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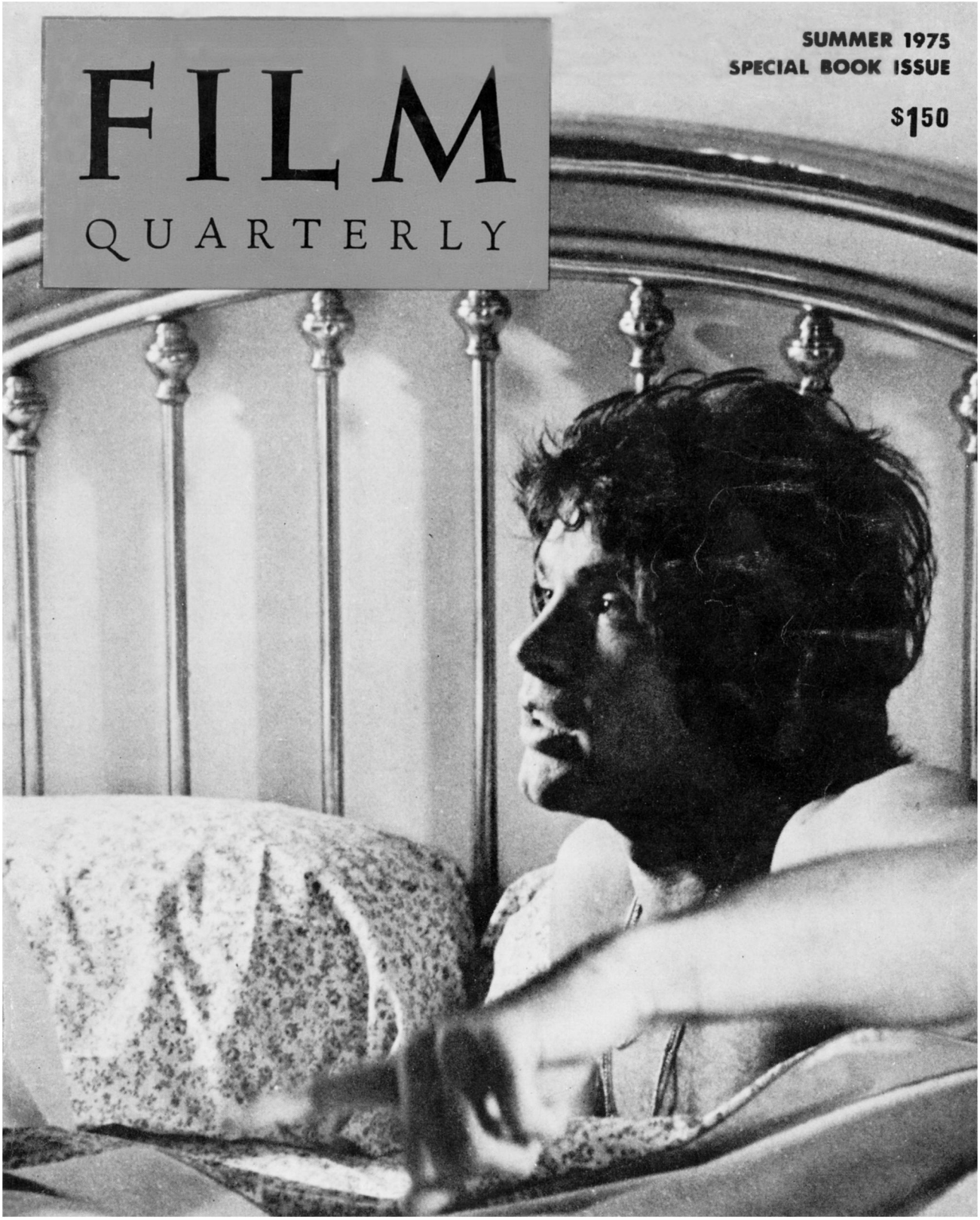

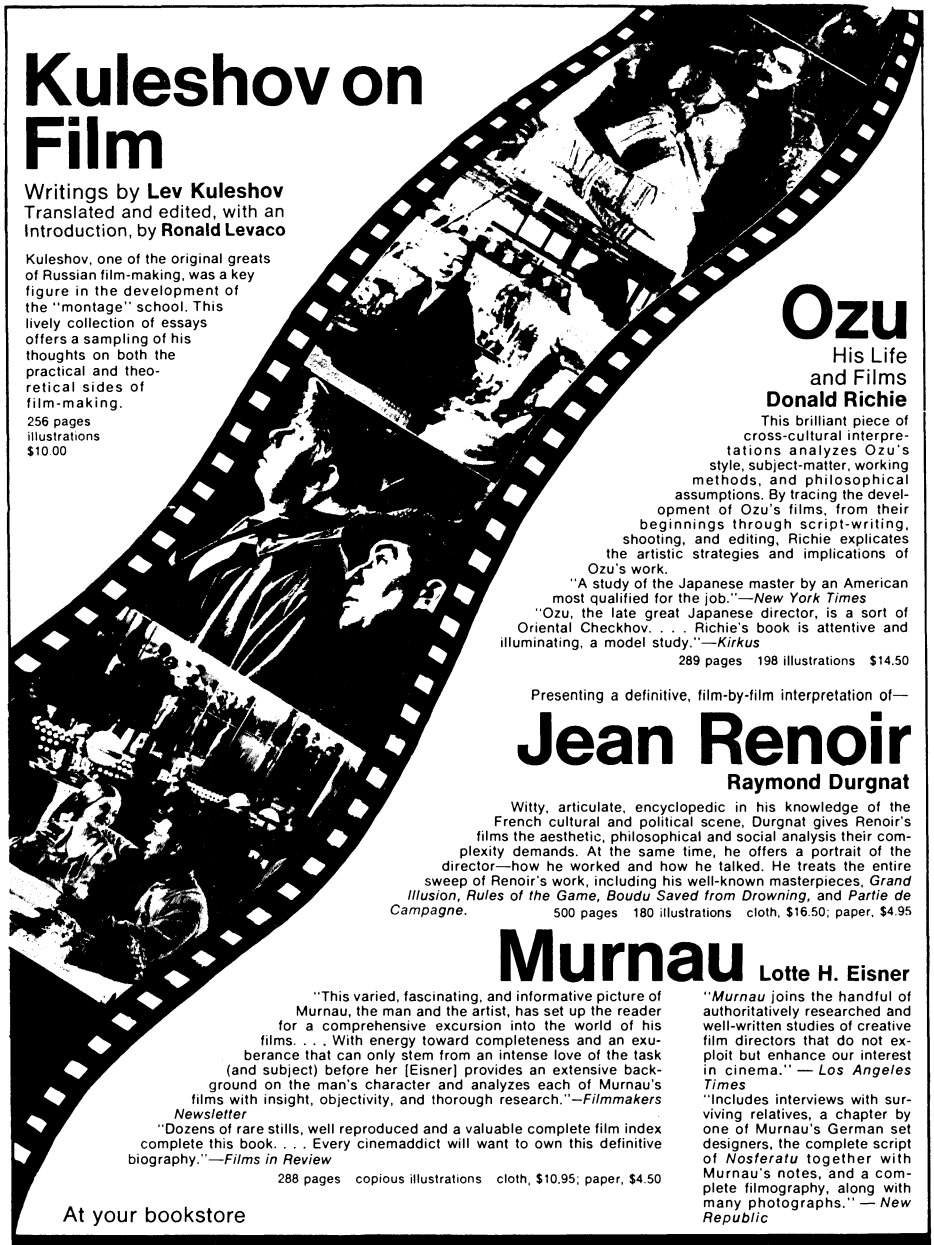

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COVER: Warren Beatty as George in *Shampoo.*

Editor's Notebook

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LEE ATWELL lives in Los Angeles, and has written for *FQ* and other journals. GIDEON BACHMANN is our Rome Editor, but now spends part of his time in England. HENRY BREITROSE teaches at Stanford. SEYMOUR CHATMAN teaches at Berkeley. ELAINE CHEKICH studies film

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TOBACCO ROAD

ers who chose to view it as camp, but its moments of intensity—and the feeling which it communicates of Ford groping towards something new for him—tip the balance in its favor.

Robert Chappetta has written that "John Ford's films are simple and traditional in meaning, but we lose something in not being able to respond to them." Indeed they are, and indeed we do. But when criticism turns to idolatry, when it tries to overinflate the films' real qualities into proofs of artistry equal to that of Shakespeare or Beethoven or whatever truly great artist in whatever medium you care to name, disappointment is the inevitable response. In such a stifling critical climate, it may be a blessing that some of Ford's best films, like the funny, autumnal *Tobacco Road* (1941) or the lively, crazy-quilt silent *Three Bad Men* (1926) have been comparatively neglected. Once, this kind of hyperbole may have had its function, when movies, especially American movies, were ignored by snobbish, ignorant worshippers of "high culture." But now that their value and artistic potential have long been established for all but the most incorrigible mossbacks, this kind of secretly defensive overpraise is valueless tactically as it always was critically. Furthermore, it plays right into the hands of today's moguls, packagers, and ex-hairdressers, who want to remake the films of yesteryear while scorning fresher, more innovative projects. Grant Ford all due honor, watch his films—but don't print the legend.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Alexander Jacobs suggested many of the key ideas in this article.

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MICHAEL DEMPSEY

John Ford:

A REASSESSMENT

"Visually beautiful, otherwise not very interesting," wrote James Agee about a John Ford epic of the forties. Today this remark is undoubtedly "dated" to those who have since turned Ford into a sacred cow. Nobody will deny that he is one of the few directors to have put his own world on film—coherently and in detail—despite the restrictions of the studio system. Such writings as John Baxter's and J. A. Place's book-length studies* have mapped this world painstakingly. But they have also done little more than take it at face value, as though its mere existence constituted proof of great artistry. The myth of Ford's great artistry badly needs a challenge. As Raymond Durgnat has commented, "The fact that a director has an 'individual' style doesn't of itself make his films interesting (except to those connoisseurs who collect odd styles like some people collect quaintly-shaped inkpots)."

The Sun Shines Bright (1953), which the director preferred to his other films, is a good place to begin. As an example of "late" Ford, which is supposed to be deeper and more melancholy than the earlier movies, it is certainly bleaker than its cheery, ambling predecessor, *Judge Priest* (1934). In each the judge, a good old boy who has more or less run a Southern town for years, faces defeat at the hands of a slicker politician. Both films end with rousing parades celebrating the judge's victory. But what in *Judge Priest* is a frolic becomes a virtual requiem in *The Sun Shines Bright*. Ford's shadowy, nocturnal images suffuse the parade with sadness, and his measured editing carefully draws out the mood. We know that this is the last triumph of the old order. *The Sun Shines Bright* is a penumbral film, keyed to sorrow and loss even amid joy.

At any rate, this is the flattering way to describe it, if you take its intentions for its achievements. If you don't, then it becomes, in Durgnat's words, a "male weepie." The movie's problem is not political fantasy but emotional facility; it never stops telling you what to feel. In the reunions of Priest's old Confederate unit, in his stand before the jailhouse door against a lynch mob, in a prostitute's funeral cortege rolling wordlessly through town with the townspeople marching behind it—in almost every scene, the movie plays shamelessly on our most ready-made responses. Ford mourns the old soldiers, backs up the judge, cries over the dead woman for us; our reactions have been built into the picture in advance.

Yet its assumptions and devices are highly questionable. If Priest defends a black boy from a gang of homicidal crackers who want to string him up for rape, naturally the boy must be innocent and one of the crackers guilty, while the rest of the vigilantes must troop into town on election day to vote the judge back in because "he saved us from ourselves." Weak-kneed liberalism wobbles home free again. During the prostitute's funeral, a local potentate, General Fairfield, finally acknowledges her as his ex-mistress and Priest's ward, Lucy Lee, as their daughter. We are obviously supposed to find the general's remorse touching and fall into the movie's penitential mood. But how can we when his unadmitted pride and puritanism caused the woman's death in the first place? The local blacks don't march behind the hearse; although some of them tended the prostitute in her final illness, they know their place—outside the door of the church—and take it with excruciat-

*John Baxter, *The Cinema of John Ford* (Zwemmer-Barnes) and J. A. Place, *The Western Films of John Ford* (Citadel).

ing humility. Even in a fantasy like this, Ford never considers putting them in the procession; he is too much the true believer in the status quo to question its contradictions very trenchantly. And in a clumsy bow to moral and religious orthodoxy, Lucy Lee's suave suitor must bend a knee and declare himself a sinner, even though his look of granite nobility never develops so much as a hairline crack throughout the movie.

Is this a searching analysis of American society, a twilit meditation on community, morality, tradition, family, religion, militarism, and julep-dipped Irishness? Only if personal equals profound and kitsch art. Other films could also serve the purpose, but *The Sun Shines Bright* is a compendium of Ford's persistent inadequacies as an artist. At his worst, he is an emotional vulgarian who lays on his ideas and feelings like a buffet supper. He touches the themes cited above, but too frequently he touches them as though they were pushbuttons. Which, in a sense, they are; for just by being alive we are all vulnerable to them, and even inept treatments of them can make us respond. Very often Ford sells "forgiveness" by the yard, trowels on "compassion" like cement. It he wants a bit of last-stand gallantry, he will drag in an old man, put a rifle in his hand, and plant him on a porch where, to the strains of "Red River Valley," he will fight the Japanese Army single-handed (*They Were Expendable,* 1945). If he wants an image of death and loss, he will cook up a howling, windswept desert funeral (*Three Godfathers,* 1948), as though a few striking shots alone could pump meaning into religious slop. Visually beautiful, otherwise not very interesting —contrary to those who think that, film being a visual medium, the former cannot fail to be the latter.

These are just a few random samples from Ford's work, and many are bound to feel that they have been selected arbitrarily, that more outrageous ones could be found. And so they could. The point is not that all of Ford is like this but that too much of it is. *The Sun Shines Bright, Three Godfathers, The Long Voyage Home, The Wings of Eagles, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, The Quiet Man, The Grapes of Wrath, Drums Along the Mohawk:* these and many others, whatever the virtues of some, can illustrate Agee's point about *They Were Expendable.* The flaws of *The Sun Shines Bright* are not the aberrations of one Ford film; they are the hallmarks of almost all.

In themselves, these weaknesses are not necessarily so serious. Many major artists, like Dickens and Chaplin, indulged in them without destroying their work. But few of Ford's films as a whole possess either the challenging complexity or the luminous simplicity which could reduce them to blemishes. His America is basically a child's fantasy preserved in the aspic of his

JUDGE PRIEST: *Precursor to* THE SUN SHINES BRIGHT

MY DARLING CLEMENTINE

horizon shots and scenic vistas. Though Baxter has tried strenuously to demonstrate the opposite, Ford is essentially a folk artist who gives us the simple evocations of heroism, defeat, community, rural virtue, religion, family life, civilization, and myth which idealistic children derive from their enthrallment with their history books and Bible stories. *My Darling Clementine* (1946) ranks among Ford's most beautiful achievements of this kind; it is moving as an elegant, moody ballad on the rise of civilization in the wilderness but feeble if mistaken for a profound study of the process. Despite erratic, often desperate efforts in some of his later movies, Ford's visionary idealism remains generally naive and untested—probably indispensable at some level to artistic creativity and, up to a point, appealing, but incapable of assimilating its contradictions or even acknowledging their existence.

