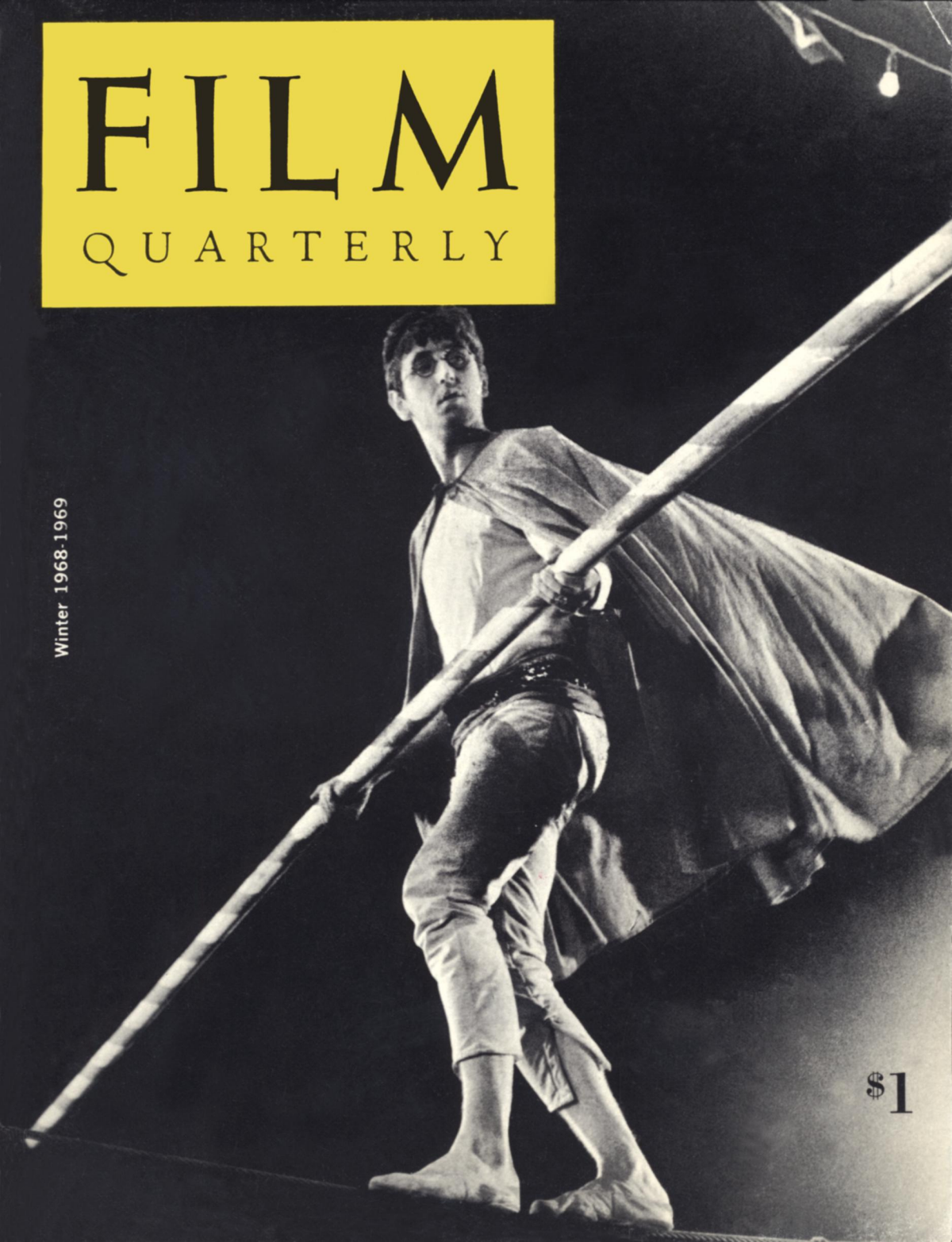
# FILM QUARTERLY



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**COVER:** The director's role: Jiri Menzel in his own film *Capricious Summer.*

# Editor's Notebook

## PERIODICALS

*AFI Film Educational Membership Newsletter* is a bi-monthly publication ($6.00 per year from the AFI—new address: 1815 H Street NW, Washington, DC 20006). The first issue features a handy calendar of events, an interview with Charlton Heston, an article on the use of videochains, thumbnail film reviews, and book notes, as well as news about AFI education activities.

*Film Fan Monthly* is published at 77 Grayson Place, Teaneck, N.J., 07666; 50¢ per issue; aimed at collectors, nostalgia buffs, and connoisseurs of rare and unknown facts about movies and movie-makers.

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## CLASSIFIED



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STEPHEN FARBER

# The Writer II: An Interview With Alexander Jacobs

When I discussed "The Writer in American Films" in the Summer *Film Quarterly,* I deplored the neglect of writers and analyzed *Point Blank* as an example of a film made by a talented director, John Boorman, struggling with a flat script. Since talking with Alexander Jacobs, the writer of *Point Blank,* I have learned that my analysis was incomplete. In a sense I was right, because the original script for *Point Blank,* by David and Rafe Newhouse, was apparently a straightforward gangster melodrama that was imperfectly refashioned by Jacobs and Boorman. But some of the confusions and weaknesses in the film can be traced to disagreements between Jacobs and Boorman. In a way, my insistence on the importance of the writer was truer than I guessed. The contributions to even so visually brilliant a film as *Point Blank* are more complex than an *auteur* critic would want to admit.

Anyone who looks at *Point Blank* knows that it *is,* in many respects, a director's film. No writer could put into a script the exact details of lighting and composition that turn bland, familiar places—an airport corridor, a noisy nightclub, a Los Angeles storm drain—into such sinister, disturbing hallucinations. But some of the most striking conceptions in the film—the car-smashing sequence, the scene in which Angie Dickinson turns on all of the kitchen gadgets in an uninhabited ranch home—are in the script. And the script has a slightly different mood from that of the finished film. In the following interview Jacobs talks abouts his efforts to introduce more variations of tone into the film—particularly more expressions of tenderness and self-doubt in the central character. Had he been successful, *Point Blank* might have seemed slightly less severe, and the characters might have had psychological depth as well as stark, nightmarish intensity.

For an example of the subtle kind of difference I'm talking about, I'd like to compare a section from the script with the comparable sequence in the finished film: what Jacobs calls the "wake sequence," Walker's discovery of his wife's suicide.

> Walker cannot shake off the sense of danger. Somehow the fixed white stillness of the room has the aura of death.
> He bends over the unmoving form of his wife. In the hand folded under her body is an empty bottle of sleeping pills.
> Lynne has taken an overdose.
> Expressionlessly, he turns the body over, listens for a heartbeat, then slips his heavy gold wedding ring onto her white finger before folding her hands over her breasts.
> He leaves her be.
>
> CUT TO:
>
> INT. LIVING ROOM – LYNNE'S HOUSE – MORNING
> From the window Walker gazes out at the panorama of Los Angeles below him.
> The Strip is alight. Beneath it, other boulevards and avenues glitter.
> He empties the remains of a Vodka bottle and leaves it on the window sill. Through the curved glass, a distorted Los Angeles can still be seen.
> Walker drinks steadily for the next three days.
> It is a wake, the ancient rite of marking a death: a final requiem from the living for the dead.
> And a period for Walker to strip forever all that he and Lynne had built together.
> The mass of trinkets and clothes deposited on the coffee table vanish; dresses are packed and go.
> He savors the perfume of one, the perfume of

her, the woman who had double-crossed their life. It is an end.
The SOUNDS of furniture being moved accompany the growth of Vodka bottles on the window sill. A sunrise sparkles above them; a sunset is distorted by yet another empty bottle.
At the window, Walker watches a day die, and Yost watching him.
The picture of Lynne and Walker on the coffee table disappears, shelves grow bare and Walker's FOOTSTEPS begin to ECHO through the empty rooms.
Lynne's body has gone, too.
Walker has grown shaggy, unkempt, creased.
But a mourning must pass and by the third day Walker is shaving, cleaning up, ready and expectant for Reese's messenger to call.
The KNOCK comes as Walker finishes.
MESSENGER (o.s., suggestively)
Hello there . . . it's the baker with your bread!

The emotional point of this sequence is simple and clear. In the film it has been curiously obscured. The sequence has been split into oblique fragments, cut together intriguingly but confusingly. In the film after Walker (Lee Marvin) finds his wife dead and slips his ring onto her finger, he walks to the window of the living room, looks out and sees Yost (Keenan Wynn). As Yost looks up at him, Walker's face comes gradually into focus—which seems to imply a passage of time; for when Walker walks back into his wife's bedroom, her body is gone. He drops one of the bottles on her vanity table, and the camera moves in close on the spilt liquid, which seems to imply another passage of time; for now the bed is stripped, and all of the furniture in the living room has vanished. Walker sits down in the corner of the empty living room and recalls the moment of his betrayal on Alcatraz. The sound of the gunshot in the subliminal flashback be omes the sound of a doorbell, and Walker goes to answer the door of his wife's apartment. But the living room is now furnished exactly as it was when he arrived. I have seen the film three times, and this sequence has never been quite clear to me. Perhaps the stripping of the apartment is to be taken as only a fantasy, a visualization of Walker's forlorn state of mind. But there is no way of knowing. These abrupt cuts from furnished to bare back to furnished apartment are arresting, but Jacob's intention is unrealized—the sense of mourning, of a life gradually, painfully stripped away. We don't see any change in Walker that accompanies the dismantling of the rooms.

Although I am not entirely happy with the puzzling character of this sequence, it is not really out of keeping with the rest of the film. The austerity of composition and the absence of emotion fit perfectly with the stylized nature of the film as a whole. Whatever Jacobs's intentions, Boorman has successfully made the film his own—he has frozen it, altered it from a study with a measure of psychological truth to a bleakly beautiful symbolic poem about a peculiarly contemporary—and American—kind of death-in-life. The film does seem to me to work on those terms. The imagery is all of a piece. And I cannot be sure that Jacobs's approach would have worked as well; perhaps it would have turned the film sentimental. But either interpretation seems to me legitimate. The slight difference in tone provides a pertinent insight into the kind of tension in the relationship of writers to directors that produces exciting films.

Careful analysis of scripts, besides clarifying the importance of creative collaboration to effective film-making, can be helpful in defining the nature of the cinematic form. The late Robert Gessner's book *The Moving Image* is an attempt at just this kind of analysis—Gessner studies dozens of film scripts in an effort to arrive at some general rules about what Bazin called "the language of cinema." What is disappointing is that Gessner's analysis so seldom goes beyond discussion of plot structures, character conflicts, "obligatory scenes"—textbook definitions of drama that would be equally appropriate to a discussion of theater and the novel. A pertinent study of scripts would investigate the effects *unique* to film. Obviously the notion of cinematic time—which Gessner discusses very crudely—is one of the key areas worth exploring. But the conception of individual scenes may be as important a factor as over-all structure. We usually think of composition as being ex-

clusively the director's province, but that is too simplified a view. Some of the most strikingly filmic ideas are writers' conceptions. Most people in Hollywood, as Jacobs notes, think that a good writer is someone who writes good dialogue—in other words, someone indistinguishable from a playwright. But dialogue is a minor part of a gifted screenwriter's contribution. I think a few passages from Jacobs's screenplays may give some idea of what film writing *can* be. It is worth noting that Jacobs does not write every camera angle into his scripts, and yet the scripts are clearly meant to be *seen*. The ordinary Hollywood script is so cluttered with precise camera movements—likely to be disregarded anyway—that the essence of the visual conception, if there is any, is lost. Jacobs's scripts are less formalized, more evocative. These passages should not be read and judged like the prose descriptions of a novel, but as attempts to give an *impression* of a piece of cinema.

This is the opening that Jacobs wrote for *Point Blank:*

FADE IN:
INT. ALCATRAZ – NIGHT
WALKER walks down a long, dim corridor of gray stone walls. He passes a grill in the brickwork; then a steel mesh; and another grill.
No real light yet, just shafts of fitful illumination peeping through gaps in the corridor walls.
Now Walker passes some scrawls chalked on the wall: amongst them a nude figure; a pair of crossed hearts and the legend: I DIED HERE.
The corridor leads through a steel-barred door to a main hall with steel-stanchioned balconies all around it.
Walker's FOOTSTEPS GRATE.
His walk is deliberate, characteristic, and a groundeater. The arms swing slightly, ready for a fight.
No face yet, just a powerful silhouette.
He stops dead: frozen, alert, remembering his bearings.
He looks up and then gropes over his head into an open, rusted elevator shaft. Finding a foothold in the wall, he raises his head to the level of the recess. He shines a flashlight into the rust and cobwebs. The shaft is empty. He lowers himself down slowly. He walks past the succession of cells, then he stops at one.
Walker stands before an iron-barred door, gripping its bolt. He slides the door sideways—rusted steel SCREECHES.
He enters a small cell-like room beyond.
He is a pilgrim, returning to the source of his strength.
CUT TO:
INT. CELL – ALCATRAZ – NIGHT
Walker stands framed in the doorway.
A small window high up filters some light.
To the right is an iron bedframe let down from the wall. In the corner by it a basin and lavatory bowl.
For a long moment he looks around the small enclosed space.
Then, crouching, he begins a systematic search: his hands stretch beneath the bed; he flicks a dusty corner clean; a crumpled cigarette pack is thrown aside.
He stretches over and behind the bed and then finds what he seeks—his talisman: a bent and twisted brass belt buckle of curious design.
Imperceptibly, a tension has taken possession of him. The buckle acts like a crystal in the palm of a soothsayer. The compelling face is damped with the effort to contain the strain within.
The buckle bites deep in his clenched grip.
Walker will allow nothing to emerge from his compressed mouth.
But memories escape.
He rises slowly, swiveling from the hips.
CUT TO:
INT. CELL – ALCATRAZ – ONE YEAR EARLIER – NIGHT
The swiveling movement is taken up by the Walker of one year before, the Walker whose face SCREAMS with pain as BULLETS smash into his stomach at point blank range.
They tear the buckle from the belt around his waist.
Walker staggers backwards to the floor in agonized, reluctant defeat.
LYNNE WALKER, the faithless wife, and MAL REESE, who shot him, framed in the doorway of the cell, are Walker's last images before unconsciousness.

The opening was not filmed exactly as written. Walker does not return to Alcatraz. The idea of the belt buckle was abandoned. The point is that this kind of writing gives a director some striking visual ideas to develop and refine. In its atten-

tion to detail, to sound as well as visuals, in its leanness and lucidity of description, in its fluidity of movement between present and past, this seems to me genuinely filmic writing, writing that can stimulate a gifted director.

In *Hell in the Pacific,* the new film that he wrote (with Eric Bercovici) for Boorman, about an American and Japanese soldier alone on a Pacific island during World War II, Jacobs uses almost no dialogue, simply sound and image. Sound can dominate a sequence as during the terrifying battle of wits between the American Red (Lee Marvin) and the Japanese Brown (Toshiro Mifune):

> EXT. JUNGLE – DAY
> From the cover of the trees, Red watches with considerable pleasure as he blows into the Mae West, inflating it. Sweat pours off him with the effort. When the life jacket is inflated, he begins squeezing the air out, pinching the end of the tube, making a high pitch squealing SOUND. He moves on a few yards, then does it again.
> EXT. CAMP – DAY
> In the cave, Brown twitches at the high pitched SQUEAL–which seems to come from all sides, reverberating inside the cave, seeming to come closer. Then a long NOTE goes on and on and on. Brown covers his ears, but he cannot blot out the SOUND. It becomes unbearable and he grabs two sticks and beats a frenzied TATTOO on the side of the cave to drown out the sound. Brown stops and listens, sighs with relief. The squealing has stopped. His arms quiver from the drumming, the sweat now dripping off him. But the SQUEALING begins again, and almost hysterically Brown begins his drumming again.

Jacobs is working on two more screenplays right now, and he hopes to direct within the next year or two. This conversation with Jacobs reveals some of the complexities of the writer-director relationship on *Point Blank,* and Jacobs's approach to screenwriting in general.

*How did the script for* Point Blank *come to be written?*

There were three main versions of the script. The first I did during my first stay in Hollywood, in four weeks, and that consisted of writing the script once and then rewriting it completely. I only had four weeks because I was working on a picture in England. John gave me the script that the Newhouses had written, which was a craftsmanlike piece of work but very old-fashioned. And the idea was to make a thriller that was enterprising. What I argued from the beginning was we couldn't make an *Asphalt Jungle,* we couldn't make a *Harper,* we couldn't make a *Sweet Smell of Success.* I thought all those days were over—television had scraped them clean. We had to do something completely fresh. We wanted to make a film that was a half reel ahead of the audience, that was the whole idea. We made a vow that we'd have no people getting in and out of cars, no shots of car doors opening and closing, unless there was a really important reason. And then I wrote a second version which consisted mainly of long letters from me in England to John in Hollywood, plus long telephone conversations on casting and all sorts of things, and of course letters from John, which were amalgamated into a second-draft script. And then I went out to San Francisco on the shooting of the picture the first two weeks. The ending and the beginning of the film take place in San Francisco and that's where we shot. I then wrote a lot more stuff including a completely new ending and a new beginning, some of which was done in script form, some of which was in discussion, and some of which was literally dictated to a girl and rushed out to location as they were shooting. This included the whole idea of using the sightseeing boat as a means of linking the past and the present. I wrote a new ending which wasn't used. I don't really agree with the ending in the film at the moment—I think it's evasive—but that's the one that was finally shot.

*What was your ending like?*

We had a grandstand ending which I liked very much, because it seemed to me to be sort of Wagnerian in its own way. In this fort, Fort Point in San Francisco, you had Yost revealing himself to Walker and tempting Walker to join him, and Walker is half-tempted and half-shattered by his experiences and by the fact that he's been used as a dupe for the whole film; all his passion, all his energy, all his madness were being *used*—he was like a puppet being manip-

ulated—and he becomes absolutely incensed, and he advances upon Yost who has a gun, and Yost is suddenly terrified by this mad force, because Walker is now completely insane. And Walker just advances upon him—he's going to kill him with his bare hands, a complete animal, he's frothing at the mouth. And Yost shoots him three times and the three bullets miss. Yost actually cannot shoot this force. He tries, his hands shake, and he suddenly realizes his age; suddenly his age sinks through him like a flood, like a great stone sucking him under, and he's a completely old man, and he steps backward and falls off the parapet and dies. And Walker comes to at the edge of the parapet, and shaken and quivering is led away by the girl out into the world again. This was the ending we had. And I thought it bordered on the melodramatic, I thought it was really dangerous, but I thought it was a marvelous way of going for an ending to a myth, if you like. And I don't know the ins and outs of it, but it wasn't played that way, so I came up with other endings.

*Were there other disagreements over various scenes in the film?*

I can give you a very specific example—the scene when Brewster (Carroll O'Connor) arrives home and Lee has been waiting for him, and demands his money. John shot that scene before we went to San Francisco and ran the picture for me so I was completely in touch with what was happening. Now the Brewster scene was quite clearly shot wrongly. He had shot it almost as scripted but in fact had cut out a crucial love scene which is prior to the Brewster scene. It's a scene where Angie and Lee not only make love but become extraordinarily intimate, and he begins to talk to her for the first time and tell her his fears and in fact reveals that this drive is something that he's generated in himself and that is now dissipating him and wearing him out and crumbling him, and that he's frightened of it. He's frightened of where it's going to lead him, he's frightened of the way he cannot control it. And I think that would have matched in with my ending very well indeed. Well, John said it wasn't possible to shoot it or that he couldn't shoot it and he didn't want to. So in this sequence with Brewster the trouble was that because you didn't have the previous love scene, and because the actor, Carroll O'Connor, is a very strong and intelligent actor, you got a complete unbalance to the scene. There are three peaks in the scene, and Carroll O'Connor took them all from Lee, which is not only dramatically wrong, it's psychologically wrong, and it's plot wrong, which is the most crucial point. And I pointed this out to John and he agreed, and he reshot the second half of the scene, and I think if you look very closely you'll see that the second half of that scene is shot with a different light and at a different area, because I don't think we could get back to the original location again. We changed it so that in the end Lee became the dominant one, which led on to the ending that we finally shot, but I think if we'd had the love scene, the scene as originally scripted in Brewster's house could have worked.

Another change was in the wake sequence, the sequence when, after his wife's committed suicide, the house is sort of stripped bare. The whole idea in that sequence was to show Walker completely revealed, but to no one else except himself. And the second revelation is when Walker at long last comes out of the abyss and reveals himself to the woman. The first time is when he's in this house and he looks round and a wall is stripped bare; he looks again, the bed is gone; he looks again and the carpets have gone and his feet begin to echo over the place, and he starts packing his wife's goods and he smells her panties and a bra, and he packs away photographs or trinkets or Welcome to Hawaii or something like that. What you get is a great sense of revelation, which is very strange and completely inside his head in many ways. And this isn't shot in that way. I think John argues that there are really subtle touches where Lee does show certain sorts of warmth, but my general impression is that he's too frozen-faced throughout. We showed the film to Hashimoto, one of Kurosawa's scriptwriters, the man who's worked with him a long time. He loved it, was very excited by it, but he said, "I think you should have been closer on his eyes," which is a

marvelously perceptive view of the film, because that's the trouble—it is, I think, too cold-blooded.

*How do you feel about the wake sequence as it is filmed?*

I don't think it works. I don't like it. I like some of its ideas, I think it is very strange, but I think it's strange because it's baffling and not strange because it's got quality and atmosphere. It isn't developed properly. You should see each room vanish as he walks through it; instead, there are times when you really don't know whether he's just walked from an empty room into an empty room. There should have been changes in his shirts and his face. John argues that there are changes; he says the beard gets a bit longer, but who's going to notice that? You needed something much bolder, much clearer.

*The differences in the wake sequence are interesting, because they do reveal a real difference in temperament. He did make the film colder, as you say, just through very subtle sorts of changes.*

Well, I think that's exactly the sort of relationship between writers and directors that is interesting to discuss. I mean, when you have a director as strong as John, and I suppose when you have a writer with ideas like I have, many times it's a very happy amalgamation, as it has been with him. And of course the next step is for the writer to direct. Incidentally, the film did extraordinarily well. I don't think it's the greatest blockbuster of all time, but I know MGM are happy with what it finally made and all the rest of it; it's done very well in Europe and so forth. In fact, it's given us all a great boost. But I would argue that the film would have been even more popular with this warmer quality to it. I don't mean by that pandering to the audience, but I mean making Lee more human, less monsterish, less zombie, less *killer,* if you like—although he doesn't actually kill a single person in the picture. I think the problem is that that sort of implacable, never-let-up drive is *not* human, and while it would have been marvelous to have continued our myth that he literally comes from the underground, roams over the surface of the earth for a brief while, then goes back into the shadows—well, by introducing the girl and all sorts of other things, we obviously go away from the essential myth. But by making him variable, by giving him variations of pace, by giving him changes of character, we would have made him human, and I think much more understandable. I think it's quite possible that lots of people were repelled by the drive of the picture, which is frenetic. We did it for a reason. Both of us were extraordinarily attracted by Los Angeles—I still am —and we both hated San Francisco, hated it in the sense that it wasn't for our picture, and it was very much a touristy sort of town, a town sort of on the asshole of America, it seemed to me. If you couldn't face the Middle West and the West and what modern America is, you retreated to San Francisco and hung on for your dear life. It's a very sweet sort of city, but it's obviously not America. I love LA because it seems to me to be absolutely what America is, at least one aspect of America, and it doesn't kid around, you know, you either take it or you don't take it.

*What are some other examples of differences between script and film, where you feel this warmer quality is lost?*

Well, where he does come alive in a much richer way is the wooing of his wife down by the waterfront, the whole of the flashback sequence there, which I think is beautifully done and far beyond any hopes I would have had at that point. And I thought there should have been indications of that sort of thing in the rest of the picture. But it doesn't come again. The whole absence of Angie at the end of the picture is a very important clue. But the crucial change is the sequence when she beats him and falls to the floor and then taunts him through the intercom about "You're really dead . . . ." Now it seems to me that those lines are absolutely crucial, and they've got to be *said.* You can't have them in this abstract way over the soundtrack through a round black piece of mesh through which the girl's voice floats. That's exactly the point where it's got to be a confrontation between two human beings. And while I think it's brilliantly shot sequence, and some very inventive ideas, it's really for laughs, and I think the

*Lee Marvin and Angie Dickinson*

audience reaction *is* one of laughs basically, and it isn't revealing on any other level. And then if you'd gone into that very long and tender love scene after that, you would have obviously had a different picture.

Another change, which is more indirect but equally important, is the first time he meets Angie, when he awakens her in her bedroom and she finds out her sister's dead. And at the end of that scene, I wrote that a certain intimacy begins to grow between them—she's lying there in bed, the blankets back, her hair tousled, one shoulder bare, and suddenly a sexual element enters the scene, and it's the temptation that is going to grow increasingly. Now that's not shown in the film at all. It's done in a two-shot, a lot of it done from behind Lee's head or just to the side of Lee. But what you don't see is a growing intimacy that should have come through a track-in, a slightly different compositon, a feeling of warmth and then a drawing back again. This is in the script, it's not in the picture.

*All of those changes are consistent.*

I think another point worth thinking about is that I feel there is very definitely an Anglo-Saxon attitude towards art and a non-Anglo-Saxon attitude towards art, particularly visual art. I think Anglo-Saxon culture tends toward a form of social observation. The artist sees himself and is seen as an observer of society, in which personal investigation and a personal viewpoint and a personal passion about life are less important than a highly skilled, very effective, and brilliant sketching in and drawing of a social page. Whereas it seems to me that the non-Anglo-Saxon attitude is much more towards personal investigation, a personal, passionate view of a situation, of people, often hopelessly unfair, but uniquely and individually the maker's own. And it may well be that part of the tension between writers and directors in English-speaking cinema is that if the writer isn't Anglo-Saxon, as I'm not—I'm Jewish and I'm certainly not Anglo-Saxon—whereas the director isn't Jewish and is Anglo-Saxon, it could be that that's where the dichotomy really takes place; in my view in the script, which is more passionate and warmer and richer, to my mind, than John's, is eschewed by John because he does have this Anglo-Saxon training. I think that's one view of it which is perfectly possible.

