's nightmare, it's also a character actor's dream. John Vernon, a powerful young Canadian actor (*Point Blank, Justine, Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*), is outstanding as a manic Castro aide. His black beard and marble-blue eyes first attract our attention, but Vernon keeps himself there by adding, to the Raf Vallone—"I am ze bool" hysteria of the role as written, an unusual amalgam of lust and tenderness for his mistress (who is really Stafford's beloved, and a devoted anti-Communist), the heroic, warm, womanly Karin Dor. The scenes between Vernon and Dor are so superior to those with Stafford and Robin that you wonder how Hitchcock could have directed one feuding couple with extraordinary passion and tactile vividness, while letting a similar scene go memor-

ably flat. The difference probably has as much to do with that felicitous congeries of situation and inspiration, of action and passion, of actor and character, as it does with any directorial epiphanies. Whatever the cause, these sequences in Dor's villa are complex, human, and beautiful. They lead from Stafford's idyll with his real love (who manages to spark this mannequin to real life), through Vernon's discovery that Dor has betrayed him and her government—and it is a measure of Vernon's and Hitchcock's achievement that we can share the Castroite's outrage and nearly tragic, cuckolded disillusionment—to her murder, photographed from above, her velvety violet dress filling the screen as she falls to the floor in a moving metaphor for the grace that informed her way of life and gives her final moral supremacy in their personal and political battle to the death. Throughout this whole middle section of the film, stereotypes become human beings, and *Topaz* comes vibrantly alive.

The final third of the film, in which Stafford discovers two Russian spies working in the French government, lacks the power and passion of the preceding encounter. Vernon and Dor are physical actors; Michel Piccoli and Philippe Noiret, who play the spies, are more intellectual, Piccoli in his suave assurance, Noiret in his Lorrean paranoia. The "confrontation" is in fact so oblique that it never really takes place. There is a luncheon for six, of whom two are spies. Hitchcock works over our suspicions through the use of supercilious glances and portentous camera angles, but the villains (the two charmers, of course) aren't revealed until later, and Stafford never gets to tell them off. The movie just runs out, like a tube of toothpaste.

Part of Hitchcock's problem is Leon Uris's unwieldy book, based on a true spy story that is more coherent than the novel and more shocking than the movie. A surprising number of important films, in these days of cinematic autonomy, are derived from that most traditional of sources, the short novel. *The Graduate* and *Rosemary's Baby* weren't even adaptations of those books: they were translations for the screen. Even *Midnight Cowboy* and *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* interpret a novelist's vision rather than create a new movie one. None of these novels is as much as two hundred pages long. *Topaz,* a 400-page novel cluttered with insignificant (presumably documentary) detail and dramatically irrelevant characters, offered a challenge not only of condensation but of elaboration; and here, Hitchcock and scenarist Samuel Taylor (*Sabrina, The Monte Carlo Story, Vertigo, Three on a Couch*) have performed admirably. Situations and characters have been first simplified and then enriched. The Soviet defector (Per-Axel Arosenius) is thus allowed to suggest that the difference between himself and his interrogators is that he is a severe, aristocratic Russian and they are open-faced middle-class Americans. Roscoe Lee Browne is given a few marvelous, largely wordless scenes that strip his character of Uris's idiosyncracies the better to let Browne create him anew with smiles and gestures. And Michel Piccoli is allowed to be himself: concerned, decadent, so graceful that he obliterates questions of morality.

I've tried to point out how any film, even one by a "great artist in his melancholy twilight period," is the result of a number of stimuli, controlled perhaps by the director, but created by actors, writers and technicians. Beneath the mythical Hitchcock who is the author of everything grand in his *oeuvre* is a partly creative, mostly collaborate craftsman who must rely on the crucial contributions of his co-workers. *Topaz,* inept and ineffable, poorly acted and well acted, shoddily shot and exquisitely shot, mediocre and transcendent, should be kept in mind before we send "Hitchcock" to the Pantheon or to critical perdition.

—Richard Corliss

LAUGHTER IN THE DARK

Director: Tony Richardson. Producer: Neil Hartley. Script: Edward Bond, based on the novel by Vladimir Nabokov. Photography: Dick Bush. United Artists.

"Judge the film as film, the novel as novel, and not one by the other"—so goes the rule. But, it seems to me, there is a point at which novelist, film-maker, and spectator are only cheated by such egalitarian aesthetics. When a film adaptation engages solely in a process of diminution, substituting convention for originality, then perhaps the film is little more than an adjunct of the novel and ought to be criticized as such. Why should we praise a director for serving a novelist's leftovers—especially when the original feast was as rich and edifying as Vladimir Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark*?

Nabokov is one of literature's great stylists; Tony Richardson is one of cinema's poorest. This alone should have encouraged Richardson to look elsewhere for adaptable material. But instead of balking at the immensity of his task, Richardson and his script writer Edward Bond simply scaled *Laughter in the Dark* down to his own size, transforming its major illuminations into "little pleasures," which, for those who appreciate Nabokov, are hardly pleasures at all.

Richardson's most obvious alteration, the change of setting, is the least important. Preferring to reenact Nabokov's drama in his home territory geographically as well as thematically, Richardson transfers the initial action from dismal, winter-lit, Depression-era Berlin to mod, colorful, contemporary London. There is an undeniable change in mood; the real decadence of the book (the fatuous rich divorced from their impoverished social context) becomes the voguish decadence of recent films: wild parties, grotesque homosexuality. There is an increased interest in social rank: Nabokov's Albinus Kretchmar becomes Richardson's Sir Edward Moore, gaining a little hair and self-assurance, but remaining the same foolish, diffident art critic. Richardson's rock music and miniskirts may make Nabokov fans wince a bit, but this is legitimate license: who would complain if Nabokov chose to relocate *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* in postwar Berlin?

These minor alterations and others like them, however, betray a crucial shift in sensibility—an emphasis shift from storyteller to story. In *Laughter in the Dark,* as in all Nabokov's novels, the setting and storyline are of secondary importance. The notion that *Laughter in the Dark* and Nabokov's earlier *King, Queen, Knave* were "satires of contemporary German bourgeois life" was discounted by critic Andrew Field. "The novel is an eternal story," he wrote, "and, when its movement has once been traced, any other set of characters could be led over Nabokov's carefully placed chalk marks." The story itself is strictly cheap melodrama (a sordid love triangle which Nabokov has also used in *King, Queen, Knave* and *Lolita*) and Nabokov dispenses with it in the opening paragraphs of *Laughter in the Dark:*

> Once upon a time there lived in Berlin, Germany, a man called Albinus. He was rich, respectable, happy; one day he abandoned his wife for the sake of a youthful mistress; he loved; was not loved; and his life ended in disaster.
>
> This is the whole of the story and we might have left it at that had there not been profit and pleasure in the telling; and although there is plenty of space on a gravestone to contain, bound in moss, the abridged version of a man's life, detail is always welcome.

Having set aside the banalities of plot, Nabokov explores a more profitable and pleasurable

theme: that of a failed artist who is so blind he does not realize when his dreams are becoming reality, or when his imagination converges with his memory.