Examples minor and major come to mind too readily. Baxter cites Ford's adoring icongraphy of General MacArthur in *They Were Expendable,* heroically evacuating only a minimal staff from the Philippines during World War II, when in fact he packed the PT boats with officers and their factotums. As Baxter admits, Ford could not incorporate the truth into his idealization. More elaborately, *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) gives us the "Lincoln of our dreams," as Pauline Kael has put it. From the movie's stately pacing, affectionate tableaux of Americana, homey heroism, and shrewd hindsight, we pick up the signals of this gawky, raw youth's latent stature. Henry Fonda's performance—with its self-conscious self-depreciation, its abstracted stare into tomorrow, and its bumbling yet floating dignity —creates a mythic portrait of the American. On this ingenuous and charming level, the film is extremely beautiful. But it turns to mush whenever it tries to motivate Lincoln through maudlin images of Mother and Family; even the famous scene between him and his soon-to-be-dead sweetheart, Ann Rutledge, falls somewhat flat because Pauline Moore, who plays the part, reads her lines inexpressively. When a more complex woman appears, the sleek and emasculating Mary Todd, Ford cannot account for Lincoln's attraction to her; his storybook hero has nothing in him to explain it. The *Cahiers du Cinéma* collective study of the film may find a castration motif in this and other incidents, but clearly Ford had neither control nor awareness of it.

Ford's films deal more often and more directly with primal American themes than anybody else's do; but since they seldom measure up to the themes, they are more vulnerable to history. Many have compared Ford to Whitman, but the comparison does not favor Ford. It is one thing to say they both sought less the literal truth than the truth of myth, but on most occasions Ford shows far less ability than Whitman to distinguish between the two. It is one thing for a nineteenth-century poet to enshrine the myth of America's unique nobility but quite another for a twentieth-century film-maker to repeat the process, and on an infinitely more sentimental and commercially bastardized level, as though American history had stood still since the Civil War. Even in Ford's heyday, let alone in recent

YOUNG MR. LINCOLN ▶

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

decades, the impossible Whitmanesque ideal had been perverted often enough to give any thoughtful person pause. But Ford the contemporary of Faulkner gives us sticky Southern Edens full of plastic magnolia trees and sashaying darkies. Ford the contemporary of Dreiser and Dos Passos and even Steinbeck gives us, in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), a hollow celebration of that emptiest abstraction, The People, along with a cop-out analysis which avoids blaming any individual or interest for the plight of the Okies. Ford the contemporary of Joyce serves up a little but watery mulligan stew at his Irish-American table. In some of the later films, Ford expresses pain and confusion over changes in his America; but for the most part he endorses —often complacently— every official piety, religious, social, and political. Baxter writes (p. 9), "On the level of invention at which he works, ideology is irrelevant." Baxter is wrong —on both counts.

One especially striking aspect of Ford's work is its abundance of Indians, blacks, and Orientals, who far outnumber the nonwhite characters in the films of his fellow directors. But Ford's responses to them complicate his simple communal idealism. Most of his communities are all-white, but a significant number are at least nominally multiracial. In several films, he tries (often unconsciously, it appears) for images of racial and social harmony among diverse people. During the hilarious climax to *Steamboat Round the Bend* (1935) Stepin Fetchit teams up with a basso profundo Bible thumper, a swamp girl, a drunk, and a snake-oil salesman to win a race down the Mississippi. *The Searchers* (1956) turns upon the abduction of a white girl by a Comanche whom she eventually marries. *Wagon Master* (1950) gracefully unites Mormons and Indians in communal peace. Two films set in the Pacific, *The Hurricane* (1937) and *Donovan's Reef* (1963), edge towards Polynesian utopias: in the first, the whites envy the islanders and compare them to birds; in the second, whites of several nationalities join Orientals to form a ramshackle community.

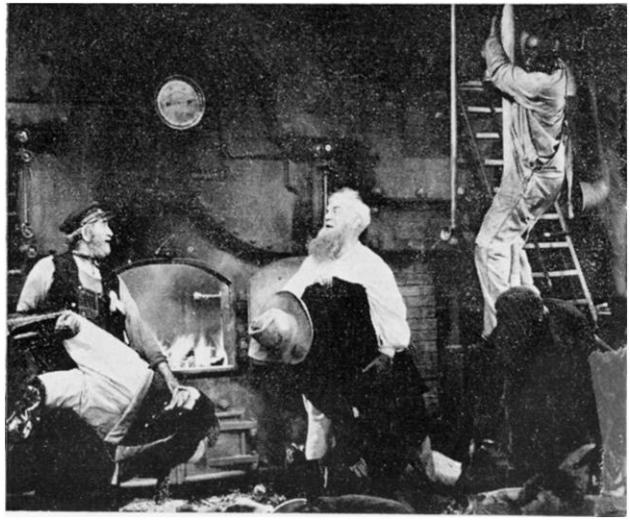
In the hands of a more thoughtful director, these premises could have led to provocative examinations of racial tension without necessarily denying the possibility of such communal bliss. But Ford is invariably paternalistic; he wants to "do right," but he cannot escape his own innate condescension. Robin Wood (*Film Comment,* Fall 1971) and Baxter have described the roles of his Indians: part of the scenery and plot (*Stagecoach,* 1939), unconscious symbols of the erupting Id (*She Wore a Yellow Ribbon,* 1949; *Rio Grande,* 1950; *The Searchers*), "good" savages (the hero's friend in *Drums Along the Mohawk,* 1939; the old chief in *Yellow Ribbon* who laments the destructiveness of war; the fugitives of *Cheyenne Autumn,* 1964).

Most of Ford's blacks lack even the cigar store dignity of the Indians. Stepin Fetchit (a character and a pseudonym of Lincoln Perry) is the obvious example, with his wheedling, his word-swallowing whine, his vacant gape and bulgy-eyed servility, his slack-limbed shuffle and cringing contortions. Paradoxically, Fetchit is such a stock figure in America's hall of racial infamy that many people may have forgotten or may never have seen for themselves just how dehumanized he is forced to be, how his extreme submissiveness makes him practically a vegetable. Lately, some critics and Perry himself have said that these gruesome exhibitions parody white racism obliquely. Their evidence tends to include his equally caricatured co-stars, Will Roger's comic imitation of his voice in one scene of *Judge Priest,* and his goofy antics as David-Begat-Solomon tumbling out of a papier-maché whale in *Steamboat Round the Bend.* These are, God knows, unique feats of acting (or rug-chewing), and they certainly do indict racism. But this is really just a rationalization, clever but hopeless. Fetchit's white co-stars may also be caricatured, but not along racial lines, and none descends to his subhuman cretinism. Neither an innocuous comic grotesque like Francis Ford's baccy-spitting old coot in *Judge Priest* nor an ethereal ninny-sage like Hank Worden's Old Mose in *The Searchers,* Stepit Fetchit makes us squirm at his own enforced abasement.

The closest that Ford comes to a sympathetic, unstereotyped black is Pompey, Tom Donophon's servant in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), and he is a soft wax statue of goodness like the Indians of *Cheyenne Autumn.* Neither gets far beyond the extras of *Arrowsmith* (1931), in which the hero tests a new yellow fever serum on black Caribbeans during an epidemic after whites refuse to take the risk, or *The Prisoner of Shark Island* (1936), in which Dr. Samuel Mudd frightens black guards into helping him combat malaria by playing on their superstitions. Nominally, each group of blacks is heroic; actually, they are just stereotypes—ignorant, hoodooed pickaninnies—who (particularly in *Shark Island*) pass from gibbering idiocy to plaster sanctity without contamination by mere humanity. Even an impersonal romance like *Mogambo* (1953) shows Ford's fear of the tribesmen he seeks to dignify, as one protracted war dance reveals.

Towards Orientals, Ford's films take a simpler but still ambiguous tone. His Orientals do not become the slant-eyed savages of war films like *Bataan,* which gloat over impossibly evil "Jap" predecessors of Vietnam's "gooks." By not showing any Japanese at all, *They Were Expendable,* to Ford's eternal credit, avoids bloodthirsty images of their slaughter. His concentration on images of defeat, loss, weariness, and death makes this ostensibly morale-boosting production unusually tentative and understated for its genre. But these qualities may also stem from an inability to take Orientals seriously. Unlike Indians and blacks (and even after Vietnam, let alone in Ford's time), they are not so immense a part of America's guilty conscience; and so, unable to inspire terror, they cannot challenge Ford's vision of American righteousness.

As a result, Ford's innate paternalism makes them trivial, like the Filipinos in one brief instant of *Expendable* who run around babbling "Jap come, Jap come," or ingenuous, like Terangi of *The Hurricane.* He earns the admiration of whites for his intrepid escapes from the prisons in which a French martinet tries to hold him on a trumped-up charge. At the same time, his fellow islanders beguile the white colonialists with their carefree mores. But Ford evades all issues in the end by patting them on



STEAMBOAT ROUND THE BEND ▶

the head like infants, sweet and charming in their naiveté but not to be taken seriously as alternatives or contributors to white civilization. Even the movie's smashing climax, a horrendous typhoon linked by the islanders to outraged gods, arises not to make us have any regard for their beliefs but to improve the martinet's character (inadequately developed in the first place) by drowning a few bit players and making some waves in the studio tank. Although it was released 26 years later, *Donovan's Reef* is no more sophisticated: its Hawaiians are cute children, its Chinese are comic dummies, and its moral dilemma (will starchy Bostonian Amelia accept her father's children by a native woman?) is utterly cut-and-dried. American movies as diverse as *Nanook of the North, Grass, Tabu,* and, recently, Philip Kaufman's *The White Dawn* depict other cultures with a respect and a depth of feeling which Ford never approaches.

Ford's idolators have generally dodged this strain of "benign" racism in his work, much as D. W. Griffith's champions often softpeddle the racism in *The Birth of a Nation.* Agee himself wrote that Griffith in this film understood blacks "as a good kind of Southerner does." Surprised and stung by protests against the film, Griffith poured all his resources into *Intolerance* and later, in *Hearts of the World,* showed a black soldier and a white soldier kissing each other as a gesture of common humanity. These sincere but woefully inadequate ploys indicate a racism that stems not from the fanatical hatred of, say, a Klansman or a segregationalist but from a kind of simple-minded, provincial innocence. Both Griffith and Ford lacked the imagination to transcend the racial stereotypes of their periods. Griffith's black rapist in *The Birth of a Nation,* pawing virginal Lillian Gish, and Ford's Debbie in *The Searchers,* returning to the white world even after she has become spiritually an Indian, are typical products of this deficiency, in which moral and artistic failures are inseparable.

Ford's portrayals of women betray a comparable inadequacy; collectively, they bear out Leslie Fiedler's famous thesis about the inability of many American artists to deal maturely with love and death. The vast majority of Ford's women are as mired in stereotypes as his nonwhites; they exist only in relation to men, whom they mother, feed, comfort, and bury. These functions add up to their only true role in life; they rarely do anything for their own sakes, nor do they really have lives of their own. The men feel genuine reverence for them but also, at bottom take them for granted. They are marked by all the negative implications of "pedestalism"; their glorification effectively removes them from "masculine" areas of life. Being idols, they are not fully human, need not be taken with true seriousness.

Within these limits (which are, of course, social as well as personal), many Ford women are appealing and heroic. In the best moment of *Drums Along the Mohawk,* Magdalena (Claudette Colbert) stands at the crest of a hill, her dress whipping in the breeze as she gazes down at a thin column of departing colonial troops, one of them her husband. The otherwise disastrous *Long Gray Line* (1955) contains a similar flash of intensity: Mary Maher (Maureen O'Hara), her face ashen with grief, staring after her surrogate son as he strides away along a rural lane towards World War II. The war itself provided Ford with the opportunity to create one of his most effective women, Donna Reed's stoic, strong, radiant military nurse in *They Were Expendable.* An episode of her waltzing with John Wayne's PT boat officer beneath a lacy curtain of light and shadow is Fordian romanticism at its most beautiful. In *How Green Was My Valley* (1941), the Morgan women (Mrs. Morgan, daughter Angharad, and daughter-in-law Bronwen, played by Sara Allgood, Maureen O'Hara—at her best here—and Anna Lee) are poignant embodiments of steadfastness and courage.

But, for the most part, his are simply "waiting women" whether they are wives, mothers, daughters, or prostitutes. So are Joyce's women; but they have individual facets and depths far beyond Ford's generally coy, angelic abstractions of Holy Womanhood. The daughters in *Young Mr. Lincoln, The Sun Shines Bright*

(with demure Arleen Whelan giving almost the same performance in each despite a gap of 14 years), *My Darling Clementine, The Hurricane,* and *Judge Priest,* among others, are little more than porcelain figurines. The prostitutes of such films as *Clementine, Sun, The Informer,* and *Stagecoach* are scarcely less pristine and equally uninteresting. Much of this unreal purity must be charged off to censorship, but Ford was comfortable with it; witness Margaret Leighton's scenery - gulping lesbian in *Seven Women* (1966). As the "hearts" of their homes (to paraphrase a description of Mrs. Morgan by her youngest son), Ford's wives and mothers have more substance but vary widely in appeal. Some are gooey: Helen Hayes's fragile blossom in *Arrowsmith,* who sickens (and finally dies) with suspiciously perfect timing at each new stage of her husband's career; Jane Darwell's Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath,* a mawkish family bulwark and earth mother of us all; Mildred Natwick's dying madonna in *Three Godfathers,* a mere tearjerker; Alice Brady's widow in *Young Mr. Lincoln,* quivering with piety; Dolores Del Rio's belle of St. Mary in *The Fugitive.* Others escape the overbearing sentimentality of these characters: Ethan Edward's sister-in-law Martha in *The Searchers;* Vera Miles's Hallie, the romantic prize of *Liberty Valance;* Vera Allen's Janet, the town physician's platonic, motherly friend and eventual spouse in *Doctor Bull.* Between these extremes lie—quite literally—the dead wives whose graves or portraits Ford has their widowers address in *Doctor Bull, Judge Priest,* and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon.* Appropriately, each has vanished before the movies begin, the better to serve as a remote icon whose earthly virtues we are expected to take on faith.

Even apparent exceptions do not really disrupt the cloying pattern. They tend to be secret marshmallows like Mildred Natwick's Irish matriarch in *The Quiet Man* and Edna May Oliver's flinty old bat in *Drums Along the Mohawk* or "spunky" counterfeits of sexuality like Shirley Jones's pig-tailed teenager in *Two Rode Together* and Maureen O'Hara's raven-haired bride in *The Quiet Man.* Other variants are the puritanical, gossipy biddies who make safe targets in *Doctor Bull, Judge Priest, Steamboat Round the Bend,* and *Donovan's Reef.* Faced with a more virulent puritanism, the communal ostracism of Angharad in *How Green Was My Valley* after she seeks a divorce, Ford fudges the issue by leaving it unresolved. Occasionally, he will present figures like Myrna Loy's slinky adventuress, who tempts young Doctor Arrowsmith, or Ava Gardner's irreverent international playgirl, who amuses herself (and wins the audience's allegiance) throughout *Mogambo* by needling Grace Kelly's frosty married prig. Maybe these two are minor manifestations of what Joseph McBride and Michael Wilmington (*Film Comment,* Spring 1972) have found to be full-blown in *Seven Women,* the idealist's suppressed desire to see his idols fall.