There's another factor that's strange. I think the great problem with writers and directors is to know when to change the role in the progress of the picture. I think at the beginning the writer is totally inside the picture, with the director and occasionally the producer, if you've got a genuinely creative producer—like Ray Wagner, the man I'm working for at the moment —outside the material, and it's the tension between those two positions which creates the material. Then I think when the picture begins the director becomes totally involved with the material, he's totally inside the material, and it's the writer, and perhaps the producer, who is outside the material. But of course in most cases in the English-speaking cinema, the writer's paid off and that's the end of it. In *Point Blank* that was exactly my position. At the end of four weeks, I was sent back to England and that was that. It was only because of my relationship with John, these constant phone calls and letters, that I was able to have any effect whatsoever. And then of course John's plea for me to come out for two weeks in San Francisco and help him again, which the producers agreed to. But under normal circumstances, you complete the script and that's the end of it. And of course if you write pictures which are purely a stimulus for the director to go on, you've got to make sure you've got the director who can do that. I mean John is someone—I may disagree with his view

of the picture—but I know that he can take it on from there. He's a very strong director, and this means that he'll argue and fight for what he wants and be prepared to give up the picture if he doesn't get it. In that sense he's very good, in that sense he deserves everything he gets. But there are many directors who are very craftsmanlike interpreters and no more. One needs to give them a different script.

*How do you write for a director who is nothing but a craftsman?*

Well, the first thing you have to do is to turn down work if you think that in the end you're not going to be happy with the director. I mean one of the great problems in the English-speaking film business is your own artistic growth. A Bergman can do twelve, fourteen films before a *Seventh Seal,* and each of them some form of development, some form of change, some exploration. In the English-speaking cinema it's hit and miss, catch as catch can, what comes up. Under those circumstances writers and directors and to some extent actors, I believe, have to shape their careers as purposefully as they can. And I think this involves somehow or other not doing pictures that you know are just going to be shot, trying to work with the best directors you can, and if you can't, if through reasons of finance or contract you've got to take pictures—and this happens to all of us sooner or later—then I think you've got to find themes that you can exploit or explore to some extent in terms of your own progression. For example, I think in the English-speaking cinema, to survive, you've got to accept that certain genres work, certain modes are in, certain modes are out, and there are times when you can only set up films under certain conditions. Now it seems to me if that is the case, what you've got to do is find a way through that genre, say with *Point Blank,* through a thriller, to investigate certain aspects of life that interest you. I mean I would not have chosen a thriller, frankly, but that was the way it came up. Obviously to some extent this maims you, you can only limp; you can run certain times and limp at others, but at least you make progress. It seems to me in the English-speaking world—and I make this distinction very sharply, because I think the view towards the cinema by producers and by money people in Europe is a bit different, it's not vastly different but it's a bit different—in the English-speaking cinema to survive either you sit in the hills like a Bresson and come down once every five years, or else you've got to get in the middle and put your talent on the line every day. And one hopes the talent will be there at 75 and not go out at 57, or be there at 57 and not go out at 27; but you've got to put your talent on the line every day. And you do put it on the line every day, because there's an enormous amount of money to be made, there are lots of temptations, it's very easy to relax. I think that with a writer or a director in the English-speaking cinema, then, you've somehow got to fashion your career as a series of progressions. An interesting example is someone like John Ford, whom I admire enormously as a film-maker and as a man. Choosing his Western world, and surrounding himself with this sort of Irish defense as it were—you could never get a sane word out of him because he was a "mad Irishman"—was the absolutely marvelous decision he made about Hollywood. It allowed him to work in complete harmony and peace within his chosen world. He saw the dangers of Hollywood and he decided to protect himself; the problem is that he may have overprotected himself. When one sees a film like *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,* which is a remarkable picture, which I think lays down Ford's intellectual and artistic credo—it's an incredibly brave film for a man to make in his sixties after all the films he's made, because he's ventured way outside his Western field really. When one looks at that film, or even *The Last Hurrah,* which is nowhere near as good, it's flawed, in the way that *Liberty Valance* is flawed —but when you look at those films, you see the potential in the man, but maybe if he hadn't stayed in a Western world, if he hadn't stayed in Hollywood, he'd have been another sort of artist, perhaps a larger artist; or maybe his talent would have gone earlier. It seems to me that's exactly the sort of problem you face. On the other hand, I might argue that someone like Huston or Welles *needed* the abrasiveness of

American life to keep themselves sharp, that leaving for Europe the way they did, moving into a sort of eighteenth-century cultural cycle, seems to me equally wrong. And I think this is exactly the dilemma. I don't think there's one solution, I think there are individual answers, and each one is a risk. I'm only interested in exploring my own development, and obviously I must go on and direct as soon as I can, and I'm trying to direct now. In one sense it's easy to be a writer. You don't have to deal with actors and actresses, you don't have to fight with money men very often—not to that extent; you may have rows with the producer. It's one thing to write it, another thing to shoot it, believe me, and there's a huge difference between the two. So I think the challenge for a writer is either to go on and become a director, or to become a producer, which is less of a challenge but I can see it, or else to shut up. If writers see their work going down the drain, if they see scenes not realized, if they really are not too happy with directors, if they find in the end they settle for a good craftsmanlike director, or if they find that a really inventive, individual director mangles their material, then they must direct. If they don't, they've got to take their money and run, or else write their novels and write their plays or write whatever they want.

*I'm interested in what you said about working in a cinema which is not oriented towards personal expression. You have concerns and obsessions that you want to explore, and yet everything in the film industry is working against that. Is this finally crippling?*

Yes. Yes. I suppose I'm being very pessimistic now actually; normally I'm much more optimistic. I think that in the English-speaking cinema our development is maimed. We will never reach our full potential. And I think like everything in Anglo-Saxon life, you settle for the next best thing. You hope to fight till the day you die. You try and keep yourself as sharp as possible, you do this very consciously. That's why I like Los Angeles so much. It's not a city, it's an area to live in, and it's not seductive. London and Rome, Paris, all the big cities are very seductive—your friends, your bookshops, your theaters, everything's around you, you can live a pretty slack life. What I love about LA is it's got none of these things, and to get what you want you may have to motor 20 or 30 miles to a good bookshop, or you may have to go to a little tiny theater somewhere, or you may have to chase up a film or even import it and run it privately. But you find out what sources are really important for you in LA. How long you can survive in it is an individual decision. LA says "Be what you feel, but you've got to *want* what you feel, and then seek what you want." And in that sense it's marvelous. It's a town to get very tough in; I don't mean callous and cynical, I mean you've got to find out what sources are important to you and serve them. LA is a desert, it's on desert land, it literally lives on desert land, and as you know, if you live on desert, you've got to know where the watering holes are and drink pretty deeply from them.

I think we do limp, we don't develop to the same extent. I think it's also true that we do use an incredibly expensive medium, even on the most modest basis, and if one is at all creatively ambitious, the need for money increases almost immediately. All I feel is that the English-speaking cinema is undergoing certain changes, and when 16 millimeter becomes as easy and as definitive as 35, and maybe even 8 millimeter, when as Cocteau says, making films is as quick and as cheap as putting pen to paper and as cheap as a pen is to buy, then I think we might get a different kind of cinema. I think the Underground cinema to some extent reveals this, although I find that it's practice without theory to a large extent. One can look through dozens of these films of the Underground, and there's a really marvelous ten seconds, twenty seconds, fifty seconds of excitement, where they've really stumbled on something fresh. And then you see the next film made by the same film-maker, and it's the same film again, you know they haven't digested what they've worked through and then gone on from there.

*That's what depresses me about the Underground. I don't think it's the answer.*

No, but it's like America generally. America

is one huge experiment. It's the first time in the world that a country decided to get people from every other nation, put them together and say, "Right, you're Americans, and shut up." I mean, America is a fantastic experiment, and as in any experiment, there's great wastage, huge mistakes, and discoveries. And I think the Underground must be seen in this light—I think it's indiscriminate and very often without thought, real thought, it's often almost a form of masturbation in its own way. But I think it's very American in the best sense—it's a huge number of skyrockets into the air, and they illuminate areas. I mean, they may very well illuminate areas that other sorts of film-makers may not need to venture into.

*I agree, it's just that I wonder whether finally what you say about Huston and Welles doesn't become relevant. I wonder if you don't have to come to terms with the pressures of American life, somehow play against all of the constrictions that the industry and the society place on you?*

I think you're absolutely right. It seems to me almost inevitable that tension is necessary for creative elasticity. I really think so. The great danger that a Welles or a Huston can suffer from is to relax into a sort of "poetry." One thing about American life that interests me enormously is that it lacks a poetic level. It hasn't got a fantasy element like English life—you think of Carroll or of the Goon Show or things like that. And it may be that one of the great problems with the Welles-Huston syndrome is you go to Europe and you become "poetic," you see these thatched cottages and eighteenth-century crafts and all this aristocratic culture, which of course America hasn't got, thank God, and you go into Shakespeare and all the rest of it, which Welles should *never* have done, no matter how interesting the experiments. I mean Shakespeare does it *better,* you know, it's no good kidding oneself about that. It's like you're asked to do *The Brothers Karamazov*—who in the hell wants to? Honestly, Dostoevsky did it *better; War and Peace,* Tolstoy's *better;* you do Dickens, Dickens is *better.* But to take the theme of a family, as in *Karamazov,* and write your own response and make a picture about your own response to family, or take a theme like *War and Peace*—now clearly you've got to be Tolstoy to take the theme in the first place—but all right, aspects of *War and Peace* fascinate you, then make your film, but to try and match Tolstoy or Dostoevsky or Dickens or Shakespeare seems to me to be a total waste of time. The most admirable attempt, it seemed to me, was Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood,* where there was a genuine attempt to evoke the whole of the samurai world and the whole of a court world in Japanese terms with some crucial changes, all of which are very interesting. But even that fails. And you know, I don't think Kurosawa's a bad film-maker, I just think it's that how can you beat Shakespeare, how *can* you? So the temptation is to turn away from your own society, and you lose. In my own case, I left England because emotionally and temperamentally I found it unfulfilling, and I found this increasingly so, and I found in America that my emotions and temperament are being served fully. I've never been so emotionally free and so creatively free in my life, and it may very well be that America in many ways is my spiritual home, I should have been here twenty years ago perhaps; but maybe I wouldn't have survived the way I have, and maybe America is a period for me to pass through before I go somewhere else, I just don't know. All I know is it's ideal for me at this point. Now it could well be that Welles and Huston would make the same argument, except I don't think their films quite support the argument.

*Let me ask about the kinds of things that you write in a script. You mentioned that you try to evoke a mood for a scene rather than writing details of camera angles.*

Oh, I never write camera angles, ever, because that's entirely the director's prerogative anyway, and very often they're impractical, because you write without seeing locations or anything else. Now that I'm in a position to choose, I try only to work closely with a director. The director's nominated in advance, so I know with whom I'm working. Secondly, I now try more and more to work directly with a star. I think in English-speaking cinema you've got to work with stars,

because that's the reality of the business; and the thing to do is to find out the archetypal image of the star you're working with and fashion something according to that. Now that doesn't just mean horses for courses, but it means working with the star, as in Lee Marvin's case, to reveal not only the peaks that his audience is used to seeing, or her audience is used to seeing, but also the valleys that the audience has never seen before. If I can't work directly with the star, I try to write a general sort of image figure of what we're after, and then as soon as the star is nominated, I would come back on the picture even for free and write for a week to try and get the dialogue nearer the image of the star. But of course ideally, as on *Point Blank*, we worked closely with Lee, on the script, on the floor, on the cutting. He was a very important contributor. That's the first thing. By the very nature of my interest in the cinema, I have a shrewd idea of what directors are about. That is, a certain director is suggested to me or else he's going to work with me; I see his films or I've seen his films, I have an idea about his particular interests and obsessions. Over four or five films, certain patterns in the director's personality begin to emerge, if the director's of interest. If he's a run-of-the-mill director or a good studio director, then obviously, you know, you won't fiind this coherence. But if he's an interesting director, who are the only people worth working with, then you get an idea of his themes and obsessions, and of your own—you should have a pretty clear idea of your own—and you see where there's a common meeting ground. You find certain attitudes and areas in common, and then I think you must work within those areas. This is a sort of limitation, I suppose. But this is one of the realities we face within the business, and I want to work within the business. And then my personal desire is to go right into the center of a subject in the first scene. Normally I do not like to have a long buildup. I think you've got to get the audience by the scruff of the neck and shove them into your mood and into your milieu and into your atmosphere and into your world straight away; if you don't do that, I think you have lots of problems. I don't think it's a matter of pace or speed or action, because all these things are unimportant. In *Point Blank*, for example, again and again the dynamic comes because of the cut. We never show policemen, we never show explanations, we let the audience think about them afterwards. Like when Angie's house is smashed up, well, obviously, the gang have been there, why bother with all the explanations? That's all nonsense. I like to get the audience and well, you know, really push them onto the bed as it were, really get them going. I hate unnecessary explanations, I hate spare flesh on a script, I'm absolutely obsessed with cutting off every inch of spare flesh. This even goes for descriptive lines in the paragraphs, for instance if it was "John and Mary walk across the road," I'd rather say, "They cross," and leave it at that; I'm as stupid about it as that. But I do feel that that gives it a ranginess and a sparseness. You know, the ribcage is well-stretched, it's on the balls of its feet, it's dancing. And I like to do that with the dialogue and I like to do that with the story, I like to do it with the characters. But this doesn't necessarily mean it's going fast—I'm not mad about galloping horses—but what I like is that sense of tension, that sense of dynamism, which is often the juxtaposition between two sequences. You know, you jump a whole passage of time, and the audience pant up with you halfway through the scene, which I think is the way to go.

*So you don't feel dialogue is most important in writing a scene?*

Oh no, no, no. I mean, one of the great problems in Hollywood is a "great script," it's got "great lines," and I hate those sorts of scripts, because I think that at best most film dialogue is what I call signpost dialogue—"Go here," "come there," "grab this," "go after this," you know, or "how are you." I think much more is done with looks and with body movements. Obviously a certain amount of information has to be given over, and obviously one doesn't do that in the dullest way; one does that in the freshest way one can, obviously dialect and colloquialism have to be taken into account. But I think dialogue should be kept to a mini-

mum. In fact, I think in *Point Blank* the first script had under 100 lines of dialogue, and that included words like "Yes" and "Okay" as a line of dialogue. I think you say one or two words or one or two lines that are really pithy, and the rest goes by the boards. That's why my scripts are very much directors' scripts and often make the studios a bit uneasy when they read them, because they don't have "great lines" and they don't have "great descriptions." What I like to do is to evoke a mood, I think that's very important. I don't think our words are sacrosanct. The stuff we write is very much the stimulus for a director to take off. The script is something that the director looks at at five in the morning on his way to the studio, and it's somehow got to give him a charge, it's got to send the adrenalin running, it's got to help him. It's got to help the actor when he reads it, and I think that comes much more through the way you write your description, even the introspective lines of what a character is thinking or feeling. I often try to give an image like "He was built like a tank," and that's it, no more, or "He runs his hand over the wall of nude photographs, drops of perspiration from his hand run down them like tears." It's almost a bit purple in its prose, to somehow invest it with a feeling of what the image will be like. Of course very often you're bitterly disappointed when you see it on the screen.

*That's another thing I want to ask. It seems to me you really have a sense of the way a scene should look. And yet you don't film it yourself.*

No, well this is the great frustration. I did direct some television in England, but I was taken off it because what I was directing they didn't like. You know, they wanted simple heads speaking to camera, and I was much more interested in other things. And to make progress I went into production. I was in the cinema originally as a salesman—I was a publicity man, and I was a distributor, and then I went over to production, and I became assistant director to Lindsay Anderson on *Every Day Except Christmas* and then I worked on other pictures and slowly made my way and started to write. Then I went into television in 1957, and the only way I could make progress was as a producer and as a writer; they wouldn't let me direct. And I was perhaps rather silly, I should have perhaps toned myself down, but I couldn't. I used to get behind that camera and images would come to me that I had to shoot, and of course it was strange stuff, I agree with them—I mean strange in terms of television, in terms of film it was absolutely straightforward, but it wasn't a talking head, or else it would be a talking head but I'd reveal other things, I'd go very close in on the teeth or the mouth or the way the lips curled and all that sort of thing. I did quite a lot of current-affairs directing, but they'd never let me go into drama. Also, the subjects I wanted to tackle weren't exactly safe. So I went into producing and writing as a means of getting on to cinema and at least working.

*I'm sure that many writers in Hollywood are dialogue writers, maybe are interested in characters, but they don't have a strong visual imagination. And when you have that quality, it must be terribly frustrating not to be directing yourself.*

Yes it is, because those visuals are often very indicative, very important in terms of character. You see, I think that's the great thing about the cinema—it's the visual manifestations which are important, it isn't the beautiful composition, it's what the characters actually do, the way they talk. For example, in *Point Blank* the whole of that car-smashing sequence is really indicative of his state of mind. I don't think it's fully shot that way, but that's what it's about. Or sending Angie up as the Trojan horse is really indicative of character, it isn't just a bright idea. Or the sniper on the freeway is shot that way for a very special reason. Or just the fights, or anything that goes on. It must work on more than one level. That's why dialogue is so unimportant, because all dialogue does is give you information. And film dialogue has got to be colloquial and have a certain syntax, whereas literary dialogue and stage dialogue are highly stylized. In novels, of course, the dialogue is often a lead into a whole introspective stream by the author which you can't do in the cinema. And in the theater it's often great statements being made not just for information—at least I'm speaking

about the best level—but also for other reasons. Whereas in the cinema the moment you have great declamatory statements of this sort, the whole film collapses. The one interesting exception I can think of is in *Force of Evil,* Polonsky's early film, where the dialogue really is a very interesting counterpoint to the action. I think it *is* too literary both in plot structure and structure of dialogue—it was Polonsky's first picture —but nevertheless it's a very interesting play on dialogue. But he was forced to put a commentary on it eventually to make the film understandable. And I think it's not understandable because the words—brilliant words, lovely words, very rich words—took precedence over visual movement. It's not action, it's visual movement that is the real secret. And that involves the emotive use of the camera, the actual camera *movement* can be evocative. And that's what the writing's got to be about. I mean when I write in *Point Blank* about a sense of intimacy between Chris and Walker on their first meeting, one hopes that that's going to be done by the director—I mean, it wasn't done by John in that scene, but what happens is suddenly they become conscious of each other. And that you say without dialogue; you don't have a line, "You're looking good" or "I can see your breasts" or something, it's done through men and women looking at each other. But of course sooner or later you have to take your finger out and do it yourself, otherwise you've got to shut up.

## WILLIAM PECHTER

# Parts Of Some Time Spent With Abraham Polonsky

Abraham Polonsky wrote *Body and Soul* in 1947, directed *Force of Evil* in 1948, and was politically blacklisted in America until 1968. In 1962, having had great admiration for his work in films from my first becoming aware of it, I contacted Polonsky, and soon after published an interview with him done solely through correspondence. I met Polonsky a short while later, and have seen him on those several occasions when we have been in the same place at the same time in the years since; a time during which our relationship progressed, I think it fair to say, from that of critic and film-maker to one between friends. And it was, I think, in the latter relationship that Polonsky telephoned several months ago to tell me that he was going to direct a film again and to invite me to visit him once the shooting had begun, though it was more in reversion to the former that I brought along a tape recorder which ran intermittently throughout much of a long day that I spent with him soon after.

I visited the set of *Willie Boy* several weeks after filming had begun; I had hoped to observe filming at one of the desert locations, but was frustrated in this by some last-minute changes in the shooting schedule. I arrived at the studio some twenty minutes after the beginning of the working day at nine, and reached the set to find it had been cleared of the crew while (as I learned subsequently) some disagreement was taking place between the director and Conrad Hall, his director of photography. Later, Polonsky spoke of it; he was going through a stage with Hall that was not uncommon, he thought, to the working relationships between directors

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cage. So there's a dynamic set up between how much you're going to go for and how much the technical crew can give you without hobbling the actor."

Later, at lunch, some comments on a few of the stars whose giant photos decorate the walls of the studio commissary led back to the subject of actors.

"Well, some have a performance that they own. Let's say they have nothing but this one performance. It's often more than enough for a film, where personality is rampant and effective."

Someone remarked that most actors don't even have one performance.

"Not really. . . . Most of them have many. But most of them come to *rely* on one performance for other reasons. When it's a successful one, for instance."

Thinking of *Madigan,* I said, "Now Henry Fonda's been doing that bit—"

"That's right!"

"But Henry Fonda can do a lot of other things."

"Oh, yes! . . . When I cast these characters for the posse, I was very careful not to pick western actors simply on the grounds that they wouldn't have a stock set of performances as a posse to give. Otherwise, you have to fight that battle too. I'm not sure what I'll get from them, but I won't have that."

The conversation turned to the direction of actors.

"Very often what you do is substitute energy for expressiveness. You drive the actors and get a lot of energy going on the set, and it feels like life, but it's not necessarily life; it's mechanical life. The way we live."

"Of course," I said, "if you're not as concerned with your actors as you are, you can get expressiveness in other ways, and use the actors more as props."

"But then you can't use my actors; you'd have to cast others."

"Well, you can't use you as a director on that film either," I said.

We discussed the morning's takes, and I mentioned my interest in seeing how some things looked in the rushes.

"Dailies can fool you. They're full of momentary energy. You have no way of knowing till they're cut together in the whole film if anything is going there. . . . Accidental energy cancels out, and things just lay there."

With us through the day was Robert Gilman, one of the most talented and technically proficient young Americans now making short films outside the industry. He asked Polonsky: "How do you work with your editor? His idea of rhythm is going to be different from your idea of rhythm."

"Well, when we first met, I picked the takes I thought were best and gave him a general idea of how I wanted to go, and he went and edited and assembled. And he showed it to me, and the rhythm was different from what I wanted. So I went back with him to the moviola, and edited it piece by piece, and he saw what I wanted.

"Now, as we go along, I select the takes I prefer and give him a general idea of how I want it to go. Then he edits the film. Where the rhythm is different from what I want, we work together until it has my feeling, where that's possible. Then my rhythm runs."

"He's quite willing to do what you want?"

"Yes. He's good. There are editors who won't do that; you can't work with them. He's only done two films, I think, before this one. The last one was *Finian's Rainbow*; he worked with Coppola who works the same way I do: he edits his own film."

One difference between them, I remarked, judging from the one film of Coppola's I'd seen, was that Coppola didn't seem to care about his actors.

"No. He's interested in technology," Polonsky said.

The afternoon's shooting moved slowly, a few brief takes surrounded by long intervals for lighting. During one of these, I commented to Polonsky that it seemed a peculiar predicament for an artist to have such periods of tedium inescapably interwoven with periods of working creation.

and their directors of photography; he was trying to get Hall to loosen up. "I need more freedom for the actors because they're complaining bitterly. He's holding them to too many marks." But Polonsky wasn't complaining. "He's interesting, temperamental, and a gambler with light. The actors are both obedient and creative. What more can you ask?"

It had been some time since I'd been on a working set, and, generally harmonious as this one was, the feel of it—the numbers of people performing small tasks or just hanging about, and the numbers of temperaments requiring solicitous orchestration—reminded me how unappealing I had always, by my own temperament, found that side of film-making. Yet Polonsky seemed not only good at it but genuinely to enjoy it, and I asked if he did.

"I enjoy it, yes. It's almost as good as writing because it is a form of writing. I like it and I feel it as we do it. It's excellent; I feel this whole thing, and I feel it all coming together and coming apart all the time, and that's part of the pleasure and part of the operation and part of the contest you have with yourself, if you have any contest at all. That's the wrong word; it's . . . it's the living sense of the set. The set is a live thing—a more complex writing experience."

I asked if, in seeing someone else's films, he could see from what was on film where, if there's some failure, it may be that kind of failure—a failure in working with people.

"I don't think I could . . . I mean, I wouldn't know."

Though I had read a copy of the script, the scenes being taken that day weren't in it, and one thing in particular, the start of a tracking movement, was giving the camera crew some difficulty. I asked if it might be possible to achieve the desired effect with a particular cut —a jump cut, though I'd failed to visualize it as that.

"Jump cut?—Why not, if you intend it. It's all right; there's nothing wrong with it if you mean it. . . . You feel that at once in a picture where that isn't the style. If it's not a general style, then it's a particular emphasis. But, if it's an emphasis, what do you mean? Well, I don't mean that sort of emphasis here."

Someone suggested what a jump cut *might* mean.

"That's true. But that would be an explanation after the event, not an intention now. That's what you can do, rationalize a meaning. When you shoot, that's a prediction; not an explanation . . . after something happens."

The shot was finally made as Polonsky wanted it, and, while the next one was being lit, the director secluded himself with his actors in rehearsal. Afterwards, Polonsky spoke of this and amplified on the issue over which he had confronted his director of photography.