Tony Richardson's intentions are substantially different—in fact, plot and setting are the fundamental components of his *Laughter in the Dark.* Not only is it easier for Richardson to tell a bizarre melodramatic tale than to lay bare his soul as a storyteller, but it is also more in accord with his specific talents. Richardson's better films have been set in contemporary Britain (*Look Back in Anger, The Entertainer, A Taste of Honey, The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*) and he is generally praised for his handling of actors—partly because he is a successful stage director and has, in films, used the best English-speaking actors: Olivier, Burton, Finney, Bates, Redgrave, Gielgud, Steiger, Welles, Howard. Nabokov, on the other hand, has little concern for the human raw materials of his novels. "My characters are galley slaves," he told an interviewer. If Richardson were to adhere to Nabokov's autocratic concept of characterization, he would deprive himself of his most conspicuous asset. By shifting the emphasis from storyteller to story he realigns Nabokov's novel with his own directorial talents, and makes the actors carry a large share of the burden. So it is not surprising that *Laughter in the Dark* finds Richardson back in contemporary London telling a story about one of Britain's finest actors, Nicol Williamson.

It is in accord with this pedestrian goal—of telling a story—that Richardson scales down the dimensions of Nabokov's novel. Richardson has streamlined the characters and situations so that the storyline can flow quickly and smoothly at a shallow level. It soon becomes evident that Richardson didn't update the setting to make it more "contemporary," but to situate the story within a familiar, comprehensible value system. Richardson simplifies his characters by bringing their motivations to the surface, causing them to respond more to external than internal contingencies. In Nabokov's novel Albinus's affair with Margot was of the Humbert Humbert variety: mad, passionate, blinded. In the film Richardson gives Sir Edward good reason to abandon his home and position—his home and position are worth abandoning. The opening of *Laughter in the Dark* sets the scene: the country estate, the demure wife, the innocent child, the fastidious brother-in-law all identify this as one of those dull, respectable, stultifying marriages so familiar to British films. The viewer immediately assumes that the rationale for infidelity will be similiar to that of films like *Room at the Top, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, Girl With the Green Eyes, Darling, Charlie Bubbles.* Although the motivation for Sir Edward's affair may seem to waver throughout the film, it remains at heart the dull cliché Richardson and his fellow British directors helped to create: the bored rich sexually drawn toward youthful philistinism.

Richardson's most damaging alteration concerned the "knave" of Nabokov's trio, Axel Rex. In the novel Rex was a close friend of Albinus who played the heinous hoax of stealing his queen and mocking his blindness. Rex is very similar to Albinus; the many facets of the knave reflect those of the king in a distorted mirror. Like Albinus, Axel Rex is a bad art critic, but his shallowness takes the opposite form: shrewdness. Albinus, Rex, and Margot are all failed artists (as film director, painter, and actress); but, unlike Albinus, Rex is aware of the artifice he creates, and, unlike Margot, he is not subject to its penalties. "Even when he was talking quite seriously," Nabokov writes, "Rex had a pleasant feeling that he was a partner in a conspiracy, the partner of some ingenious quack—namely, the author of the book or the painter of the picture."

Inexplicably Richardson transforms the pivotal character of Axel Rex into a vacuous stereotype. The knave of the film is a sauve, young, sun-glass wearing continental named Hervé. Hervé is virtually without a past and his only access to Sir Edward is through Margot. He has no integral relationship to the affair and is in effect nothing more than a plot device. It is a curious case of Richardson eliminating a complex motivation in an unsuccessful attempt to create a simple motivation. Richardson gives

Margot a very elementary reason for preferring Hervé to Sir Edward—Hervé is much younger and better looking (in the novel Axel Rex was no more or less appealing than Albinus). But Margot's simple physical attraction for Hervé in no way explains the bizarre revenge they take on Sir Edward, and mass confusion results. Physical attraction is the most superficial basis for a relationship, in or out of a film, and if Richardson rests his film on such vapid concepts he can only expect to create melodrama.

If there is a consistent thread throughout Richardson's adaptation of *Laughter in the Dark* it is one of diminution, whereby Richardson almost systematically substitutes the banal for the complex. One specific example may bring "profit and pleasure." Early in the novel Albinus, trapped between business appointments in a strange section of Berlin, passes the time in a sleazy neighborhood theater where he first sees Margot, an usherette. As he watches her silhouette through the half-darkness of the theater the conclusion to a thirties murder-mystery appears on the screen: "A girl was receding among tumbled furniture before a masked man with a gun. There was no interest whatever in watching happenings he could not understand since he had not yet seen their beginning." Albinus is such a poor critic and so blind personally that he does not realize then (or ever) that what he is watching will be the conclusion to his own life. Richardson's adaptation differs only in the little, crucial aspects. Sir Edward leaves his office abruptly and inexplicably to drive to a plush theater where he also encounters Margot and watches the conclusion of a movie very similiar to the one Albinus saw. Richardson's concern, however, is not with the microcosmic drama on the screen; instead, Richardson focuses his camera on Sir Edward and the chubby-faced male matinee-moviegoers sitting around him. With the exception of Sir Edward the viewers laugh hysterically, uncontrollably and illogically at each urgent serious statement from the screen. This is the sort of cheap trick that has given Richardson a bad name; at best he gains a cute snicker, at worst he loses his viewer's confidence before ten minutes of the film have gone by.

All of the above criticisms would be petty and trivial if Richardson were eliminating Nabokov's style and complexity only to replace it with his own. But it becomes increasingly obvious to the reader of *Laughter in the Dark* that Richardson is returning ill for good, exchanging the shattering effect of art for the expediency of the popular statement, and that Richardson's style and content, as they exist in *Laughter in the Dark,* do not constitute a viable interpretation, elaboration, or adaptation of Nabokov's work. The opposite view of *Laughter in the Dark* (film *qua* film) would be that *Laughter in the Dark* is the work of a director who, in the words of George Lellis, "has a constant level of interest," and that the film, for all its failures, is better than most. In fact it could be said that *Laughter in the Dark* contains a great deal of "good Richardson." Tony the Bad only shows his face occasionally, as in the above-mentioned scene at the theater or the camera gymnastics in the bedroom and swimming pond. For the most part Richardson's direction is dully competent. Nicol Williamson's acting is generally effective and occasionally powerful—but then Williamson is an excellent actor with or without Richardson.

But my question is still how good is good Richardson when it consists primarily of an insidious devaluation of the original property? Of course *Laughter in the Dark* has "interest," but that isn't much to ask of any film. Should a director be praised for not completely destroying what he set out to adapt?

One critic has praised Richardson's "black comedy" in *Laughter in the Dark.* What Richardson black comedy? Perhaps this was the black comedy Richardson displayed when filming Evelyn Waugh's set-ups and Terry Southern's one-liners in *The Loved One.* Perhaps the critic was thinking of *A Taste of Honey* or *Charge of the Light Brigade,* films where the inherent black comedy cried out to be treated but wasn't. What black comedy exists in Richardson's *Laughter in the Dark* is only a grey shadow of that which existed in Nabokov's

novel—a book which defined that sensibility thirty-five years ago. Richardson has also been complemented for his handling of the "theme of blindness" in *Laughter in the Dark*. When Sir Edward had his sight, he was blind; but after he lost his sight, he could see—get it? This was the overall metaphor of the novel, and is in itself basic and simplistic—the stuff that soap operas and religious anecdotes are made of. But as Nabokov says, "Detail is always welcome," and it is Nabokov's detail which makes the metaphor work. Richardson provides the premise without the props, and although this makes great program notes and newspaper reviews, it also makes superficial art.

When Richardson serves up his plate of Nabokov leftovers we naturally recognize some of the ingredients: an eye, a nose, a couple fingers. Not everything was lost in the kitchen—just the soul. Of course Richardson leaves some themes in the film, but what of the many he left behind: the relationship of cinema to seeing, the failed artist as creator or creation, the storyteller as master or victim?