But, except in *Seven Women,* they never really do. With these saintly tintypes mated to Ford's stolid heroes, it is no wonder that the love relationships in his films are so often insipid. Robin Wood has an explanation for this: "... Ford tends to sublimate sexual attraction into either gallantry or heartiness: the relationships positively presented are always strictly 'wholesome' and honorable. Romance and courtship have their own rules, and sexual love is never regarded as a value in itself." (*Film Comment, Fall* 1971, p. 13) A cogent statement but, apart from not improving Ford's more puerile romances, also an incomplete one. More is involved than just a personal hierarchy of values (or appeasement of the audience's desire for amorous sentimentality): sensuality, love, passion, sex make Ford intensely uneasy. Over and over again, he gives us blushing swains and simpering maidens straight out of mid-Victorian valentines; even after marriage, many of them behave like embarrassed teenagers at a square dance. In *The Long Gray Line,* Maureen O'Hara must imitate a jet bomber, sweeping her arms back as she puckers up to Tyrone Power in one of the most stupefying howlers ever palmed off as a love scene. Later, when he learns of her pregnancy, he must grin with amazement, as though he truly couldn't imagine whodunit, or how. Faced with marital strife in *The Wings of Eagles* (1957), Ford resorts to

equally lame clichés, among them the memorable moment when O'Hara (who must have risked a whiplash playing the scene) gets snapped around by John Wayne for a kiss. In *The Searchers,* Jeffrey Hunter and Vera Miles play Post Office; in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon,* two peach-fuzzed lieutenants squabble over glacéed Joanne Dru.

Of this sickly roundelay, Baxter writes: *"She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* dramatizes the fact that private responsibility to universal standards of community must transcend arbitrary military rules, and in the romance of Olivia and Flint suggests that the next generation, while honoring the men who upheld them, may discard entirely the beliefs by which their elders lived." (p. 79) By the same process of embroidering the possible intention and ignoring the actual achievement, the others, too, can be invested with comparable significance. But the inept execution of each episode—especially the stilted, mugging performances—tells another story: of the macho male's queasiness about intimacy and equality with women.

Like racial paternalism, the sexual paternalism of machismo is a more important element in Ford's work than many want to admit. In much of it, regardless of his conscious intentions, manliness implicitly means fighting, yelling, drinking, and—however reverentially—dominating women. Nearly every American director who has worked extensively in the outdoor action genres has ladled up his share of macho mush. But those critics who, for example, are always zeroing in on Sam Peckinpah's tortured ceremonies of maleness never seem to notice Ford's, possibly because, glazed over with a solemnity that can pass for Tradition or Ritual, they are complacently untortured. Peckinpah wrestles with his complexes and, at his best, makes powerful drama out of the struggle; Ford usually does no more than affirm his as if they were eternal verities.

Two comments by Baxter make the point succinctly, though not the point he intended to make:

> . . . pugnacity and drunkenness are regularly employed as symbols of pleasure and release, indissolubly linked with honesty, integrity, and community spirit.
>
> Although, to Ford, the traits of "Irishness" can appear in any country or community, their most effective symbol is the character of Victor McLaglen, a personification of noisy, violent, drunken, but lovable Ireland . . . (p. 49)

But Baxter overlooks Ford's grossly sentimental handling of these motifs, especially the barroom bruisers and good ould sods who overpopulate so many of his movies. *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* wastes endless footage on McLaglen simpering over a jug hidden in his commander's office or demolishing a gin mill when soldiers try to clap him in the brig. In *The Wings of Eagles,* lusty gobs keep conking each other gleefully. The two lummoxes of *Donovan's Reef,* Guns and Boats, start denting each other's skulls every time they meet, and Guns subdues uppity Amelia with a spanking. In themselves, brawls and benders like these and numerous others in Ford's work are just traditional genre elements, which is precisely why they cannot effectively express the meanings which Baxter attributes to them. Instead of "honesty, integrity, and community spirit," they express infantilism, stupidity, and machismo. They are too hackneyed to express anything else in a serious context.

One could argue that machismo, whatever its overt thematic role in Ford's lesser films, functions in them mainly as corny comic relief, like the silly, amusing saloon demolition in Peckinpah's *Junior Bonner.* But in a major work like *The Searchers,* it does real damage. Ethan Edward's long quest for his kidnapped niece marks him as the avenger of a family and a community even though he cannot truly join either. It also renders him a racist neurotic. For most of this majestic and disturbing film, Ford maintains an extraordinary tension between these two perspectives, making Ethan his most complex and fascinating hero by far. But, in the end, the tension slackens as unexamined macho assumptions take over. The Indians, poorly directed, look like beasts or buffoons; and although the grown-up Debbie refuses at first to leave the tribe, she meekly acquiesces when Ethan lifts her angrily but then gracefully swings her into his arms. This celebrated gesture beautifully

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expresses the exorcism of his murderous rage by familial reverence; it is the perfect climax to the film's study of his tortured ambivalence. But it cannot clear up the muddy, evasive treatment of Debbie.

We never know why she returns to the white community. In one of the weak spots of an excellent essay on the film (*Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1971), McBride and Wilmington cite her memories of her childhood, but how can they compel her allegiance in preference to years of Indian life from childhood to marriage? She mentions them; but we never see them, nor can Natalie Wood make us believe that Debbie is all the richer for having lived in both worlds. Her story somewhat resembles the case of Cynthia Ann Parker, who was captured in 1836 and raised by Comanches, married to one, then retaken in 1860 along with her infant daughter (her son escaping to become Chief Quanah Parker, who is portrayed in *Two Rode Together*). Within a few months, she and the girl died. Captivity literature is extensive; and, even though much of it must be read with an informed skepticism, it reveals a wide variety of white captives' experiences among and reactions to Indians. As a reputed authority on the West, Ford must surely have known about these writings. Yet he fails to motivate Debbie's final choice convincingly; he simply cannot conceive of her making any other.

As he does elsewhere, Ford here attempts a gesture of reconciliation: Debbie returning to the white community still dressed as a squaw. But because the movie offers no evidence of true cultural reconciliation, this is just an empty symbol. And what is this community into which she is being reintegrated? Another gang of piersixing, leg-chawing idiots whose unfunny antics, mingled with dim romantic comedy, supposedly represent a warm hearth of humanity in an indifferent universe. In making them more grotesque than usual, Ford may have wanted to poke some fun at the brawling boyos, or perhaps he felt that this knockabout farce would best express the communal spirit he sought. Either way, he miscalculated badly enough to make his community totally uninviting. If these morons are the best he can offer, who wouldn't prefer to wander away with Ethan from their closed door?

Ford's machismo is rooted in his Irishness, which he never does more than merely celebrate. His Ireland lacks the resonance of Monument Valley. Noisy but nice, violent but innocuous, drunken but childlike, it is a fantasy realm of chlorophyll, hearty boozers, impromptu chorales, fiery colleens, and relentless religiosity. Artists may not reasonably be criticized for expressing their fantasies, unless they are as conventional as Ford's Emerald Isle. Even tinctured at times with overtones of memory and loss (the primary mood of *How Green Was My Valley*, whose Welsh characters, like most of Ford's Southerners, are really Irish in mufti), this Eire almost totally hides the bleaker aspects of its

HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY ▶

people's history. Ford gives us pubs full of haymakers and choirboys, but no Citizen bilious with rage on Bloomsday; dells full of picturesque livestock, but no "old sow that eats her farrow."

Ford's two principal movies with overtly Irish settings, *The Informer* and *The Quiet Man,* both suffer from his artistic paralysis before his own shibboleths. By now, most film-goers know how overrated *The Informer* was when it was first released in 1935 as a rare "art film" from the commercial factories. Nevertheless, this official classic, in its ponderous and schematic way, does convey at least a shadow of the Irish night through Gypo Nolan's guilt-ridden wanderings and maunderings, whereas *The Quiet Man* (1952) settles for pale sunlight. Its hero, Sean Thornton, has returned from America to settle down; but because he once killed a man in the ring by accident, he refuses to use his fists no matter what the provocation. Naturally, this eccentricity sits badly with the locals, who, ignorant of its motive, belabor him for cowardice every time he backs away from a potential brawl. For a while, Ford seems to be using him to develop a critique of Irish machismo. But comes the climax, a proposed battle with his wife Mary Kate's muscle-brained brother Will, and does Sean keep his fists unclenched? No, he piles into logy Will, and the two beefy oxen crunch up a few props but no bones before reconciling with slaphappy camaraderie. In other words, Sean never really had to worry about his punching power after all. By begging his central question in this tricky way, Ford reduces the film to a pack of postcards, visually pretty, otherwise not very revealing.

Machismo also rots most of the performances in Ford's films; his actors generally rely on posiness and stale mannerisms. John Wayne's cast-iron emoting is typical, though many are too enthralled by the mystique of stardom to care. A major presence but a highly limited actor, he can (despite his own protest to the contrary in *Film Comment,* September - October 1972) make only cosmetic changes from role to role, with the result that, however important he may be as a kind of mythic figure, he never really plays anybody but himself. McBride and Wil-

THE INFORMER

mington call him a mysterious actor; and in the sense that there is something mysterious about all stardom, perhaps he is. But is there any star whose performances are less mysterious? As a callow outlaw in *Stagecoach,* or an aging captain in *Yellow Ribbon,* or a naval officer in transit between bumptious youth and disappointed maturity in *The Wings of Eagles,* or an ambiguous man-in-the-middle in *Liberty Valance,* Wayne is essentially the same: earnest, chivalrous, coy, stalwart, lumbering, slow-talking, self-consciously masculine. If he is winning in the first film, slurpy in the next two, and moving in the last, that is primarily because of the different contexts in which his persona is placed. More than anyone else, he incarnates the machismo of Ford's work; like Ford, he projects a distrust of "feminine" emotions. Probably no major star of either sex is less convincing on the screen as a lover.

But he can hold the screen regardless because, like every star, he has an identity which almost makes acting irrelevant; this is close to a definition of traditional stardom. But most other Ford actors—Ward Bond, Harry Carey, Jr., Hank Worden, John Qualen, and the rest—have even skimpier repertoires of expression and gesture without anything close to Wayne's compensating aura and stature. So when they trot out their schtiks, when they strain to be tough, manly, boyish, folksy, gruff, or deliriously senile,

THE QUIET MAN ▶

THEY WERE EXPENDABLE

they can do no more than push their tired routines long past the point where, comatose at the outset, they have stiffened into rigor mortis. It may be significant that the rare subtle performances in Ford's films—such as Robert Montgomery's expressively understated PT boat commander in *They Were Expendable* or Donald Crisp's robust, yeomanly paterfamilias in *How Green Was My Valley*—generally come from actors who were not really part of Ford's stock company.

"Stock company" does not necessarily mean the same for, say, an Ingmar Bergman as it does for a John Ford. Everyone knows that "Ingmar Bergman" is also an artistic collective whose members, collaborating frequently with him, enrich his work while extending their own possibilities in ways that neither could do separately. But Bergman has never had to fight for survival in Hollywood. Consequently, he works often with the same people solely because they are vital to his art. But a Hollywood director, even a big one like Ford, could not (and in most cases still cannot) take for granted his freedom from hackers and meddlers of the front office. In such a situation, a stock company becomes, like cutting in the camera à la Hitchcock, one more way to increase a director's control over his movies in an industry hostile to personal expression. By parcelling out most of the roles in each film to friends and cronies, Ford could reduce the number of enemies ready to try and sabotage his work.

But this kind of casting can become perfunctory. It tends to suit actors who are content to trot our their tricks instead of trying anything risky (which they probably couldn't bring off in the first place). This, in turn, encourages paint-by-numbers screenwriting, in which characters, lines, and details must be color-toned to match the same old bunch of zeroes in film after film. As a result, the stock company protects the director not only from interference but also from fresh, challenging, even fearsome influences which might enrich his work. When a director like Ford must confront realities which oppose his beliefs and feelings too powerfully, he can beat a hasty retreat to his cozy circle of pals and sidekicks, where he can find reassurance that all is well after all. Only a stock company as talented as Bergman's could have helped Ford escape this prison which he mistook for a fortress.

The concept of art also disturbed Ford, as his interviews reveal. This is usually ascribed to his innate modesty about his "job of work," his disinclination to spell out the objectives of his films like failed jokes or to have the unpretentious activity which he enjoyed so much be given such a high-and-mighty title. No doubt this is all

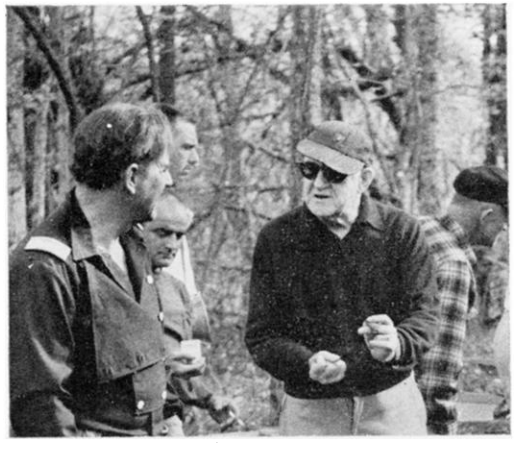
true, but it is not the whole truth. Many, perhaps most, Americans have always been leery of art, largely because they consider it unmasculine to be an artist. According to this view, an artist is not really a man unless he manages to make a lot of money from it, in which case he becomes a businessman. (For women, art is a suitable pastime because it is just like crocheting doilies.) This macho line can be found at one extreme in the old saw that all male ballet dancers are homosexuals and at the other end in the frequent ridicule of their profession by American actors, especially male movie actors who plaintively moan the classic line, "Is this any way for a grown man to be making a living?"

Like many other directors who were active in the industry almost from the beginning (often as actors), Ford led a rough-and-tumble life which left little time for contemplation of aesthetic niceties even if he had been inclined towards it. Almost every available description of Hollywood's infancy indicates that it was a kind of madhouse, that movie-making was a wild, exhausting, exciting, often dangerous game. The men who played it did not have to worry about being thought unmasculine because the whole strenuous, frantic adventure called for the derring-do of steeplejacks and the stamina of ditchdiggers. They could make movies (not films) "innocently," unself-consciously, without the stigma of "artist" getting in the way.

Now, when movies are more often regarded as potential works of art in the more formal sense of the term, many of the old-line directors who survive that bold, roughhousing period which has gone forever now confront critics and interviewers eager to probe their "visions." Almost invariably, they deny that what they did had any connection with art; they prefer to be treated as plain craftsmen, which is what most of them were. Since few are intellectuals themselves, they are understandably uncomfortable with the methods and jargons of intellectuals, who can be naive as well as condescending. Naturally, too, they recall how suspiciously the Cohns and Mayers and Warners regarded artistic aspirations; witness the stir caused in its day by Capra's "one man, one film" declaration, or read the Selznick memo (in the Avon paperback, p. 455–457) which castigates King Vidor for calling movies an art form. But it also seems probable that the idea of letting themselves be regarded as artists conflicted intensely with their sense of masculinity.