"The reason for the rehearsal was to find out where they would go naturally in the scene. I don't want to tell them to go there and go there and go there—just to help out with the lighting. Not today, anyway. It turned out they were going to go exactly to the places I had asked them to originally. That happens very often. Excluding documentaries where you take the camera and expose yourself to the scene, whichever way it works . . . in this kind of film, what you do is construct a *cage* of light around these actors—and they are not really free in this cage because, if they are really free, neither the sound nor the light works in it. One of the ways to eliminate the sound problem is to loop it. But you can't eliminate the light problem. You can't eliminate the cage of light, and this is true outdoors too. Depending where the sun is in the sky, and how your scene is going, you can't see the expression on a face even if you're two feet away. So what you do with the kind of film we're used to seeing —clearly full of expression in every detail—is construct this geometrical thing . . . and live with it.

"If you ask the cameraman to loosen up, and if he just falls back and lights it generally, you're not going to see anything. I'm shuffling around from heads to bodies in the same shot and moving them. There are very grave difficulties for the actor and all the technical crew. . . .

"Now the problem is that professional actors, in this cage, give you *their* performance, which enables them to survive the cage. And if you want anything else, they're fighting with the

"That's why experienced directors learn to live their lives between shots—writing letters, calling on the phone, making dates with girl friends, investing in the stock market . . ."

Later, during one particularly long pause for lighting, we left the set where, the actors having been rehearsed, the director was as dispensable as I was. In a small trailer, the director's equivalent of a dressing room, we were able to talk without interruption.

"Now to maintain full expression throughout the course of the film, and freedom, is the problem."

"By full expression you mean the expressiveness of the actor?"

"And my own. But the liberation of the actor in the scene, the liberation of the content of the script, and the excellence of the technical apparatus to make it visible . . . and audible; to make this all come together in sound and talk and light and clear expression. What you tend to do is *settle* . . . for technical excellence. What you do is find yourself settling for a passing grade. It tells the story, it's pretty good, there are no big mistakes; thank God, let's go on. Disaster."

"Settle for technical excellence?"

"And performance; competent, excellent performance. That's not the same thing as a real performance by anyone, including the camera. By the end of the day, you're willing to settle too. This is where you have to stop. Your greatest problem is not to settle for what's good enough; to try to go a little further. You have pressing you on schedule, cost, all those things which are forcing you to settle."

"I suppose the advanced stage is when you don't know that you're settling."

"Well, then, as in all things, you've succeeded in your profession. You are now successful."

A bit later, while we were still alone, Polonsky said, "I'm kind of amused by all this."

"What do you mean, it amuses you? You love it."

" I love it, but this is, in a way, too late."

"Too late to be struck by the glamor of it, you mean?"

*Abraham Polonsky at work.*

"Well, it's not glamor . . . Marcel Proust said —or was it Marcel Proust who said someplace that—don't wish too intensely for anything because you'll get it . . . but too late. . . . Or something like that. . . . Some witty remark of that nature. . . .

"I don't know, it isn't really too late, but there's a lot of—something of that in what I feel . . . like I don't really care any more, but I do. Twenty years is too long . . . in a strange kind of way I'm doing this and I'm saying, well, I'll do it, but I don't really think it's worthwhile bothering with all this stuff anymore. Now that may just be—"

"What do you mean by all this stuff? Films?"

"No . . . perhaps just weariness as you work . . . I mean so many people are such a drag . . . I'm surrounded by hundreds of people. . . . I ought to retire to my mountain and meditate, that's what I mean. . . ."

"Maybe you should be making films in a different set-up?"

"Maybe I shouldn't make anything, is what I mean. . . . I don't know what I'm saying really . . . I mean—I don't know what I'm talking about. . . . I'm talking about something . . . I don't know what it is . . . I mean something."

"I've often had that feeling."

". . . There's something wrong with what I'm doing. On the set, everything's fine. I'm having all the freedom anyone gets. . . . The management doesn't even look at the rushes. . . ."

"Is it anything to do with the feeling that you

could make a good film or a bad film and it wouldn't make any difference to most of the people you're working with—I mean, they wouldn't *see* the difference?"

"No. No, it has nothing to do with that. They'll see the difference; of course they will. They may not like the same things I like, but, in general, they know the difference. All they want is for it to be a good film. If it turned out not to make money, they wouldn't be horrified because they know that happens very often . . . so there's no problem with that. . . . I'm talking about something else, I think . . . but I don't know what it is. . . . I don't know how it even came out. I didn't intend to say it. . . ."

Before returning to the set, we talked a little about the blacklist, which Frank Rosenberg had broken for Polonsky with a co-author's credit for the screenplay of *Madigan*—a project to which Polonsky had come late, following the departure of the first writer, Howard Rodman (who has pseudonymous co-author's credit for the film as "Henri Simoun"). Earlier, I had referred to *Madigan* (a film I had enjoyed despite or, probably, as much because of its forties-melodrama clichés, as well as for its occasional passages of genuine feeling and the performance of Richard Widmark) as "hack work," meaning only that I assumed it had been a job undertaken while waiting for or as a means to the more meaningful work of direction, and Polonsky had been somewhat defensive, thinking I was simply accusing the work of mediocrity. (He agreed with me, of course, that there was a good deal of mediocre work in the film, but hoped I'd realized that his share of it wasn't done with a free hand.) He had thought there would have to be a succession of *Madigan*-level assignments before he'd have a chance to direct again. But then he was given the chance to do *Willie Boy* as a film for television, and, as the project took shape, the studio was persuaded to produce it as a theatrical feature; Polonsky, all the while, buying directorial independence by relinquishing his own financial prerogatives in the film as a business venture. Yesterday, and for twenty years, he was anathema; today he is, with an unusual degree of freedom, directing a film budgeted at three million dollars, and planning three other projects to follow. In America, there is always a happy ending, and all wishes come true. Sometimes, too late.

"And there are still people blacklisted?" I asked him.

"It's about over now. . . . Till there's a new one. . . . It's part of the way the world goes. . . ."

I asked about a few people in particular; John Berry, and Bob Roberts who had produced *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil*. "They're making films again?"

"Yes. . . . Everybody is . . . unless they're dead. Some died . . . some of them left. . . . Everything comes to an end, including you and me. And that's a relief."

After the day's shooting was finished, we went to see the previous days' rushes. In the audience, Katherine Ross and Robert Blake, who hadn't been involved in the present day's shooting, joined Susan Clark and Robert Redford who had. I saw on film some of the scenes I had read in the script, but there was little I could tell about the finished work other than to get some sense of its visual style and see how those actors whom I hadn't seen working looked in their roles.

*Willie Boy* is the story, based on an actual incident, of an Indian hunted for killing the father of the girl with whom he has fled; the action takes place in 1909, at a time when President Taft is on a speech-making tour through Southern California. The single Indian is so incredibly resourceful in eluding his massing pursuers (at one stage, including eleven posses) that rumors reach the press of an Indian uprising and an attempt to assassinate the president. Robert Blake, whom I hadn't seen in films before, plays Willie Boy, the hunted Indian.

Afterwards, Polonsky took me to his office; he had something to show me. There, spread over two walls, were photographs of the actual Willie Boy and others involved in the events: Willie Boy in what seemed to be a studio portrait; individual pictures of the participating sheriffs; the full posse, posed for the press, stiff and erect as a graduating class or early baseball

team; and, finally, the full posse again, its members proudly smiling, like fishermen with their big catch, as they stood over the corpse of their solitary quarry; all interspersed with pictures of the Banning and Twenty-Nine Palms desert landscapes where the action had taken place. Somehow, it had never occurred to me that the entire episode would be so fully documented. I turned again to the studio portrait, but could not fathom the pathos in that blankly impassive, young yet ancient face; though I had known there was an actual Willie Boy, it was not until the instant of seeing his photograph that he ceased for me to be fictional. Seeing Robert Blake's to me unfamiliar face on the screen while viewing the rushes, I had been impressed by the un-actorish verisimilitude he bore as an Indian, but now I felt humbled in this presumption by the eloquent presence of what James Agee used to venerate as "the real thing."

Polonsky, too, seemed slightly awed before the photographs' mute authority. I think Polonsky knew that I had reserved feelings about the script; one of the first things I had asked him that day was whether his commitment to this film was of a kind with that he had given *Force of Evil*, and he seemed surprised and irritated that I had any doubts that it wasn't. Other than that, the day's conversation had tended away from any discussion of the film as a whole to concentrate instead on the meaning of this or that particular shot, a natural course of direction when all one's activity on the set is centered upon the particular shot that is being made. One comes to take it for granted that an actor's performance in a film is pieced together bit by bit from shots made out of dramatic sequence, the sequence of takes in most films being dictated by economic rather than dramatic necessity; but one is less inclined to consider that the director must then perforce work this way too. I had thought that much of the unevenness in even the best of films, especially those made in America, owed to the participation of too many hands, but now it occurred to me that virtually everything in the conventional processes of commercial movie-making operated as a threat to the work's artistic unity. Unless a film-maker's work was episodic of its nature, as, for instance, Godard's, what a feat it must be to keep before you an imaginative vision of the work as a whole through all the fragmentizing stages of its creation. And given the further enervation in having to bend great numbers of other people around to your vision while yourself striving to sustain it, the sheer labor of making a film suddenly seemed to me almost heroic.

And now, for the first time that day, and in the presence of those photographs, Polonsky began to talk about his vision of the film; of how he imagined it and of its meaning. I had no illusion that the script I had read was any adequate imaginative equivalent to the film that might be made of it, but Polonsky spoke now of possibilities in the material which I simply hadn't seen in the reading; and possibilities not simply for visualization but of bringing out the meaning of the action and relationships. It would be untrue to say that what he said utterly dispelled my reservations about the script; whether the film would realize those possibilities he saw in it, I couldn't know; but, for the first time, I was brought to see that those possibilities were there. And I recalled what Robert Redford had said to me earlier when I had asked him if Polonsky was an easy director to work for. "Yes," he said. "He has passion."

It was almost nine, and dark outside. I didn't run the tape while we spoke thus, or for the short time remaining that we spent together. Exactly what Polonsky said then would mean little without one's having read the script, and, in a sense, it wasn't important; either it will be in the film, or it won't. Either it will have its life as art, or join the ghosts in that crowded limbo of unrealized intentions. It will be important, or it won't. ". . . Like I don't really care any more, but I do."

*From* WILLIE BOY.

# Struggle on Two Fronts: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard

*"What we demand is the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form. Works of art which lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are politically. Therefore, we oppose both works of art with a wrong political viewpoint and the tendency toward the "posters and slogan style" which is correct in political viewpoint but lacking in artistic power. On questions of literature and art we must carry on a struggle on two fronts."—"Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art" (May 1942),* Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung, *Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1966, p. 302.*

*Because of the kind and the degree of its commitment, people are wondering whether* La Chinoise *doesn't risk losing adherents to all the political "lines," and whether it doesn't, then, in the final analysis, just bring it all back down to film.*

If that were the case, it would have missed its mark and be reactionary. What you say reminds me of what Phillipe Sollers told me about it. Though he, unlike the people you speak of, bases his view of it on the idea that it doesn't as a matter of fact "bring it all down to film." To give support to his view, he points to the conversation between Anne Wiazemsky and Francis Jeanson on the train. According to Sollers, the scene *is* reactionary. It's reactionary because it pits the "real" talk of a real person —the talk has to be "real," he says, because the character's name, like the real man's, is "Jeanson"— against the "fictional" speech of a pseudorevolutionary, and because the scene *seems* to justify the former.

*Do you think it does?*

I think it justifies Anne Wiazemsky's position. But spectators side with whichever they choose.

*Why did you ask Francis Jeanson to be in the movie?*

Because I knew him. So did Anne Wiazemsky. She'd studied philosophy with him. That meant they'd be able to talk. Anyway, Jeanson's the kind of man who really likes talking to people. He'd even talk to a wall. He has the kind of humanity Pasolini defined when he said, in the movie Fieschi made about him for television, he didn't like talking to dogs in the familiar terms you're supposed to use. In any event, I needed him, Francis Jeanson, not someone else, for a TECHNICAL reason: the man Anne talked to would have to be a man who understood her, who'd be able to fit his speech to hers; it would be just that much harder when Anne's text, if you can call it a "text," wasn't her own: I whispered it to her. I'd tried to find phrases that didn't sound too much like slogans. But they'd still need to be linked. So I had to have a man with Jeanson's skill. As it was, and although he was replying to really disjointed remarks, he always found the right answers; it looks like a coherent conversation, now. I was really relying on the allusion to Algeria. It places him well. It outraged Sollers. Others just say Jeanson's an ass, and leave it at that. It's a mistake, if only because he agreed to play a role. Others refuse—Sollers is one; I asked him to be in my next movie; so is Barthes; I'd asked him to appear in *Alphaville.* They were afraid they'd look like fools. That isn't the issue. Francis has the sense to know that an image isn't anything but an image. All I ask people to do is listen. Start by listening. I was afraid I'd hear people say what they said when they saw Brice Parain in *Vivre sa Vie,* that "they wished that old shit would shut up," or even that I'd meant to mage him look a fool. Because of the allusion to Algeria, they can't. When I interview someone, independently of the personal reasons I have for preferring one man to another, the position I take is imposed by technique. Because he'd taught Anne philosophy, I thought at first that I'd film a lesson in philosophy—a mind giving birth to an idea, prompted by Spinoza or Husserl. But it became in the end what you see in the movie now: the idea being that Anne would reveal to him plans of action he'd try to dissuade her from, but that she'd go

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*A taped interview by Jacques Bontemps, Jean-Louis Comolli, Michel Delahaye, and Jean Narboni,* Cahiers du Cinema *#194 (October 1967) pp. 13-26, 66-70; reprinted by permission. Slightly abridged —— omissions available from translator.*

ahead with it anyway. To know whether that all exists only in fiction is another question; it's hard to say; when you see your own photo, do you say you're a fiction? To have an interesting debate on this whole thing you'd have to have Cervoni, say, for the one side and somebody from the *Cahiers Marxistes-Leninistes* for the other. Or Regis Bergeron and René Andrieu. They'd cover each other with shit for a start; but they might, still, come up with something in the end; but only if they'd agreed to start with film before they finally get into it.

*The reaction from the Marxist-Leninists wasn't the one you'd expected.*

No, it wasn't. They didn't know what to think at the Chinese Embassy. They were really put out. Their big complaint was that Léaud isn't all bloody when he unwraps the bandages. They obviously haven't understood. That doesn't mean, of course, that they're wrong; but, if they're right, they're right at the first remove and not the second, or vice-versa. They were afraid, too, the Soviets might take advantage of Henri (a character who for a good many is far more convincing than I ever thought he'd be) to justify their own position. They weren't too far off the mark: André Gorz (Henri reads some passages from his book *Socialisme difficile* in the first shot) was telling me it was "the first time he'd really liked one of my movies; it was clear, coherent; the concrete triumphs over the abstract, *et cetera.*" I guess I didn't make it clear enough that the characters aren't members of a real Marxist-Leninist cell. They ought to have been Red Guards. I'd have avoided certain ambiguities. The real activists—the kids who publish the *Cahiers Marxistes-Leninistes*; they impress you with their real, deep commitment—maybe wouldn't have been as annoyed by it as they were. Because they shouldn't have been. It's a superficial reaction, I think, not too far different, when you get down to it, from the kind of reaction it got from the collaborators on *Le Figaro*: "It's ridiculous! They say they want to make a revolution. Look where they're going to make it—in a plush bourgeois flat." Though this is said in the movie itself, quite clearly.

*Can you explain this sort of misunderstanding?*

People still don't know how to *hear* and *see* a movie. That's what we need to be working on now. For one thing, the people who have training in politics hardly ever are trained in film too, and vice-versa. My training in politics came out of my work in film; I think it's almost the first time that ever happened. Even if you think of a man like Louis Daquin, you realize all he's doing is coming to film with an education he's gotten elsewhere; a poor one at that. As a result, the movies he makes are just fair; they aren't the good ones he might have made. All right, what can I say for my movie from this point of view? I can say I think it quite clear that it views the two girls with sympathy—with something like tenderness even; that it's they who form the support for a certain political line; and, finally, that you have to start with these two girls if you're going to understand its conclusion. It's anyway Chou En-lai's. They *haven't* made a Great Leap Forward. The Cultural Revolution is only the first step in another Long March ten thousand times longer than the first. If you now apply this conclusion to the personal cases, the character played by Anne Wiazemsky, prepared as she is for it, is bound to go farther. So is the character played by Juliet Berto. Léaud really goes a long way: he finds the right kind of theater. Henri makes a choice; he decides for the *status quo*; he sides with the French Communist Party; he's at a standstill, somewhere inside himself —the fixed-frame shot, the absence of cutting inside the shot characterizes this. As I view it, then, he's cut himself off from all the real problems—but, I repeat, only if in judging a movie you start with a *filmic* analysis—it can be a "scientifically" or a "poetically" filmic analysis, but it's got to be a filmic analysis—and not the fictional or the political plot. Kirilov is the only one who really fails. This is all quite clear. Anyhow, it's the Third World that teaches the others the real lesson. The only character in the movie who's really balanced is the young black, I think. I wrote his speech too; it's coherent, though it too is in fact made up of fragments: a paragraph from the preface of Althusser's *Pour Marx,* quotations from Mao, clippings from *Garde Rouge.* Of course, though it's coherent, there's still something to it that's slightly unsettling; Pierre Daix has pointed it out: the questions they ask him have less to do with the situation they find themselves in than with much more general problems. Still, this young militant agreed to be filmed, to use his real name, and to make the slightly peculiar speech I'd written for him. But we're talking now like men of the same world—we might say the same cell. The one really interesting point of view here would be the view from the *outside*—the way it would look to the Cuban movie-makers, for example. There's a real gap between film and politics. The men who know all about politics know nothing about film, and vice-versa. So, I say it over and over again, the one movie that really ought to have been made in France this year—on this point, Sollers and I are in complete agreement—is a movie on the strikes at

Rhodiaceta. They are typical—much more instructive than the strikes at Saint-Nazaire, say, because, viewed in relation to a much more "classical" kind of strike (I'm not taking into account the hardships they involved), they are, properly speaking, modern in the way the strikers' cultural and financial griefs interact. The thing is, once again, the men who know film can't speak the language of strikes and the men who know strikes are better at talking Oury than Resnais or Barnett. Union militants have realized that men aren't equal if they don't earn the same pay; they've got to realize now that we aren't equal if we don't speak the same language.

*Two or three years ago, you told us you thought it extremely hard to make political movies: there'd have to be as many points of view as there were characters, and an "extragalactic" viewpoint as well, to include them all. How do you feel about it now?*

I don't think so, now. I've changed. I think you're right to favor the correct view at the expense of the wrong views. The "elegant" Left would say that's another one of the Little Red Book's truisms—though I don't think they are truisms. If you're not carrying out a correct policy, you're carrying out a wrong policy. When I told you that, I was thinking that you were obliged to be objective—the way the press is "objective": you pay everyone equal attention—or, as they put it, "democratic." But in the sketch I've made for *Vangelo 70* it's put quite plainly that, on the one hand, there is what you call "democracy," on the other, revolution; that's it; that's all.

*How do you feel now about the movie in which you first got into politics,* Le Petit Soldat?

It's okay for what it was. I mean, it's the only movie a man born a bourgeois and just beginning to make movies could have made if he wanted to get into politics. The proof is that Cavalier used the exact same theme when he made his movie on Algeria. There just aren't that many. It's close to the theme of some pre-war novels, *Aurelian* or *Reveuse Bourgeoisie*—film lagged so far behind life. It's too bad nobody else made his own movie about it—the underground Jeanson organized, or the French Communist Party. They'd have been hard to make, of course. But, once again, if *I* didn't know what I needed to be saying in my movie, the ones who did didn't know how to say it in movies. My movie's all right in so far as it's film; it's wrong for everything else; which means it's just average.

*Let's go back to the line that concludes* La Chinoise. *It's put in the simple, preterite past and pronounced in a "distant" tone of voice. Mightn't it risk, as a result, making us think everything that precedes it a phantasy, a day-dream?*

It's a simple, not a complicated past. The tone isn't "distant": it's the tone of voice Bresson's heroines always have. As for it being a "phantasy," it's precisely because she's realized so much that Veronique will be able to make it something more than a day-dream. Besides, the tone in which she says the line is soft; it's calm, like the Chinese. I was really impressed at the Chinese Embassy by how softly they speak. It's the tone of a final report. She realizes she hasn't made a Great Leap Forward. Just one timid step in advance—though she has, in fact, already seen lots of action; she's gone so far as to kill the man who "never wrote *Quiet Flows the Don!*"

*A movie on the strikes at Rhodiaceta would have led to a quite different kind of realisation . . .*

Yes, it would. But if it were made by a moviemaker, it wouldn't be the movie that should have been made. And if it were made by the workers themselves—who, from the technical point of view, could very well make it, if somebody gave them a camera and a guy to help them out a bit—it still wouldn't give as accurate a picture of them, from the cultural point of view, as the one they give when they're on the picket-lines. That's where the gap lies.

*The movie-maker has to learn how to be their relief.*

Yes, he has to learn how to take his place in the line. Learn how to pass the word along, a new way, to others.

*In* La Chinoise, *film assumes so many, such diverse forms that they might cancel each other out.*

The thing is, I used to have lots of ideas about film. Now I don't, none at all. By the time I made my second movie, I no longer had any ideas what film was. The more movies you make, the more you realize that all you have to work with—or against, it comes down to the same thing—is the preconceived ideas. That's why I think it's a crime that it isn't a man like Moullet whom they hire to make movies like *Les Adventuriers* or *Deux Billets pour Mexico.* The way it's a crime that Rivette's being forced—he now after all the others who've been exploited by the Gestapo of economic and aesthetic structures erected by the Holy Production-Distribution-Exhibition Alliance—to reduce a statement five hours long to the sacrosanct hour and a half.

*Do you think you've made any discoveries in film?*

One: what you must do to be able to make a smooth transition from one shot to the next, given

*Anne Wiazemsky and Jean-Luc Godard during shooting of* La Chinoise.

two different kinds of motion—or what's even harder, a shot in motion and a motionless shot. Hardly anyone ever does it, because they hardly ever think of doing it. So, you can join any one shot and any other: a shot of a bicycle to a shot of a car, say, or a shot of an alligator to a shot of an apple . . . People do do it, I guess, but pretty haphazardly. If you edit not in terms of ideas, the way Rossellini edits the beginning of *India*—that poses quite different problems—but in terms of form . . . when you edit on the basis of what's in the image and on that basis only . . . not in terms of what it signifies but what signifies it, then you've got to start with the instant the person or thing in motion is hidden or else runs into another and cut to the next shot there. If you don't, you get a slight jerk. If you want a slight jerk, fine. If you don't, there's no other way to avoid it. The women who do my cutting can do it all by themselves, now. I hit on it in *A Bout de Souffle* and I've been using it systematically ever since.

*You said you don't have any ideas about film now. But it's still very much there in* La Chinoise. *It's even thematic . . .*

It asks questions about film because film is beginning to ask itself questions. I don't see anyway how I could have kept it from coming into the movie less than it does—though it tends in effect, paradoxically, to narcissism. In this sense, the camera that filmed itself in a mirror would make the ultimate movie.

*As in your sketch for* Loin du Vietnam?

No, not entirely. There wasn't any other way to do it, there. It had to be pushed to just that extreme. Because we are all narcissists, at least when it comes to Vietnam; so we might just as well admit it.

*Your characters think the Soviet communists have "betrayed" Marxism. Do you think so too?*

I've made a movie I call *La Chinoise,* in which I adopt, against the point of view of the French Communist Party, the point of view of the writings of Mao Tse-tung or the *Cahiers Marxistes-Leninistes.* I repeat, it is film that's imposed the direction I take, which explains why the *Cahiers Marxistes-Leninistes* can accuse it of being "leftist" and why *L'Humanité Nouvelle* can even attack it for being a "fascist provocation." But, even if there is some truth in these opinions, it's still not quite that simple; for, insofar as it's a question of *film,* the question's been poorly framed.

*How do you explain the impact the revisionist Henri's statement has had on a good many?*

I hadn't foreseen it, but it makes sense to me now. At one point, four gang up against one. That's all. If you'd film Guy Mollet one against four, it's Guy Mollet, that stupid ass, who as the underdog is going to get all the sympathy.

*Henri's the only one of the five who explains himself completely.*

No, you're wrong. People think he's the only one who explains himself "completely." The others don't need to, to the extent that things are just that much clearer for them. You have to take into account, too, that people are apt to favor the guy whose views they prefer; that, in any case, they're incapable of being good listeners; and that they don't, in addition, ever attempt to make a final accounting of what they've heard the characters say.

*Renoir has already asked what immediate effect film might have. He's remarked that the war broke out just after he'd made* La Grande Illusion—*a movie*

*in behalf of peace.*

Exactly. Film hasn't the slightest effect. They thought, once, that *L'Arrivée du Train en Gare* would scare people out of their seats. It did—the first time, but never again. That's why I've never been able to understand censorship, not even its ontological grounds. It seems to be based on a notion that image and sound have an immediate effect on the way people behave.

*Though you can't really trace the influence an image exerts . . .*

Correct. But, then again, no more and no less than the effects any of the rest might have—in other words, no more than you can the effects of the whole thing. Because everything exerts some influence. If you leave out that part of film that people call "television," we could say that film "has the influence" of scientific research, theater, or chamber music.

*Does this diminish your confidence in film?*

No, not at all. But you've got to realize that the millions of people who've seen *Gone with the Wind* have been no more influenced by it than the many fewer who've seen *Potemkin*. There've been some attempts to blame film for juvenile delinquency. But the people who've tried it don't seem to have noticed that in precisely the same period that juvenile delinquency was on the rise in the USA, movie-attendance was dropping off sharply. The sociologists haven't even begun to study the question.