Surprisingly enough the outward appearance of Richardson's *Laughter in the Dark* is one of complete fidelity. With the exception of character and setting changes, Richardson's film adheres to the basic plotline of the novel, that is, it is faithful to the dreariest aspects of the novel. Several reviewers have complimented Richardson on this "faithfulness to the original." But trends in novel adaptation have changed. Just as at one time it was expedient to disregard the intentions of a novel, now it is expedient to be faithful to it. Formerly film directors were afraid to let the novelist's artistic intentions interfere with the preset rules of entertainment; today, now that the rules of entertainment are uncertain, directors are afraid to let their personal artistic intentions, if they have any, interfere with the preset prestige of the novel. Film adaptations of great novels for the most part remain uninspired, they are just more faithful.

In *Laughter in the Dark* Nabokov gave an excellent rule of thumb for adaptations of all sorts. One of Albinus's pipe dreams is a plagiarism of an idea by novelist Udo Conrad (Nabokov's alter ego in *Laughter in the Dark*). Nabokov justifies this plagiarism by saying, "In any case, he (Albinus) made it his own by liking it, playing with it, letting it grow upon him, and that goes to make lawful property in the free city of the mind." This is why Nabokov has on several occasions expressed pleasure over Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of *Lolita*. Kubrick, also a man of style and talent, made *Lolita* his own, giving the film a dimension the novel did not have. Nabokov's concept of adaptations contrasts strongly with Tony Richardson's wrong-headed approach to *Laughter in the Dark*. Several years ago Richardson criticized the *auteur* theory, saying: "They (metteurs en scène) are not content—or not able—like the true interpreter to submerge their personalities in the job of putting whatever they are tackling on screen." Although this statement may reveal a resentment at having been excluded from the *auteur* sweepstakes, it also reveals a concept of the "true interpreter" antithetical to Nabokov's. Richardson's interpretations submerge personality. If Richardson sought to submerge his personality while adapting a personal novel like *Laughter in the Dark*, it is understandable why only a shell of the original remains.

Tony Richardson may have liked *Laughter in the Dark*, but he did not play with it to any profitable or pleasurable degree, and he certainly did not let it grow on him; and so in the free city of the mind *Laughter in the Dark* remains the property of Vladimir Nabokov.

—Paul Schrader

HIGH SCHOOL

A film by Frederick Wiseman. Photography: Richard Leiterman. OSTI, 264 Third St., Cambridge, Mass. 02142.

Cinéma-vérité (or "direct cinema") in America began as a cinema of personalities. The films were as good as the people in them, we were told, and style was seen to be evident only negatively, usually as shaky camera techniques or a forced conclusion. The view of the film-maker

novel—a book which defined that sensibility thirty-five years ago. Richardson has also been complemented for his handling of the "theme of blindness" in *Laughter in the Dark.* When Sir Edward had his sight, he was blind; but after he lost his sight, he could see—get it? This was the overall metaphor of the novel, and is in itself basic and simplistic—the stuff that soap operas and religious anecdotes are made of. But as Nabokov says, "Detail is always welcome," and it is Nabokov's detail which makes the metaphor work. Richardson provides the premise without the props, and although this makes great program notes and newspaper reviews, it also makes superficial art.

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as midwife to the delivery of a real-life star to his waiting audience can be traced through most criticism of American *cinéma-vérité* films. (See, for example, Richard Corliss's review of *Birth and Death* in the Spring 69 issue of *FQ*: "*Cinéma-vérité* is essentially a performer's medium.") This implies that the crucial decision comes a good deal before the first foot of film is exposed—in the selection of the subject. From that point, the theory goes, it is enough for the film-maker to let us get close to these interesting people at moments of real drama when they aren't paying much attention to the camera.

High School, in addition to its other considerable merits, should lay to rest once and for all this mystique of "interesting personalities" in direct-cinema films. *Cinéma-vérité* need be no more a performer's medium than the fiction film. Those situations where the subject is so fully occupied with other things that the camera's presence is forgotten are far outnumbered by times when nothing much is going on and we damn well know that people are trying to act as though the camera's presence isn't making any difference. In fact, it is this tension between camera and subject that direct cinema implicitly exploits. The strongest moments of credibility occur when the people being observed feel they are behaving in so typically normal a fashion that the camera is not considered an intruder. It is the gap of awareness which exists between what we see in a person's life as part of it unfolds on the screen and what they know about themselves that in many cases makes direct cinema so revealing. "How can these people not realize how silly they look?" we ask of many c-v films, from *Lonely Boy* and *The Most* on through to *Salesman* and *High School.* We react to what we know are moments of truth—to people exposing their way of living and thinking to the camera.

The film-maker in this process is still the conscious creator of his film and not the Invisible Recorder of Life. Choice of subject is important to the final success of a film, of course, but this really is only a way of saying that the film-maker must be responsive to the requirements and dimensions of his subject. We must be able to sense that the film-maker understands what he is filming, that his selectivity (be it in camera movement or editing) is not random, that if something is shown to us there is a reason for it. Some c-v films make us think that they were assembled out of the most overtly dramatic footage shot. Good ones (like all of Wiseman's, *Salesman, Birth and Death*) give you that special sense of reality for a purpose, a cinema of feeling and implications as much as of personalities. A *cinéma-vérité* film, contrary to most critical thinking, doesn't just happen.

Frederick Wiseman's films are about indispensable institutions in conflict with the people they are supposed to be serving. *High School* is his third film, following *Law and Order* (made for NET, about an urban police department) and *Titicut Follies* (filmed in an institution for the criminally insane and as likely to be shown on television as Peter Watkins's *War Game*). Each of his films has an episodic structure, a lack of emphasis on individual personalities, and a general diffidence about verbal information. What matters in a Wiseman film is not necessarily what people say to each other, but the tone in which they are speaking and the degree of emotion behind their words. Attitudes rather than factual information are the substantive content of his films.

High School is a 75-minute examination of Philadelphia's Northeast High, whose student body is typically upper-middle class and predominantly white. The film is a series of interactions between students and their parents, teachers, and administrators. It's not a general study of educational methods or the attitudes of today's youth. We never see students at football games, dances, or even talking to each other beyond earshot of their elders. *High School* is a film of frustrating confrontations. A student is scolded by a vice-principal for talking back to a teacher, another for being in a hall during lunch without a pass, yet another for suggesting at a meeting that tuxedoes might not be necessary for the school dance. We also get clear depictions of boredom in the face of irrelevant and outrageously mindless classroom lessons, as in

one devastating scene when a teacher subjects her captive audience to a stirring rendition of "Casey at the Bat." On the surface, the film might be seen as little more than a single-minded condemnation of secondary education in America. As a film-making objective this could have been sufficient, but the film would then be easy prey to the customary criticisms of bias, selectivity, and over-simplification. If *High School* were attempting to do no more than that, these objections might have at least partial validity. But through deliberate choices of content and structure, Wiseman suggests that his target is bigger and his attitudes more complex. The ability of *High School* to transcend its visible subject matter is the measure of its considerable power as a film experience.