Ford usually parried interviewers asking about his art. I was part of a group at UCLA which watched him, a couple of years before his death, tangle with a professor and several students who were trying to draw him out about his films. Resplendent in his black eye patch and truculent as an old condor, he had himself a grand time: cocking his deaf ear, making questioners shout and reshout until their questions turned to gibberish, staring at them balefully, debunking the more arcane queries by denying that he remembered the movie, reducing the professor to a basket case by poking fun at his seriousness. It was a hilarious, expert performance, in its way rather admirable, for many of the questions were pompous and many of the questioners incapable of accepting art unless it had been chewed over in advance by the artist. It was also refreshing to observe such a lack of self-importance in an era when so many doodlers, scribblers, and media freaks, who will never achieve a fraction of what Ford achieved, glibly call themselves artists and pontificate into every available ear about their aesthetics.

Yet this irascible cowboy persona seemed as much a defense mechanism as the stock company was. On this occasion, Ford appeared to be both pleased and annoyed to be treated as an artist; and the brawling, sentimental celebrations



Ford's "cowboy persona"

of masculinity in his films (which go back at least as far as *The Blue Eagle,* 1926) express unconsciously the same ambivalence. Ford *was* artistically ambitious. The elaborate patterns of motif, theme, attitude, detail, characterization, situation, and image which his admirers have so thoroughly traced, not to mention the highly self-conscious artiness of a film like *The Fugitive* (another of his favorites), are not the products of mere unassuming craftsmanship. But the feminine connotations of art bothered him; thinking of himself as an artist conflicted too sharply with his machismo. Other hard-nosed action directors like Henry Hathaway and Raoul Walsh shared the machismo; but they did not have Ford's artistic aspirations, his complex of beliefs and feelings seeking expression, so they were not so split. Others who were not typed as action directors, such as Mitchell Leisen, Roy Del Ruth, or Jack Conway, made movies which were neither unduly macho-ridden nor personally expressive. They were comfortable as skilled studio craftsmen; they were not straining for art. Part of Ford was, but he couldn't reconcile this part with his machismo. He never, it seems, entirely came to terms with his vocation. As a result, he was usually hamstrung when faced with challenges to his beliefs, which called for more self-conscious artistic effort. He could neither avoid them nor confront them.

So many of his later films display this inadequacy: *The Long Gray Line,* with its hollow affirmation of dated platitudes, its rote application of past devices (like the coda which brings back dead characters as if for an encore to a musical comedy); *Two Rode Together,* an appalling shambles of sloppy plotting, trite narrative gimmicks, sticky romance, and easy liberalism *vis-à-vis* a young Mexican woman held captive by the Indians, bearable only because James Stewart entertainingly plays up the jaunty cynicism of his chartcer and because Manny Farber was inspired to pepper it with buckshot in a witty review; *Donovan's Reef,* a shallow mishmash with some melodious music and a few poetic images; the massive ruin of *Cheyenne Autumn.*

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance is a beautiful, elegiac credo, but it is excessively bound to genre conventions. The stock figures and devices were just about played out by the time the film was made; they cannot truly bear the weight of its ambitions. For instance, Andy Devine, who plays young and old versions of one character, cannot generate emotion because his mannerisms are just too hackneyed; ritual is one thing, but this is cliché. And as for the legend which must be printed "when the legend becomes fact," it is remote from real legends and the real facts which they obscured. The shades of venerable stereotypes hang too heavily over this fable; it is too much a meditation on a lost genre to be fully satisfying as a meditation on a lost world. "Genre," like "stock company," can be another cell in the same prison.

Seven Women suggests that, late in the day, Ford may have begun to seek a way out of his prison. Most of the characters in this wildly erratic study of a besieged mission in 1930's China are women. Ford's male stock company is largely absent, and those who are present (Mike Mazurki and Woody Strode) parody their usual roles. The heroine, a doctor, is not only single but strong and forthright, and Ford the conservative Catholic presents her suicide as a bleakly heroic act. At the same time, the mission leader, who would have been the heroine in the customary Ford film, is an arrogant, hysterical bigot who caves in under pressure. Much of the acting and the dialogue are very clumsy, and the irreligious doctor's "outrageousness" is quite carefully limited. An area of confusion in the film may be indicated by Ford's comment to Peter Bogdanovich that she "got in with this bunch of kooks and started acting like a human being." Kooks the others certainly are, but when does she not act like a human being? Yet there are moments of unusual delicacy rightly praised by the film's admirers: the leader's confession that mere faith in God can no longer sustain her, the doctor's walk to death in a kimono; the quick fade-out on her last moment of life. Each screening I've attended of this ungainly movie had its contingent of laugh-

TOBACCO ROAD

ers who chose to view it as camp, but its moments of intensity—and the feeling which it communicates of Ford groping towards something new for him—tip the balance in its favor.

Robert Chappetta has written that "John Ford's films are simple and traditional in meaning, but we lose something in not being able to respond to them." Indeed they are, and indeed we do. But when criticism turns to idolatry, when it tries to overinflate the films' real qualities into proofs of artistry equal to that of Shakespeare or Beethoven or whatever truly great artist in whatever medium you care to name, disappointment is the inevitable response. In such a stifling critical climate, it may be a blessing that some of Ford's best films, like the funny, autumnal *Tobacco Road* (1941) or the lively, crazy-quilt silent *Three Bad Men* (1926) have been comparatively neglected. Once, this kind of hyperbole may have had its function, when movies, especially American movies, were ignored by snobbish, ignorant worshippers of "high culture." But now that their value and artistic potential have long been established for all but the most incorrigible mossbacks, this kind of secretly defensive overpraise is valueless tactically as it always was critically. Furthermore, it plays right into the hands of today's moguls, packagers, and ex-hairdressers, who want to remake the films of yesteryear while scorning fresher, more innovative projects. Grant Ford all due honor, watch his films—but don't print the legend.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Alexander Jacobs suggested many of the key ideas in this article.

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GEORGE LELLIS

Retreat from Romanticism:

TWO FILMS FROM THE SEVENTIES

The European art film of the past few years has been marked by a trend toward the politicized treatment of subjects and situations that only ten years ago would have been considered personal, subjective or psychological. Film-makers have discovered that a socially conscious film need not deal exclusively with the helpless, hungry, *Bicycle Thief* oppressed or overt, violent revolutionary activity, or even with specific points of persuasion. Rather, many new films, such as Alain Tanner's *Retour D'Afrique* or Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Merchant of Four Seasons,* are what might be called attitudinally political, and seek a politicized consciousness beyond the realm of agitation and propaganda.

This phenomenon can be traced to the events of May 1968, and the Gallic propensity for living, breathing, eating and drinking politics on at very least a parlor-game level. One allows that as a trend, this may be a function more of fashion than of significantly greater awareness or commitment, but the tendency to mix politics and art is very much a part of the French tradition. The spirit of Jean-Luc Godard, of course, hangs heavily over both the Tanner and the Fassbinder films. In the former, the *hommage* is direct: two Godardian actresses, Anne Wiazemsky and Juliet Bertho, appear as post office workers in a dialectical discussion of revolutionary child rearing with the film's heroine, played by Josée Destoop. Their conversation is accompanied by the kind of rhythmic, lateral camera movements that could refer to no other previous director. Although *Retour D'Afrique* is a very different film from those of Godard, its characters are the sort familiar to us from the likes of *La Chinoise.* Educated, engaged, yet societal misfits, they look for a path toward making their lives socially relevant. In Fassbinder's film, the influence is subtler but no less marked. Without Godard, one cannot quite imagine the stylized, deadpan acting of *Merchant of Four Seasons,* nor its coldly mechanical treatment of people in alienating, urban environments. But the differences with Godard are where the films acquire their relevance, not in the similarities. In both cases, we see a withdrawal from the extremes of formal experimentation that one finds in the Frenchman's late work. (Tanner and Fassbinder are no doubt wise to avoid competing with the master in that regard.) Rather, they take the area where Godard is often weakest, i.e., the actual clarity of the discourse, and focus attention there.

Retour D'Afrique explores what might be considered the major problem faced by today's college-educated revolutionary: finding a way to action in an affluent, comfortable, superficially peaceful society. The film examines its would-be revolutionary couple in a way that is at once critical and compassionate. They decide to leave the comforts of life in Switzerland to go to North Africa—not with any specific goal to accomplish there, but out of an amorphous feeling that this will somehow bring them more in touch with the Third World, with people, with reality. It is the kind of crazy, unrealistic, simultaneously idealistic and self-centered act that the textbook revolutionaries produced by today's higher education would be attracted to. Tanner pokes gentle fun at this: a going-away party, for example, given despite the fact that the hero's Algerian connection has left them hanging without word, is a desultory affair; the hero and heroine are characterized by a kind of pathetic and likable sincerity that begins to mature only near the film's end. If Godard's raging Marxists are abrasive and pestily egotistical, Tanner's engaged characters, while no less vain, are milder, almost bland. One feels they might rather read than demonstrate. But one also can't help but

feel that Tanner has found what is likely to be the perfect mirror image of what one expects is the audience for this film—the amiable, but somewhat stubbornly genteel committed.

What is remarkable, both aesthetically and dialectically, is the way in which Tanner sees the growth of engagement as a process or system. Revolutionary changes here consist of gradual development rather than drastic, self-defeating measures. The revision of Françoise and Vincent's priorities is a part of that growth. When their plans for Africa go awry, the couple are confronted with themselves, but we see their changes only gradually, both while they are sheepishly holed up in their empty apartment and after. The decision to remain in Switzerland is presented not as a major dramatic scene, but is worked into the fabric of their daily activities as they pick them up and resume them. In the schema the film sets up, each change becomes subtly moving. Vincent is forced to shift his attentions away from his directionless idealism and toward more immediate problems, such as his male chauvinism toward his girl; when she gets a job, it is not in the presumably chic art gallery where she had worked before, a kind of nest of bourgeois comfort, but in a post office, where she can relate to her proletarian peers; when forced to move out of their apartment, they find not the kind of enviable, bohemian garret that they had before, but a modern, impersonal apartment in the middle of the flight paths to the airport, for which they must organize a rent strike among the tenants; their decision to have a baby becomes a political one as well. Some of these changes are voluntary, some forced upon them. All indicate not only the inseparability of personal and political life, but they have a poetic determinism about them as well, whereby a foolhardy safari is converted into a genuine coping with social realities. One advances toward commitment on all fronts, the film asserts.

Stylistically, *Retour D'Afrique* is characterized by noteworthy sobriety. Shot in soft 16mm black-and-white and unobtrusively edited, it stands in reaction to the audiovisual elaborateness that one associates with sixties film-making, even against a certain falseness that would be inherent in a pseudo-*vérité* style. Appropriately, one doesn't talk about the compositions or camerawork in a film like the Tanner work, one talks about the content. And with much of the film done in long shot, a sense of detachment is ever present, one in keeping with the tone of a film in tri-partite balance between satire, affection and didacticism, a film which demonstrates the banality of the Swiss urban landscape by indicating nothing of particular note to look at on it.

Retour D'Afrique differs from conventional propaganda in that it makes a serious effort to

Alain Tanner's RETOUR D'AFRIQUE

link politics with psychology. The two are, for it, inseparable. A person's consciousness is influenced by the society in which he develops; a change in that society can be brought about only by a change in consciousness. In light of this line of thought, much contemporary film that does not nominally treat political issues is nonetheless a product of a politicized consciousness. To the extent that we know the context of Marxist thought (however corrupt or revisionist) in which it was produced, it is not at all amiss to discuss, let us say, *Last Tango in Paris* politically, even though it deals superficially with sexual passion alone. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Merchant of Four Seasons* lends itself particularly well to this type of treatment. Although its story is the sort more suited to a clinical case history than a political pamphlet, the work makes the most sense when dealt with as social and aesthetic commentary.

A man, most easily described as an archetypal loser, suffers—to put *Merchant's* events in chronology—first, humiliation (he is busted as a policeman for accepting services from a prostitute he is questioning) then even further humiliation (the girl with whom he is in love will not marry him because he is merely a fruit seller), then, after what appears to have been a satisfying courtship degenerated into a cold and loveless marriage, physical distress (apparent alcoholism, followed by a heart attack), all leading to decreased activity (he must hire an assistant for his work), increased lethargy (he is too indifferent even to let his former love seduce him), despair, and finally suicide.

The movie's biggest *coup* is that our feelings for the man are never really for him personally —he is ugly and unsympathetic throughout. The film remains outside of him, something that gives us, in the final analysis, more of a portrait of the world that made him than one of the man himself. And it is a cold, unfeeling world. That Hans Epp is fundamentally unloved is established from the picture's first frame, when he comes home from the Foreign Legion and his mother tells him it's too bad all the *good* ones die in wars and those like him remain; but the rest of the work portrays a society in which all potentially meaningful things are ritualized into mechanism. Religion is present (from the crucifix prominent on the wall of Epp's apartment), but offers no help. Marital love is a memory (alive only in a cheap Italian phonograph record that Epp listens to obsessively). Sex is somber and joyless, marriage little more than a convenience (the wife marries her husband's only real friend right after he dies). Family life consists solely of acts of aggression and protection. Even social drinking is turned, in Epp's final suicide, into a fatal, unfeeling rite performed among people who seem disturbingly unconcerned. As an attack on society, *The Merchant of Four Seasons* is diffuse, to say the least, but it is in this diffusion that it achieves most of its power, and its ultimate, paradoxical lucidity.

One cannot look at the film without thinking of Brecht. Events in it are never quite believable as naturalism, and their blunt portrayal, particularly early in the work, mixed with the script's stilted, haltingly wordy dialogue, clearly suggest that distancing is its stylistic aim. A scene in which Epp beats his wife as his child simultaneously beats her father is so unmodulated, goes on for so long, and is so clearly mechanical for the actors participating, that even while the viewer knows that no one is really being hurt, he responds strongly to the *idea* of the wife's being hurt this way; and the scene is no less chilling as a result. A story which some ten or twenty years ago would have been presented as a subjective, solipsistic study of a suicide here becomes a vision of German life which implies throughout that such an existence must change. The film calls out for a committed response not only because we know that Fassbinder is an

Fassbinder's MERCHANT OF FOUR SEASONS ▶

engaged film-maker, but also because it allows us no other way to respond. *Merchant of Four Seasons* treats a psychological subject, but denies the audience all of its conventional psychological responses.

Such an approach represents a retreat away from romanticism, something else Fassbinder has in common with Tanner (though certainly not with Bertolucci), and toward a type of film-making that finds its inspiration not so much in internal experience as in external observation. In this way, these films tend to be modern in the way that many of the cooler, less involving forms of painting, sculpture, and writing of the past several years have been. In ambience, these new political films become almost the narrative cousins of "structural" cinema. They treat social structures in a systematically analytical way comparable to the way in which Michael Snow or Hollis Frampton treat physical perception. *The Merchant of Four Seasons* is often a beautiful film to look at, but one never can (as with, let us say, Fellini or Antonioni or even Godard) separate its physical beauty from its moral message. Even the movie's most striking visual moment—Epp's funeral, in which his wife identifies his former lover as "the love of his life," the latter carrying a bouquet of red roses comparable to the one Epp offered her when she rejected him—is subverted for us emotionally by our having to fit this new piece of information into the whole portrait on both a visual level and a literary one. Fassbinder keeps the two shots to the rose bearer short and unemphasized, despite the quick, rhetorical zoom toward her in the first. The effect is electric, but only after the cognition has registered fully.