*The first shots you've ever made of the rural scene come in* La Chinoise: *the two shots of the countryside that remarks on the farm-problem accompany off . . .*

Yes. *L'Humanité* called them picture-postcards. I don't know. All I can say is, as soon as we saw a meadow, a cow, and some chickens, we stopped the car and shot some footage. Then we turned around and drove home. I don't see anything wrong in that. I had to have these shots, because Yvonne had come up from the country, and because one of my characters had a couple of things to say about rural problems.

*The character Juliet Berto plays is new for your film.*

I wanted something besides Parisians. I wanted someone who'd come up from the country, so I could illustrate another of the vices of our society: centralization. Someone, too, who in contrast to the others has nothing, who's dispossessed. Someone sincere, who has a feeling there's something their little group *can* do. She has access through them to the culture that's been refused her. She used to think it dropped from the skies. Then she started reading the papers. Now she's selling them. It's a first step.

*In the traveling shot along the balcony during the theoretical presentations, the division of space by the three windows divides the " class" into three groups: "professor," "pupils," and Yvonne, the maid, who's shining shoes or washing dishes the whole time.*

I had to show that even for those who'd like to live without them, social classes still exist. It's just at that moment you hear someone asking, "Will class struggle always exist?"

*The first two categories—"professor" and "students"—can still relate, interact. But the third is effectively kept to the side.*

But it's only physically, not mentally, that she's "forbidden" a part in the discussion. Or else it's "tactically": because at the end of the movie she's no longer forbidden to take part in it all. For one thing, she's voted. There's no doubt she discovers that it's she who, in the final analysis, has come much closer to the others than they have to her personal reality—which they should have explored, but they haven't; they've put if off. So, of all the characters it's the little farm-girl who covers the most ground. Then comes Léaud, then Anne, then Henri.

*The movie is made up of a series of short sequences that seem to be quite independent of one another.*

It's the kind of movie that's made in the cutting. I shot self-contained sequences, in no particular order; I put them in order afterwards.

*Does that mean it might have been different?*

No, it doesn't. There was an order, a continuity that I had to find. I think it's the one that's in the movie. We shot it . . . in the order that we shot in! Though as a rule I shoot the sequences in order, in some kind of continuity; I mean, with some clear idea of the movie's chronology and its logic—even if I've found myself having to change the order of whole sequences. This is the first time the order in which I shot a movie presupposed nothing. It happened, of course, that I'd know right when I shot them that two different shots would go together—two shots in the same discussion, for example; but not always . . . For the most part, they were independent. The linking came later. So they aren't independent now; they're at least complementary if not also coherent.

*That was the point of view on which you relied? Was it some notion of a purely logical kind of coherence? Or was it emotional? Or was it simply a visual coherence?*

Logical. Always. But logic can be conveyed in a thousand ways. Let's take an example. One of the texts in the presentation is a speech of Bukharin's. Right after it's read there comes a title: "Bukharin made this speech." Next, you see a photo of Bukharin's accuser. Of course, I could have used a photo of Bukharin himself. But I didn't need to: you'd just "seen" him in the person who reads the speech. So, I had to show his adversary: Vichynski—and, eventually, Stalin. Okay: photo of Stalin. And because it's a young man who speaks in the name of Bukharin, the Stalin in the photo is young. That takes us then to the time when the young Stalin was already at odds with Lenin. But by that time Lenin was married. And one of Stalin's greatest enemies was Lenin's wife. So, right after the photo of the young Stalin: photo of Ulianova. That's quite logical. What has to come next? Well, it's revisionism that toppled Stalin. So, next, you see Juliet reading an ad in *France-Soir*: Soviet Russia is busy publicizing Tsarist monuments. Right after you see the men who in their youth killed the Tsar. It's a little like a theorem that presented itself as a puzzle. You have to see which pieces fit. You've got to use induction, feel your way, deduce. But, in the final analysis, there's only one possible way to fit them together, even if you have to try several things to find it.

*So what you do when you edit is work that most movie-makers do in their shooting-scripts.*

In a sense, yes. But it's work that just isn't interesting if you do it on paper. Because if it's paper work you like, I don't see why you make movies. On this point, I'm in agreement with Franju: as soon as I've imagined a movie, I consider it made: I can more or less tell it; so why should I go ahead and shoot it? Oh, to do right by the public, I guess: Franju says it's "so the public has something to chew on." He says something like this: "When I'm done with my eight hundred pages, I really don't see what else I've got to do. So they want me to shoot it. Okay. I shoot it. But it's all so depressing, I have to get drunk first." There's just one way to avoid that: don't write scripts.

*So it's as if you shoot in the dark, but in complete freedom too?*

No, that isn't it. It's only in shooting that you find out what you've got to shoot. It's the same thing in painting: you put one color next to another. Because you make film with a camera, you can just as easily get rid of the paper. Unless you decide to do what McLaren does—and he's one of the greatest men working in film—and write your movies right on the stock.

*So when you shoot it's as if you collect a lot of stuff you have to sort later . . .*

No, it isn't. It's not just "a lot of stuff." If it's a "collection," it's a collection that always has a particular end in view, a definite aim. And it isn't just "any" movie: it's always a particular movie. You "collect" only the stuff that can meet your needs. It's almost the reverse for my next movie: the structure's all there; it's entirely organized. All I had for *La Chinoise* were the details, lots of details I had to find how to fit together. I've got the structure for *Week-end,* but not the details. It's sort of frightening: what if I don't find the right ones? What if I can't keep my promise—because, after all, for the money they give me, I promise to make them a movie. No, that's all wrong. You shouldn't think about work in terms of a debt or a duty—in the bad sense of the word; you should think about it in terms of some normal activity: leisure, life, and breathing evenly; the tempo has to be right.

*One of your characters says that Michel Foucault has confused words and things. Do you share his opinion?*

Oh God, the Reverend Doctor Foucault! The first thing I did was read the first chapter in his latest book, the analysis of Velasquez' *las Meninas.* I skipped through the rest of it; I picked up a little here and there—you know I can't read. Some time later I was at Nanterre, looking for locations. In talking to students and professors there, I began to appreciate the real inroads the book had been making in the academic establishment. So I went back to it again, with this in mind. It began to look really debatable. The current vogue for the "humanities" in the daily press seems very suspicious. I heard that Gorse had been thinking about making Foucault head of the Radio-Television. I have to admit I preferred Joanovici.

*In this connection, how do you view the use of linguistics in the study of film?*

As a matter of fact, I was just talking about it with Pasolini, at Venice. I had to talk to him because, as I've told you, I can't read, or at least not the stuff men like him have been writing about film. I just don't see the point. If it interests him, I mean Pasolini, to talk about "prose film" and "poetic film," okay. But if it's somebody else, well . . . If I read the text on film and death *Cahiers* published in French, I read it because he's a poet and it talks about death; so, it's got to be beautiful. It's beautiful like Foucault's text on Velasquez. But I don't see the *necessity.* Something else might be just as

true. If I'm not so fond of Foucault, it's because he's always saying, "During this period, people thought 'A,B,C'; but, after such and such a precise date, it was thought, rather, that '1,2,3'." Fine but can you really be so sure? That's precisely why we're trying to make movies so that future Foucaults won't be able to make such assertions with quite such assurance. Sartre can't escape this reproach, either.

*And what did Pasolini say?*

That I was a stupid ass. Bertolucci agreed, in the sense that I'm too much of a moralist. But . . . Well, I'm still not convinced. It means you're going to wind up in the kind of "filmology" they used to teach at the Sorbonne, or even something much worse. Because, when you get right down to it, Sam Spiegel's in complete accord with all this stuff about "prose film" and "poetic film." Though he'd say that "*he*'s going to make 'prose film': 'poetic film' bores the public shitless." It's the same old thing all over again: people borrow and then distort some interesting ideas; Hitler revisiting Nietzsche . . . I view linguistics the way Leclerc might —or, even worse, Poujade. But I still have to agree with Moullet. At Pesaro he talked commonsense . . .

*But it's precisely a man like Levi-Strauss who refuses to make random use of linguistic terminology. He uses it only with the greatest caution.*

I agree. But when I see him use Wyler as an example when he talks about film, it makes me unhappy. I tell myself that if he, as an ethnologist, prefers the Wyler tribe, I much prefer the Murnau tribe. Here's another example: Jean-Louis Baudry has published an article in *Les Lettres Françaises*. As I was reading it, I kept saying, "This is really good writing! Here's a guy who ought to write something on *Persona*. He'd do a really good job." This thing is, the article I was reading was supposed to be an article on *Persona*. Metz, too; he's a peculiar case. He's the easiest to like of them all: because he actually goes to movies; he really likes movies. But I can't understand what he wants to do. He begins with film, all right. But then he goes off on a tangent. He comes back to film from time to time; he'll poke around in it for a bit. But then he's off again on another track. What bothers me is that he seems not to have noticed; it's unconscious. If it were a question of research in which film were only a tool, I'd see no objection. But if it's film that's supposed to be the object of the research, then I don't understand. It's not that there's contradiction in what he's doing; it's more like some real antagonism.

*But Metz just isn't interested in what interests us.*

All right. But there's still some common ground it's all got to be based on. The way it looks to me, they leave this common ground much too often. I can understand, in some general sense, the intuitions Pasolini begins with; but I don't see the need for the logical development that follows. If he thinks a shot in a movie of Olmi's is "prosaic" and a shot in a movie of Bertolucci's "poetic," all right. But, objectively, he could say just the opposite. Their tactics resemble Cournot's when he rejects one whole kind of film because, in his view, it just "isn't film"; so, he's forced to reject Ford; but only because he can't tell Ford from Delannoy! That's not in the least enlightening. This all brings to mind Barthes' recent book, the book on fashion. It's impossible to read, for one simple reason: Barthes *reads* things he ought to be seeing and feeling instead: it's something you *wear*, so it's got to be something you *live*. I don't think he's really interested in fashion: it isn't fashion as such that attracts him; it's some kind of dead language that he can decode. You had the same kind of thing at Pesaro. Barthes scolded Moullet the way a father scolds his kids. But we're the sons of a *filmic* language; there's nothing in the Nazism of linguistics we have any use for. Notice: we always come back to how hard it is for us all to be talking about "the same thing." The people who publish *Tel Quel* seem capable of making some really basic discoveries in science and literature. But as soon as it's film, something seems to elude them. Men who know film really well talk about it in quite different terms—whether it's you on *Cahiers* or Rivette and I when we're talking about the movies that have just come out or the people on *Positif* when they're talking about Jerry Lewis or Cournot when he says of Lelouch that "it isn't a question of 'feeling,' but it isn't a question of 'thinking', either." This reminds me again of the talk I had with Sollers. He reproached me for talking "in examples." "He said I kept saying "it's the same thing as" or it's like." But I don't talk "in examples." I talk in shots, like a movie-maker. So I just had no way to get him to understand me. I'd have had to make a movie we could have talked about afterwards. What it signifies on the screen for him is maybe what "signifies it" for me. There's got to be something right there that we've got to clear up; it's probably pretty simple, too. It's somewhat similar with painting: if Elie Faure moves us, it's because he talks about a painting as if he were talking about a novel. Somebody should finally get around to translating the twenty volumes of Eisen-

stein that nobody's read: he'll have dealt with it all in very different terms. He began with technique, too, the very simplest problems, so he could get on to the hardest. He goes from the travelling to Nô theater so that he can get back to explaining the Odessa Steps. The place to look for an ideology is in a technique. The way Regis Debray finds the revolution in Latin America in the guerrilla. The only thing is, the ideology of film has so decayed, it's so rotten that it's harder here to make a revolution than anywhere else. Film is one of the things that exists in purely practical terms. You'll find that here, too, the economic forces at work have laid down an ideology of their own that has, little by little, eliminated all the rest. The others are beginning to re-emerge, right now; some of the best are among them. In this connection, a lot of the stuff Noel Burch has written is very interesting. What he has to say about *raccords* is strictly practical. You have a feeling they're the view of a man who's done it himself, who's thought about what is involved in doing it—a man who has come to certain conclusions on the basis of his physical handling of film. Well, all you'd need to get it all down in a orderly list is some serious, well-organized team-effort. The best work a new nation could do to get started is something along those lines. All they've got to do is buy some good movies, start a film library, and study movies. They can make them later. They can learn while they're waiting. Before getting yourself involved with what the linguists call a "scientific" analysis of film, you'd do better to list the scientific *facts* of film. Nobody's done it. Though it still could be done: the projections at the Grand Café weren't that long ago; Niepce's first plates are still at Chalon. But if you wait too long, you won't be able to do it. Movies disintegrate. Even books fall apart. Movies fall apart a lot faster. In two hundred years you won't be able to find a single one of our movies. There'll be a few bits and pieces—of bad movies as well as the good: the laws to protect the good movies still won't have been made. So, the art we're working in is really short-lived. When I started to make movies, I thought film something that lasts forever. Now I think it something really short-lived.

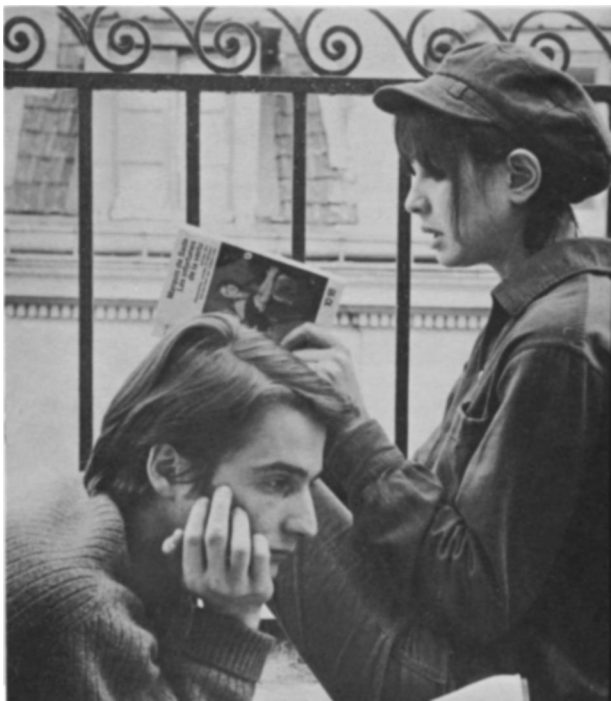
*So the incompatibility in the language of the writers and movie-makers is just as severe as it is for movie-makers and the strikers at Rhodiaceta—though the writers have already had a good deal to say about film.*

Well, if they have, it's often only because movies sometimes refer to literary forms or simply just cite literary texts.

*Wiazemsky and Léaud:* La Chinoise.

*Do you think it's your use of collages that leads Aragon to write about you?*

Maybe it's the digressions that have attracted him: the fact that there's someone who uses them as digressions, besides as a structural device. In any event, Aragon is a poet, which means that anything he has to say is beautiful. If you don't talk about films in poetic terms, then you've got to be talking about it in scientific terms. We haven't reached that point yet. Notice this one simple fact: you go to a theater to see a movie; you never ask *why;* though there is simply no reason why movies should be shown in *theaters.* This in itself is revealing. Of course, they way things are, you've got to have theaters. But they shouldn't be more than something like a deconsecrated church or a track field: you should hold onto them; people will go a theater to see an occasional movie; there'll be a day when they'll want to see a movie on a big screen; or like the way an athlete will go out to train by himself in the middle of the week; he wants to be far from the frenzy, the racket, the drugs of the weekend meets. Ordinarily, you should be able to see movies at home, on a television set or a wall. It's feasible, but nobody's doing anything about it. For a long time, now, the factories ought to have had screening-rooms; someone should have investigated what increasing the size of TV screens involves, practically. Nobody has. They're all scared.



*Do you think there is a connection between the ways film is distributed and exhibited—theaters, chains, and so on—and its aesthetics?*

If these conditions were to change, everything else would change, too. A movie is subject today to an unbelievable number of really arbitrary rules. A movie is supposed to last an hour and a half. A movie is supposed to tell a story. All right. A movie tells a story. We all agree. The only thing is, we don't agree on what a "story" is, what it's "supposed" to be. You see, today, that the silents had immeasurably more freedom than the talkies—or, at any rate, what they turned the talkies into. Take as unimaginative a director as Pabst: he gives you a feeling that he's playing a grand. A movie-maker today who has no more than Pabst's talent, if he analyzes his own case correctly, has to feel that he's playing not much more than a toy. It's all a state of mind. For example, when someone's building a theater, he never takes the trouble to ask the advice of a cameraman or a director. And nobody's ever going to ask advice of a viewer. So, as a result, the three most interested parties never have a chance to make their desires known. It's true they build houses this way too. But the guys who design theaters are always the worst they can find. And they're never the ones who go to see movies.

*What could we do, at short range, to change it?*

The best we can do is attack the technical problems, everything that results from the economic forces at work in film: production, processing, projection . . . The young men who are just getting their start in film don't have to know everything about it. They can get along very well without knowing anything about Lumière or Eisenstein. They'll run into them sooner or later themselves. The way it isn't until he was thirty that Picasso got onto African art. And if he hadn't just then, he'd have painted *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* a few years later. He'd have done something else in the meantime. The young men have all the luck: they can always start over. People have been doing a lot they can benefit from, even if it's been fairly haphazard, disorganized. They need to make a long list, get everything on it, the little things as well as the most important: everything involved in film that *just won't do*. Everything: from theater-seats—the worst are in the art-houses—to editing-tables. I bought an editing-table recently. It didn't take me long to discover that nobody had asked the right questions. They're manufactured by men who've never done any editing. I'm holding onto it. I'm hoping I'll get the money to have it rebuilt, so that it will work right.

*In what sense has it been badly conceived?*

The way they're manufactured is the result of a particular aesthetics. They've been conceived as little projectors. That's fine for men who think editing a few pencilled notes: the director shows up Monday morning; he tells his cutter where to make cuts and splices; she takes the footage off the editor and does the work she's been told to do at another table. Or, if it's someone like Grangier or Decoin she works for—they just can't be bothered, she'll do the whole thing herself. But in any case, the real editing gets done somewhere else, not at the editing-table itself. But, there *are* movie-makers —Eisenstein's the first, Resnais is the second, I'm the third—who do their editing, each in his own way, of course, right at the editing-table, *with* the image and *against* the sound. The problems you have with handling the film are completely different. I keep winding the film back and forth. I make splices without ever taking the reels off. And if the table hasn't been manufactured with work of this sort in mind, it's not easy to do it. Again, it comes down to a simple economic gimmick that all by itself bears out a whole ideology. If that's how they manufacture editing-tables, it's because three-fourths of the people editing film edit this way. Nobody's ever told the manufacturers to do it differently. I use editing as an example, but the same kinds of thing turn up everywhere else. If you're trying to make revolutionary movies on a reactionary editing-table, you're going to run into trouble. That's what I told Pasolini: his linguistics is a shiny, new, *reactionary* editing-table. Besides, the more movies I make, the more I realize just how precarious a thing a movie is: how hard it is just to get it made, and then how hard it is to get it shown—in other words, just how distorted the whole thing is. If problems like these were ever solved—though I don't think they'll ever be solved in the West—then we just might discover some new ways of working—ways to make film that's really new. Things as new as the discoveries made in the very first years of film. Everything we're using now was invented in the first ten or twenty years of the silents. Technique was moving right in step with production and distribution, then. Right now, we've lost sight of the ways they're connected. Everything goes its own way—if you think it's going anywhere at all. The only thing I'd want to write for *Cahiers* now—it would take time to do it; I'm always running into something else to say on the subject—would be something about the ways to get film off to a complete new start. I'd discuss it in terms of the problems a young African would have to face.

I'd tell him, "All right, your nation has just won its freedom. Now that you're free to have a film of your own, you and your comrades have been asked to get it started. Okay. Get Jacquin and Tenoudji out of your theaters."—You know, even in Guinea, the most revolutionary of the new nations, the theaters all still belong to Comacico. And, though the Algerians have nationalized their film-industry, they've handed it right back to the distributors, which means that in no time at all it'll be back in private hands again; it'll be just the way it was before. "You've decided to have a film of your own, to make film of your own. This means that you're not going to import any more trash like *La Marquise des Anges.* Book Rouch's movies, or movies made by some young African he's trained—anything that interests *you.* If you work for De Laurentiis, don't go to him. Make him build studios for you here. In other words, since you have it all still to do, turn it to your advantage. Make a thorough investigation of everything that's involved in the production and distribution of movies. Build or rebuild your theaters—or what might replace them in the eyes and the hearts of your militant countrymen." Things like that. It's impossible to list the mistakes that have to be corrected. You'd have a list as long as the lists in Rabelais or in Melville. But you'd have to try, if you really wanted to redefine film. To get back to Algeria: They should use the money they've made in co-production deals to build processing plants of their own, not in financing (aside from a couple of things like *Le Vent des Aurès*) Jacquin's movies: I know it's hard to believe, but half the money in *Le Soleil Noir* is the Algerians'. They haven't even got their own processing plants: they send their newsreels to France or Italy, on Air France or Alitalia; they don't trust Air Algeria.

*It's sometimes only too obvious that movie-makers in the new nations imitate the very worst in our film when they're making their own first shorts.*

Of course it's also an individual, a mental problem. But if you want to get off to a start, you've got to base yourself on a non-mental thing—on technique. The new mentality can develop out of it. Obviously, things are hard, everywhere. The director of the Algerian Film Center is convinced he's better off having Jacquin or Tenoudji distribute his movies. That's the tragedy of the Third World: it's always in a corner, always in a jam for money. Everyone's in league against it, the way they've all ganged up against the unemployed. The Algerians produce Italian movies instead of movies by young Algerians. They did give them some film, but the kids used it to make irresponsible junk. They'd do better, in such a case, to put a stop to their production for a time and give the kids the opportunity and the time to do a little homework, research, and to see as many good movies as possible. The crisis will take care of itself. Or they could put them to work in television or in the processing plants and the sound studios. It would be all that more practical because no director, anywhere, really knows what goes on in an editing-room or a film lab. Everybody in film ought to get some training in the sector closest to his own. Cameramen, for example. They learn a little in school, but then they never go on to get some training in the film labs. As a result, the cameraman and the lab are never able to reach an understanding. Let's say you shoot a movie with a man who's a real master of light. Let's say he's as familiar with Renoirs as with Rembrandts. Fine. The print will be timed by a man who hasn't the faintest idea what lighting is. No more Renoir's than Rembrandt's. So, as a result, the print will be too dark, or too light, but in any case *flat.* Simply because the lab technician neither knows what he can nor what he should do. Or just the opposite. I just remembered that Matras, when he was in Madrid, spent his time sending his wife Mexichrome postcards instead of looking at pictures in the Prado. You run into the same thing at every level in film. Nobody's really been educated. It's a question of education. Right here in France, there's all you'd need to make really good movies. But the men who are supposed to be directing the work are lazy bums or highway-robbers. They employ honest men, but they give them no training and no responsibilities. The people who do the actual work think they're doing it right. But, the thing is, they're imprisoned in a whole system of economic and aesthetic preconceptions. What you have to do, then, is explain it to them. For example, you can explain to a projectionist that there just isn't any point in closing and opening the curtains: film *isn't* theater . . . And if projectionists are so badly paid, it's because no one thinks the work they do is work of any real importance. There's as little respect for them as there is for the grips or the sound-men. A grip knows a good deal. He can, often, talk much better sense about film than his director. But he "doesn't count." And as for the men who manage the sound, they're paid even worse than the men who make the image. Why? It's a result, once again, of a whole ideology. So they say, "Why should we pay the sound-man as much as we pay the director of photography? Film is the art of the image!" That's all wrong. But

the sound-man continues to get half what the cameraman gets—and, what's worse, to think it fair. If we start talking about distribution, we run right into another problem: the distributors. Film got off to a start without them. All it took was a cameraman and a director. What did Lumière do? He took his movies right to the guy who ran the Grand Café. All right. But since then, distribution has become a trade. The middlemen—the distributors—are lazy. They don't make a move. But they still keep on saying (and it's as much for themselves as it is for us), "You can't do without us. It's all got to go through us." But the only reason that there are "distributors" at all is that everyone else is too lazy. The exhibitors won't move an inch to find the product to sell. The producers won't move an inch to take it to them. As soon as that happens, they *need* the third man—who robs them blind in the end . . .

You want to: make different movies. But to be able to make them, you have to work with people you despise and dislike, instead of with people you like and admire. The industry's rotten to the core: from the point where the film is processed to the point it must reach—if it ever gets there—to reach a public. From time to time, of course, there's a hint things are beginning to move. The Hyeres festival, for example, isn't ideal, but it's still a lot better than Cannes; and Montreal's better than Venice. You've got to keep moving ahead. Film in Canada is an interesting case. The National Film Board is a real movie factory. They're making more movies than Hollywood now. A beautiful set-up. But what happens? Nothing. There's nothing to see. Their movies never get shown. One of the first things Daniel Johnson should do is nationalize the theaters in Quebec. In Canada, too, film is subject to the imperialism that prevails everywhere else. Those of us who keep trying to make movies differently have got to organize a fifth column, attempt to destroy the whole system.

*But some film is already being made outside the system . . .*

Yes, of course. Bertolucci isn't making American movies. Neither is Resnais, or Straub, or Rossellini, Neither is Jerry Lewis. But even this different film, good or bad, is no more than 1/10000 or 1/100000 of what's being made.

*But is there still a really "American" film?*

No, there isn't. There's a counterfeit that calls itself "American," but it's only a very poor copy of what it was once.