The last scene in the film, when considered in retrospect, states explicitly a connection which Wiseman reinforces throughout the film. The principal is addressing a large assembly of her teachers, and with tears in her eyes she reads a letter written to her by a former student now in Vietnam. He is about to parachute into action, and he writes to thank his teachers and his school for all they have done for him. He expresses his wish that in the event of his death his insurance money should go for setting up a scholarship for a Northeast High student. Almost emotionally overcome, the principal finishes the letter and says, "Now, when you get a letter like this, to me it means that we are very successful at Northeast High School. I think you will agree with me." End of film. The idea of training (or indoctrinating) students to fit into the orderly processes of society might not be all that *High School* is about, but it is at least the guiding principle behind its structure. The film is concerned with the attitudes which the high school hopes to foster in its students and the all-pervasiveness of its philosophy, beyond classroom learning into matters of sexual relationships, competitiveness, dress habits, social graces, and roles within the family. If *High School* generates controversy, it should be on the level of whether these are the proper functions of education, and not about whether Wiseman has shown us a balanced picture. To say that the experience of going to high school is more than what is in the film, or that the film does not show a typical day for any student, is irrelevant. Wiseman presents a thesis which has to be argued on its own terms.

The film has the remarkable quality of appearing to be a series of random occurrences, There is no specified time sequence to the film. Individual episodes never last more than three or four minutes (and frequently are much shorter), and if people appear in more than one sequence it seems to happen more by accident than by dramatic necessity. But unmistakable patterns emerge. First, we begin to notice how rarely we hear kids talking. The students are forced to be listeners, and what they are told starts sounding pretty much the same. "We're out to establish that you're a man and can take orders." "We're going to do in this school what the majority wants." "It's nice to be individualistic, but there are certain places to be individualistic." "The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work." Along with the verbal barrage comes the variety of subservient, competitive roles which the students are forced to enact. We see a girls' gym class hanging from a series of metal rings, trying to outlast each other as their teacher holds a stopwatch to them. In one of the film's longer and more spectacular scenes, three boys emerge from a mock-capsule in full astronaut regalia after having spent 193 hours in simulated space flight—part of a handsomely funded science project.

Although this sounds as if Wiseman has fashioned a sober polemic out of his material, his visual style and sense of drama are full of a purposeful black comedy which often makes us gasp, first in surprise, and then in recognition. He has a playful tendency towards the deliberate delaying of establishing shots, often giving us bits and pieces of a slightly preposterous scene before moving his camera back far enough for us to realize what is going on. Situations like a boys' cooking class are effectively introduced by this technique because the close-ups make us expect something we're used to dealing with, and the eventual disclosure of the

full scene emphasizes its unnatural aspects. Wiseman (and/or his cameraman Richard Leiterman) also enjoys the underscoring of spoken emphasis by camera movement. *High School* is a marvel of visual expressiveness, a display of a fully engaged sensibility adding a quiet commentary all its own. When a student tries to avoid a gym class by presenting a doctor's note, the zoom-in on the vice-principal's eyes just after he glares back and replies "We'll determine that" hints at a cold hatred which is made more terrifyingly revealing by this magnification of the military coldness in his eyes than by his actual words. It's frightening, but as at many other points in the film, we can't help but laugh in nervous recognition of such blatant displays of authoritarianism. Wiseman's almost freakish sense of humor, allowing us to laugh at boredom and repression, keeps *High School* from being a chamber of horrors like *Titicut Follies*.

The most meaningful form of social criticism treats institutions as indicative of problems inherent within the broader social order. It is one thing to point out faults within a high school, quite another to relate its workings to the desires of parents and educators to transmit their values to the young. If there are villains in *High School* (or in any of Wiseman's films), they exist outside the film's milieu—in a general attitude in America which imposes a rigid, traditional philosophy on the administrators of its institutions. It is simple-minded to view teachers, prison guards (in *Titicut Follies*), or policemen (*Law and Order*) as bad guys. There is no evidence in the films to indicate that Wiseman sees these individual personalities as anything more than representatives of their group occupations. *High School* can't be placed within the "cinema of personalities." Its effectiveness stems from the interchangeability of individuals enacting their specific social roles, from ritual processes enforced by organizational relationships.

High School takes special risks because it deals with a subject that we all know about. Wiseman has not shown us people or situations which are by themselves particularly interesting or that we couldn't know about in any other way. He surmounts this problem by seeing the logical connections within his material and vesting his film with the mathematical elegance of a neatly executed proof. The fragmented, highly selective structure of the film is a result of his sensing the parts of the high school experience which are relevant to his argument, and his willingness to sacrifice dramatic continuity for a unity which isn't apparent until the film's conclusion. Wiseman does not so much give us facts to consider as recall an atmosphere we might not have been in a position to evaluate at the time we were living within it. *High School* does more than imply that this kind of educational system leads to willing soldiers and spacemen. It leaves us doubting seriously whether America has the capability for altering its institutions to suit the shifting expectations and needs of those who are supposed to benefit by them. Judging from our readiness to police the world to defend our interests and travel to the moon loaded with plaques and political souvenirs, we have the insensitive, cruel institutions we deserve.

By showing attitudes within the high school rather than processes of learning and by avoiding the limitations of specificity that concentrating on certain individuals would have led to, Wiseman has adroitly left the task of what to make of all this to his audience. We must make these final connections and conclusions ourselves, for if we couldn't see them there would be no point in spelling out the message any more clearly, as a traditional documentary might. Wiseman deploys a passionately sophisticated approach to our familiar or forgotten institutions. Like other good *cinéma-vérité* film-makers, he doesn't stumble upon "great material"—he challenges us by a personal vision of the way we live. —STEPHEN MAMBER

THE STERILE CUCKOO

Producer-Director: Alan J. Pakula. Script: Alvin Sargent, based on the novel by John Nichols. Photography: Milton J. Krasner. Music: Fred Karlin. Paramount.

Yes, but . . .

Pookie Adams—the heroine of *The Sterile Cuckoo*—is that rare thing in movies, rarer still in American movies: a memorable, almost fully-created, round character. In some ways she's one of a familiar type in American fiction, drama, and film: the bright, sensitive, lonely, misunderstood adolescent. She owes a good deal to Holden Caulfield, and the closeness of her name to that of Carson McCullers's Frankie Addams is probably more than a coincidence. She can also be seen as one of the protagonists of the current rash of American films about sensitive youth ushered in by *The Graduate*. But as the part is written by Alvin Sargent (from the novel by John Nichols) and played—sometimes brilliantly—by Liza Minnelli, she's also a complicated and original character and makes this seriously flawed, sometimes clichéd film into one of the most interesting and moving American films of the last couple of years.

Sensitive, brilliantly funny, motherless and with a relationship with her father defined only by the tense absence of communication or understanding (the first scene, in which he and Pookie silently go through the ritual of his seeing her off to college, tells us almost all we need to know about their relationship), almost totally isolated, she makes her way in the world by nerve and brilliance alone. These qualities make her appear self-sustaining, but a person can no more survive on nerve and brilliance alone than he can pull himself up by his own bootstraps or fend off starvation by feeding on his own body.

Yet it's her crazy nerve and her crazy brilliance that bring her into a love affair with Jerry (Wendell Burton)—a nice, sensitive, but very straight freshman at a neighboring men's college. It's a kind of saturation seduction: Pookie is virtually ubiquitous, showing up at the most unexpected times, and her conversation is a kind of entrapment: she leads Jerry on, then runs ahead seemingly at random, putting him through changes, always keeping at least one step ahead so that he can never "have" her.

POOKIE (shifting the center of the conversation): What grabs you about grasshoppers?
JERRY: You're putting me on now, aren't you?
POOKIE: No I'm not. I just want to know what grabs you about grasshoppers.
JERRY: I got interested in insects several years ago because . . .
POOKIE (interrupting): Will you take me out to dinner tonight?
(I quote from memory.)