Unlike the comparatively classic ***Retour D'Afrique, Merchant of Four Seasons*** is shot in a manner that is far more rigidly stylized than appears at first glance. Fassbinder's compositions are most often frontal, roughly symmetrical and from an angle just below eye level of his characters. This avoidance of oblique points of view reaches an effective extreme in the scene just before Epp's heart attack: the camera has so studiously avoided floors and ceilings that we don't become aware of the crimson carpet on the floor until Epp falls to it—the moment at which the color, now suddenly dominant, can take on significance.

The movie's editing produces a series of abrupt starts and stops rather than a graceful flow, and it plays an important part in the construction of each episode. The director frequently holds shots for a few beats longer than one would expect, but the resultant weightiness seems only to make the main character's plight more tangible. Like Griffith, Fassbinder will analytically split up a scene into its constituent parts, often repeating compositions and groupings in the process. Epp's final suicide, for example, is portrayed with conventional A-B-A-B crosscutting, from Epp to each of the people around him and back again; but the scene is given an incredible ominousness by the repeated tapping of his glass on the table, as each successive drink is fatally consumed.

Camera movement is minimal in *Merchant*. The director prefers the zoom, here an artificial device for mechanical emphasis which appropriately complements the artificial mechanics of his mock melodrama, and which somehow preserves the sense obtained from the film's editing

RETOUR D'AFRIQUE

of scenes shaped with a Léger-like, cubist solidity. Fassbinder constructs a whole by putting together the simplest, heaviest, most basic cinematic pieces, making functional visuals take form with a life they would not otherwise have had. Even the sound track reflects the movie's predominant negative tone by having a constant, whispering background of automobiles and street noise: the mechanized city is always somewhere behind the action.

Thus, *Retour D'Afrique* and *The Merchant of Four Seasons* work differently from conventional propaganda in their attempts to merge the personal and psychological sides of human experience with political meaning and significance. They work on two levels, seeking to find the logic in emotions and the emotion in logic, the place of politics in the personality, the personal need for political change. For them, political expression is a fundamental side of personal expression. That they preach to the converted may well be irrelevant, for their arguments are at a level of sophistication and complexity that may be meaningful only to the converted. The one may be a little sermon on morality *(Retour D'Afrique)*, the other on the problem of why there is evil in the world *(Merchant)*, but in each case the didacticism is wholly secondary, or, more correctly, fully integrated into the whole.

What remains ironic, however, is that after the short-lived and abortive pre-revolutionary activities of the late sixties, such typical seventies films come after the fact, as post-activity rationalization, perhaps, or as a testament to the way in which their makers' lives have been affected by the leftist thought of the time. Their subdued manner may well represent the only viable alternative for a committed sensibility not terribly optimistic about the possibilities for social change. But as works which commingle the personal and political spheres of human existence, they allow the one to enrich the other and become both ethically and aesthetically satisfying.

MARSHA KINDER

The Tyranny of Convention in *The Phantom of Liberty*

The Phantom of Liberty has been damned with faint praise—particularly by critics who complain that it treats material already covered more successfully in earlier Buñuel films, most notably in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. There is no one more aware of this thematic and stylistic continuity than Buñuel, the master ironist himself, who brilliantly uses his latest film to comment on his own entrapment and that of his audience.

Phantom of Liberty is a film about the impossibility of escaping the tyranny of convention in politics, society, and art. Opening with the image of Goya's political painting "The Third of May" (1808), Buñuel dramatizes these events in Toledo as a Napoleonic firing squad executes Spanish patriots seeking liberty. He soon allows us to escape from these brutal murders into the comic absurdities of the gothic tale in which they occur (a statue of a Spanish knight strikes the French officer who makes amorous advances to the statue of his lady; the captain gets his revenge by exhuming the lady's dead body). Then, we escape even farther into the twentieth-century

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frame in which the story is being told. Yet, by the end of the film we return to political violence similar to that in the opening sequence. This ending also evokes Buñuel's earlier film *Exterminating Angel* (1962), where the actors move from entrapment at a dinner party to a larger entrapment in a cathedral as the world outside is plunged into violent anarchy. No matter whether he is making a French *avant-garde* film like *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) or *L'Age d'or* (1930), a documentary on poor Spaniards like *Land Without Bread* (1932), a Mexican melodrama like *El* (1952), an adaptation of an English classic like *Robinson Crusoe* (1952), a darkly ironic film like *Viridiana* (1961), or a witty comedy like *Discreet Charm* 1973), Buñuel's anarchistic vision has remained constant. Man persists in denying his animal nature and creating a civilized code of laws and manners that only heightens his absurdity and intensifies his oppression. This theme lies at the center of all Buñuel's work; he never escapes it, and neither do we, his audience.

As in earlier films, the central social ritual is the dinner party, for it offers a prime example of how civilized man copes with his basic animal needs. In *Viridiana* and *The Milky Way,* the banquet parodies the Last Supper, mocking the false values of Christianity; in *Exterminating Angel,* it is the setting for the entrapment which leads to the disintegration of all civilized behavior and a regression to the primitive murder and cannibalism that lie at the root of Christian mythology; in *Discreet Charm,* it is the recurring social event of the external plot, which is constantly being interrupted by sex, violence, and dreams—the primary activities of the subconscious. Using a Swiftian ironic reversal, in *Phantom* Buñuel reminds us that eating and shitting are merely opposite ends of the same biological process and that our culture's decision to glorify the former and forbid all mention of the latter is totally arbitrary. In a hilarious scene, we watch smartly dressed guests approach a low modern table surrounded by gleaming porcelain toilets. Each person carefully chooses an appropriate commode, then all engage in polite conversation as they shit. One man excuses himself from the table and goes to a secret locked room where he devours food before returning to the polite company. The point is that the power of convention prevents us from seeing that all aspects of our animal nature must be accepted.

This theme is reinforced by the recurring image of animals placed in an elegant setting. In *Un Chien Andalou,* as a young man lunges forward to rape a young woman, he is dragged down by the weight of his cultural and biological heritage that lies at the end of his rope—two grand pianos, two praying priests, and the carcasses of two decaying donkeys. In *L'Age d'or* a horse-drawn cart carrying drunken labourers rides through the ballroom of a mag-

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nificent villa without any of the aristocratic guests deigning to notice the intrusion of these vulgar objects. When the hostess in *Exterminating Angel* goes to the kitchen, she is not surprised to find sheep and a bear. Later, when the guests are entrapped in the drawing room, the sheep become their sacrificial victims and the bear lumbers through the mansion, juxtaposing his clumsy bulk against the elegant fragility of a crystal chandelier and embodying the emerging bestiality of the socialites. The final image of the film is a flock of sheep fleeing from anarchy and seeking shelter in the cathedral prison, which insures their doom.

When a cock and an ostrich first march into Jean-Claude Brialy's commodious bedroom in *Phantom,* we are tempted to interpret them as the dream images of an uptight neurotic—particularly since these birds offer such handy symbolic associations with sex and avoidance. The sequence that follows is framed by allusions to the fox, an animal associated with sex and pursuit. On her way to the country to visit her dying father, a young woman encounters soldiers in a huge armored tank, incongruously hunting foxes. They tell her the road has been washed out, so she stops at a nearby inn. The rooms are full of assorted bourgeois pursuing forbidden pleasures, which culminate in an orgy. A sadist and masochist perform before an audience of four Carmelite monks, one incestuous young student, and our own little red riding hood who brought us to the inn in the first place. The act spurs the boy on to complete incest with his virgin aunt; on the morning after, the camera cuts suddenly to a close-up of a stuffed box. As if to insure that animals are not sentimentalized, in the mass-murder sequence Buñuel introduces the sniper as a dog-lover who growls, "These bastards who mistreat animals should be drowned." Apparently unaware that man, too, is an animal, he guns down one innocent person after another. Ironically, the victim who attracts the most sympathy and attention is a pigeon. The use of animals is most powerful in the final sequence at the zoo, where the police have staged a round-up of dissident students. Determined to keep the radicals from reaching the cages, the police expect some animals to be killed accidentally in the confrontation. Suddenly Buñuel cuts to one startling close-up after another of the imprisoned creatures sensing the danger. As the police move in for the action, an ostrich watches in the background. Then the camera makes a dizzying pan before stopping to focus on the confused bird, craning its long neck and shifting its beady eyes as we hear sounds of gunfire, church bells, and human voices shouting, "Down with Freedom." The final image, which blurs and then freezes, is of the ostrich, that strange creature who contributes to the disaster through its avoidance but who is at the same time one of the victims—the perfect embodiment of Buñuel's vision of man.

In *Phantom of Liberty,* Buñuel also explores education, potentially a source of change and freedom. The existing institutions, however, merely reinforce the status quo. In the police school the liberal teachings of the instructor, which seem to support Buñuel's attack on conventions, are totally undermined by the nature of the military institution in which they are being expressed, by the conventional power relationship between students and teacher, and by the stupid behavior of the specific individuals playing these roles. In his lecture on the relativity of laws and mores, the teacher cites the example of the shitting party, yet he uses it to show that the "upheaval of customs" would be

◀ *The student and his aunt*

harmful. Of course, it actually proves no such thing.

In the incident involving the little girl lost at school, we see that false words, once confirmed by authority and convention, have the power to contradict logic and the direct evidence of our senses. The child, like the horse-drawn cart at the mansion in *L'Age d'or,* is totally invisible because the adults do not expect to see her. Thus, perception and knowledge are almost totally controlled by cultural expectations. Within the school, no attention is paid to the creative potentialities of the child—individuals are named and numbered, they copy dictation and learn by rote. "Speak only when you're spoken to" and "children should be seen and not heard" are the maxims that prevail; unfortunately they lead to the invisibility of the individual child. The search for the child who is not missing is intertwined with the episode of the poet-murderer whose crimes are hardly noticed and who, though found guilty and condemned to death, ultimately goes free and becomes a star. Our attention and that of the police is drawn away from this injustice and focused instead (at the insistence of an authoritative narrator, whom we never hear from again) on the recovery of the child who was never really lost, just as the Patty Hearst kidnapping distracted us from Watergate and the Manson case blocked out the Calley trial and My Lai massacre. If we are going to understand these events, we must search for the pattern of connections, even if they seem random, and find the larger plot that encloses them. The story of the lost little girl eventually leads to the police attack on the students. Ultimately, *Phantom of Liberty* is one gigantic circle of corruption and entrapment. As usual, Buñuel does not tell us how to escape into positive alternatives; but like Swift and Makavejev, he insists that a courageous and honest confrontation of things as they are is the first step to freedom. If we are to resist the dangers of our society, we must not allow our heads to be buried in the sands of convention.

In *Phantom of Liberty* the struggle against convention is most powerful in the realm of art. As in Has's *Saragossa Manuscript* or his own *Milky Way* and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie,* here Buñuel valiantly tries to rebel against narrative conventions, breaking through to a totally open-ended form capable of frustrating the audience's expectations. Nevertheless, the film is enclosed in a structural circularity and repeats many of the same images, themes, situations, and narrative devices that Buñuel has used before. Despite his playful experimentation, he does not completely escape artistic convention or his own subconscious. Liberty is a phantom even in the creative process.

Previously, Buñuel had explored this idea most fully both in theme and structure in *The Discreet Charm.* Stressing the revolutionary nature of the subconscious, this dream film uses an expansive style opening outward, which defines narrow conventions, linear design, and rational interpretation. After telling an elaborate dream about his own death, a young soldier is asked to tell another, that is apparently well known among his colleagues. But we never see him again and thus never hear his tale. In a restaurant, a young man approaches three women and tells them a sad story of his childhood, in which he is led by the ghost of his dead mother to poison his father; instead of responding in horror, the women are distracted by the banal absurdity of a restaurant out of coffee, tea, and milk. A woman fetching a priest for a dying man promises to tell the story of why she hates Jesus, but we never hear it; instead we get involved with the interaction between priest and sinner. In confessing, the man reveals that he has murdered the priest's parents; after absolving him of his sins, the priest shoots the dying killer. In this film, we can never believe what people say, nor can we predict what they will do next. The lines between dream, inset story, and bizarre incident soon break down.

After an intense anxiety dream, Buñuel cuts to one of the characters awakening in bed, telling his wife, "I was dreaming, no I was dreaming that Senechal was dreaming . . . " According to Freud, dreams within dreams usually express a true memory or highly charged fear while the

continued outer dream represents the wishes of the dreamer. By labelling it "only a dream," the censor manages to transform the most threatening material into harmless fiction. Buñuel uses this strategy in *Discreet Charm:* he manages to sneak past his critical censors (in the audience and in the film industry) the harshest perceptions of man and society by passing them off as a playful farce about dreams. Although death and violence occur most frequently within the inner dreams, the outer dreams provide short-lived escapes into situations that are only slightly less threatening. The film suggests that at any moment one may awaken into a totally different reality with totally different conventions; the only certainty is that this new reality will be equally arbitrary and elusive as the previous one.

Despite the disruptive narrative structure, in *Discreet Charm* we repeatedly encounter our six bourgeois characters, dressed in their modish clothes, walking down a country road that apparently goes nowhere. This recurring image, which is rendered abstract both in time and space, evokes the ironic pilgrimage in *The Milky Way*, but with more of the comic energy displayed by Dorothy and her friends in *The Wizard of Oz.* These characters are puppets manipulated by Buñuel, the master dreamer, who handles them as easily as the props and settings. Here he uses time to suggest that dreaming is an endless tripping; yet despite the expansive variety of the realities we may encounter along the way, there is always something terrifyingly familiar about the terrain. Despite their resilience and charm, these characters never really escape their anarchistic nature.

In *Phantom of Liberty* Buñuel uses the same kind of expansive, anarchistic structure, but with much greater self-reflexiveness. Personally, he recognizes that although he is an exiled artist, he cannot escape his own national heritage, which he acknowledges in the selection of Goya's paintings, highlighting French imperialism in Spain. This choice is bound to be ironic in the context of a film being made by a Spaniard in France; interestingly Goya also ended up as a voluntary exile in France. Buñuel playfully alludes to his own earlier films, not only in the themes and images already mentioned, but through playful casting. The poor woman who fails to tell the story of why she hates Jesus in *Discreet Charm* is here the storyteller of the opening gothic tale, which includes the political murders; perhaps we have her reasons after all. Julien Bertheau, the gardner/priest who kills his parents' murderer in *The Discreet Charm,* is here cast as the police commissioner, whose official identity is once more in question and whose morality is again discredited by family relations. Having incestuous feelings for his dead sister, he tries to reach her in the crypt, which leads to his arrest. The sister is played by Adriana Asti, the actress who was the aunt having an affair with her nephew in Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution;* as if to underscore the connection, in a previous sequence Buñuel has a powerful case of incest between a maiden aunt and her lusty nephew. After his arrest, the brotherly police commissioner appears to be in on the student round-up at the zoo, so we wonder just how widely these intertwining plots extend—perhaps into other movies and into the world outside the theater.