*Would you work for an American company again?*

Yes, I would. If that's what I'd have to do to make a movie. Or if it gave me a chance to make an expensive movie, like *Michael, Circus Dog*; I mean, a movie for which more money goes into the image than into the actors' pockets. In saying this, though, I don't compromise myself or my view of America and the imperialistic policies of its giant film companies. In the first place, there are Americans and Americans, good ones and bad ones. In the second place, there, too, they need a fifth column. You might get it into their heads that they could make different films too. You might even get them to *want* to. If the movie you made were a success, you might, little by little, get them to change their system themselves. It would be hard. You keep running into their imperialism at every level of production and distribution. But you've got to hold onto the hope. People *can* change. Then again, something is on the move in America right now. You can see it among the blacks and in the opposition to the war in Vietnam. And as for film, the universities are beginning to distribute movies; they're turning into real chains. New companies are being formed. I sold *La Chinoise* to Leacock's. Anyway, the world's a little bit larger than America. But if I put the Americans and the Russians together into the same bag, it's because their systems are almost identical. They both treat their young movie-makers like naughty children. Every one of the Americans we really admire got his start in film at an early age. They're old now, and there's nobody there to take over. When Hawks got his start, he was Goldman's age now. Goldman's all by himself. Obviously, there are young men still who do get into Hollywood, but none of them have anything like Hawks's ideas. They've gotten what training they have in structures that are on their decline; they haven't had the guts to destroy them. It isn't in freedom that they come to film; though it isn't in any real poverty, either, aesthetic or otherwise. They are neither explorers nor poets. But the men who made Hollywood were poets—even gangsters, who took it by force to dictate their poetic law. The most courageous man in Hollywood today, the only man who's managed to get out from under it, is Jerry Lewis. He's the only one in Hollywood who's doing something different, who remains outside its categories, its norms, its principles. Hitchcock did for a long time. But Lewis is the only man who's making courageous movies right now—and I think he's aware of it. He can get away with it because of his personal talent. But who else can? Nicholas Ray is typical of the point American film has now reached. The case of the New York School isn't encouraging, either. They're already buried. And if it's "underground" film they want to make, it's got to mean

they'd like to be buried deeper. I don't see why. The Russians haven't helped Hanoi bomb New York. Why do they want to live underground? There are going to be more great American movie-makers. They've already got Goldman, Clarke, Cassavetes. We'll just have to wait, help them, even push them. I was talking about the universities. Film's being made in the universities—or, at least, they're beginning to; there didn't use to be any film there. That's important. Film's got to go everywhere. We should list the places it hasn't been yet and then say that that's where it's got to go. If it's not in the factories, it's got to get into the factories. If it's not in the universities, we've got to get it into the universities. If it's not in the brothels, it's got to get into the brothels. Film has to get away from where it is now and go where it hasn't been yet. . . .

Where and when you get your start has a lot to do with how you get started. No one in France had been taking film seriously. Then people turned up who were saying you *had* to, that it deserved some serious thinking. For the same reasons, we had to say, too, that there is such a thing as a "work." I don't think now that there is. That's a point you reach if you push your thinking on art just a little bit further. There is no such thing as a "work," even if there is something that's kept in cans or printed on paper, not in the way that there are such things as beings or objects. But, at the time, that was the thing we had to do *first*: force it on people that there was "work," even if you have to tell them now that they've got to go a little bit further in their thinking. In the same way, I'll say too that there is no such thing as an "author." But to get people to understand in what sense you can say that, you have to tell them over and over again, first, that there's such a thing as an "author." Because their reasons for thinking there weren't weren't the right ones. It's a question of tactics. . . .

*Aren't you increasingly influenced by theater?*

You've got to do theater in film, I think—mix things up a little. Mix it all up. Especially the festivals. I think it's absurd that they don't hold the music and theater festival at the same time as the film festival at Venice. They should have music one night, film the next . . . You remember how it was at Pesaro: after you'd seen a movie you could go and hear jazz; you had a really good time.

*But when you say that, you've begun to attack one of the public's biggest taboos—against the mixing of genres. You begin to realize the damage done some thirty or forty years ago when the "theoreticians" would decree that something "was* theater, *not film."*

There are a lot of movie-makers right now who'd like to talk about theater: there's Rivette and *L'Amour Fou*; Bertolucci and others. *Persona, Blow-Up, Belle de Jour* are part of it, too. And *Shakespeare Wallah*; that's a beautiful movie. I suppose it means that people who've gotten the feeling they're trapped by their means of expression want to get out of it. I'm not talking about Bergman now; he's been doing theater all his life; he's done more theater than he's made movies. For a long time, now, I've been wanting to make a didactic movie on theater, about *Pour Lucrèce*. At the beginning you'd see the girl who'd act the role get out of a cab; she'd be going to a rehearsal; no, not a rehearsal; she'd be going in for an audition. Then you'd get into the play. You'd see an audition, a rehearsal, a scene in performance. From time to time, there'd be some critique of the play itself. Some scenes would be done two or three times: the actors would make mistakes or the director would want to get something just right. You could have the same scene done by several actors: Moreau, Bardot, Karina could each act the same role. And the director could review the seven or eight great theories of theater with the actors: Aristotle, the three unities, the *Preface de Cromwell, The Birth of Tragedy,* Brecht and Stanislavsky—but they'd be doing it in the play, still. At the end, the girl you saw coming in at the start would die: because Lucrece dies; you wouldn't know where the fiction stopped, then. A movie like this would aim to teach an audience what theater is. Readings are just fantastic! When you get right down to it, the most fantastic thing you could film is people reading. I don't see why no one's done it. Film someone who's simply reading . . . The movie you'd make would be a lot more interesting than most of them are. Why couldn't film mean filming people reading really fine books? Why shouldn't you see something like that on TV, especially now that people don't read much? And people who can tell good stories, make them up—like Polanski, Giono, Doniol. They could make up stories right in front of a camera. People would listen to them. If somebody's telling a really good story, you can listen for hours. Film would be going back to the traditions and role of the Oriental storyteller. We lost out on a lot when we stopped being interested in storytellers. But the ideology that tells us what a spectacle "is" is so firmly established that the people who'd been spellbound by the story you'd been telling them at the Gaumont-Palace would come storming out in a rage; they'd say you'd tried to take them for fools; they'd say they'd been robbed.

*But you don't question spectacle itself . . .*

No, I don't. If you look at something, it's a spectacle, even if it's just a wall. I've always wanted to make a movie about a wall. If you really look at a wall, you wind up seeing things in it.

*One gets the impression that there's an intention to destroy the image itself at work in your sketch* Anticipation, *to destroy it as the support for "realism."*

It annoyed me that it was much too easy to identify the actors. When I started shooting it, I still hadn't thought of anything like it. It was only later that it occurred to me to give the movie—you could call it a "biological" look—like plasma in motion. But plasma that speaks.

*But the minute you do that, you attack an idea that's almost sacred: the idea that an image in film is sharp, clean, "solid"...*

But an image is always an image, as soon as it's projected. So I haven't destroyed a thing. Or else, one idea of the image and what it's supposed to be. I never thought of it as destruction . . . What I wanted was to get *inside* the image, because most movies are made *outside* the image. What is an image? It's a reflection. What kind of thickness does a reflection on a pane of glass have? In most film, you're kept on the outside, outside the image. I wanted to see the back of the image, what it looked like from behind, as if you were in back of the screen, not in front of it. *Inside* the image. The way some paintings give you the feeling you're inside them. Or give you the feeling you can't understand them as long as you stay outside them. *Red Desert* gave me the feeling the colors were inside the camera, not out there in front of it. The colors are all in front of the camera in *Le Mépris.* You're convinced it's the camera that makes up *Red Desert.* In *Le Mépris,* there is the camera, on the one hand, the objects on the other, outside it. I don't think I'd know how to make up a movie like his. Except that I'm beginning to want to. You can see my wanting to in *Made in USA.* That's why people haven't understood it. The people who've seen it think it's supposed to be "representational," but it's not. I must have put something over on them, because they kept trying to follow it "representationally": they kept trying to understand what was happening. They did keep up with it, quite well. But they didn't know they had: they kept thinking they hadn't understood a thing. It really impressed me that Demy was so fond of *Made in USA.* I'd always thought it a movie "in song"; *La Chinoise* is a movie "in talk." The movie *Made in USA* resembles the most is *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg.* The actors don't sing, but the movie does.

*Now that you bring up resemblance, is there a connection between* Persona *and your last few movies?*

No, I don't think so. And anyway, I don't think Bergman likes my movies too well. I don't think he's taken anything from me—or from anyone else, for that matter. Anyway, after *In a Glass, Darkly, Winter Light,* and *The Silence,* he could hardly have made anything but *Persona.*

Persona *is much more daring stylistically than the preceding movies. The way the narration is "doubled," for one thing...*

No, I think the shot you're talking about is, aesthetically, just a continuation or a development of the long shot in *Winter Light* in which Ingrid Thulin confesses. But it's much more striking in *Persona,* of course; it's close to formal aggression. It's so striking as a formal device that as soon as you see it you tell yourself "it's so beautiful; I've *got* to use it in a movie myself." I got the first shot for my next movie when I was seeing *Persona* again. I told myself that what I needed was a fixed-frame shot of people talking about their genitals. But in another sense, it reminds me of the opening shot in *Vivre sa Vie*: I stayed behind the couple during the whole shot, but I could have gone round in front. What he's doing is something like what the interviews are in my movies; it's very different in Bergman, but, in the final analysis, it always comes down to the desire to represent a dialogue. And it has something to do with Beckett, too. At one time I'd wanted to film *Oh! les Beaux Jours.* I never did—they wanted to use Madeleine Renaud; I wanted to use young actors. I'd have liked to—I had a text, so all I'd have had to do is film it. I'd have done it all in one continuous travelling. We'd have started it as far back as we had to to get the last line, at the end of an hour and a half, in a close-up. It would have meant just some grade-school arithmetic.

*How do you interpret what in* Persona *keeps reminding you it's a movie you're watching?*

I didn't understand *Persona.* Not a thing. Oh, I did watch it, carefully. This is the way it looked to me: Bibi Andersson is the one who's ill; it's the other girl who's the nurse. When you get down to it, I guess I always rely on the "realism." So, when the husband thinks he recognizes his wife, *I* think she's his wife: he's recognized her. If you didn't rely on realism, you'd never be able to do anything. If you were on the street, you wouldn't dare to get into a cab—if you'd even risked going out, that is. But I believe in it all. You can't divide it up into two; you can't separate the "reality" from the "dream"; it's all one. *Belle de Jour*'s really great.

There are moments when it's just like *Persona.* You say, all right, beginning now I'm going to follow it carefully, so I'll know just exactly where we are; then, all of a sudden, you have to say, damn it! we're already there: you see you're already in it. It's as if you decided you wouldn't go to sleep so that you wouldn't be asleep when you went to sleep. That's the problem these two movies pose. For a long time now, Bergman's been at a point where it's the camera that makes the movie, eliminating everything that can't become part of the image. That ought to be axiomatic for all editing, and not notions like "the pieces have to be put together in just the right order," or "there are rules that must be observed." You ought, instead, to say that you've got to eliminate everything you can *say.* Even if you have later to turn it all inside out and say that all you can keep is what is *said.* That's what Straub, for example, does. In *La Chinoise,* it's only what's said that I keep. But the result is completely different from Straub's, because it isn't the same thing that's said. Buñuel eliminates everything that is said, since even what's said is there to be seen, too. There's a fantastic freedom in his movie. You get a feeling that Buñuel can "play" film the way Bach must have played the organ at the end of his life.

*How do you view the notion of the "door-to-door theater" Léaud picks up on at the end of* La Chinoise?

I'm afraid it hasn't been understood. I suppose I didn't make it clear enough. It's not *he* who's in question; it isn't an individualistic solution. The way I'd been thinking about it, I'd have had to show him together with others. One would have been playing a guitar; one would have been singing or drawing on the sidewalk—the kinds of things hippies do in front of cafés. But this time they'd be communists doing them. They'd have been doing real work: they'd be having to choose their text for the given situation, switching from Racine to Sophocles or something else. I really ought to have had more than one doing it. There'd have been times when they wouldn't know what to say; they'd have to talk it over, to decide which was the right response. They might even start talking to the people watching them, engage in *real* dialogue. Instead of acting theatrical texts, they could have recited some Plato. There shouldn't be any restrictions. It's all theater; it's all film; it's all science and literature. If you'd mix things up a bit, we'd all be a lot better off. For example, the lectures in the universities could be given by actors; the professors speak like they've got mush in their mouths, anyway. And you could profit from that to learn how to speak a text, too, how to read it. It's not just the conclusion you reach when you come to the end of Descartes' sixth *Meditation* that counts, or having to be able to talk about his system on an exam, but the time it takes to reach its conclusion, the distance you have to go—in other words, the experience lived in learning about Descartes. I'm not saying this is the only thing that needs to be done; but, after all, when thousands of things need to be changed, I think you'd do well to try changing just one or two, instead of saying right off, once and for all, that it's good or it's bad.

*Do actors, like movie-makers or technicians, need more study? Do they need more training?*

Training, yes. The kind the American actors used to get. If I were giving a course for actors, I'd give them physical or intellectual exercises to do, nothing else. I'd tell them, "now you going to some gymnastics" or "you're going to listen to this record for the next hour." Actors have so many prejudices in physical and intellectual matters. For example, when we were making *Deux ou Trois Choses,* Marina Vlady came up to me one day and said, "What should I be doing? You never tell me." So I told her —she lives in Montfort-L'Amaury—I told her to walk to wherever we'd been shooting, instead of taking a taxi. "If you really want to act well, that's the best thing you can do about it." She thought I was putting her on, so she didn't do it. I think I still hold it against her; just a little bit. She might have done it if I'd explained it all. But she'd only have done it once, and then the next day she'd be expecting me to come up with something else. So it just wasn't worth explaining it. I wanted her just to *think* what she had to say. That's all. Thinking doesn't have to mean intellectualizing. If she was supposed to put a cup down on a table, I wanted her to think an image of a cup and an image of a table. Everything that's involved in just walking to the location every day would have put her in shape to move and speak the way that would have been right for what I was trying to do. What I asked her to do was a lot more important than she thought, because to get to the point where you can think, you've got to do a few simple things just to get yourself into shape. Everyone knows that a dancer can't dance unless he trains himself for it every day, does his exercises. But the idea that actors need "exercise" too was already on the decline among the actors in theater. Film actors haven't the slightest idea of what kind of exercises they ought to be doing. They tell themselves that since they don't have to kick up their legs there's just no point in exercise. Before shooting started on *La Chinoise,* I asked Jean-Pierre Léaud to eat. I gave him the money—I told him he couldn't spend it

over at the Cinémathèque—just so he'd be eating a meal, in peace and quiet, ninety minutes a day every day, not reading the paper, not doing anything but eating an ordinary meal in an ordinary restaurant. That's what he needed to do for *La Chinoise*. Exercises like these are a little like a reverse yoga. It's the kind of thing the surrealists used to call "practical exercise." They are needed in every activity, on every occasion. Actors don't seem to remember they're being paid for eight hours of work a day. Just like factory workers. The thing is, as soon as the worker reaches the factory he *works*—a full eight-hour day; he can't cheat. Actors can and they do—like a lot of others in the white-collar professions. An actor doesn't work an eight-hour day—if only because you can't shoot eight hours straight. All I ask is that he do more work between the takes and less during them. Because, if he's done his work before the take, I can be sure it'll be good. It doesn't do any good if he has to do his work during the take. The trouble is that it's the hardest thing there is to get an actor to do. But even so, when we were making *La Chinoise* they got along pretty well. They worked well as a group; together they did just the right kinds of things to keep them in pretty good shape for shooting. It went a lot smoother than *Masculin-Féminin*. Obviously, now, everything I've been saying applies to professional actors as well. Neither the professionals nor the nonprofessionals are prepared to submit to the slightest training. Anna Karina's like all the rest on this point. I kept telling her, all I wanted her to do was, every day, read the editorial in the paper, *Le Figaro* or *L'Humanité*, aloud, calmly. She didn't understand either. Even though little things like this have a direct influence on one's acting. It's exactly the equivalent of walking for an athlete, scales for a pianist, limbering-up exercises for an acrobat. The big problem with actors in film is that they're often so very proud. So, they've got to be taught to be humble, the way the humble have to be taught to be proud. It's as Bresson says, "give and receive." And from this point of view, I see no difference between the professionals and the nonprofessionals. There are interesting people all over the place. But Bresson talks about actors the way the Russians talk about the Chinese. I kept telling him, "They've all got eyes, mouths, hearts . . ." And he'd keep saying, "No!" If I'd said, "Well . . . when Jouvet was still in his mother's belly . . ." he'd have said, "Oh well, you know . . . Predestination!"

*There's a much larger problem involved in these exercises you've prescribed: it's a problem of education. For example, the characters in* La Chinoise *have all emerged from the bourgeoisie, which has given them the education they've begun to question.*

The fact is, it all lies in the way they've gotten the knowledge they have. Their education is an education in class. The way they conduct themselves is determined by class; they conduct themselves like members of their class. That's all made very clear in the movie, anyway. On the subject of this "education in class" that prevails here in France, here's a thing I cut out of a paper the other day; I'm keeping it because I'd like to make a movie on Rousseau's *Emile*. Missoffe—he's our Minister of Youth, remember—is on record as saying—it's in his White Book—and I quote: "The schools must translate the structure of society into its programmes: it must organize (1) a long and highly intellectual training for children appointed in the main by their family origins to the highest posts in the direction and administration of society; (2) a shorter and simpler kind of instruction for the children of workers and peasants, whose entry into the labor-force, it would seem, requires no more than a limited training." No comment.

*Tell us something about your* Emile. *What will it be?*

A modern movie . . . The story of a boy who refuses to go to his high-school because the classes are always too full. He sets about teaching himself, on the outside. He observes people, goes to movies, listens to radio, looks at television. Education, just like film today, is an immense accumulation of techniques that need to be re-examined, corrected. Everything needs re-examination. What's going to happen to the son of a workman who decides he wants an education? Right at the start, he'll find himself in a jam for money. We always get back to the Third World's problems. The whole system of scholarships is really immoral. They are supposed to go to those who "deserve" them. All right, who "deserve" them? Because the schools are recruiting right now, just like the army, and the kid who doesn't answer the call just hasn't the right to pass his exam, those who "deserve" them turn out to be the ones who always come to class, which means, then, the ones who can always afford to come, who don't have to be working their way through school. Even if the ones who attend every class don't necessarily learn any more than the ones who miss more classes than not. Then again, no one knows what to do to give people the desire or the time to learn. Then again, the teachers are so poorly paid! I don't say it's simple. I'm just saying that there's much too much that's totally unacceptable, right from the start.

*Are you saying the problem has no solution?*

No! Because, all the same, it's nothing like it is in France in America, Russia, or even Albania. In the first place, they spend much more on education than we do. In France, the restrictions placed on funds are the result of deliberate policy. I refer you to Missoffe. And de Gaulle. He's just finished telling the Canadians that "they had a right to form elites of their own." There's the whole government mentality, right there. Notice: he was careful to choose his words. He didn't say, "You have a right to train more teachers, more researchers." No, he said, "elites of your own." The thing is, they already have an elite. Quebec doesn't need to be free to have an elite of its own.

*In eastern-bloc nations, it's much easier to get an education. But some kinds of training are still reserved for an elite. A thirty-year-old day-laborer can't ever hope to make movies. He'd have had to have been to film school.*

The work a day-laborer and an intellectual do are quantitatively but not qualitatively different. Ve've never been placed on an equal footing, which is why we can't say or do anything *together.* A worker . . . I have to repeat myself—a worker has nothing to teach me, nor I him. It ought to be just the opposite. There ought to be a lot I could learn from him and he from me, instead of its being me from my colleagues and he from his. That's why some people today—the Chinese, let's say, or, at any rate, some Chinese—want to change it. The hope of changing it isn't utopian if you're willing to reckon not on a few but on a few hundred years. Civilizations last a long time. How can we expect the new civilizations that began with Marxism just a hundred and fifty years ago to be accomplished all at once? It's going to take a thousand years, maybe two thousand.

*As a matter of fact, the world's last Cultural Revolution is just two thousand years old. It was the Christian revolution.*

It's only just starting to finish up. It's produced nothing but reactionaries. The industries of image are still its most trusted mercenaries.

[Translated by D. C. D.]

JAMES ROY MACBEAN

# Godard's Week-end, or the Self Critical Cinema of Cruelty

*Week-end,* in more ways than one, equals "dead-end:" not for Godard, and not for the cinema, but for a particular type of cinema—the cinema of spectacle—which is pushed to its limit. Future generations (if there are any) may even look back upon *Week-end* as the terminal point of a particular phase in the development—or, more literally, the disintegration of western civilization. The point seems clear: "civilization," as it exists in *Week-end,* is doomed to devour itself.

But *Week-end,* in spite of its searing insights and its sense of the general movement of history, offers a very selective view. Godard, in this film, concentrates almost exclusively on two of the most flamboyant aberrations of contemporary life—the bourgeois materialist in his most aggravated fever of accumulation and consumption; and his double, the antibourgeois, antimaterialist drop-out from society, whose only alternative to the horror of the bourgeoisie is more horror still. "This is a helluva film," remarks the male lead in *Week-end,* "the only people you meet in it are sick!" The remark is crucial to the understanding of the film, for clearly *Week-end* is the negative and destruc-

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*Life on the highway:* WEEK-END

tive side of the same social revolution which is depicted in a more positive and constructive side in Godard's previous film, *La Chinoise*. But *La Chinoise* only becomes positive and constructive by means of a dialectical process of trial and error and by a lucid acknowledgement of the negative and destructive tendencies which revolution contains within itself, but which are gradually overcome and transcended; whereas *Week-end* presents a view which seems so overwhelmingly negative and destructive that one can hardly come away from the film without a feeling of profound despair at the spectacle of man's inhumanity to man.

Still, on closer examination, it is not altogether true that everyone in the film is sick, but simply that the few relatively healthy exceptions (in the film or, for that matter, in society) are either not given much to say or do, or that when they do speak out or act they seem irrelevant and insignificant amidst the spectacular carnage all around us—and appear flat, dull, and uninteresting compared to the grotesque, Ubu-esque bourgeois characters and the bizarre freak-out types of the hippie guerilla-band. That the healthy and reasonable should appear flat, dull, and insignificant (again, both in the film and in society) is an integral part of the theme, for *Week-end* is, first and foremost, a spectacle which examines civilization's ritual of the spectacle.

## WEEK-END

One might call *Week-end* a primer on civilization in much the same way that Godard called *Les Carabiniers* a primer on war; moreover, Godard, in *Week-end,* takes up and develops many of the insights and ideas he introduced in *Les Carabiniers*—perhaps the most important being the linking of the passage from barbarism to civilization with the transition in the human psyche from concern with *things themselves* to concern with *images* of things. As an illustration of this transition, there comes a moment in *Week-end* when Corinne (Mireille Darc) takes a bath—a classic example of the voyeur-spectacle aspect of cinema; but Godard does not show us her breasts (just out of sight below the frame) but shows us instead the breasts of a woman in a Renaissance portrait hanging on the wall behind Corinne: thus we are twice-removed from direct physical experience: the movie image we are viewing is only a flickering shadow-play of light and darkness; and, secondly, even the breasts that are photographed are not the breasts of the real woman who, at least at the moment of being photographed, was physically present, but instead the flat, two-dimensional breasts on a painted canvas.

The real irony of this scene, however, is that within the ground-rules of our society's ritual of the spectacle, we have seen what we paid our money to see and we are satisfied. The image, no matter how far removed it may be from the real thing, has somehow become more important than the thing itself. In our modern civilization, we don't want sex, we want the spectacle of sex.

The bathtub sequence in *Week-end* is a subtle refinement of the memorable bathtub movie-sequence in *Les Carabiniers,* in which Michel-ange, who was not yet initiated into the ritual of the cinema (not yet civilized), responded naturally and directly to the sight of a nude woman taking a bath, and, unsatisfied with the mere image of the woman, wanted to touch her and to possess her physically—an impulse quite natural and healthy, and yet an impulse which, in our society's ritual of the spectacle, appears as a biological anachronism which produces only comic results: the unsuspecting Michel-ange

falls through the movie screen. One will recall, however, that Michel-ange, by the end of *Les Carabiniers,* has learned his lesson, he has been civilized through war—and can now take his place in our society's ritual of the spectacle and be content with images. Witness the famous sequence with the post-cards.

But in *Week-end,* the nature of the spectacle is intimately related to the phenomenon of language: the first "image" may have been a word, and perhaps the ultimate refinement in the passage from the thing itself to an image of the thing is the "spectacle" of the spoken word. Corinne's remarkable description, at the beginning of the film, of a three-way sex orgy, provides a perfect illustration of the magnificent spectacle that is the word. Corinne herself, while she describes what took place, is clad only in bra and pants and she sits on the edge of a table in front of a window. Now, normally, the opportunity to take a good, long look at one of France's leading sex-kittens déshabillée might very well qualify as a spectacle-of-sex *par excellence.* But Godard plays it down, photographing the scene in a soft half-light which utilizes only the natural daylight filtered through the yellow curtains which are pulled closed over the window. Thus, with the only light source in back of her, Corinne is photographed in half shadow which does not reveal the contours and proportions of her body. If this scene is to be a spectacle of sex, as it assuredly is, then the spectacle has got to come from something other than the visual image. And, indeed, it does: the spectacle, in this scene, is the word.