As lonely, independent people tend to do—simultaneously asking for sympathy and denying they need it—Pookie treats her own suffering with an oblique, morbid, self-protective irony (the morbid pattern of her jokes, which show her obsession with her mother's death and with her own, is brilliantly worked out). Jerry is no match for her wit, but he recognizes what's disturbing in it, and he responds not only with discomfiture and embarrassment but also, instinctively, on a deeper level, with a serious, kind sympathy. On this level he understands Pookie better than she does herself.

Although in certain ways the film is simple, even simple-minded, a lot of its surface simplicity is deceptive: Pookie's a pretty complex character. Yet much of the audience when I saw the film was taking it on its most simple-minded level. Although Pookie is often brilliantly funny, she's not just a stand-up comedian: she's a character with dimensions of her own, and we can see how her irony and her not-so-subtle invective grow out of her character—in particular, out of her pain, past and present. Humor is the main point in some scenes, but in others it's only secondary, and in some it's not the point at all. For instance, the scene where Pookie excoriates everyone around her at the dorm dance is not funny but painful: the point isn't how funny she's being but that she's committing social suicide, alienating even Jerry, who loves her but is ashamed and embarrassed. Yet even here—as well as in a number of other scenes—many members of the audience seemed

to have no sense of what was going on, reacting to each one of Pookie's lines as though it were an isolated gag (and often obliterating the next four or five lines with their laughing) rather than part of a larger dramatic situation. They were taking Pookie as though she were Groucho Marx when she's more like Jimmy Porter or Hamlet or even Thersites.

Yet much of the film is very funny. There's a very good comic unsexy sex scene of Pookie and Jerry getting undressed and into bed in a motel cabin: their first chance to sleep together (or with anyone). As you would expect, they are both so self-conscious—so concerned either (in her case) by the drama of the situation or (in his) by simple mechanics—that all sexual feeling is ruled out. He meticulously folds each article of her clothing, walking away from her each time to deposit it on the other side of the room. As usual she dominates the situation, this time gently, lovingly, and condescendingly, and crudely verbalizes everything. This prelude is a sexual disaster, but because of their anticipation and excitement and above all their love for each other, it's in no way an emotional disaster.

Granted that the scene is meant to be funny (and succeeds), it is not just played for laughs. If our two main characters are being caricatured, it is *they* who are being caricatured, not someone else. Unlike, for example, in a number of scenes in *The Graduate,* the screenwriter has not descended to having his characters speak uncharacteristic or unmotivated lines for the sake of a cheap laugh. Pookie and Jerry are authentic characters and, for the most part, they are treated authentically.

Indeed the dramatic, dialogue scenes between Pookie and Jerry are almost always very good and are sometimes brilliant. The lyrical, non-dialogue sequences (usually accompanied by a Simon-and-Garfunkel-type song which happens to be sung by the Sandpipers) are often nice and lovely, but they're too nice and too lovely, there are too many of them, and they're reminiscent of sequences from eight or ten other recent American films.*

Why does their love affair end? We can of course see the seeds of the break-up from the very beginning: not only in their great differences from each other, and in the fact that Pookie is frequently very hard to take, but also in that, since she has always been running a step or two ahead of him, although he has come to love her he never really had the chance to choose her (or not to choose her) of his own free will. Pookie in a sense sold herself to him—and with a hard sell, at that—and the position of someone who sells himself is usually precarious. But above all there's the banal fact that freshman-year love affairs are almost sure to end simply because of the youth and inexperience of the lovers. What makes the end of this relationship, and the end of the film, terrifyingly sad is that it's the only relationship Pookie has and that she has nowhere to turn.

There's another reason given for the break-up, and it's the weakest part of the depiction

* "Playful" or lyrical montage sequences with a song on the sound-track—each sequence more insipid and staler than the last—have been the stock-in-trade of American films in the late sixties. Let's hope this won't continue to be true in the early seventies. It probably all originated in England, with the delightful, strikingly original play sequence of the Beatles in Richard Lester's *A Hard Day's Night.* Lester continued to do this kind of thing well, sometimes beautifully, in parts of *The Knack* and *Help!* But since then, in films like *The Graduate, Easy Rider, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,* it has gradually become more and more predictable.

of their relationship: this is the idea that the relationship is ending because Jerry is becoming a "weirdo." "Weirdo" means for Pookie pretty much what "phony" means for Holden Caulfield, and the word is used with even less intelligence and discrimination here than "phony" is in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Pookie simply applies it to everyone she doesn't like, to all the girls in her college and to all the other boys in Jerry's—in fact to everyone around except Jerry and herself, and finally to him as well. (The not-so-subtle irony is that Pookie is the one who's "weird" whereas the people she calls "weirdos" are all horribly average.) It's true that Pookie is the only one who uses the word (Jerry never does) and that we have some of the same distance and judgment about this aspect of Pookie that we have about her generally. But from the scene when Pookie says, "You're going to be a weirdo soon, too, aren't you, Jerry?", and he urges her to come to the dance ("Those people aren't all so bad.") we're never sure how much we're supposed to think, along with Pookie, that he's *betraying* her. Yet from everything else we see, Jerry is no more of a "weirdo" now than when he first met Pookie, probably less so. And the only real alternatives presented to him, not only by Pookie but by the screenplay, are either to have some friends besides Pookie, thus betraying her by becoming a "weirdo" and putting an end to the relationship, or total isolation with her: a kind of *folie à deux*.

That these should be the only two alternatives has much to do with the general unreality of the film once it steps outside the immediate relations between Pookie and Jerry and tries to depict their environment: the two colleges. In fact the depiction of the two colleges—and of all the other students—is slapdash, superficial, and clichéd. In atmosphere they seem much more like a boy's and a girl's prep school. Now freshman year in some American colleges may be a lot like prep school, but aren't there also some juniors and seniors around in these colleges? Aren't there at least a few non-preppy, non-partygoing types at these colleges—some grinds, some hippie-ish types, or even some actual *people?* We don't see any. In fact we don't even see the party-goers in their time off—when they're studying or talking or sleeping or going to the bathroom. Either they're whooping it up in a car or at the local eating place or at the big dance—and in every case these scenes are staged in such an obvious, cliché way that all we see is a mass of undifferentiated preppies. (The one exception is Jerry's roomate, who has a number of scenes alone with Jerry, is fairly well individualized, though still somewhat clichéd, and is well acted by Tim McIntyre.)

Pookie is an odd ball all right—she'd be an oddball anywhere—but at any real college she'd have one or two friends of some sort, or anyway her relations with some of the girls would be different from her relations with others. But since these girls are all exactly the same, all virtually the "opposite" of Pookie—she's equally (and almost totally) isolated from all of them. Pookie would be an even more credible and successful character—even her general isolation would be more credible—if her isolation at her college were not made so absolute.

American films have many strong points—wit, energy, intelligence, polish—but depth of feeling, by and large, is not one of them. Nor (as I implied at the beginning) are American films noted for round, memorable characters (as opposed to caricatures). There are many "better" American films than *The Sterile Cuckoo;* the film is too much of a tour de force relying on the character of Pookie and the performance of Liza Minnelli, it is too sketchy in other areas and too uneven stylistically, to be anything near an aesthetically satisfying whole. But there are not many with a character as memorable as Pookie or that are ever as moving as the most moving moments here. In Pookie's long telephone conversation with Jerry, or in the final scene, when she shudders as the bus pulls up in front of her and, later, the bus door closes over her like the door of a trap, we're moved to tears and we don't feel ashamed. That's rare.