The self-reflexive nature of the film is also expressed in the way Buñuel handles the narrative structure. He seems to combine as many storytelling devices from as many different genres as possible—e.g., the narrative painting, the gothic tale, the inset story, the letter, the dream, the exemplum, the flashback, the omniscient narrator, the horizontal wipe. He creates the illusion that the artist has unlimited powers of invention and that the story has endless possibilities; he can follow any character or story line in any direction according to his will. Or, as in *Discreet Charm,* he can tease us with unfinished business: we never find out what is in the letter delivered to Brialy in his dream, we never learn the secrets of death that the sister promises to reveal from the crypt, we never discover how the little girl was recovered although we twice reach the point, "they found to their astonishment . . . " Like the bourgeois gentleman who exclaims, "I'm fed up with symmetry" as he makes for a spider on his mantle, Buñuel

always keeps his narrative off balance and his audience surprised by the unexpected. Playfully moving backward and forward in time, he starts in Spain in 1808 with a grim gothic tale and then flashes forward to a lighter comedy set in France in the 1970's. Although the story is constantly moving in time and space and shifting the tone and narrative mode, the theme being expressed is essentially the same—the tyranny of convention.

The story lines begin to intermingle with the introduction of the lost little girl. When her parents go to report her missing, Goya's painting "The Third of May" is hanging on the wall of the police station—the first clue that the film's structure is circular. After the episode of the mass murder, we return to the story of the lost child, which also leads up to the police commissioner, whose violation of his sister's tomb moves us back to the necrophilia of the opening gothic tale. When he confronts the real police commissioner, whom he is supposedly impersonating, instead of discussing the problem of identity as we expect, they turn their attention to the noon action scheduled for the zoo, a larger plot that they both seem to be in on. It is at this moment that we begin to see that Buñuel is also drawing a larger plot that encloses all of his inset stories into one great circular framework. This suspicion is confirmed in the final shooting with the cry of "Down with Freedom" that opened the film.

The narrative action within this circle is arranged in patterns that comment on the storytelling process. Several times Buñuel literally uses the automobile as a narrative vehicle to move from one story to another. When Brialy has a dream, a surprise figure walks in each time the clock strikes the hour, as if the introduction of new characters is the means of advancing narrative time; this is precisely the strategy that Buñuel uses in following characters from one story line to another. The best example of the self-reflexiveness is the sequence in the inn where the several rooms off the hallway provide a perfect visualization of the narrative development. Doors repeatedly open and slam shut as characters rush in and out of the hallway and in and out of the story. Following the whim of the master storyteller, the camera can choose to follow any of these characters into a separate room and a separate tale. Or it can create ingenious combinations: a prayer meeting turns into a card game among the woman and four monks; a flamenco dancer and guitarist in one room provide the background music for the incestuous coupling in another; and practically everyone becomes the audience for the performance of the sadist and masochist. What better narrative solution than to have an orgy and incest provide a double climax, which Buñuel brings off with amazing dexterity. Yet the sexual freedom of his players is secretive and closeted, like the bare buttocks of the masochist so decorously covered by his tuxedo tails.

Buñuel's artistic freedom, though daring and playful, is similarly constrained. Although he is one of the most truly experimental and anarchistic film-makers who has ever lived, he is also one of the most consistent in expressing the same theme and rebelling against the same conventions. For almost half a century, his career has been one long pursuit of the Phantom of Liberty.

GIDEON BACHMANN

Antonioni After China: Art Versus Science

There is a difference between seeing and proving, and it is this difference which divides art from science. To the artistic observer, the scientist who seeks proof seems a pitiable wretch, and conversely, the use of mere perception as the source of knowledge seems highly suspicious to some scientists. —KONRAD LORENZ

"I want the Chinese to know this: during the war, as a member of the Resistance, I was condemned to death!"

Antonioni's need to make this statement, polemically and publicly, in discussing the Chinese attempts to sabotage, the world over, the screening of the documentary he shot in China, indicates the bitterness in the man. A bitterness, undoubtedly, which cannot but reflect on his works which follow. In fact, Maria Schneider, who plays in it, told me that *The Passenger,* his latest film, seemed to her, during its production, his most desperate. A film, she says, without any form of optimism. He had gone to China full of optimism.

There he produced 220 minutes of calm, poetic footage. A documentary that gives no facile answers, provides no scientific analysis. A work of perception that calls upon your sensibilities, even your endurances. Certainly not one of those which to its claim of objectivity adds a dose of attitude. (That, in fact, is evidently what the Chinese resent most.)

Even if Antonioni's "other side" is less easily defined today than it was in 1943, when even anti-fascism seemed a simpler concept, with enemies more readily identified, it is certainly not Antonioni who has changed barricades. It is precisely the lack of the simplistic, "scientific" attitude requested by the Chinese, precisely that openness and lack of bias, which for the thinking viewer represents the film's greatest value. *Chung-Kuo* is a film made with love, not with opinion.

In *The Passenger* (originally entitled *Profession: Reporter*) Jack Nicholson plays a man given the chance to change identity midway in life. Based on an idea by Mark Peploe, it shows what disasters follow this attempt at self-liberation. It is basically a film about the uselessness of human individuality and of the strife for quality in one's expressions. It is the first time that Antonioni has filmed the idea of another, but after initial perplexity he found in the story elements which intrigued him in terms of his own experience. He denies that it is an autobiographical study. But the spirit of the work is the spirit of Antonioni.

BACHMANN: *Your films are similar inasmuch as they have always shown the world to be in decline, but you have always seemed to say that we must live in it, as best we can, anyway. This seems the first time you depict the attempt at escape. Are you less confident now?*

ANTONIONI: I have only tried to be more objective, even if this word seems ambiguous. A journalist sees reality with a certain consistency, the ambiguous consistency of his viewpoint, which to him, and only to him, seems objective. Jack in the film sees things in his way and I, as the director, play the role of the journalist behind the journalist: I again add other dimensions to reproduced reality.

So "objectivity" isn't something you seek . . .

No, the dialectic of life would be missing. Films would become boring. Pretending to be

objective, you annul yourself. Others talk through you but you remain extraneous. What sense would life have, then? When I say that I have tried to be more objective, I mean it in a technical way. I no longer want to employ the subjective camera, in other words the camera that represents the viewpoint of the character. The objective camera is the camera wielded by the author. Using it I make my presence felt. The camera's viewpoint becomes mine.

Did going to China, where you were forced to use the camera as an observer, prepare you for this?

Certainly; this is one of the reasons why the China project was so interesting for me. I had to shoot very quickly: 80 shots a day, my absolute record. We had five weeks and an enormous itinerary. I could not do what I had done in the period of my early documentaries, where I studied the light for every shot, and picked the best hours of the day for shooting. I couldn't prepare much. While my early documentaries prepared me for features, this Chinese experience has prepared me for the new way in which I have used the camera in *The Passenger*. I am not really a good son of neorealism; I'm rather the black sheep of its family, and with this film even more so. I have replaced my objectivity with that of the camera. I can direct it any way I want; as the director, I am God. I can allow myself any kind of liberty. Actually, the liberty I have achieved in the making of this film is the liberty the character in the film tried to achieve by changing identity.

So it is your own story in a way?

Only inasmuch as it is my story as an artist, as a director—without wanting to sound presumptuous. In my own life, I don't know whether I shall succumb. I don't mean to the temptation to change identity; we all have that. But to destiny, since each one of us carries his destiny within himself. I do not know whether I shall succumb to that, to all those acts which at the end of a life come together to make up one's destiny. Some succumb and some don't. Perhaps changing one's identity one commits an error, one succumbs to life, one dies, in essence. It depends on the acts one commits, having appropriated to oneself that other identity. It's a presumptuousness that probably puts one in conflict with life itself.

Of all the species, only man seems overly concerned with his identity. We seem to have done, as a species, what you describe.

We have created a structure that produces doubts. We are all dissatisfied. The international situation, politically and otherwise, is so unstable, that the lack of stability is reflected within each individual. But I'm used to talking in pictures, not words. This conversation doesn't create images; I prefer to remain more concrete. When I talk of man, I want to see his face. In China, when I asked them what they felt was the most important thing in their revolution, they said it was the new man. That is what I tried to focus on. Each individual, each one creating his own little revolution, all those little revolutions which together will change humanity. That's why I insist upon a personal viewpoint, concretizing it with the camera; every change in history has always started from individuals. You can't change facts: it's the human mind that creates human action.

Aren't we losing this faith in the industrial age?

When this age began, it enlarged the definition of the individual. As it also enlarged the conflict between it and society, the social conflict, which obviously was born in an industrial context. Perhaps Marx today should be corrected a little. Not his drive to change society, but the ways of doing it. We are back to discussing identity. It is a question of the usefulness of individuality in a given social context. In an antheap identity was lost since it no longer served a practical purpose. It was replaced by the individuality of the group. In my work, too, the usefulness of art is changing, and its utility to society, but I think that the product we call art will continue to exist. The human being needs to express himself in some way, in community with others. That is the search for identity: the desperate need to participate in society.

Thus you create a personal cinema, a viewpoint cinema, in order to participate in society?

Films are seen by this mass of people, all to-

gether. Thus a minimum of contact, for those seeking it, is produced. It is important to find the common denominator, even if this can lead to misunderstandings. As in the case where the common denominator is the political ideal. But I don't think cinema will remain so complicated much longer; the future lies in videotape. People will use film cameras as they use still cameras today; they will express themselves. And when television comes to present—as it has barely begun doing in a few countries—a more stimulating product than the cinema, the cinema will lose out. But we are still very much behind. In Italy, for example, until we have color television, I will not work for TV. What I would really like to do is make a feature film with television cameras, that is my dream. That is what I had planned on doing with *Technically Sweet,* the film I had hoped to make before this one. It was to be based on a story by Calvino, the Italian poet who lives in Paris. Telecameras offer a very free working method. You can paint your images. You can change the colors. Since the colors are electronic, this is easy, as it is for a painter. I had tried to do this in the cinema, with *Red Desert,* but I want to carry this technique even further. What counts, is the reality that ends up on the screen. My reality.

So "objective" reality doesn't exist?

Certainly not. But it exists inasmuch as we exist.

What does this film represent, finally, in your career?

It's an important stage for me, mostly because it's not based on a story I wrote myself. When it was first suggested to me that I should direct a film based on this script of Mark Peploe's, I was somewhat taken aback, but then, rather instinctively, I decided for it, feeling that after all there was something in this story which reminded me of I-don't-know-what. I began to shoot, to work, before I even had a final script, because there wasn't much time, due to Jack Nicholson's other commitments. So I started working with a certain feeling of distance. A feeling of being somewhat removed from the story itself. For the first time I found I was working more with the brain than, let's say, with the stomach. But during the shooting of the film's beginning, the certain something that this story contained began to interest me ever more. In this journalist, as in every journalist, there co-exists the drive to excel, to produce quality work, and the feeling that this quality is ephemeral. The feeling, thus, that his work is valid for a fleeting moment only.

In an age of rapid consumption, that is a feeling shared by all those working in art or in communication.

In fact no one can understand such a feeling better than a film director, since we are working with a material, the film stock, which is itself ephemeral, physically short-lived. Time consumes it. In my film, when Jack feels saturated to the gills with this sentiment, after years of work, a moment arrives when there is a break in his inner armor, when he feels the need for a personal revolution. Add to this frustrations for other motives: a failed marriage, an adopted son whose presence did not have the expected effect upon his life, and another, ethical need, which becomes stronger as he progresses. You will understand, then, how this character, in the moment when the occasion arises, takes the opportunity to change identity, fascinated by the promise of the liberty that he expects will follow. That, in any case, was my point of departure. What the film tells, is the story of what happens to him after this change of identity, the vicissitudes that he encounters, perhaps the disappointments.

So the film is in a way also the story of itself?

Only indirectly, because I have been able to apply a technique which resembles that of the journalist in the film. I shot the film with the same eye the journalist uses in his viewing of reality, using this "objective" kind of camerawork I described. Two or three "subjective" shots have remained in the film, but for the rest of it the camera was free to abandon the characters, to precede them where they were headed, to shoot that which was interesting for me, the reporter of my reporter, to watch, to fix, to record. I have thought a great deal about this, because in my previous films I had never quite felt this liberty.

How would you define the technical differences between this work and your preceding ones?

This way of looking at things has permitted me to return to the *piano-sequenza* [the "sequence-shot" or very long camera take, in which events change and grow within the frame, rather than using a short-take-based "montage" technique.—G.B.], which I had abandoned quite some time ago. But even that is not true for the whole film; actually every sequence in the film uses its own particular technique. I can't even say whether there is a coherent, uniform style for the whole; if there is, it is an *internal* style. I felt the need to present myself, afresh, in a free way, in confrontation wtih every new part of the film. In shooting, this system has allowed me a feeling of great joy.

You said China prepared you for this. There, too, you had gone with joy. But you seem to have carried those experiences to fruition more in The Passenger *than in* Chung-Kuo. *Was that because you had more control?*

My experiences in China must be divided into two clear and separate ones. The first one was that of the shooting, of visiting certain parts of China—unfortunately not many, but more was not allowed me. That experience, I must say, was of an absolutely positive nature. I found myself facing a people, a country, which showed clear signs of the revolution that had occurred. In seeking out the face of this new society I followed my natural tendency to concentrate on individuals, and to show the new man, rather than the political and social structures which the Chinese revolution created. Because in order to understand those structures, one would have to stay in a country much longer. These five weeks permitted only a quick glance; as a voyager I saw things with a voyager's eye. I tried to take the film spectator with me, to take him by the hand, as it were, and have him accompany me on this trip. Also, social and political structures are abstract entities which are not easily expressed in images. One would have to add words to those images, and that wasn't my role. I had not gone to China to understand it, but only to see it. To look at it and to record what passed under my eyes.

Had it been your idea to go there?

No. This was not a documentary planned by me. The project was born of a relationship which Italian television (RAI) had initiated with the Chinese Embassy in Rome. I had not been informed beforehand. One day they called me and asked if I wanted to shoot a documentary in China. I responded enthusiastically, because the matter obviously interested me greatly.

You said your experiences in China must be divided into two parts . . .

When the film was finished, the first persons, outside of my collaborators, to whom it was shown, were some representatives of the Chinese Embassy in Rome. The ambassador didn't show up. There was the director of the New China Agency and two or three others. At the end of the screening these persons expressed themselves positively. "You," they said, "Signor Antonioni, have looked at our country with a very affectionate eye. And we thank you." That was the first reaction of certain Chinese responsible people. I don't know what happened after that. I have no idea why they changed their opinion. I can only imagine why, but it would be a useless subject for discussion.

From what I've read, it doesn't seem to me that the objections were on an artistic or filmic level at all.