It is interesting to compare Corinne's description of her sexual activities in *Week-end* with the sex anecdote related without flashback in Bergman's *Persona,* which inspired Godard to conceive a similar anecdote (two females and one male, with ambiguous and constantly shifting relationships among the three) and letting the words tell the story. Moreover, Godard clearly intends the word to be more stimulating, more exciting, more capable of arousing the sexual appetite of the audience than the image. It is important to note, however, that Godard (mistakenly perhaps) does not let the words and

*Mireille Darc and Jean Yanne:* WEEK-END

their incantatory powers work alone, but chooses instead to supplement the words with intermittent passages of string music of a suggestive nature, always building in intensity, then waning, then building again. It is "movie-music" of the kind often used to accompany (or to substitute for) torrid sex-scenes; and its use here by Godard, although it still calls attention to the blatant manipulation that invariably goes into an audience's response to sex on the screen, also erodes somewhat the power of the words, which, if left alone, might have done the job by themselves. Still, the use of the music is so obviously contrived that it calls forth on the audience's part a very healthy critical awareness of how each individual element works, and makes it clear that from then on if you are the slightest bit aroused by the scene, it is due to the power of the word. Finally, the pre-eminence of the word as an instrument of eroticism is emphasized again and again in Corinne's account, not just of what was done at the orgy, but also of what was said.

She recounts, for example, that when feeling each other in the car before the orgy began, she and a man named Paul (whom we never meet) kept telling each other that what they were doing was "vulgar and dirty" as a means of getting each other aroused. Then, during the orgy itself, as we learn from Corinne's account, much of the excitement was generated by one person's

describing in detail to a second person a part of the anatomy of the third person. Moreover, when Corinne is asked what she was doing at a particular moment in the orgy, she explains that her rôle was to describe in words exactly how everything felt—"in order to excite them." In the final analysis, then, in spite of the obvious preoccupation with feces of the orgy's climax (one woman squatting nude on top of the refrigerator with her *derrière* in a bowl of milk while the man slowly shoved an egg between the *fesses* of the other woman until the egg broke and oozed out), this entire sequence, instead of being called "ANAL-YSE," might more accurately have been called "ORAL-YSE."

Let us consider now, however, the very different form of sexual behavior practised by the hippie band in the latter part of the film. For the hippies, too, sex is a ritual; not as for the bourgeoisie, a ritual of words but rather a ritual of deeds. One might be tempted to infer that hippie sex brings man back into direct physical contact with things and is therefore more healthy. As the film suggests, however, this is not exactly the case. Words, it is true, are reduced to a minimum (a few shouted commands: "Take off your sweater . . . skirt . . . bra . . . pants!"), but there is no real contact between sex partners: instead of lying down with a nude woman, the hippie (in this case, a girl) dances around her; instead of embracing a nude woman, the hippie (this time a boy) takes a paint brush and paints psychedelic colors on her body; and in the climax of the hippie ritual of sex, a phallic *symbol* (a large, live fish) is used to penetrate the woman's body rather than the phallus itself. In short, far from providing direct physical contact with the *thing itself*, hippie sex in *Week-end* provides no direct contact at all between one human being and another; in many ways it is more cruel and inhuman than the verbal sex of the bourgeoisie. Ultimately, the hippie mode of sex is outright destruction, for the victim is ritually violated and then sacrificed, and finally eaten—thus revealing that hippie life, just as much as bourgeois life, rests on the capitalist's fundamental obsession with *consumption*. One doesn't *live* life, one *consumes* it.

*Week-end*'s juxtaposition of the bourgeois ritual of consumption with the hippie ritual of consumption points to a dead-end in which the only movement is in vicious circles of endless exploitation and destruction. The hippies feed off the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie nourishes within itself the future hippies. The bourgeoisie fails to recognize the internal contradictions of its existence, but so do the hippies fail to recognize the internal contradictions of their existence. Moreover, the hippie way of life ironically seems to attract the most blatantly fascist of the young bourgeoisie, as is illustrated by the fact that the mod girl (Juliette Berto) who invokes class priorities, and who indignantly berates and despises the peasants early in the film, eventually turns up as a member of the hippie band engaged in guerilla warfare against the bourgeoisie. Finally, just as the members of the bourgeoisie inevitably exploit and destroy one another, so to the various hippie groups turn against and destroy one another. An exchange of women hostages near the end of the film turns into an internecine shooting match between the hippie gangs of "Uncle Ernest" and "Arizona Jules."

The ultimate identity (or at least interchangeability) of the bourgeoisie and the hippies is brilliantly suggested by Godard in a long-range group-shot of the hippie band on maneuvers, peering out from behind the ferns and foliage of a forest scene reminiscent of the tableaux of Henri Rousseau. The irony and insight of this shot is that the hippie *fauves* are no more *sauvages* than the stolid *bourgeois* and *bourgeoises* of the Douanier Rousseau's compositions. (We might also turn the comparison around and say that the impeccable middleclass citizen in capitalist society is actually no tamer, no less barbaric than the bizarrely dressed hippie.) In *Week-end* they are, each of them, unhealthy aberrations of a sick society.

Because the notion of ritual is so important in this film, we should look for a moment at ritual and its functions, and, in particular, at ritual's relation to the drama. Antonin Artaud, the famous theorist of the Theater of Cruelty, saw in primitive ritual man's highest form of expression

and he sought to create a new theater which would reverse the nineteenth-century trend toward psychologizing melodrama and bring the theater back to its essential nature—ritual. For Artaud, the word as an instrument of rational dialogue was deadly and stultifying; its place in the drama had to be eliminated, the only saving grace of the word being the magic of its incantatory powers, which Artaud sought to incorporate into a total theater of ecstatic communion. Ritual, for Artaud, was essentially cathartic: the community came together to act out its destructive impulses and to express its deepest fears, and, in the acting, to purge them. The most destructive impulses—murder, crimes of blood and sex—were to be pushed to the paroxysm of intensity, to the very brink of action, to that instant just prior to the point where the impulse would spill over into direct rather than symbolic action: but at that brink the tension was to be sustained. The ritual, then, and hence the drama, function as a release-valve for the society to blow off steam and return to its normal level.

The problem with this view of ritual, however, is that it ignores and excludes the larger context within which primitive ritual operates—a context which can only be described as *revolution*; a context in which *change*, not perpetuation of the status quo, is the goal. Theodore H. Gaster, in his exhaustive study of ritual and its relation to the drama (see his *Thespis*, rev. ed. 1961) points out that the purgative aspect of ritual is only one phase in a seasonal cycle whose ultimate goal is to prepare the community for a transition from one phase of life-experience to another. The Year-Festival ("Out with the Old and in with the New!") and the *rites de passage* are basic examples of this function of ritual. In brief, the wider view of ritual advanced by Gaster and others recognizes that while preservation of the society is implicit in ritual, it is a preservation of society *through its ability to transform itself*, often radically; and through its ability, not just to adapt to changing conditions, but to bring the changes about, willfully and lucidly.

In terms of the modern theater, then, whose theories and traditions are constant preoccupations of Godard, we can see how the cathartic spectacle provided by Artaud's so-called total theater falls considerably short of providing a total picture of the function of ritual. Artaud's theatrical techniques need to be placed in a much larger context of social change in which theater also functions as a stimulant—as a sort of Socratic gadfly, which, by engaging society in a dialogue, manages to sting society into looking at itself in new ways. In short, if Artaud's Theater of Cruelty is one phase of the ritual cycle, Brecht's Dialectical Theater is another; and the Brechtian notion of theater as a stimulant comes closer to the ultimate function of ritual than does the merely purgative theater of Artaud.

*Week-end*, Godard's Artaud-style spectacle, seems to concentrate almost exclusively on what might be termed the purgative phase of the ritual cycle. In order to be seen as truly constructive it may have to be considered within the larger context of social change introduced by Godard in *La Chinoise*. That Godard intends both *La Chinoise* and *Week-end* to be considered as interrelated parts of a larger whole seems quite clear. Chronologically, it can even be established that *Week-end* is a sequel to *La Chinoise*, not simply because Godard made it after *La Chinoise*, but because *Week-end* picks up Jean-Pierre Léaud's character (Guillaume, the committed actor) at the very point where he left off at the end of *La Chinoise*: where, dressed-up in eighteenth-century garb, he went

*Juliet Berto and Mireille Darc:* WEEK-END

out into the world to shake up people's notion of the theater and, at the same time, shake up their notion of society.

That Guillaume doesn't seem to be having much success in *Week-end* is perhaps to be expected, since *Week-end,* as the title implies, is a hiatus within the productive cycle, a period given over to idling or, among Parisians, to mad dashes out into the countryside and to frantic orgies of consumption. Nonetheless, Guillaume perseveres in his task, declaims aloud a text from Saint-Just with his only audience the bourgeois husband-and-wife team and he places poignant singing-telephone calls "dans le vide." That Guillaume's efforts seem ineffectual, to say the least, may simply indicate Godard's own modest admission that the artist's chances of really establishing communication with his audience are small indeed, especially when, as in *Week-end,* the spectacle aspect of his art is so diverting.

Still, Guillaume's activity in *Week-end,* although ineffectual, can be considered an instructive lesson in his "theatrical apprenticeship" undertaken at the close of *La Chinoise.* Moreover, something that Guillaume says in *La Chinoise* seems to look forward to *Week-end* and to suggest that Godard, when making the very Brechtian *La Chinoise,* may already have been thinking of the very different sort of film that would be inspired by Artaud, and thinking as well of the inconsistencies and limitations in Artaud's notion of the theater and its function in society. Guillaume, in *La Chinoise,* reveals that his father worked quite closely with Artaud in the days when Artaud's notions were considered the most revolutionary movement in the theater; but Guillaume goes on to point out that something was obviously lacking in that notion of revolution, for his father now works as social-director of a vacation site run by the Club Méditerranée—a bourgeois travel organization given over to blatant consumption of holiday accoutrements, with overtones of fascism that recall the organization of the Nazi concentration camps under Hitler.

In any case, the point seems clear: even if Artaud's theater could accomplish what it sets out to do, it would still not be enough; for the result, as we see in the example of Guillaume's father, is merely reintegration of the individual within the existing social institutions and preservation of the status quo. Moreover, it is questionable if Artaud's theater, as he envisioned it, could ever even exist. What we usually attribute to Artaud is often nothing other than garish spectacle: instead of evoking total involvement on the part of the spectator, it simply provides him with a wider range of sensory phenomena to divert him, to entertain him, and even to flatter his sense of self-importance by the extravagant dissipation of energies that has gone into the task of providing him with such a magnificent spectacle.

Fittingly enough, *Week-end* itself seems vulnerable to some of these accusations; and it is ironic that Godard seems likely to receive more acclaim from the general public for *Week-end,* in which, by pushing spectacle to its utmost, he attempts to demonstrate the inadequacies of spectacle, than for previous films such as *Les Carabiniers, Masculin-Féminin,* or *La Chinoise,* from which the element of spectacle is rigorously excluded—or in which what spectacle remains is clearly subordinated to the critical awareness which the film calls forth on the part of the spectator. This is not to imply that *Week-end* is *merely* spectacle or that the film does not seek to call forth critical awareness; quite the contrary; but the immensity of the spectacle in *Week-end* may make it too easy for the audience to remain at the level of spectacle instead of critically questioning both the ritual of the spectacle and the society which has evolved this form of ritual.

Consider, for instance, some of the critics' reactions here in America to the "Third World" sequence in which a black and an Arab (those who are forced to do the meanest tasks in our highly advanced society—like collecting our garbage) stand alongside their garbage-truck, eat their meager meal of unbuttered bread, and deliver rather formal little speeches about the plight of the oppressed and the need for revolution. Renata Adler, in *The New York Times,* advises people to walk out on this sequence, get

themselves a cup of coffee and a cigarette, and come back in when the "unprofessional invective" is finished and the spectacular carnage is resumed. Pauline Kael, in *The New Yorker*, admits to "blanking out" on this sequence, rebukes Godard for its "directness," and asks "who can assimilate and evaluate this chunk of theory thrown at us in the middle of a movie?"

Assimilating and evaluating this sequence is precisely the task we must undertake, not by treating the Third World sequence as a chunk of theory alien to the film, but rather by understanding how this particular chunk (not of theory but of images and sounds) fits into the film and relates to the other sequences and to the film as a whole. The Third World sequence is not an interjection; it is not an aside; it is an integral part of an artistic whole. To dismiss it or to walk out on it because it seems too direct and unspectacular compared to the rest of the film is to miss the main point. Both of these critics, while praising *Week-end* as a spectacle, refuse to rise to the film's level and to do what the film itself does: namely, to question the ritual of the spectacle.

Of course the Third World sequence is unspectacular: and of course it is direct. The underprivileged and oppressed peoples cannot afford the luxury of spectacle and they are not nearly as interested in the symbolic image of a thing as in the things themselves. Things, we should realize, are precisely what they lack. The mass media, penetrating even into the darkest corners of the Third World, provide them with plenty of *images* of things and arouse their hopes and desires; but the things themselves remain forever out of reach. Even the things which we, in our affluence, take for granted—like bread—are the things which they have to struggle for and which are often denied them.

Godard could have made this point in a spectacular way—by photographing some of the Third World's emaciated victims of malnutrition—but that sort of spectacle works so powerfully on our emotions that it leaves little opportunity for constructive reason. By eschewing spectacle and letting the black and the Arab look directly into the camera while they deliver (in a "voice-over") lucid and unemotional statements calling for revolutionary awareness, Godard places the Third World sequence in dramatic contrast to the spectacular sequences devoted to the bourgeoisie and the hippies. But when critics denounce the Third World sequence for failing to sustain the spectacular frenzy of the rest of the film, they are falling into the very trap which *Week-end* attempts to expose. When wisdom and calm are rejected in favor of the greater spectacle offered by violence and destruction, we can only agree with Guillaume's conclusion, quoted from Saint-Just, that "it seems as if humanity, tired of calm and wisdom, preferred to be miserable and mad." And we in the film medium (whether directors, producers, actors, critics, or just moviegoers) are certainly just as guilty of this charge as anyone —perhaps even more guilty. Wisdom, apparently, is not what we want; but with spectacle we're very much at home, the more violent the spectacle the better. But in *Week-end* the spectacle spills over into life. Only up to a certain point are we still safe and secure in our knowledge that the dead bodies on the screen are not really dead, that the carnage is not real, that it's all a game, that it's cinema. Godard's films, we recall, are often full of what looks like blood but is really only ketchup or paint. Even when the bourgeois husband in *Week-end* kills his mother-in-law and pours her blood over the flayed carcass of a skinned rabbit, we may flinch a bit but only because it's such a grisly *image*. But when we see one of the hippie band slaughter a live pig and a goose, the props are knocked out from under us. Suddenly we don't know where we stand: it was all such wonderful spectacle a moment ago, and now, well, the *image* and the *thing itself* are one; *the cinema is real life*.

We laughed earlier in the film when the characters kept insisting that cinema was real life; but we don't laugh anymore. Spectacle has been pushed to its limits and has brought us down abruptly. In the cinema, as in the Roman Coliseum, the ultimate spectacle has turned out to be the taking of a life. But getting angry at Godard and blaming him for this death is only bad faith, an evasive tactic to enable us to retain

our self-respect by washing our hands of any complicity and foisting all of the blame upon the film-maker. All Godard has done, after all, is to film an act which we, in our society, have others commit for us thousands of times each day. What this shot accomplishes, if we are honest with ourselves, is to shatter one of our most cherished illusions—the illusion of the innocence of the spectacle. For all our talk about total theater and audience involvement and ecstatic communion, we have obviously refused to accept one iota of responsibility for what takes place in the theater: it has all been a spectacle and we have considered ourselves innocent, untouched, and uninvolved.

Once again, as in *La Chinoise,* we see that the artist's way of contributing to the revolution is to revolutionize the way people look at art and the relation between art and life. The killing of the pig and the goose is only one of many attempts in *Week-end* to help us step out of our habitual ways of looking at things. The Emily Brontë sequence, for example, illustrates both the artist's attempts to stimulate people to look at things in new ways and society's rigid resistance to having its illusions shattered. To the bourgeois couple, a blade of grass is a blade of grass and a pebble is a pebble; no further thought is required. The name suffices. But to the poet or to the scientist, these things have more meaning: they are even called by different names. The poet, who, long ago, placed a word between us and things, now realizes the need to bring us back to direct experience of things. Emily Brontë holds up a pebble for us to look at and we suddenly begin to understand what the poet Francis Ponge has called "le parti pris des choses." Moreover, the poet helps us, too, to look more closely at words, to see how they work, and to see their limitations. Emily Brontë's reading of the nonsense riddles points out what the laborer's nonsense phrases in *Made in USA* pointed out: namely, that words are a system unto themselves and that words do not necessarily have any relation to the world of things.

In the final analysis, then, it is not ecstatic communion, but *critical awareness*—of things, of words, of ourselves and our society—that is for Godard the goal of art. Nor is it awareness for its own sake, but rather, as Marx and Freud, among others, have pointed out, because awareness enables us to master situations instead of being mastered by them. Unfortunately, however, we still have with us members of society who, instead of working with their fellow men for the common good, strive only to master other men in order to retain and augment their own position of power and privilege. To this type of person, the true artist is a threat which must be removed—even, like Emily Brontë in *Week-end,* burned at the stake. But another poet steps forth to speak the eulogy and to carry on the artist's task of helping us to confront ourselves and the world.

And, in a way, this is the task being carried out in *Week-end* by the pianist who plays Mozart in the farmyard. Like Guillaume at the end of *La Chinoise,* he is taking art to the people. Moreover, his is a very human art, a modest art, an art, like that of Mozart, "too simple for beginners and too difficult for the experts"; and his art is an art of dialogue. The pianist does not offer his recital as a spectacle; he breaks into the music to talk, to explain, to point out his own inadequacies as an artist. His art, like Godard's, is unafraid of self-criticism; in fact, it makes self-criticism an integral part of the artistic whole.

While the pianist plays and talks, the camera executes a 360° pan shot around the courtyard of the farm, encompassing the tractors, trucks, plows, onlookers, sheds, farmhands, and the pianist himself. Even the cameraman and his camera, although they are not shown, are encompassed within the circle of the 360° pan. The artist, in this shot, acknowledges that he is in the same boat with his audience.

How different this self-encompassing pan shot is from the long, comic apotheosis of the tracking shot, which, earlier in the film, moved relentlessly ahead, past stalled cars, lions, monkeys, a llama, and who knows what else, straight ahead to destruction, but with the camera remaining serenely Olympian in its complete detachment! How different, too, is the modest and human art of the pianist from the strident ultra-

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If there is an image of hope in *Week-end,* it lies in that farmyard circle, self-contained within its narrow circumference and yet open to those who care enough to attempt to establish a dialogue between one human being and another. There, in the eye of the storm, in the middle of *Week-end's* nightmarish cataclysm of violence and destruction, Godard has depicted a haven of wisdom and calm. Like the Third World sequence, the scene in the farmyard is unspectacular, to say the least; but one of the things *Week-end* seems to be trying to tell us, in its own spectacular way, is that our civilization, if it is to continue, could use a lot more wisdom and calm—and a lot less spectacle.

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**NORM FRUCHTER, NY NEWSREEL:**
Newsreel, for me, is the constant challenge of facing choices which are at once, and indissolubly film-making choices, political choices, activist choices, aesthetic choices. None of us are satisfied with the blend that emerges . . . how to make what we want? Films as weapons? (Historical phrase—badly weathered.) Bullets kill, and some films get into people's heads, to shock, stun, arrest, horrify, depress, sadden, probe, demand. We want that kind of engagement—films people can't walk away from, with "Oh yes, I saw a filmshow last night, sort of political."

Who doubts, any more, that this country is so monstrously damaging, to both its domestic and foreign captive populations, that revolution is essential? The problem is how: what forces we're building, what this multifaceted thing we call the Movement will grow into, what real organizations we're

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making out of all the disaffection this country breeds. Not that armageddon is coming, or apocalypse—but in small ways the streets explode, and the fabric of consent which sociologists once celebrated shreds visibly on the TV. Who knows what's happening to this country? So our films have to attack, they come out of as close as we can get to the activity we value. Getting deeper, harsher, more corrosive, more inflammatory—those are our problems.

We should hate a lot more. Let it out. Let it dissolve the insufferable smugness which protects everybody. The media. None of us are old enough to have any illusions about infiltrating the major media to reach mass consciousness and change it—we grew up on TV and fifties Hollywood. . . .

**MARILYN BUCK AND KAREN ROSS, SAN FRANCISCO NEWSREEL:**

This society is one of spectators, who live and perceive through the news media, particularly the visual media. People's lives revolve around the assumptions which are made by which channel they watch or what movie they choose to see. And all the TV channels and American films speak from the same mouth of control and power. We looked around . . . and Newsreel was conceived and born. A way for film-makers and radical organizer-agitators to break into the consciousness of people. A chance to say something different . . . to say that people don't have to be spectator-puppets.

In our hands film is not an anesthetic, a sterile, smooth-talking apparatus of control. It is a weapon to counter, to talk back to and to crack the facade of the lying media of capitalism.

The radicals who have become involved in San Francisco Newsreel had previously participated in the development of the left political movement. Yet some of these experiences resulted in alienation. A disappointment and frustration with the forms of the left. Creative action was lacking. Newsreel has offered a definite medium in which to work; a weapon to destroy the established forms of control and power over people. We have had to overcome our lack of technical knowledge of film-making. Moreover, we must realize our political responsibility within our chosen form.

Many others who came to Newsreel as film-makers and artists had isolated themselves in their own work and private political fantasies. Newsreel has become an outlet for real political expression in a medium familiar to them. Their political fantasies were exposed. They had to begin relating to more active participation in the movement. They were political but it was necessary to combine the political content with form.

**FRUCHTER:**

Easier to define than make the films we want. We're tied to events, and we shouldn't be: Pentagon, Columbia, Chicago, the Haight. Where should we begin? Most instincts are particular: narrow it down—this group, this action. Follow the officers of the Hanna Company in their jaunts through Brazil? Follow a Peace Corps volunteer? But why document the obvious—none of the people we make films for need **that** bad joke exposed, they've lived with (and often worked within) the reality. The varieties of domestic and external pacification deserve burlesque, no more. New forms? But how much will time, limited energies, finance, and the wearing pressure of events, the race to stay responsible, limit us?

**BUCK & ROSS:**

Newsreel is a collective rather than a cooperative; we are not together merely to help each other out as film-makers but we are working together for a common purpose: to make films which shatter the image and reality of fragmentation and exploitation in this society. Yet there are problems in developing and maintaining this collective form. These lie in the question of assimilation. Assimilation of the film-maker and the radical, assimilation of the individual into the collective. In making films together which reflect a collective, a movement of ideas and actions rather than the individuality of the artist, we must develop new values, forms,

new criteria for individual interaction. Differences in techniques and analysis of content must be worked out collectively. The body must endorse the resulting film or it cannot be distributed through Newsreel.

**FRUCHTER:**

Responsibility. There's no revolutionary party yet, only fledgling forms of various undergrounds. No coherent strategy, no discipline to stay hewed to, so we make our politics (our films) on the hoof; our discussions often threaten to become interminable. How transcend this transition stage? What's our response, for instance, if we think that sabotage is only marginally effective and yet guys are going to jail for it? What's our response to the police ambush in Cleveland, who among us has doubts about why black men are moved to shoot police? Newsreel is a jumping-off point. Or are we kidding ourselves? In '42, '43, '44 in Italy, what did Zavattini and Rossellini and the rest say to themselves? Were the partisan units a real alternative? What were the terms on which they said, "But we must fight as filmmakers"? What historical stage are we in, what categories can we use to decide what we must do?

**ROBERT KRAMER, NEW YORK NEWSREEL:**

*We began by trying to bridge the gap between the states of mind and ways of working that we were accustomed to as film-makers, and the engagement/daily involvement/commitments of our political analysis and political activity. This had immediate implications—not only for our film-making, but for interpretations of what, as film-makers, as people engaged in a struggle against established forms of power and control, against established media of all forces, we had to do* with *or* without *cameras.*

*In regard to our films. I think we argue a different hierarchy of values. Not traditional canons of "what is professional," what is "comprehensive and intelligent reportage," what is "acceptable quality and range of material." No. Nor do we accept a more sophisticated argument about propaganda in general: that if the product isn't sold well, if the* surface *of the film (grainy, troublesome sound, soft-focus, a wide range of maladies that come up when you are filming under stress) alienates, then the subject population never even gets to your "message" about the product—they just say, "Fuck that, I'm not watching that shit."*

*Panthers in the park—Oakland.*

*The subject population in this society, bombarded by and totally immersed in complex, ostensibly "free" media, has learned to absorb all facts/information relatively easily. Within the formats now popularized by the television documentary, you can lodge almost any material, no matter how implicitly explosive, with the confidence that it will neither haunt the subject population, nor push them to move—in the streets, in their communities, in their heads. You see Cleaver or Seale on a panel show, and they don't scare you or impress you or make you think as they would if you met them on the street. Why? Because they can't get their hands on you? Partly, sure. (Fear and committed thought exist in terms of the threat that power will be used against you—in terms of the absolute necessity of figuring out what has to be done —not in terms of some vague decision to "think it through" in isolation.) But also, because their words are absorbed by the format of the "panel show," rational (note well: ostensibly rational) discussion about issues that we all agree are important and pressing, and that we (all good liberal viewers) are committed to analyzing. Well: bullshit. The illusion of the commitment to analyze. The illusion of real dissent. The illusion of even understanding the issues. Rather, the commitment to pretend that we're engaging reality.*

*OK. At the point when you have considered this argument then you start to make films with different priorities, with shapes justified in a different way. You want to make films that unnerve, that shake assumptions, that threaten, that do not soft-sell, but hopefully (an impossible ideal) explode like grenades in peoples' faces, or open minds up like a good can opener. We say: "The things you see in these films are happening at this moment, they are our 'news,' they are important to us and do not represent the droppings of a few freaks, but the activity of a growing wave of people, your children who were fighting the pigs at Columbia, your brothers who walked out of this high school, your sons who deserted the army, your former slaves who will not now accept your insufficient reparations, etc., etc. You know this reality. You know enough to know that this is real—now deal with it, because soon it's going to come to deal with you, in one way or another." The effect of our films is more like seeing 250 Black Panthers around the Oakland Court House, or Columbia students carrying on the business of revolt at Kirk's desk, or Free Men occupying the streets of Berkeley, than listening to what some reporter tells us about what these people might have said, and how we can understand "rebellion" psychologically. We strive for confrontation, we prefer disgust/violent disagreement/painful recognition/jolts—all these to slow liberal head-nodding and general wonderment at the complexity of these times and their being out of joint.*

*We want a form of propaganda that polarizes, angers, excites, for the purpose of discussion—a way of getting at people, not by making concessions to where they are, but by showing them where you are and then forcing them to deal with that, bringing out all their assumptions, their prejudices, their imperfect perceptions.*

**BUCK & ROSS:**

Some viewers make the whole choice to see Newsreels. They are aware of what they are going to see, and the films thus reinforce their conceptions—or they may shake these viewers back into radical action and analysis. Most importantly, Newsreels must be weapons: they must confront people who are not motivated to go see them. Newsreel must make half the decisions for them. Street projection is the first answer we've come up with so far. We take the films into the street, we stop people on the street, and confront them with our films. Involve them as participants. They're not home glued to their TVs, where if subjected to action they merely sit and absorb it in some unconscious place in their heads. The truck, mobile, produces live action on the street. Motion within motion. It has come to them during a walk down the street, they've stumbled upon it. Newsreel has forced itself into their consciousness. They have been confronted. The decision to watch, to register disgust or interest is now theirs. We have the opportunity to talk with them about their reactions, between films. To those inquisitive, we explain more. To those objecting, we can try to break their arguments. We have our confrontation as people, Newsreel has its confrontation through film.