—PAUL WARSHOW

No, but . . .

Can a genuinely unconventional hero be created for a mass audience movie? It was never easy. The gangster spoke in an appealing nihilist voice to dispossessed Americans of the Depression, but pious prologues and epilogues to the gangster films tried to deny his appeal and condemn him as a social evil. In *Casablanca* Bogart's cynical alienation turned out to be only a mask for his patriotism and nobility; in the last reel he adjusted to the traditional image of the brave, self-sacrificing movie hero. Pauline Kael described a general tendency in her analysis of Marlon Brando's career: "This democratic leveling of movies is like a massive tranquilizer. The more irregular the hero, the more offbeat, the more necessary it is for him to turn square in the finale." Alan J. Pakula's *The Sterile Cuckoo* also fails to accept the challenge that its offbeat heroine poses, but the evasions are now more skillfully camouflaged. The movie has squeezed by on its "charm" to become one of the more successful films of the year. But I don't think its success is encouraging; the young people who see it don't seem to realize that they're buying another tranquilizer in a shrewdly designed package.

The film's equivocations begin with the insularity of its college setting (Hamilton College in upstate New York). It is inconceivable that any student in America today, even the sweet, shy, bug collector Jerry Payne (Wendell Burton), could be so unaware of what's going on away from school. The heroine, Pookie Adams (Liza Minnelli), is even said to be a compulsive reader, but it's impossible to imagine what she reads; she never says anything that places her in her period—or any period, for that matter. Even in the fifties, college kids must have occasionally thought about something besides their own love affairs and their homework. "College" in this movie means an enchanted autumn landscape, the perfect poetic backdrop to first love, about as close to reality as the golden-hazed playing fields of the English public school in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. Unfortunately, Pakula's responsiveness to the countryside does not carry over to his handling of the people. The film is surprisingly narrow, even small-minded in its treatment of character.

Pookie is a potentially rich creation. She intrigues us from the outset with her startling wit and irreverence, the slightly desperate energy that imperfectly conceals a still-lonely, frightened child. We can tell right away that Pookie has serious problems, but what draws us to her is her sensitivity and her imagination, her unconventionality. She has a sense of humor about religion, about America, about sex, about her family, about the hypocrisy of other people.

The first half of the film has some tender scenes of two people getting to know each other, a funny, protracted seduction, some bland, programmed lyric interludes in which the writer's inability to find something for the kids to talk about is uncomfortably accentuated by regular reprises of a sluggish romantic theme song, "Come Saturday Morning." But all of this is pleasant, if not especially imaginative, and Pookie keeps us interested. It is at about the halfway point, as the romance begins to go sour, that the film goes sour too. Pookie seems to be too disturbing a figure for Pakula to manage, so he reduces her to nothing more than a case study—a girl whose mother died in childbirth and who, because her father never forgave her for it, grew up masochistic and self-destructive and hopelessly agonized. Now it's perfectly legitimate—although it's never very interesting from an artistic standpoint—to film a case study, but it's dishonest here because in the early scenes Pookie is clearly being presented as something more than that, as a compelling eccentric who charms us just because she *isn't* well-adjusted to a banal middle-class life. By bearing down heavily on her neurosis as the film continues, is Pakula warning us to beware of first impressions, advising us that people who look kooky and unconventional have to be guarded against because they are often, in essence, deeply sick? I'm afraid that's what he *is* saying, though there is enough ambivalence left in his response to Pookie to

make the film importantly confused and, in the last analysis, deeply offensive.

If we're sharp, we're to notice a morbid streak in Pookie right from the start, a strange obsession with death. She gets to sit next to Jerry on the bus by telling two nuns that they're going to their mother's funeral; later she frightens him by playing dead in the school gym, lies down in front of a grave and asks him to take her picture as a corpse, at still another point lets herself be covered by a pile of leaves. But what do these chic perverse touches really mean? The film seems designed as some kind of psychological detective story in which we use bits of action as clues to "solve" Pookie and compartmentalize her—the guilty, death-wishing, unloved child. And they give us, later, a dubious excuse for approving Jerry's rejection of her.

Pakula and his writer Alvin Sargent never quite allow Pookie to speak in a truly unconventional voice. They play safe by keeping her conversation trivial. But to show that a character's genuinely bright or original you don't necessarily have to write learned or soul-searching speeches for her. There are marvelous opportunities to imply Pookie's intelligence through the evaluations she makes of other people; but even there, Pakula and Sargent make sure to load the film against her. She says things about the girls in her school—"Ninety per cent of Nancy Putnam's body is by Dupont, fiberglass boobs, fiberglass brain, fiberglass smile"—that could be taken as witty, devastating criticisms of the anonymity of the American college girl. But when we actually see Nancy a little later, playing her guitar and singing "Greensleeves," she's sweet and gentle, quite ladylike about Pookie in a way that Pookie wasn't about her. We have no choice but to conclude that Pookie's bitterness is simple malice; she's envious because she isn't as pretty and popular as Nancy. Similarly, when Pookie accuses Jerry's roommate—a beer-drinking, back-slapping, masculine-camaraderie type who's always boasting of sexual conquests he's never made—of being a homosexual, we don't know quite how we're supposed to respond. From what we see of Charlie, she could well be right; he's a familiar figure, the over-protesting male who can't be taken at his word. But the film plays for a simpler response—that Pookie's vicious and paranoid, jealous of anyone who takes up some of her boyfriend's time. It's easy to see how a richer film could have grown from these two scenes—by suggesting that Pookie is *right* about Nancy and Charlie, while at the same time suggesting that she takes too much vindictive pleasure in showing off her perceptions. But as far as we can tell, she's not really perceptive at all; in fact, she's the very opposite—*blind* to people because of her own sickness. Pakula creates a potentially striking, complex character, and then refuses to respect his own creation.

In the last scenes Pakula makes Pookie obnoxious—leechy, catty, hysterical—as a way of distancing her from us. When Jerry drops her at the end, Pakula wants us to share his sense of relief. To be sure, Pakula continues to extend her "compassion"—the patronizing compassion that Hollywood liberals customarily bestow on the incurably sick—but he no longer wants to admit that she embodies anything valuable. Instead of sympathizing *with* her, as we do in the early parts of the film, we begin to feel sorry *for* her—a very different attitude. Pakula's "compassion" is a way of keeping the character in her place. Pakula and Sargent may not realize what they've done, but they've actually structured the film as a dramatic affirmation of conventional life. When Pookie recoils from the ugly insanity of the overcrowded, beer-guzzling fraternity party, we're supposed to know that she's lost; and when Jerry laughs at being soaked in beer and lifted onto the shoulders of some of the frat men, we're to take that as an indication that he's growing up. Since we've heard that Pakula is a "liberal," "enlightened," "humanistic" film-maker, we may look for a way of reading some irony and complexity into this scene, but it just isn't there. Viewers experienced something of the same shock last year when Pakula—associated with Robert Mulligan on a series of well-meaning problem pictures (*To Kill a Mockingbird, Love With the Proper Stranger, Up the Down Staircase*)—

produced *The Stalking Moon,* an astonishingly old-fashioned Western in which the good scout Gregory Peck was locked in an extended death battle with a cruel, murderous savage. The critics couldn't believe that Pakula and Mulligan would make a film with the same dichotomy of good white man and evil Indian that had informed traditional Westerns of decades, and some of them tried to come up with elaborate theories to justify the film. In fact, the film only exposed the profound, fundamental *conservatism*—formerly concealed, surfacing at last—of the Establishment liberal.