I am accused of having associated myself with Lin Piao in denigrating the Chinese revolution. It has been said that I did not sufficiently appreciate what the socialist system and the dictatorship of the proletariat in China have constructed. I reject in the most decisive manner that this is true of my documentary. Seeing it you will realize this. It has been said that I am being paid by Russian revisionists. Who these Russian revisionists are supposed to be, I truly do not know; or rather I suppose that I do know, because, after all, I live on this planet and not on another, and thus what happens in other countries does interest me. It has been said that I purposely denigrated China in many other ways; one of these is supposed to be the fact that I have used a "cool" color tone in order to eliminate the

real colors of China and of the Chinese landscape. It has been said that I've denigrated Chinese children, I really don't know why. I made shots of those children while they were singing their little songs; their delicious little faces. They are really beautiful, Chinese children, and if I could, I would adopt one. I don't see how I could have denigrated them. I have been told that I showed the bridge in Nanking in a diminished way, not triumphal enough. I must say that in fact the day I went to shoot it it was a foggy day and I asked to be allowed to return another day. There is a long shot of the bridge left in the film, I think, but it doesn't show the bridge in a very expressive way. I had to limit myself to take shots of the bridge from closer by, and naturally, passing underneath it, the bridge appears slightly deformed. But that is our way of looking at things, from an individualistic viewpoint. That is the point of departure that our own social context creates. When certain aspects of reality fascinate me, my first instinct is to record them. We, as descendants of Western civilization, point our cameras at things that surround us, with a certain trust in the interpretative capacities of the viewer.

Is there anything that could fall under this definition that you were actually kept from shooting?

Well . . . I remember when we were in the center of China, in Hunan province, we came through a village where a free market was going on, a thing apparently widely tolerated in China. I asked to get off, but the driver wouldn't stop. I made something of a fuss; I said to the driver, look, let me off, and I opened the door of the car, and he stopped. But the people who were there to accompany me—and in this case they were eight—didn't tell me "don't shoot." They just said, "You may shoot, if you wish, but it displeases us." You will see this scene in the film. What would another Italian director have done in my stead? Obviously I started shooting; then I saw that their displeasure was indeed great, and I stopped. What I want to say is that everything I did in China was done in complete accord with the people who were there to accompany me. Usually there were eight of them. In Nanking there were fourteen. Thus I never did anything that wasn't allowed and I never shot anything without their being present. I don't see what they are accusing me of now. It is really unheard of. May I add that the vulgar language of their accusations really hurts me. And that is what I mean by my second experience of China; not the experience in China itself, which was positive. The negative experience concerning China is this one, this lurking about in the undergrowth of politics. Their going to the Foreign Ministry to try and stop the projection here. Their going to Sweden, as they did, to try to blackmail the Swedish government by threatening to cease having cultural relations with Sweden if Swedish TV presented the film. Their going to Greece—mind you, while the colonels were still in power—and asking the colonels not to show the film, which happened. Their going to Germany to try and do the same thing; the Germans, unlike the Greeks, refused. Their going to France to try and do the same thing again. It is this method they use which seems so small-minded to me. This way they have of insulting me personally, calling me a charlatan, a *buffone*—that is the word, I can't tell you the Chinese original, I only read the papers in Italian. I have been accused of being a fascist! Of having fought with the fascist troops! I want the Chinese to know this: during the war, as a member of the Resistance, I was condemned to death. I was on the other side! I must say these things, once and for all, because it can't go on that these people go around insulting me in this way and I can't even find anyone to defend me, because . . . because, after all, we do like the Chinese people, and I like them too. What I don't like is those who insult me without even knowing who I am, this business of allowing people like those fools of "Italia-China" [a Maoist Italian youth organization.—G. B.] to say whatever idiot things they want to. I have nothing else to say.

Film Books: An Inexhaustive Survey

We present below an incomplete round-up of recent film books, mainly titles published through 1974. Certain works not dealt with here will be reviewed at length in later issues, but we have tried to give some notice to all the books of which we have knowledge, with the exception of a few quiz books and other amusements. Unsigned annotations are by Ernest Callenbach.

TALKING PICTURES: SCREENWRITERS IN THE AMERICAN CINEMA

By Richard Corliss. Preface by Andrew Sarris. New York: Overlook Press, 1974. $15.00.

In editing an anthology of articles entitled *The Hollywood Screenwriters* Richard Corliss fired a first salvo in what Andrew Sarris calls his "noisy crusade" against the directorcentric bias of auteur theory as is. His follow-up, *Talking Pictures,* is an unprecedentedly sustained survey of Hollywood scriptwriters, their screen personae and their characteristic contributions, and does for writers what *The American Cinema* did for their better publicized colleagues.

Title-deeds to the plots on this scriptorial Parnassus come in four kinds. Pride of place goes to the author-auteurs (Hecht, Sturges, Krasna, Tashlin, Axelrod, Polonsky, Wilder, Koch, Peter Stone, Borden Chase). In the elegant suburb of "Stylists" we may visit the residences of Samson Raphaelson, Nunnally Johnson, Ernest Lehmann, Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Garson Kanin (and Ruth Gordon). Under the rubric "Themes in search of a style" Corliss includes Robert Riskin, Joseph L. and Herman Mankiewicz, Dudley Nichols and Dalton Trumbo. His "Chameleons" (both thematic and stylistic) are Jules Furthman, Sidney Buchman, Casey Robinson, Morrie Ryskind, Edwin Justus Mayer, Delmer Daves, Charles Lederer, Charles Brackett, Frank S. Nugent and Ring Lardner, Jr. "A new wind from the East" inspires the works of Terry Southern, Erich Segal, Buck Henry, Jules Feiffer, and David Newman and Robert Benton.

Corliss writes amiably and wittily, a rare combination. If his sentences are less emphatic in their alliterations than Andrew Sarris's they make up for it by the intensified intricacy of their rhythms. His freedom from fixations on a director's consistency hones his sensitivity to a film's variety of dialogue, gesture and mood. Literate nostalgia-buffs will suffer so many joyful pangs of recall they'll have to stop reading every page or so to rest awhile. Wherever I've picked it up I've been grabbed, on my way to the beginning, by a trenchant phrase and hijacked into reading on from there. One is constantly stimulated to disagreement and grateful to be. Frequently Corliss gets all fantangled between discussing the film as a whole (e.g., what actors do rather than what they do what to) and pinpointing specifically scriptorial contributions, but such conclusion is fertile and logical, for he freely grants that casting influences writing, and maybe *Ninotchka* has three and/or five auteurs (Lubitsch, Garbo, and Brackett-Wilder-Reisch). His passages about writers like Furthman, Raphaelson, Hecht, and Nichols are required reading about directors like Sternberg, Lubitsch, Hawks, and Ford. *Talking Pictures* has so much going for it as a smorgasbord, or kaleidoscope, or pot-pourri of evocations and observations, that it belongs on the best-seller lists along with *The American Cinema* and *I Lost It at the Movies.* Though it may still

make it, it's hard to explain the resounding silence with which it's been greeted by specialist reviewers.

On reflection, I think it derives from the rigidities that have overtaken auteurism. Though Corliss quite rightly thinks he's offering us a new and enjoyable source of intellectual riches perhaps he's threatening us too, as films long loved as directional monologues turn into dialogues or symposia and so need seeing all over again. For my part, I'm delighted, since though I sometimes think along directorcentric lines I wouldn't give such thinking any sort of precedence over thinking about (in ascending order of importance), (a) genre, (b) cycle, (c) each film as an individual experience, and (d) how reel experience relates to real experience (including sociological, psychoanalytical, and other matters arising). Corliss reacts against directorcentricity, but in such a way as simultaneously to modify and extend auteurism. And while many directorcentrics would concede auteurship to such writers as Mayer, Prévert, Aurenche-Bost, Zavattini, and Chayefsky, and some would even subscribe to multiple-auteur theory in principle, most filmbuffs shrink from applying it, rightly fearful of the law of diminishing returns, or wrongly fearful of upsetting one-effect-one-cause simplicities ("God wrote the Bible and its authors weren't auteurs but only secretaries"). Lubitsch, of course; Garbo, sure; but how to weigh these two against Wilder, Brackett, Reisch, and each of the trio against the others? Corliss shows us how. In his collaboration with Wilder, "Brackett acted as both a mellowing influence on Wilder's effusive sarcasm, and as author of the important but underrated 'bridging' dialogue between Wilder's Berliner jokes." I can't imagine anyone refining on research as patient and judgment as fine as that, which, ironically, is why Corliss is likely to retain his corner on screenwriter auteurism. It's a discipline difficult enough to dishearten competition as, I suspect, it has discouraged comment.

It's clear enough, if you concentrate, that Corliss is tracing the real contributions screenwriters have made, as well as the coherent and identifiable emergence of their personae. Nonetheless the auteurist tendency to conflate creativity and identifiability lingers on insidiously enough to leave auteurists worried that henceforth they must quadruple their work by linking themes with scriptwriters and not just directors.

Corliss's passages on Borden Chase are characteristically enlightening but against what I take to be their general drift I'd concede to directorcentricity that even insofar as *Red River* and *Winchester .73* are both his work each is less like the other than it's like *some* other films by the same director. All the more necessary to stress that neither film would be what it is without Chase, and that his dramatic structures account for their differences from and superiority over innumerable Hawks and Mann movies with weaker scripts. A film's qualities may be largely due to work by an artist which nonetheless doesn't assert him as an *auteur,* and this distinction is vital given the frequency with which scriptwriters' work is directed at respecting an original by someone else (who may come through as the *auteur:* e.g. Dr. Seuss in *The 5000 Fingers of Dr. T*) and eclipsed by director-actor interpretations.

De gustibus . . . , as they say, and undoubtedly everyone's agreements with specific opinions will pullulate as multitudinously as mine. I remain unconvinced that Krasna, Peter Stone, and even Hecht after 1940 are *auteurs,* or that Joseph L. Mankiewicz isn't. Why didn't Corliss include, as, I would, William Rose, Alexander Jacobs, and Waldo Salt? And an index? How to characterize Sidney Buchman without discussing *The Mark* and *The Group?* While admiring Corliss's patient and good-natured appreciation of competence (which critics too often take for granted and never even inspect), I still felt a need for the anti-*auteur* asperities of John Schultheiss's essay on an older wave of Eastern writers in Hollywood (*Cinema Journal,* Fall 1971). But to say that Corliss and Schultheiss represent thesis and antithesis is to say that both are indispensable, like yin and yang, and one's dissatisfactions come as spin-off from one's stimulations. Corless embraces innumerable movies,

normally neglected for fitting uneasily into directorcentricity (like Wilder's *Sherlock Holmes*) and achieves neat but not pompous characterizations like: "In the fifties and early sixties, Axelrod's triple-sec wet dreams ended (as wet dreams will) just before climax: the hero never got the heroine to bed. But all of his film scripts read like suicide notes, for which the morning-after hangover—and not the night-before revelry—has provided the inspiration." If that's what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed, Corliss's new directions make it clear that Hollywoodology must supplement its directorcentric charts and countercharts with an entire Atlas of Parnassus. Directorcentricity is a Mercator's Projection: a fine start, and still everyone's basic image of the world, but it won't do by itself.

Screenwriting remains one of moviedom's darker arts. Directorcentrics can turn to a useful if inconclusive tradition of theorizing about moving images, but the arts of narrative and dialogue as such have tended to evade analysis, perhaps because tales and words exist through so many media. I'm not really happy about Corliss's title, which links writing with spoken words and is unfair to silent scenarists. It assents to linking scriptwriting with "literary content" (whatever that's supposed to be; the specifically literary content of literature comes from style and excludes the story). In fact scriptwriting, like theaterwriting, differs as radically from on-the-page forms as the comic strip does from the pulp-novel. Vulgar structuralism all but obliterates narrative continuity, the accumulation of tensions and the uniqueness of any given moment; it's as if music were reduced to nothing but the inversion of chords, or as if "the hat sat on the cat" were reduced to its symmetry with "the cat sat on the hat" (but the inversion of the elements produces other changes, e.g., the shape of the hat).

Disagreements aside, there are many roads into Corliss's Kingdom. Which makes his book all the more important, and it would be all the sadder if his breakthrough were ignored just because he'd adapted to an intricate topography so well.

—RAYMOND DURGNAT

BERGMAN ON BERGMAN
Interviews with Ingmar Bergman

By Stig Bjorkman, Torsten Manns, and Jonas Sima. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973. $9.95.

This is to my mind the most impressive interview book ever done. Bergman, who declares at one point that he hardly ever talks of such things, expounds on the making of all his films up through *A Passion* and *Faro Document*. The taciturn Swede can, it turns out, be positively loquacious, charming; he is gentle on his terribly serious interlocutors when their theoretical predilections throw him into a paralyzed depression; he answers their questions, most of which are acute and relevant, in concerned and responsive detail.

The interviews spanned the period from June 1968 through April 1970, and were obviously unrushed: Bergman made himself remarkably available by the usual standards of film directors. (He even offers to show the interviewers additional home-movie footage made of his shooting.) They do not provide any astonishing revelations of intent or technique. What they do, and it seems to me immensely valuable, is to show us an overwhelmingly gifted mind reviewing its own operations: not in a spirit of cold analysis, yet not indulgently either (Bergman has, it turns out, a very low opinion of *Virgin Spring*, for instance; *Lesson in Love* gets dismissed in a phrase) but affectionately looking back at the circumstances and motives that shaped the work and the works. Yet this reminiscence is never slack, as in the usual Hollywood autobiography, or for mere amusement's sake; there is, in his practical commonsense way, a lesson in everything. And this is close to the central impression the book leaves: of a collected, businesslike, competent, self-contained man who has spent a lifetime making films in the most workmanlike fashion conceivable; yet those films delve into the craziest recesses of the human psyche that any film-maker has yet dealt with, and have a psychic verve and sophistication utterly unmatched elsewhere in the cinema, not to mention an astonishingly vivid visual style. If this comes from the sort of "angry childish-

normally neglected for fitting uneasily into directorcentricity (like Wilder's *Sherlock Holmes*) and achieves neat but not pompous characterizations like: "In the fifties and early sixties, Axelrod's triple-sec wet dreams ended (as wet dreams will) just before climax: the hero never got the heroine to bed. But all of his film scripts read like suicide notes, for which the morning-after hangover—and not the night-before revelry—has provided the inspiration." If that's what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed, Corliss's new directions make it clear that Hollywoodology must supplement its directorcentric charts and countercharts with an entire Atlas of Parnassus. Directorcentricity is a Mercator's Projection: a fine start, and still everyone's basic image of the world, but it won't do by itself.

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The interviews spanned the period from June 1968 through April 1970, and were obviously unrushed: Bergman made himself remarkably available by the usual standards of film directors. (He even offers to show the interviewers additional home-movie footage made of his shooting.) They do not provide any astonishing revelations of intent or technique. What they do, and it seems to me immensely valuable, is to show us an overwhelmingly gifted mind reviewing its own operations: not in a spirit of cold analysis, yet not indulgently either (Bergman has, it turns out, a very low opinion of *Virgin Spring*, for instance; *Lesson in Love* gets dismissed in a phrase) but affectionately looking back at the circumstances and motives that shaped the work and the works. Yet this reminiscence is never slack, as in the usual Hollywood autobiography, or for mere amusement's sake; there is, in his practical commonsense way, a lesson in everything. And this is close to the central impression the book leaves: of a collected, businesslike, competent, self-contained man who has spent a lifetime making films in the most workmanlike fashion conceivable; yet those films delve into the craziest recesses of the human psyche that any film-maker has yet dealt with, and have a psychic verve and sophistication utterly unmatched elsewhere in the cinema, not to mention an astonishingly vivid visual style. If this comes from the sort of "angry childish-

ness" that Bergman says (he recurs often to a view of himself as somewhat infantile, and says that he is always in a rage) evidently other film-makers could use more of it.