Newsreel can evaluate the effectiveness of its films by looking at its audiences and their responses to the films. Many of our showings have been very discouraging: not many people or no reaction to the films at all. Others have been elating: lots of people who react vigorously to the films, asking questions or arguing about the validity of the films. And the difference in the showings may be only the audience. Middle-class neighborhood groups may feel that the straight documentary sync-sound film on draft resistance is very good to see: informative, encouraging, and perhaps even motivating. But when the same film is shown to young chicanos, it's absolutely useless. The guys walk out, hiss, and ask "When are you going to show us some action?" And so, we run the Haight riot film, a five-minute street film with a lot of action set to contemporary rock music. And they dig it. We show *Garbage*, a cultural exchange between the Motherfuckers of New York and Lincoln Center, a fast-moving film also, thinking this might also turn the guys on, and they are bored by it and finally walk out. But college and ex-college radicals say, "Far out, those guys are

doing some good things—I like their style." And the older, middleclass people in the audience may not dislike it, but don't quite see the point . . . or register confusion or a polite distaste for the obscene language and people of the film.

**KRAMER:**

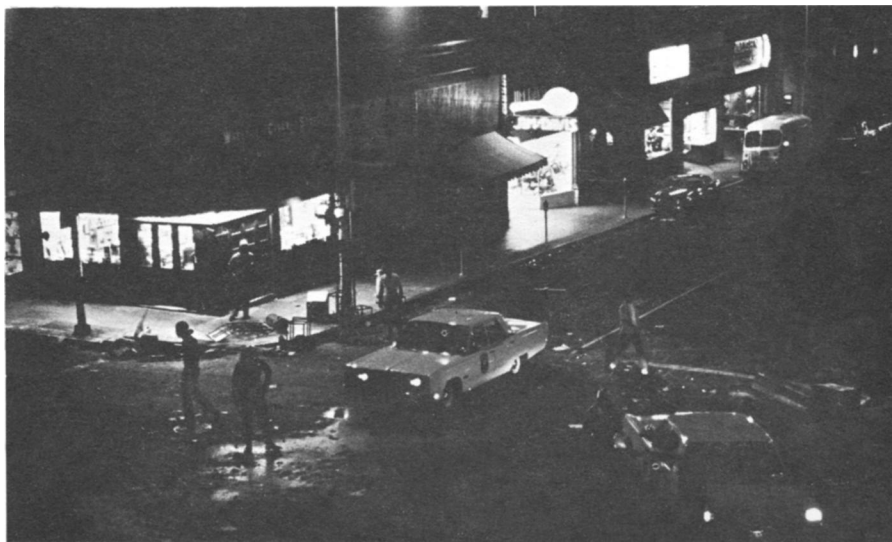
*We shoot as best we can—but we shoot what's important to us, what meets our perceptions of our lived reality; we cut according to our priorities, our ideologies, not "to make it plain and simple to them." Not to present a "line." Not to present the lived reality as less complex than it really is. Not to enter into that sterile game: modulating our emotions and intensities and intelligences in some vain hope that by speaking your language your way we can persuade you. No, we know the effective outcome of that: only the acceptance of another of the subtle forms of domination and control. Now we move according to our own priorities, and we are justified in this by objective conditions. Five years ago, for example, such a decision would have been suicidal. Our movement was only emerging—few people knew anything about it—few people were involved. But now, all our audiences (and our audiences represent the full spectrum of the society) know the essence of what we're talking about. They read it every day in every paper digested and shaped to their preconceptions. So now we present it to them in its nakedness, in* our *true understanding of it, not vitiated by analyses and "in-depth studies" that we do not accept, but just exactly what counts from our point of view. The established media have done the job of popularizing: now we must specify and make immediate; convert our audiences or neutralize them; threaten.*

**BUCK & ROSS:**

The Columbia film, about the seizure of Columbia and the politics of that seizure, is an important film to college students. It was shown to students at the University of California, Santa Cruz, on the eve of a scheduled protest against the board of regents which was meeting on campus the next day. The film helped to bolster enthusiasm for the students' action and create a mood in which the protest could take place and be successful. The film on the Black Panther Party turns people's heads around, aweing them with the strength and the nature of the Panthers of which they may not have previously conceived. We think the film is politically and visually exciting—it demands that people react to it, and not pass it off. It is a film that evokes response with the most diverse kinds of audiences—liberals on their way to the film festival, students at the universities, the black community in the streets.

**KRAMER:**

*Our films remind some people of battle footage: grainy, camera weaving around trying to get the*



*"Who knows what's happening to this country?"*

*material and still not get beaten/trapped. Well, we, and many others, are at war. We not only document that war, but try to find ways to bring that war to places which have managed so far to buy themselves isolation from it.*

*So, to return to the issue of propaganda. Our propaganda is one of confrontation. Using film —using our voices with and after films—using our bodies with and without cameras—to provoke confrontation. Changing minds, altering consciousness, seems to us to come through confrontations, not out of sweet/reasonable conversations that are one of the society's modes of absorbing and disarming dissent and movement, of giving that illusion that indeed we are dealing with "the issues." Therefore we keep moving. We keep hacking out films, as quickly as we can, in whatever way we can.*

*To all film-makers who accept the limited, socially determined rules of clarity, of exposition, who think that films must use the accepted vocabulary to "convince," we say essentially: you only work, whatever your reasons, whatever your presumed "content," to support and bolster this society; you are a part of the mechanisms which maintain stability through re-integration; your films are helping to hold it all together, and finally, whatever your descriptions, you have already chosen sides. Dig: your sense of form and order is already a political choice—don't talk to me about "content"—but if you do, I will tell you that you cannot encompass our "content" with those legislated and approved senses, that you do not understand it if you treat it that way. There is no such thing as revolutionary content, revolutionary spirit, laid out for inspection and sale on the bargain basement counter.*

LEO BRAUDY

# Newsreel: A Report

*. . . What we demand is the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form. Works of art which lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are politically. . . . We must carry on a struggle on two fronts.*

MAO TSE-TUNG, quoted at various moments by Kirilov and Véronique in *La Chinoise*

In the approximately nine months of its existence, New York Newsreel has completed fifteen films, with several more almost ready for release. The films are frequently very good and always interesting, although sometimes much good will is necessary to disentangle the web of aesthetics and politics at a particular film's center. But Newsreel shows in general a vital and aggressive willingness to experiment with traditional documentary methods in a concerted effort to work "on two fronts" and integrate its political commitment with the movie-making techniques.

The earlier Newsreels are closer to usual documentary form. They do imply that the viewer has some knowledge, for example, of the anti-war, antidraft movement. But they generally take the expository approach dictated by the documentary assumption "I was there and you weren't." This method is best exemplified by *Boston Draft Resistance Group*, done mostly in synchronized sound with some narration that describes and explains the group's activities. It is clean and straightforward in a kind of BBC manner that perfectly suits the incessant rea-

*material and still not get beaten/trapped. Well, we, and many others, are at war. We not only document that war, but try to find ways to bring that war to places which have managed so far to buy themselves isolation from it.*

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sonableness of the Boston Draft Resistance Group's arguments and their decision to look freshfaced and shorn. This familiarly professional documentary form (even down to the detailed credits, the only such in the Newsreels I have seen) with its radical content is one way of attacking the problem.

Two less successful films about draft resistance are *Chomsky* and *Resist and the New England Resistance*. The frame of the first is an interview with Noam Chomsky that is then interspliced with antiwar and antidraft activities. It was made just after the Coffin-Spock indictment, but still has a sense of immediacy in its combination of shots from the first Call to Resist meeting several months before, an interview with Coffin, and the actions of several individual resisters. *Resist and the New England Resistance* use the same Call to Resist footage, but relates it more directly to individual decisions to turn in draft cards and the political implications of such acts.

Except for some close-ups, the camera in *Boston Draft Resistance Group* only records. It is a witness, not a participant or a commentator. Such an approach appears more purely in a film called *Four Americans* released by Newsreel, but edited and synchronized from Japanese footage. Before a dark backdrop the four deserters from the *Intrepid* make joint and later individual statements about their decision. The setting is very stagy and frontal; the camera never moves. But gradually the men emerge in contrast to their rigid aesthetic format.

Later Newsreels do not completely drop this more "objective" and traditional approach because the group preserves a sensitivity to the special kind of treatment each subject demands. A comparatively recent film like *Meat Cooperative* again has a fairly straightforward chronological form, while it describes in a *Consumer Reports* manner the growth of a Lower East Side community meat cooperative that successfully does away with the bad meat and high prices of the local supermarkets until OEO funds are cut off and it must close. The second section, in which the leaders of the cooperative try to get help from the local congressman to have the funds renewed, is inconclusive and abrupt, like the action itself. But the promise of the cooperative, and its potential as an example, carries the weight of the film. Although *Meat Cooperative* like *Boston Draft Resistance Group* is aesthetically traditional, it is politically part of a propaganda of possibilities that stands opposed to what one Newsreel member called "the aesthetically and politically mindless propaganda of the thirties."

But the more pervasive trend in Newsreel has been films that demand much more from the audience in both aesthetics and political response. *Meat Cooperative* can be called open-ended because it suggests the possibility of other cooperatives on its model. But films like *No Game, Garbage, Riot Weapons, I.S. 201,* and *Chicago* abandon the familiar documentary explicitness and chronological linearity to demand more of the audience's attention and engagement. The assumption of these films seems to be that a TV-conditioned desire for pleasant sound and sync dialogue is related to a desire for easy and unabrasive answers to distant problems. Their soundtracks and frequently their spray of images are irritating and confusing. The non-sync film becomes more radical than the sync because sync suggests easy solutions, the effortless marriage of word and image. But these films imply that neither the problems nor the solutions are easy. Earlier propaganga frequently had little aesthetic appeal, while its political content was simplistic, schematic, and therefore easily ignored. These more experimental Newsreel films attempt to achieve a more open-ended political result by aesthetically radicalizing the audience as well. The understanding needed to bring together sound and image mirrors the understanding necessary to translate accurate analysis into appropriate political action.

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**NEWSREEL**

Information about Newsreel and its films is available from Box 302, Canal Street Station, New York 10013, or 1374 Fulton Street, San Francisco 94117. In addition to its own films, Newsreel also distributes a number of political films from abroad, dealing with Vietnam, Latin America, etc.

*No Game,* Newsreel's Pentagon film, stands uneasily between the "witness" films and the more experimental ones. The camera moves about the Lincoln Memorial, recording parts of speeches, incidents, and faces, and then follows the marchers to the Pentagon. The soundtrack is a frequently hard to understand mix of statements by the speechmakers, hubbub, and marching noise that synchronizes momentarily in a Peter, Paul, and Mary song. Finally, when the camera sweeps down a line of troops before the Pentagon, a studio voice authoritatively addresses the soldiers about the War, and the image shifts to Vietnam footage. Although some audiences have complained about this voice and the way it disrupts the more documentary tone of *No Game,* I found it much less annoying than the many pointless wide-angle shots. The shift in images is, however, very effective. The confused charges around the Pentagon give way to the overexposed blacks and whites of the war scenes; the familiar bushes and trees change into the landscape of a lunar world; and the helicopter that hovered over Arlington Bridge is transformed into an image of malevolent destruction.

Despite these striking images of the dream-world of evil marchers are trying to fight, the studio voice in *No Game* does detract from its final effect; it is too authoritarian and its final optimism about the value of the march is too easy. The explaining and interpreting overvoice is feasible for films like this primarily because it's cheap. Politically, its effect can be dogmatic and abstract, without a feeling for the nuances of the concrete situation. Films without the direction of an overvoice, on the other hand, risk fuzziness or the imposition of even more simplistic devices. *The Jeanette Rankin Brigade,* which details a trip to Washington by a group of militant women, falls too easily into a series of heavy ironies that juxtapose the resolute women with a supercilious world of men—cops and otherwise. The effect of the march is politically inconclusive, and could lead to more understanding of the proper use of this kind of protest. But without an appropriate or compelling artistic form, inconclusiveness appears only as confusion.

In *Riot Weapons* the last image makes a direct appeal to the audience to engage the film and the problems it depicts: two black New Jersey National Guardsmen point out of a billboard in Newark, while the camera closes on the pointing hands. But the direction of the film that precedes this image is unclear. Gun advertisements in police magazines, publicity shots of police tanks, and scenes of riot training alternate with footage and stills of riots and their aftermath. The contrast is heightened by the soundtrack: behind the ads is the clatter of guns and the shriek of sirens; behind the riot scenes, only silence. But the riot sequences generally lack any bite or point, in addition to being repetitious. What are the demands that the final image is making on the audience? If the contrast between the two kinds of sequence is the main point, what choice has been made about the length of the film? Does *Riot Weapons* merely document trends in police militarism or does it also imply that black and white radicals should arm themselves too? Is there, for example, a progression from ads for police weapons to ads for ordinary weapons? (I could not tell when I saw the film.) *I.S. 201,* which deals with a memorial parade in honor of Malcolm X and other commemorative activities in a New York public school, similarly tries to find some form other than the chronological narrative of the observing documentary camera. The titles for the separate sequences have a screechy soundtrack behind them (and follow rather than precede the events they desmribe). The film does capture some sense of the rush of these activities and the energy liberated by Malcolm's influence. But once again there is a lack of effective rhythm in the film itself, an inability to set up its own terms securely enough. For a film that deals with potential action and movement, *I.S. 201* has a curious lethargy, especially in the shots of the destroyed areas of Newark, while an I.S. 201 panel discussion occupies the soundtrack.

Talk, as it is embodied in the discussions that swirl around political action, forms an increasingly important part of Newsreel's films. The films now in progress concentrate even more on

developing a kind of "follow" documentary, a film about the dynamics of different groups as they get into, learn about, and try to deal with the society they live in, to bridge the gap between talk and action. *Garbage* and *Chicago* are the two most interesting and most successful attempts I have seen so far to document this process of thought and action and produce a film that has aesthetic form without political finality. *Garbage* follows a Lower East Side group called "Up-Against-The-Wall-Motherfuckers" on a trip to throw garbage into the central fountain of Lincoln Center as a statement about the cultural garbage Lincoln Center purveys and the mounds of real garbage people are living in because of the New York garbage strike. The soundtrack is full of talk—jokes, arguments about the project in earlier discussions, commentary during the trip itself, "America the Beautiful" in falsetto, and discussions afterwards, and more talk about later action to relate the existence of Lincoln Center to the problems of the Lower East Side as a community. *Garbage* was shot by many Newsreel cameramen and therefore embodies many points of view, in its images as well as in its soundtrack, about the appropriateness of the garbage dump as a reaction to the fact of Lincoln Center. One especially ambiguous shot of a black janitor with a broom watching the exuberant Motherfuckers go by introduces the idea that those in power will never be touched by something as whimsical as this; the only effect will be extra work for the people who have to clean up.

*Chicago* deals with the late March conferences at Long Villa outside Chicago to plan for radical action during the Democratic convention. Most Newsreels start with a "teaser" before the logo and title. In *Chicago* it is a seemingly pointless ride down a long Chicago street, faster and faster, with jumpier and jumpier cuts, until the street deadends in the International Amphitheater, site of the convention. This trip appears several more times in the film, together with approaches from other streets, and rides around Chicago by car and elevated. The camera is restless—not content, as in, for example *Boston Draft Resistance Group,* to follow along and listen to explanations, but dodging in and out, breaking away from the conference discussions with their endless cups of coffee, speakers, and uncomfortable chairs, looking out into Chicago for the relevance of all the talk, for where it connects. The two longest sections devoted to speakers underline this problem. A white committee leader reports on the arguments, the irresolution about what exactly should be done at the convention. Then, towards the end of the film, a black speaker lists in numerical order the demands the convention has decided on and phrased with a rigid certainty, while the camera keeps cutting back to the elevated train ride. Is this the way to Chicago? Is this what should be done?

Films like *Garbage, Chicago, Boston Draft Resistance Group,* and *Meat Cooperative* have a richness and vitality that repays seeing them several times. Even the less successful Newsreel films are provocative in their deficiencies. Ideally, Newsreel is a community of politically commited film-makers who can progress in artistic ability and political understanding at equal pace. But practically, people come into the group at different levels of sophistication in both film-making and politics, make films, and then change to varying degrees. Making films that strive for some immediacy, with a large group and possibly interminable discussions, forces the need for a series of compromises, with many bad choices being made about both subject matter and treatment. Newsreel members admit that many of their films contain "cheapies"—bald ironies, badly conceived footage, muffed effects. But more important is that many Newsreel films work fruitfully in the terms they have set for themselves. The Newsreel logo is the words "The Newsreel" flickering violently to the sound of a machine gun—the cinematic equivalent of Leroi Jones's line "I want poems that can shoot bullets."

# Reviews

## Auteur! Auteur!

**BOOM! Direction: Joseph Losey. Script: Tennessee Williams. Photography: Douglas Slocombe. Music: John Barry. Universal.**

**BIRDS OF PERU (Les Oiseaux Vont Mourir au Perou). Script and direction: Romain Gary. Photography: Christian Matras. Music: Kenton Coe. Universal.**

A sneak preview of *Birds of Peru* at the theater where *Boom!* was playing gave a few hundred New Yorkers the chance to see these films as a double bill. It must have been a curious experience, rather like seeing *King Kong* with *Mighty Joe Young*, for the two films have an awful lot in common: Both are acting vehicles, *Boom!* for the Burtons, *Birds of Peru* for Gary's wife Jean Seberg. Both center around sick women: Mrs. Goforth (Elizabeth Taylor) is dying, apparently of TB; Adriana (Jean Seberg) is an incurable nymphomaniac. Both have a seacoast setting—a Mediterranean island and a Peruvian beach—which they cling to from start to finish. Both are overtly symbolic. On her rocky island, Mrs. Goforth has tried to build a stronghold against dying, but she cannot keep out the angel of death (Richard Burton). Adriana is compared to the birds that fly to a certain Peruvian beach when they are dying: ashamed of her nymphomania, she goes to this same beach and has sex with as many men as possible in the hope that her husband will kill her. Finally, both films are bad.

Their badness is, however, engrossing and instructive. Watching *Boom!*, you see an experienced director fight a losing battle on the one hand with an impossible script and on the other with stars who insist on jumping through the same hoops as in *Virginia Woolf* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Watching *Birds of Peru*, you see an inexperienced scriptwriter-director (who happens to be a veteran novelist) blunder along in the belief that he knows all that needs to be known about scriptwriting and directing. *Boom!* is the lesser failure, because Losey does manage to pull the film back from going even further in the wrong direction. Gary exercises no such restraint, and *Birds of Peru* turns out to be the most hilarious bad film since *Valley of the Dolls*.

The difference between the two directors is apparent right at the beginning, even before the films have shown themselves to be bad. As with most films of the sixties, great attention has been paid to the credit sequences. *Birds of Peru*'s credits are imprinted over a series of beautifully photographed shots of birds in flight, some in slow motion and some with special color effects (the beat of a bird's wing, for example, runs up and down the spectrum). Yet this sequence is purely decorative, with no bearing on the film's action—a fact that becomes progressively clear during the course of the film as Gary tosses in more and more shots of birds in flight. Presumably all these shots are intended to establish the symbolism of the migrant dying birds, but there's nothing to tell the spectator that he isn't seeing perfectly robust specimens hunting for food. Thus there is a break in tone when the film's action begins—which is a pity, since the opening scene is the best in the film: a slow fade-in on a gently bobbing carnival mask which turns out to be on the back of the head of a man who's making love to Adriana. But the sheer visual distinction of this scene and the preceding credits emphasizes the break between them. Already it's apparent that Gary thinks of filmmaking in terms of individual scenes, ignoring their continuity and interaction.

Losey doesn't make this mistake—at least, not at the beginning. The background for his credit titles is a single scene, a long, slow zoom-and-dolly back from crashing waves into the dark interior of Mrs. Goforth's house. The progression from sunlit movement to black stillness is not merely symbolic of Mrs. Goforth's decline but gives a direct sensation of passing from life to death. In the next scene, the camera follows a glass of scotch as a servant carries it to Mrs. Goforth, who is simultaneously dictating her memoirs and being massaged; suddenly she cries out in pain and spills the drink. These two scenes are a model of exposition: the first establishes the mood of what is going to happen, the

second reveals the kind of person it is going to happen to.

The momentum of this opening carries through several scenes, but quickly fades as the outlines of the plot take shape. Tennessee Williams must like this plot, since he tried it out first as a short story and then as a play ("The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More"), but it cannot stand the light of day—let alone the brilliance of the film's Mediterranean location. The vague symbolism of Richard Burton as the angel of death strikes an especially false note in this setting, where objects are so sharply and solidly delineated. The action of the screenplay is thin and static: a woman objects to dying, although she is not shown to have anything special to live for; eventually she dies. Williams has tried to flesh out the action with dialogue, but most of it is only sawdust padding. Even the lines that do come to life have a rhetorical cast which deadens them on the screen. At one point Mrs. Goforth complains that life is made up of nothing but memories, and as an example she gestures toward a shooting star that has just flashed across the night sky with an incredible sense of timing. While Gary would probably have focused attention on this stagy device by inserting a scene of the shooting star, Losey is wise enough to hold the camera on Mrs. Goforth; but he cannot conceal the unreality of the situation.

In *Birds of Peru*, action and setting clash even more disastrously. It isn't enough for Gary to have Jean Seberg and flocks of birds seeking death on that Peruvian coast. (In addition to birds in flight, the film is riddled with shots of birds on the sand dying.) Although there are no ordinary houses in sight anywhere near this particular beach, it offers two well-stocked service facilities—a café-bar run by Maurice Ronet and a brothel run by Danielle Darrieux. After exhausting four young men in carnival masks, Jean Seberg takes a job at the brothel, where her first client is a truck driver. Meanwhile her husband and chauffeur—who is also employed to serve her in a different way—are tramping up and down the beach on her trail. Since death is coming too slowly, she walks into the sea. Maurice Ronet rushes down from his café-bar and hauls her to safety. (As he bends over her he murmurs, "Has anyone ever told you that you're beautiful?") Jean Seberg and Maurice Ronet retire to bed, while her husband and chauffeur keep plodding along the beach and birds keep flying and dying. Gary now dreams up a bring-'em-all-together dénouement reminiscent of a Victorian melodrama: the truck driver from the brothel gives a lift to the four young revelers, and they all stop for a drink at Maurice Ronet's café just after Jean Seberg's husband and chauffeur have arrived. Upbraidings and recriminations!

All this accumulation of incident would be hard to accept in any setting, but on what is continually shown to be a lonely beach it is grotesque. Gary obviously has no idea of the strength with which concrete objects can assert themselves on the screen, or the extent to which the hard edges of reality—sunlit sand and birds and breaking waves—can rip holes in his inflated melodrama.

Gary's double ineptitude—in scriptwriting and directing—also wreaks havoc on the interiors. The dialogue between Jean Seberg and Maurice Ronet is banal enough to begin with, but it is made ridiculous by Gary's insensivity to screen tempo and to the interplay of close-ups and long-shots. The sequence lurches along spasmodically, marks time for a while, and then lurches on again with no dramatic rhyme or reason. As a result, the actors are often pinned down uncomfortably in scenes where Gary has given them nothing useful to do. In Louis Malle's *The Fire Within*, Ronet spent half his time on-screen apparently doing nothing and doing it well; but there he had a director who knew how to put scenes together. In *Birds af Peru* he is made to look like an insecure amateur.

Losey's troubles with his cast are a little different. Not only do the Burtons dominate the action, but it seems as though Losey spent so much nervous energy trying to wrestle their characters into shape that he had very little to spare for the rest of the cast. As Mrs. Goforth's young secretary, a part which could have made a bright contrast to Elizabeth Taylor's moodi-

ness, newcomer Joanna Shimkus is ill at ease, at times left stranded on the screen almost as forlornly as Ronet in *Birds of Peru*. Even Michael Dunn, who has a seemingly juicy little part as Mrs. Goforth's sadistic bodyguard, fails to make any sharp impression.