The Sterile Cuckoo reveals the same conventional mind at work. Some film-makers would have gone to another extreme and glorified Pookie's eccentricity, played her as a lovable kook, but that might have been just as facile. It would be exciting to deal with a character who is talented, incisive, stimulating, unconventional, and at the same time lonely and neurotic—a character something like the hero of *Morgan,* who ended up in an asylum (Pookie seems to be on her way to one), but who engaged a very complex response *throughout* the film. Pookie is handled more schematically, a deceptively gifted free spirit in the first half, a basket case—still an object of compassion of course—in the second half. And the only alternative to Pookie's disintegration is Jerry's "healthy" adjustment to the frat world. Jerry rejects Pookie for the straight life, with Pakula's blessing.

An artist would have demanded more of us. It may be true that a square like Jerry could take only a few months of a difficult outsider like Pookie, but the film doesn't seem to see that this is *Jerry's* limitation as well as Pookie's. There is one moment when the film does seem about to take a more complex attitude—during the long, overwrought telephone scene in which Pookie begs Jerry to let her stay with him over Easter vacation. He insists that he must study because "my head is on the block," and Pookie replies angrily, "Did you ever think that other people's heads are on the block too?" She's right that there is something astonishingly selfish and insulated about Jerry; like most conventional people, he isn't really willing to extend himself, to take the risks of real commitment to anyone else. But even that criticism seems accidental, for the telephone scene as a whole is drawn out so painfully to expose Pookie in all her pathetic dependency that we come away from it sharing Jerry's impatience with her. If we are bored with Jerry too, it isn't because that was Pakula's intention. The final images of Pookie are all framed in ominous dark shadows, while the last shot of Jerry shows him standing in the sunlight. The statement is clear enough—Pookie equals death, Jerry equals life; the film finally comes down to black and white. Just as *The Stalking Moon* ignored any possible ambiguities in its dichotomy of good and evil, the ending of *The Sterile Cuckoo* draws the line between normality and neurosis with cruel rigidity.

I don't even have great admiration for Liza Minnelli's highly praised performance. She clearly has an interesting face, and a good deal of talent, but she comes on too strong here. And I don't think it's the *character* who's coming on too strong; it's a very self-conscious virtuoso performance. Liza Minnelli is probably too sophisticated for the part. After years in theater and nightclubs, she can't really play an awkward teenager without making us aware that her own experience is greater than the character's. What makes this so obvious is that she is playing opposite Wendell Burton, who *never* shows his experience, never lets on that he's acting; he underplays—rather wanly—in an unself-conscious, naturalistic style that calls attention to Miss Minnelli's rhetorical flourishes. The actors are as badly matched as the characters. And in the crucial ten-minute telephone scene, all too obviously designed to stop the show, we're too impressed by Miss Minnelli's technique to be moved. If you compare this scene with Shirley Knight's long telephone scene at the start of *The Rain People,* also filmed in a single take, you can see the difference between a clever set-piece and a fully-imagined *performance.* But I think Pakula must take the blame for Liza Minnelli's overacting; it's probably his fear of the character that constricts

Miss Minnelli, and makes her too often arch and artificial. The character may not turn square, like earlier outsider heroes of American movies; instead, Pookie turns freaky. It's the film that turns square. Because it uses psychological clichés to strain out any elements that disturb a placid, bloated vision of collegiate harmony, it is probably the year's most unpleasant copout.

—Stephen Farber

GOOD TIMES, BAD TIMES

Directed, photographed and edited by Don Shebib. B&W, 40 min. Sound: William Rhodes, P. Spence-Thomas. Research: Linda Knelman. Narrator: John Granik. Executive Producer: Ross McLean. CBC.

This is a young Canadian's very personal and original rendering of our elders' blackest nightmare; the savage and insane armed slaughter of the two great wars. In its effect, the film lies somewhere between Huston's *Out of Darkness* and Resnais's *Night and Fog*, but it resembles neither in conception or materials. Intercut are direct cinema in veterans' homes; compilation footage from several nations' combat archives; clips from other people's features and documentaries; some staged shots of a soldier falling. The music ranges from Barber to the Iron Butterfly; the narration is sometimes laconic, only reminiscent names of half-forgotten battlegrounds, and at other times, consciously poetic in the vein of Wilfred Owen or Sassoon.

Now this kind of mixture, by any standard of realist film-making, ought to be uncomfortable and at first viewing (while being terribly moved) I was bothered by it—the kind of irritation you feel when shaken up by a work whose formal design you find suspicious. This feeling was replaced, on subsequent viewing, by admiration for Shebib's craft and imagination. *Good Times, Bad Times* really *is* all over the place, but there is elegance in its passion.

The thing starts out as a routine investigation of an old soldiers' home, and the usual documentary coverage of what these people do and say in the pub flows predictably to scenes of everybody marching downtown in a memorial day ceremony. But then some double-frame printing makes the veterans pace in half-step and *Good Times, Bad Times* goes out of sync with the viewer, keeping us off-stride for a long and (to my memory) unprecedented scrutiny of the disabled veteran's place in our minds. For the ghostly march of the old soldiers leads to some particularly brutal footage of the Normandy landings (while we still hear the patients' feelings (banal) and what it's like to re-live it all in wheel-chairs around the wards) and then, we're back in the veteran's pub reviewing the ordinary faces of the old men who say these extraordinary things. But as the platitudes about "comradeship" go on amid the background of bad saxophones, the picture goes back to hold-frame printing of WW2 clips, forward rest areas, uniformed WAAC's dancing in spectral slow motion with combat soldiers who wave beer glasses at the camera; and then, the grim shaky records of the next campaigns—artillery barrage, automatic-weapons fire cutting down the distant running figures, and a final sweep of slumped corpses, obscene, rotting, flies unaffected by the presence of the camera.

We've all seen material like this before, but *Good Times, Bad Times* goes on to make the ordinary treatment savage, and the obvious arcane; the last corpse dissolves to a beautiful old still of some teen-age private, hair awry, laughing in delight at something off-camera, and we know they are the same person. But then the lovely photograph dissolves to a toothless veteran in the pub, his face blank in some mindless odyssey, and we know that *he* was that boy, once; and by some magic we in the audience are all three, stinking carrion, bright youth, and haunted age. Our hearts begin to break with memories of wars we never fought in.

The rare quality of this film is that, like Resnais, Shebib has found a way to make archival material something very close to racial consciousness. From this point on, the combat clips begin to blur in origin: sometimes 1917, now 1945, here German, now again Allied, Passchendaele, Tobruk, Ypres, Normandy, St. Julien—we lose our focus in some ancestral night-

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So when we come back to the memorial day ceremony, we have to take a new look at these old veterans, solemn in their squareness, standing in rimless glasses, medals on their business suits like some Canadian equivalent of the American Legion (which I suppose they are), as they uncover their bald heads in memory for something truly theirs. The last post sounds over them, but echoes through the rooms of palsied companies, amputated, re-sectioned, and dribbling in senility; the men whose minds were ravaged by unspeakable carnage we had forgotten, or never known.