Meanwhile the Burtons obstinately remain the Burtons. Richard ambles through his part with an ironic detachment, as if he's merely standing in for a more intense actor who's been delayed. Elizabeth, in compensation, hurls such tremendous energy into her performance that it's sent sprawling in all directions. The setting once more works against the film: in the Mediterranean sunglow, Elizabeth Taylor looks far too young to have buried six husbands (as the script specifies) and, like Gary's airborne birds, far too healthy to be dying.

But Losey also has himself to blame for the failure of *Boom!* As a film-maker he is something of a Jekyll and Hyde: Jekyll has an accurate understanding of the screen medium and knows how to be clear and subtle; Hyde lusts after symbols and portents. When Hyde is kept under control he can be an asset, bringing tension and excitement to what might otherwise be banal. This was true during Losey's early years in England, when Hyde helped turn out some memorable thrillers by straining against the bonds of low budgets and tight schedules. Since those bonds have been eased, Hyde has best been kept under control by a taut, understated script, like the one Pinter provided for *Accident*. But Williams's script for *Boom!* is almost the exact opposite, using slack and empty words to reiterate its one symbolic idea. As a result, Losey's Hyde slips out of control and the film gets the last thing it needs: more portentousness and more repetition. Toward the end of the film, for example, Elizabeth Taylor is posed hieratically against a huge bronze statue of outstretched wings while she delivers a speech that goes on for about five minutes. Within another five minutes she is dead, and Richard Burton is posed in an artificial head-cocked-to-one-side attitude while with slow deliberation he puts Elizabeth's diamond ring into a glass of wine, holds the glass over the balcony and finally drops it onto the rocks below.

The failure of *Boom!* points up the limits of the director as *auteur*. The film is bad by cinematic as well as by literary standards. After the opening, in fact, whatever excitement the film does arouse has little to do with pure cinema: it comes mainly from Elizabeth Taylor's vulgarity and the personality of Noel Coward. Only a director who consistently chooses scripts that suit him—as Hitchcock does, for example—can maintain cinematic excitement regardless of the merits of each script. In choosing *Boom!*, Losey saddled himself not merely with a poor script but with the kind of script that his talents could neither improve nor make enjoyable.

On the other hand, the failure of *Birds of Peru* points up the limits of the writer as *auteur*. The fact that Gary had seen and disliked what other film-makers had done with his books did not qualify him to do any better. (He is in much the same position as a poet who decides to set his own verse to music—without knowing the ranges of the human voice and instruments involved, or what the notes he writes down will sound like.) As it happened, his idea for the film was bad to begin with, but his script and direction made it far worse.

*Birds of Peru* and *Boom!* fail for such different reasons that the similarities listed at the beginning of this review may be purely coincidental. But there is one other similarity which could be significant. Both films contain all of the most fashionable elements to be found in films today —sex, perversions, nakedness, obscenities, and violence. It seems as if Losey and Gary are deliberately using these elements to make their serious content more palatable.

Meanwhile, as Hollywood becomes more "emancipated," frankly entertainment films are doing the reverse: introducing social and philosophical significance in order to justify their sex and violence. Films like *Valley of the Dolls, The Detective, PJ, No Way to Treat a Lady* and *The Thomas Crown Affair* are still distinguishable from films like *Boom!* and *Birds of Peru,* but the similarities loom large enough to be disquieting. They suggest that both heavy- and lightweight films are converging on a common ground where

they will no longer have any true individuality of style or feeling.

This is, I hope, an unwarranted surmise. But when men like Losey and Gary, with the freedom to do what they can do best, decide to do what they can do only badly, hope doesn't come easy.—WILLIAM JOHNSON

# Short Notices

**Bullitt** is slick, tough, and entertaining if you don't try to make sense of the plot. Audiences today want sensations, not logical structures, and at least *Bullitt* delivers some of the kicks that it promises—a car chase over San Francisco's hills, and a cat-and-mouse game between moving planes at the San Francisco airport are among the most dazzling action sequences on recent celluloid. William Fraker's photography is splashy and dynamic, and the director, Peter Yates, has an unusual eye for detail. He lets several apparently irrelevant scenes run much longer than we expect; at first I thought his timing was off, but then I began to admire his attempts to challenge the rules of the genre. We expect thrillers to be tight and fast, but this one is often eerily distended. When the hero visits an elegant Nob Hill party what might have been only an atmospheric bit in another film reveals character in this one; the scene goes on long enough to make Bullitt's distaste for aristocratic pretension palpable and painful. Yates absorbs us in the machinery and language of hospital operating rooms and morgues, forcing us to look at much more than we *want* to see, refusing to cut away—like more fastidious moviemakers—from the methodical, gruesome routines of men who trade in death. And in the car chase Yates traps us in those cars, on city hills and country roads and freeways, until we can feel the excitement, the claustrophobia, the insanity of the automobile with sudden, therapeutic clarity. I don't want to make this film sound important—it's basically conventional and empty-headed, and when it tries for a "meaningful" scene, like the one in which the hero's girlfriend gives a little speech about his callousness, it's thoroughly ridiculous. But if you do happen to see *Bullitt,* it has a few minor rewards.

—STEPHEN FARBER

**The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach** is one of the year's most daring films, yet on the surface, it is among the least spectacular—eschewing color, fast cutting, topical references, zooms, flashbacks, and all the other trimmings of the most "advanced" of the films of the sixties. As noted by other critics, it is primarily a film about the *music* of Bach, rather than about the man himself. One aspect of the film's daring lies in its relentless presentation of whole works or at least whole movements of Bach's works rather than the usual snippets. (The performances, one may add, are both exquisite and restrained). If the *Chronicle,* however, were simply a record of performances, one would hardly need a film; and the daring of director Jean-Marie Straub (with co-director Danièle Straub-Huillet, his wife) is as much visual as auditory. Straub dares to hold the camera still and to force us to *look.* The entire film contains only some 100 shots, about one tenth of the usual number for a film its length. Far from being boring, the long-held shots give us time to observe the period costumes, instruments, settings, even original documents. Most of the long shots as well as many closer ones are taken at an angle. The angles themselves as well as the restless curve of the Baroque interiors give such a strong impression of movement that I was several times surprised to realize that the camera had not actually moved at all. Also adding to the impression of movement are the backgrounds: usually a large window or a round or oval-framed picture, which draws the eye to the rear of the composition. But of course there *is* movement within the individual shots, though always of a slow and subtle kind. Hands move on harpsichord and organ keys, and one remarkable shot shows feet moving over the organ pedals. There are slow dollies to the main point of interest, or from a soloist to embrace a group. Or a seemingly static frame will contain small but significant movements, such as the lovely scene of Anna Magdalena sitting at her spinet with her little girl quietly playing in front of it. It is perfectly appropriate for the images to be understated, in keeping with the understatement of Anna Magdalena's journal itself, parts of which are read (in an almost toneless voice) between and occasionally during the musical selections. From listening to Anna Magdalena's account one gets the impression of a man and woman facing with unshakeable stoicism some of the worst calamities that life can bring—illness, failure, and death of children, disfavor with employers and punishment for the assertion of one's rights, sickness, near-blindness, death. Anna Magdalena (Bach's second wife) al-

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most casually slips mention of these disasters into her chronicle of married life. The acting is equally understated. All of the actors are real musicians—the notable harpsichordist Gustav Leonhardt plays a rather lean and dour Johann Sebastian, and Christiane Lang plays his wife—and none of them pretends to be anything other than what they are. Nor, however, do they look uncomfortable in their curled wigs and ruffles. The film, in short, has the calm and grandeur of much of Bach's music. An initially perplexing shot, twice repeated, of waves breaking against a shore was explained to me when I learned that Beethoven once said of Bach: *"Das ist kein Bach, das ist ein Meer"* ("That is no brook, that is an ocean"—with another possible pun on the word *Meer,* which is also a homophone for *mehr, more*). The quotation is appropriate to a film which presents, without any resort to trickery or modishness, a man, his time, and above all his music in a way that is both faithful and touching. It is a film to be seen many times.—HARRIET R. POLT

**The Firemen's Ball.** When one gets through laughing at absolutely every character and situation in Milos Forman's third feature film (also known as *Like a House on Fire*), one realizes that, far from being benignly humorous, the film depicts and satirizes most of mankind's unbeautiful traits, as well as many of the natural disasters that flesh is heir to. Practically plotless, *Fireman's Ball* deals with the attempts by a fire brigade of a small Czech mountain town to stage a dance, honor their pitiful, ancient ex-chief, choose a pretty queen of the ball, hold a raffle, and finally extinguish a fire which consumes the house of another pitiful old man. Despite multiple disasters, the party is a success: almost everyone has a good time. But the queen candidates, partly through sheer luck and partly through bribery, turn out to be the homeliest, most squirmy and unpoised girls of the town; the raffle prizes are stolen (one—a large headcheese—by the wife of the firechief, who brings disgrace on the brigade by being discovered in the act of trying to return it). Efforts to raise money for the old man whose house has burned are unsuccessful, and he is offered instead the box full of raffle tickets for the stolen prizes—at which he bitterly observes, "But I need money, not pieces of paper!" The old chief, forgotten in the melée, is finally discovered after all the guests have left, patiently waiting to claim his prize—a box supposed to contain a gilt fireaxe. It has also been stolen, but the old man has too much pride to let on that the box is empty, and only the audience shares his secret.

All along we are exposed to a rich collection of human foibles—lechery, greed, pride, gluttony, envy—as well as natural disasters—fires, of course, and stupidity, ugliness, and sickness (the firemen, in their pre-party planning session, matter-of-factly state that the old chief has cancer and won't live to see another ball). The two old men, one heartbreakingly tactful, the other just as plainly frank, come off both best and worst. Though they alone have both honesty and dignity, no humiliation is spared them: at the fire, the burned-out man sits on a chair in the snow watching his house burn to the ground. Someone suggests turning him around so that he won't have to watch; someone else, noting that he is dressed only in pajamas, observes that he may be cold. The logical solution, suggested by yet another helpful bystander, is of course to move him closer to the fire! As in Forman's earlier *Loves of a Blonde,* some episodes are carried too far. Forman doesn't seem to know when we have had enough of a joke, and the film would benefit from further editing. Yet for the most part it all works, and this tragicomedy has more lasting impact than would pure comedy. Forman treats the failings and misfortunes of human beings with the sardonic wit that we have come to expect of the Czechoslovakian film makers of the sixties. Whether their recent financial and popular success, and the more recent (and more lamentable) reoccupation of their homeland will change their films for the worse, yet remains to be seen.—HARRIET R. POLT

**For The Love Of Ivy.** It is the outlandishness of the idea of black people cavorting in one of those stud-chases-virgin sex comedies that makes *Ivy* worthy of mention. Certainly, no reasonable person would challenge the assertion that the American sex comedy is one of the most appalling creations of recent decades. Why, then, with so many important themes aching to be explored, would black stars make forays into a worthless genre like the sex comedy? Screenwriter Robert Alan Aurthur is less to blame than Sidney Poitier, who created the storyline, somehow convincing himself and producers that the black people of America needed this. I am certain that I speak for the majority of my fellow black Americans in suggesting that Poitier cease deluding himself that cinematic debris such as this is beneficial to the black cause. Actually, it is flattery to even categorize this as a comedy, since few of the incidents and jokes rate more than a begrudging chuckle. The plot concerns a live-in black maid, Ivy (Abbey Lincoln), who threatens to leave her long-time employers,

wealthy suburban whites, to explore the big city and trap a husband. In order to dissuade her from leaving, the youngsters of the family blackmail a shady playboy (Poitier) into dating her. She eventually corrals the elegant Poitier by using the same teasing backhanded tactics that Doris Day has used on Rock Hudson countless times. What rescues the film from being completely laughless is the performance of Beau Bridges as the spoiled hippie son whose disregard for the Establishment is surpassed only by his love for luxury. Poitier, who turns many people off with his goody-goody antics, is unlikely to enlist new admirers on the basis of this performance. Abbey Lincoln, potentially a fine dramatic actress, is too grim and restrained in a role that demands effervescence. Though this film is probably worse than it sounds here, it has a positive aspect. Having Poitier be the co-owner of an illegal gambling enterprise is a mild relief from his usual purity. The photography and the editing appear to be the work of bumbling amateurs and director Daniel Mann should go into hiding.—DENNIS HUNT

**Ice Cream Soda** is the work of a young and talented Dutch film-maker, Kees Meyering, who demonstrates particular gifts in his handling of actors and oblique situations. (The title, other than suggesting an American ambiance successfully captured in the film, seems to mean very little.) The film treats of an ambiguous sadomasochistic relationship in which the roles of oppressor and oppressed constantly and subtly shift. It opens on a desolate, wintry road at dusk. A young man, his hair cut in a Beatle mop, is walking alone when he is almost run over by a car. The car screeches to a stop, and the people inside debate momentarily and then offer the young man a lift. He makes no reply, and the longer he remains silent the more insistent they become. Finally, with the doors of one side of the car, they entrap him against a fence. As the car begins to move the young man is forced to run like an animal in a floorless, moving cage. In an attempt to free himself he lunges onto the hood, desperately clutching the windshield wipers as the car speeds away. This atmosphere of the untoward propels the rest of the film. Frozen, more dead than alive, he is dragged inside a comfortable suburban home. Slowly, under the brutal urgings of his hosts, he revives, and then begins a strange interplay between hosts and seemingly entrapped guest, heightened by the carefully oblique photography of Jan de Bont. For example, shortly after the young man is thawed out he is forced to his feet. Still unsteady, he starts to collapse and the camera, placed under a glass table, catches his fall as he plunges into and then shatters the table. In a fleeting instant one shares the guest's pain, his confusion and, above all, his dread of what may happen next. This is only the most virtuoso moment in a film whose continually menacing quality owes much to its photography. Several tense scenes ensue with the men, each counterpoised by one between the guest and a woman of the group, in which the ambiance quickly turns teasingly sexual. The progression in these curious erotic interludes is such that by the last of them it is clear the guest is indulging in a nasty but harmless retaliation for the treatment he has received from the men. By morning, when the young man finds himself free to leave, the option no longer seems attractive. He has learned to play and to like the game, quickly sensing the unwritten rules which place him at the mercy of the men while elevating him to a position of command with the women. In the final scene, the viewer discreetly follows his hesitant departure from an ambiguous captivity toward an unwanted freedom. A disturbing film, *Ice Cream Soda* suggests no past and promises no future; it keeps one riveted to a slowly unfolding present.

—LARRY LOEWINGER

**The Legend of Lylah Clare** has been called Camp, which may be accurate, depending on your definition of Camp. The term has been debased to mean simply a work that is immoderately bad—so bad that it's funny—but I don't think *Lylah Clare* deserves that kind of condescension. It's not a terrible movie. It *is*, however, flamboyant, wildly exaggerated in both plot and character, stylized to the point of madness, so consistently and utterly unreal that it makes considerations of realism irrelevant—several important qualities that Susan Sontag described in her famous essay on Camp. Robert Aldrich's films all tend toward excessive grotesquerie of character, excessively melodramatic plot trickery, excessive violence. And I would say his least interesting films are the ones that play straightest—*The Flight of the Phoenix* or *The Dirty Dozen*. The outrageous *Lylah Clare* has no such problem; but the excesses seem almost justifiable. The film is about Hollywood—the garish, swollen Hollywood of Hedda Hopper and King Cohn, Nathaniel West and *Sunset Boulevard*, the Hollywood of our most extravagant nightmares. People say we have seen Aldrich's characters before —a boorish, bellowing studio head, an arrogant, ruthlessly egotistical director, a dope-addicted lesbian housekeeper and "dialogue coach," a solemn, milky, cancerous agent, a voracious, crippled gossip

columnist who wears a rose in her brace and is wrenched in and out of rooms by a couple of sinister, silent homosexual bodyguards—and I suppose we have, but never in quite this ferocious and gross a parody version. These characters are almost absurdly distorted and monsterish, but it seems to me that in their stylized way they are true to what is most appalling about Old Hollywood (and despite propaganda to the contrary, Old Hollywood is not yet extinct). The story itself is harder to defend—it concerns a young ingenue, Elsa Brinkmann, who looks astonishingly like the legendary Lylah Clare, and is signed by the dead star's director-husband (von Sternberg to Lylah's Dietrich?) to appear in the film biography of Lylah, only to find her own personality more and more absorbed by Lylah's, until she is playing out, in real life, the psychotic breakdown she has been simulating on film. There are moments when this weird transformation takes on a measure of psychological cogency—the mousy Elsa, whose individuality is stifled by the Hollywood tyrants around her, finds a way of expressing her feelings—her outrage at the way she is being humiliated—only by adopting the deep Germanic accent of Lylah; Lylah becomes a sort of alter ego for the terrified starlet, a voice for her deepest hostilities and desires. But when Elsa begins to develop clairvoyant knowledge of the secrets of Lylah's private life, psychological insight gives way to a sort of Alfred Hitchcock Hour gimmickry. But then Aldrich is still a lazy film-maker; he has not yet decided whether he wants to make films that he cares about for an audience he respects, like most film artists, or toy cynically with an audience he despises, like Hitchcock. He cannot have it both ways. Considering this confusion it is surprising that *Lylah Clare* is so lively so often. The venomous dialogues between the director, the studio head, the housekeeper *et al.* are well written by Hugo Butler and Jean Rouverol (though sometimes overwritten—the film is surprisingly talky); the character of the director, especially, has a bracing sort of nastiness that is almost worthy of Albee. In this dissection of the Hollywood artist who devours and destroys everything he touches, who will literally commit murder to create a more perfect scene, Aldrich has perhaps unconsciously fashioned a hysterical, withering self-portrait that makes much of the film urgent and painful. The performances are almost all up to the dizzying demands of the grand caricature parts, particularly Peter Finch as the director. Here, with a less "serious" part than he is accustomed to playing, he abandons his customary restraint and relishes the excesses of his role with almost frightening zeal. Ernest Borgnine, Rossella Falk, Milton Selzer, Coral Browne, Valentina Cortese give excellent support. Only poor Kim Novak is at a loss—but then her dual role is probably beyond human capability. Admittedly an insane film, and not recommended for everyone; but there must be a few other people with a taste for this kind of lush, decadent carnival of Hollywood horrors?—STEPHEN FARBER

**La Sixième Face du Pentagone.** Chris Marker is among that rare breed of men in whom the currents of political engagement and searching human honesty reinforce and enrich rather than antagonize each other. His new film *The Sixth Side of the Pentagon* is an impressive study and sympathetic evocation of the October 21, 1967, Washington peace march. The title, taken from a Zen epigram, reflects the large, sometimes predominant, role the well-chosen word plays in a Marker film. A rough paraphrase is as follows: "If one is to attack a pentagon and its five sides are well protected, then assail it from the sixth side." To challenge directly and *en masse* this symbol of war and to be repulsed by the very violence against which the demonstration was aimed constituted both the assault and the victory. Accompanying the film is an eloquent, if somewhat distant, commentary (in French) on the events. Marker's eyes and ears seize upon the ironic or paradoxical incident to reveal a larger meaning. There is a wonderful moment where his cameras catch an evangelist high on a hydraulic lift preaching his anticommunist hate. At the same moment below a colorful group of hippies are trying to exorcize evil. Who, the narrator wonders, is the more religious? The film starts by recording the demonstration's preliminary activities in New York several weeks before the event itself and concludes the morning after in Washington. Comprising a kind of preface and postscript these two sections are rendered as tinted stills. In contrast the body of the film, beginning with the marchers' arrival in the capital, including the didactic entertainment and speeches, and ending with the battle, is in full color.

The march begins, as Marker's commentary has it (evoking Renoir) like "a picnic in the country." The tone changes as the demonstrators approach the Pentagon; the film, like the demonstration, climaxes with the confrontation between protestors and the forces of order—the moment where political stance escalates into political action. The high tension just before the mêlée is conveyed through a series of close-ups of the police as the demonstrators chant

"Peace Now!" Then the violence erupts, followed by confusion and bloodshed. The film's major theme is the change in political climate resulting from the prolongation of the war. From verbal opposition to active resistance was an inevitable, if tragic, progression and, as the film amply documents, the Washington march was a crucial event illustrating this change. Chris Marker is not a film journalist in the conventional sense, nor is he, as some would urge, a propagandist. His working material is human events but his intent is that of an artist: to give permanence and coherence to transient experience. If Marker's films are to last, *The Sixth Side of the Pentagon* included, they will be remembered not as historical documents but as a series of modest statements on the human condition.—LARRY LOEWINGER

**Tattoo** is the first feature by Johannes Schaaf, who is a 35-year-old actor-director belonging to the group of young and youngish film artists composing the "Young German Cinema"—a group which declared their independence from "Papa's Cinema" at the Oberhausen Festival of 1962. That virtually none of the films by these young directors has been seen here, outside of an occasional festival entry, is lamentable. *Tattoo,* at least, is a film of universal validity that deserves a larger audience than it is likely to get. Alienation is its theme. The alienation of Benno, the 16-year-old hero, is about as absolute as it can be. "Rescued" from a home for delinquent boys by a wealthy fortyish manufacturer and his wife, Benno is at first fascinated by the world of material comfort which his new "family" dangles in front of him. Soon, however, he sees through the platitudinous and hypocritical set of values which his foster-father offers in place of the brutal but clearcut values of the reform school. Nor does he find any real understanding in his foster-mother, a chic woman whose Pucci dresses appear to be her trademark. The one relationship which means something to Benno is sexual: with the 20-year-old niece of the foster-parents, a provocative little number who quickly tires of Benno's puppy adoration and returns to her rather overt though cynical flirtation with her uncle. The youngsters' disaffection with their elders' ways and ideas extends, of course, to politics. Far from espousing radical causes, however, the young people espouse nothing at all. The film is set in Berlin, the manufacturer's house is a few hundred feet from The Wall. But the kids amuse themselves by triggering the Wall's alarm mechanism which sends a barrage of fireworks-like rockets into the air. So much, they seem to say, for Papa's politics. Beautifully photographed in color, the film is occasionally self-indulgent. The mosaic factory which is the family home and place of business both, is a splendid neo-Romanesque building; but why mosaics anyway? The symbolism is simultaneously crude and unclear. And why the title? Schaaf has tried to explain it by saying that the young boy is "tattooed" by his environment, but the explanation doesn't fit the film. The camera is nervous and jumpy, the color striking. Most of the time it all works, and sometimes it is delightfully wry. When it doesn't work, one can forgive a first film.
—HARRIET R. POLT

TATTOO

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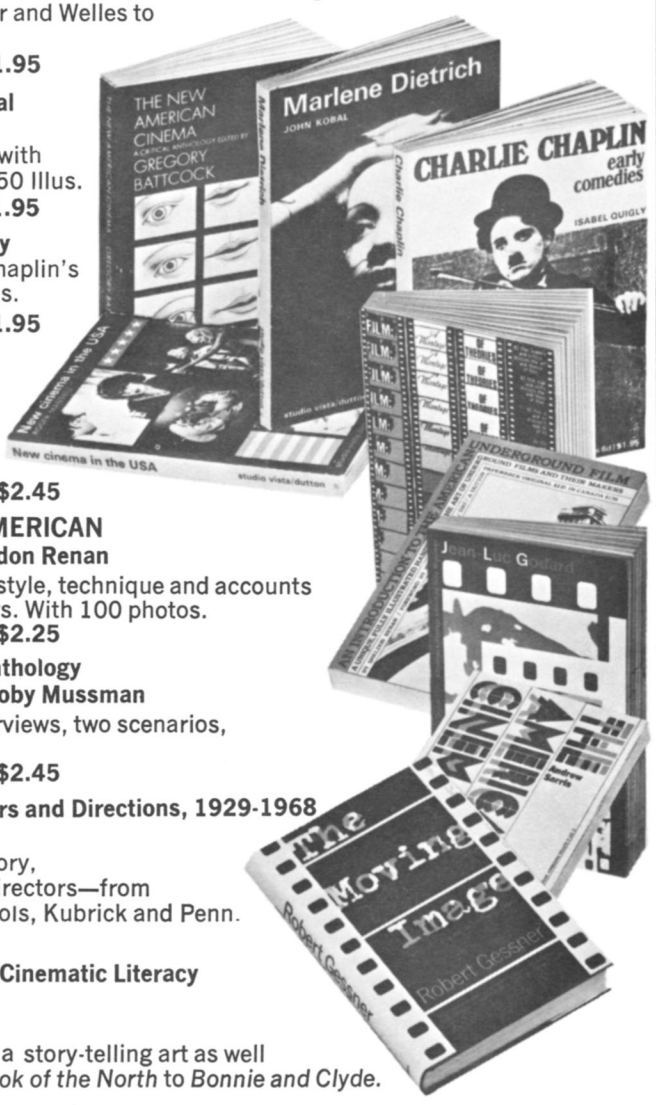


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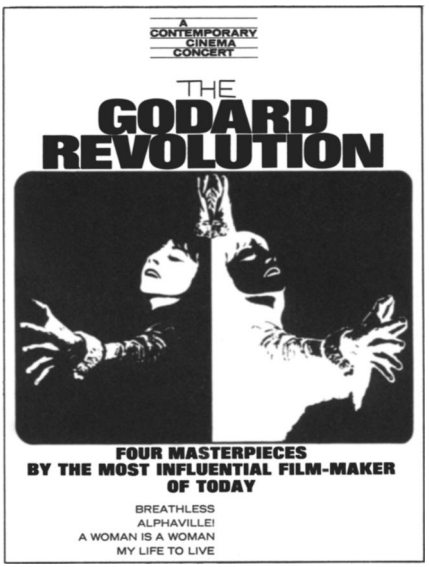


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