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There is more but mostly downhill. A scene of some old cronies watching a BBC documentary of their campaigns somehow doesn't have the relevance that it should; a compilation sequence of the 1944 liberation rises to the film's previous intensity, but then we're back in the wards again for some (by now) gratuitous pity for the more grotesque vegetables. What should be a perfect final scene (a little old man sings "God Save the Queen" to the camera in some child-like idea of what the movie ought to be, and then announces " . . . I'm tired now, put me to bed" as we freeze on his wasted face) seems out of rhythm, and far too long in coming. But this is critical cavil, for *Good Times, Bad Times* has done for us by then. We have already surrendered to a grave and beautiful elegy for a past which wounds both young and old, in what the film makes clear is now our common generation.—MARK MCCARTY

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The Downhill Racer, although Robert Redford is always interesting to watch, is a disappointment; it's really just an auto-racing movie transferred to the Alpine slopes. Director Michael Ritchie has chosen the fastest but also least interesting form of skiing as a center for his story. It's about an ambitious but feckless young skier who has the sullen pride, laced with realism, of a Brando ("I ski fast, that's all"). He gets into the tense international ski world: Olympic runs, a charming European piece to sleep with, rivalry with Ivy League types. Finally he wins the gold medal and vindicates the national honor. What makes the story not entirely routine are asides: a subtly edgy performance as the coach (and money-raiser) by Gene Hackman, curious and unresolved digressions on sex and athletics (the hero only wins his medal after losing the girl), and a weird episode with his father back on a run-down Colorado homestead. (Champions? "The world is full of 'em.") But the skiing itself is oddly ineffective on film; express-train speeds and the brutal endurance they demand don't photograph interestingly, and what comes across most is the mechanical side of modern skiing: the brightly enameled crash helmets, the all-important goggles, the ingenious bindings, the electronic apparatus for timing, walkie-talkies among the scouts and coaches, television reporters and closed-circuit screens. The snow itself might as well be cornflakes, and the scene Palm Springs. Oddly enough, in some of the shots you can spot another cameraman at work: Paul Ryan, whose nonfiction film *The Racer* catches powerfully and poetically an emotional side of skiing, with a visual grace woefully absent from *The Downhill Racer*.—E.C.

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and money-powered, where Fidel's is direct, personal, technically primitive, and need-powered. You notice that Fidel carries a sidearm but never seems to worry about his safety; phalanxes of secret service cannot reassure our own politicians when they go out in public, yet Fidel seems relaxed and confident, despite the CIA infiltration. "If I ever lost touch with the people, I would feel very sad," he says. Is this only the propaganda ploy of a clever dictator? It's impossible to think so after watching the man in action for an hour: he too visibly enjoys and courts genuine interaction with people. The camera sits beside him in the jeep when they stop in tiny villages; it catches the women complaining, debates with *campesinos* over priorities for roads or houses; it stops to watch him play baseball. Is it just ham or Latin manners that enables him to talk directly to people, to relate to them as persons? In any case it makes you think that the anarchists are right: revolution doesn't necessarily mean grim bureaucracy. It's reassuring to observe a leader who is manifestly an intelligent and sensitive human being, and not a dubious simulacrum programmed by PR men or a captive of his own folk-thinking. The film has been accused from the left of dealing with "cult of personality" rather than politics. But the film is full of political facts, it just doesn't run to slogans. Besides, personality *is* politics: it is, for an American audience, a revolutionary idea that a leader might take his people seriously enough, even on rare occasions, to go out and ask what's worrying them, to argue policies with them. Certainly small countries have political advantages in their small scale; but Cuba has about the same population as New Jersey, yet we don't notice its governor travelling around the backwoods to find out what's happening. The film shows us emigrants headed for Miami, but we can only speculate whether the bureaucracy which has galled them is any more insensitive or inefficient than our own; no one film, after all, can provide a total picture of a country. *Fidel* tries to broaden its portrait by including revolutionary songs, speeches, and miscellaneous documentary footage, but these operate on a more stylized level than the direct footage of Fidel's trip and seem, on the whole, distracting. What remains in your mind is the image of Fidel, with cigar, listening or talking, definitely in touch.—E.C.

The Lawyer is something of a remake of one of Preminger's best films, *Anatomy of a Murder:* the unravelling of an apparently routine country murder by a devoted lawyer brings some astoundingly decadent happenings to the surface. The case is the Sam Shepard case in disguise—moved to the Goldwater west. Barry Newman, cast as the ethnic professional in a hostile town, plays an interesting variation on the Jimmy Stewart role. Director Sidney J. Furie manages the story of the unpromisingly ambiguous case with routine energy but little real sense of locale. The preview version concluded with some smug pronouncements about the American judicial system which, coming just as the Chicago conspiracy trial was ending, brought roars of laughter from the audience; hopefully these will be dropped, as they're both silly and dramatically anticlimactic. Otherwise, the film is a pleasant entertainment. We never do find out the truth.—E.C.

Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here, on the surface, is an arty western about a manhunt, but underneath it is a reminder to white Americans that they are bigoted bastards who have been brutally mistreating the Indians. It is an excellent opportunity for whites to immerse themselves in guilt, since writer-director Abraham Polonsky ignores subtleties and melodramatically channels all our sympathy toward the symbolic fugitive Indian, Willie Boy, and characterizes the whites as scoundrels. For whites, this is a self-flagellating experience that is somewhat like their sitting passively at rallies and meetings while black militants rant about how vicious whites are. The Willie Boy incident is historical fact, and Polonsky presents it in such a portentous fashion that there is no doubt that he wants us to draw parallels with today. In 1909, a bitter, moody young Indian named Willie Boy (Robert Blake) kills the father of his girl friend (Katharine Ross) and kidnaps her—which, under tribal law, merely means marriage. Since white men never bother themselves with cases of Indian killing Indian, he feels secure at first. But President Taft happens to be passing through at the time, and headline-hungry journalists exaggerate the story until the fleeing Indian becomes a band of blood-thirsty savages bent on assassinating Taft. During the gruelling manhunt, Willie kills the girl so she won't be captured, and suicidally stands up to the straight-shooting sheriff (Robert Redford), who quickly kills him. In a scene in which Polonsky was obviously aiming for greatness, he has the sheriff sitting on a rock dramatically attempting to use sand to rub Willie Boy's blood off his hands. Polonsky plays up Willie's plight for all it's worth. He is portrayed as a hard-living, independent youth who just wants to settle down with his woman. All the whites are either irredeemably wicked or hypocrites. The sheriff is

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sympathetic toward Indians, but he kills Willie Boy anyway. The Radcliff-educated Indian agent (Susan Clark) is dedicated to helping them, but still patronizingly refers to them as "my Indians." It is a mystery what Polonsky is trying to prove by contrasting the sordid affair between the sheriff and the Indian agent with the relationship of Willie and his girl. Surprisingly, Polonsky presents both women as psychological slaves to their men. In a scene that is quite degrading to womanhood, the lady Indian agent struggles hysterically to keep from getting into bed with the studly sheriff, and finally succumbs. But this aspect of her character (like the rest of it, for that matter) isn't developed further and is irrelevant to the film. Of the cast, only Robert Blake, who played the bantam-weight killer in *In Cold Blood,* is in any way commanding, and even he has to fight lines like "I'm only an Indian and no one cares what Indians do." If pressed to choose an actress least likely to succeed in that role of an Indian girl, I would have chosen Katharine Ross. With her finishing-school manner, she never appears to be at home on the range. Even Redford's strong, silent act is beginning to get on my nerves. It seemed to fit in *Butch Cassady and The Sundance Kid,* and it was tolerable in *Downhill Racer,* but in this film, I began to wonder if he had more than one expression. Looking like a fraternity boy playing at Brando, he underplays the role so heavily that he comes on like a catatonic.

—DENNIS HUNT

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