The book, whose interviews were done by the then editors of the Swedish film magazine *Chaplin* (who are also film-makers), offers not only tremendously valuable documentation on the making of Bergman's films and an era in Swedish film and theater, but also insights into the practical creative side of film-making that will be valuable to any aspiring director. It is a basic and essential text. —E. C.

VISIONARY FILM: THE AMERICAN AVANT GARDE

By P. Adams Sitney. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974. $10.00.

The long-overdue and under-reviewed *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde* by P. Adams Sitney is far more *derrière-garde* than *avant* when it comes to postulating a theoretical history. But it is the most comprehensive study of American experimental films and film-makers we have to date. Other histories and critical anthologies have emerged in recent years but, unlike Sitney's book, none have attempted to delineate a national movement in terms of a critical framework. Over the last decade generally two types of experimental film books emerged: the purely historical overview and the unsystematic compilation of essays. Representative of the former we find Sheldon Renan's excellent but outdated "encyclopedia," *An Introduction to the American Underground Film*[1] and David Curtis's ambitious international survey, *Experimental Cinema.*[2] Of the anthologies, Gregory Battcock's *The New American Cinema*[3] affords the most rigorous essays. P. Adams Sitney's *Film Culture Reader,*[4] a collection of articles from *Film Culture,* like Jonas Mekas's *Movie Journal*[5] (a collection of his *Village Voice* articles and *True Diaries*) is generally limited to subjectivist, pro-independent cinema propaganda. The works which most closely approximate critical histories in the field are Parker Tyler's *Underground Film*[6] and Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema.*[7] The value of Tyler's critique was its creating of an interface between "underground" films and other disciplines in the New York art scene in the sixties. Where Tyler (a sort of Rex Reed of the underground) relied on a Freudian interpretation of specific films, Youngblood's model was a technological-metaphysic derived from Buckminster Fuller. Both these critics limited their selections of films to suit an *a priori* approach to the experimental field; both have provided exceptionally colorful (albeit presumptive) analysis on those films which suited their approaches. *Visionary Film* attempts to tackle the entire American *avant-garde* and to place it, theoretically, in the context of Romanticism.

It would be unfair to launch a critique of this book without extolling its virtue as a fascinating catalogue. For all its intellectual taradiddle and critical quackery, *Visionary Film* is packed with extensive descriptions of heretofore "invisible" film-makers and films (the best examples are to be found in the "Absolute Animation" chapter on the hermetic Harry Smith or the delightful portrait of Zen Victorian master, James Broughton, and his witty partner on *The Potted Psalm,* Sidney Peterson).

Sitney's chronology spans the 30 years from Maya Deren to the currently fashionable "structuralists"; for the historical "patterns" which "emerged" he has invented a series of terms. The opening chapter, on *Meshes of the Afternoon,* situates Deren's film in the "psychodramatic" or "early trance" film genre. Her later work is decidedly "trancist" (a film in which "the protagonist passes invisibly among people, through dramatic landscapes toward a climactic confrontation with one's self and one's past") as analyzed in the succeeding chapter, "Ritual and Nature." Deren's dream and ritual emphasis is seen by Sitney as a foundation for the Romantic tradition of the entire American *avant-garde,* a legacy which later flourished as a "mythopoeic" genre. "The Lyrical Film" traces the romantic influence in the evolutionary works of Stan Brakhage and Bruce Baillie's heroic odes. In "Major Mythopoeia," a survey of Brakhage's mature works, Sitney supplies us with the key to

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his text: that the thread which ties the American to the European *avant-garde* is the modernist influence on the native American tradition (Whitman, Pound, *et al.*, "fed by European Romanticism"). These influences, fusing with Brakhage's later Abstract Expressionism, produce a Major Mythopoeia (the creating and expressing of "new myths").

West Coast film-makers (Northern Californians) either come under the heading of the "Paradise of Fools School" (initiated by Peterson and Broughton and influenced by everything from Man Ray to Mack Sennett) or clumped together in the "Apocalypses and Picaresques" section which unveils an "ontology of terror" in the works of Christopher MacLaine, Ron Rice, Robert Nelson, and Bruce Connor. "Recovered Innocence" explains an East Coast counterpoint to this in the films of Jack Smith and Ken Jacobs (works like *Flaming Creatures* and *Blond Cobra* which Mekas so appropriately termed "Baudelarian cinema"); these two chapters neatly bracket the Beat sensibility operating on both coasts throughout the sixties. The final chapter is on the advent of the "structural" film: a genre which includes the most recent *avant-gardists* working with strictly formal film rhetoric (Kubelka, Snow, Sharits, *et al.*).

Sitney's historical morphology provides us with a body of works. But a summing up of the parts is not a taking of the parts themselves apart. Films are analyzed according to their place in a technological structure. The genres Sitney supplies for his "mimesis of the human mind" run as follows: "Beginning with an attempt to translate dream and other revelations of the personal unconscious in the trance films, through the imitation of the act of seeing in the lyric film and the collective unconscious in the mythopoeic film . . . the latest formal constructions have approached the form of meditation—the structural film." This galloping historical approach and connected theory of system of genres ignores and flattens textual process (as it must do to subdue and colonize such a large area of film work). As I explained in an article elsewhere (*FQ*, Summer 1974) Sitney's attempt to draw parallels between Deren and Anger as "trancists"—through their mutual preoccupation with mystical ritual—is misleading:

> With Deren the narrative form orders the subconscious into a design . . . The interior event is presented as a matrix out or which a pattern is made and this pattern of ritual elements is combined to form the overall structure. Anger's use of ritual is quite different, his narrative model is constructed through comparative analysis of myths, religions and rituals and their associations external to their respective systems.

Sitney sees *Meshes* as "the translation of a dream." Whether or not it is the dramatization of wish-fulfillment, identification with and substitution for the "Other" or libidinal object, or the collision between psychological riddle and its solution, the film is still a *dramatization,* far more than the "fragmentary psychic activity" of a dream, to be analyzed in terms of psychological motivations. It is neither dream nor psychodrama but a series of artificially forged associations linking latent representations to the manifest content of the "dreamt" narrative. In her program notes for *Meshes* Deren emphasizes certain of what Barthes has described as "exercises of structure," which she called "controlled succession of a certain number of mental operations." She states, "It reproduces the way in which the sub-conscious of an individual will develop, interpret and elaborate an apparently simple and casual incident into a critical emotional experience." To Deren the abstract ideal was achieved through classical structuring; the technique of cinema was absolute form: the harmonies of time, space and movement. Sitney's eagerness to Romanticize Deren's early works as springboards for the following plunge into his lake country of the American *avant-garde* openly defies her classicist aesthetic. Another unwelcome result of Sitney's Romantic *idée fixe* is his *auteurisation.* The *avant-garde auteur* is a redundant concept; the term "visionary" implies much more than the notion of authorship or personality. There is a ring of prophecy about it, of sanctity. But when the myth of a film and the film-maker's own myth of his life become totally interdependent, the artist

may be placed before the art. The entire locus of Sitney's book is centered in Brakhage. All stages of the evolution of American visionary consciousness lead up to or away from Brakhage as Wordsworthian lion: grandsire of the Romantic Lyrical Tradition. But the Romanticism in Brakhage's work is confounded by the romanticization of the artist-as-visionary. The works are permeated with and inexorably linked to the public "romance" of Brakhage's family life; this remythification of a "personal cinema" serves to reinforce the "underground" position of non-commercial poetic cinema, economically and critically. American *avant-garde* film criticism has the specific responsibility of providing examination and analysis of the texts themselves, exclusive (or inclusive) of the artist. Biographical trivia, lengthy attention to the artist as husband and father, domestic details and descriptions of the artist's great travails do serve to make the book, as Gene Youngblood put it, "read like a good novel." But visionary gossip, whether spread by artist or critic, is not necessarily part of a vision and may be the illusion of one. Sitney describes *Window Water Baby Moving* as an "interplay" between film-maker and wife. Aside from some brief close-ups of Jane Brakhage's face, the film is entirely an abstraction of her: as cubistic-watermelon-in-bath-tub-reflecting-window and other expressions of Stan's own highly interpretive and objectifying vision. Nonetheless, Jane is reduced to a beautiful belly through Stan's romanticization; there is more beauty than "truth" here, and to continue to remythify this vision of woman (who is visually "absent") is to refuse to accept her in full manifestation of self, much less to "interplay" with her.

One of Sitney's more frustrating practices is to reduce a film to one of its icons and then to analyze the film in terms of the still and carry on comparative analysis with an icon isolated from another film. This is a crucial instance of his Hegelianizing: his insensitivity to textual process. The first and perhaps most seductive of these comparisons is a juxtaposition of the frame enlargement of Pierre Batcheff looking "out of the window as repressed barrier" in *Chien Andalou* and the shot of Maya Deren pressed against the "window as reflector of the self" (i.e., "looking in") in *Meshes*. This is designed to illustrate the break between the French surrealists and the American *avant-garde* as one of exterior-vs.-interior concerns: the window becomes a metaphor for the screen and the screen is metamorphized into a wall in the surrealist icon and a mirror in the *Meshes* icon. Sitney reduces the reflecting windowpane through which Deren gazes to the problematic of Romanticism: the seeing of one's self reflected in the seeing of nature, the look inward to describe the external (cf. *Tintern Abbey*). Now instead of Stendhal's novel as "a mirror going down the road" or Hollywood as "a window going down the road held by six union members," we have the screen as a two-way mirror between which the "self" must mediate. Gaston Bachelard has said that "the mind thinks it is thinking when it creates metaphors." A final smashing of the mirror - metaphor is accomplished with the "structuralist" film-makers; here the screen is used to reflect a feedback continuum of the entire filmic process, including the spectator's viewing experience. With the process-loop specific emphasis is placed on the spectator's "gaze" remaining on the screen's "surface." It is amusing to witness with what vehemence Sitney denies any connections between "his" structuralists and structuralist inquiry. ("It was a mistake to have chosen that word which the de Saussurian model had overwhelmed.")[8] He attributes the advent of structuralist film-makers to a counter-attack against Warhol. This is a distortion. In fact, Sharits expresses a great admiration for Warhol and it is sensible when one considers Sharits's *Frozen Film Frames*[9] as "reproducibles" (the framed film print as a sort of silk-screen cut from the original, negative stencil). One also questions the seriousness of Sitney's involvement with "his" structuralists when, after crowning Warhol the mogodaddy of the movement he dismisses him in three pages (and these liberally sprinkled with quotes from Steven Koch's *Stargazer*).[10] The omission of Warhol's

career is a serious weakness; Sitney doesn't describe or discuss *Chelsea Girls,* one of the top ten masterpieces of underground films, and discards Warhol on the basis of "his fierce indifference to (and attack against) the Romantic Heritage." This is undeniably a case of critic-as-tyrannical-parasite; even Andy is not destined to escape the clutches of Romanticism, for, "on one level, at least, and that is the only level of importance to us, Warhol turned his genius for parody and reduction against the American *Avant-Garde* film . . . yet whether or not the anti-Romantic stance can escape the dialectics of Romanticism is an open question." The implications here extend to other film-makers whom Sitney omits for the same "reason" (it would be difficult to make a case for Shirley Clarke, Stan VanDerBeek or Ed Emshwiller as "romanticists").

In her oft-reworked and republished essay, "Film as Radical Aspiration," Annette Michelson sees experimental cinema epistemology in terms of redefining narrative structure. In her latest revision[11] she encapsulates the evolution of *avant-garde* cinema in terms of spatial and temporal "radicalizations" of narrative. Beginning with Cocteau's assault on time and preservation of spatial integrity in linear narrative in *Blood of a Poet,* she covers Deren's restructuring of time and space in terms of gesture (movement), Brakhage's destruction of both spatial and temporal coordinates through Abstract Expressionism and his reclamation of basic film materials and the process of viewing. All this historically overdetermines the advent of structuralist/materialists like Sharits and Frampton. Also, Michelson would have the independent cinema explore Eisenstein's "intellectual cinema" which would become capable of reproducing the process of thought itself. What she set forth epistemologically Sitney has managed to "drag up the wormeaten staircase of syntax" and to obscure through his vast historical metaphor for the "expansion" of the human mind. To propound the development of consciousness, "expanded" or otherwise, one would have to be a "visionary" of Hegelian proportions.

Experimental film analysis has fallen far behind that of the narrative cinema in constructing or applying critical techniques. Reviews of *Visionary Film* are conspicuous by their absence, while Metz's *Film Language,* published simultaneously, has inspired overwhelming critical response. Does this imply that for all its "obscurity," semiology is far more accessible than experimental film analysis? —CAREL ROWE

NOTES

1. New York: Dutton, 1967.
2. New York: Universe Books, 1971.
3. New York: Dutton, 1967.
4. New York: Praeger, 1970.
5. New York: Macmillan, 1972.
6. New York: Grove, 1970.
7. New York: Dutton, 1970.
8. Lecture at San Francisco Art Institute, Fall 1974.
9. These are celluloid strips of completed films mounted and exhibited inside screen-sized plexi-glass, suspended in this static "aspic" in art galleries. Also, the function of Sharits's "flicker" technique can be understood as a form of serial reproduction, re-emphasizing the successiveness of each frame and redefining screen size-shape.
10. New York: Praeger, 1973.
11. Published in catalogue form at Montreux, Summer 1974, pp. 9–16.

DOCUMENTARY

A History of the Non-Fiction Film

By Eric Barnouw. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974. $10.95.

In bad times it is reasonable to evoke an heroic historical past in lieu of a very promising present. Eric Barnouw's *Documentary, A History of the Non-Fiction Film* is that kind of an effort. Rather than being an epitaph, this kind of history is more appropriately viewed optimistically as taking stock. It is intelligent history, without the nostalgia. Barnouw, whose monumental contributions to the history of broadcasting have earned him the reputation of a shrewd and knowledgeable chronicler and analyst, is once again at the peak of his form.

There seems to be ample evidence that the fortunes of documentary are currently at a pretty low ebb. Commercial television was never very

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comfortable with documentary programming, despite the evocations of the glory days of *See It Now* and the regular *CBS Reports*. Theatrical documentaries never amounted to very much in America after Flaherty and Pare Lorentz, and the financial problems of distribution are problematic enough to make all but those films which can be shown as part of some sort of school curriculum very chancy speculative enterprises. Even so carefully crafted and topical a film as *I. F. Stone's Weekly*, produced on a shoestring and completed with help from friends, must recover its modest cost by virtue of careful and time-consuming distribution by its maker. Despite its Academy Award, *Hearts and Minds* may not fare much better.

Television, as the late Bill Bluem pointed out in his *Television Documentary*, is an ideal way to reach a great number of people with images and interpretations of actuality, but anyone who has ever worked for television knows there are great numbers and greater numbers, and almost without fail the programs and genres which attract the greatest numbers are the ones which persist. Television defines its audience, tells them what to expect, and is largely designed to fulfill these expectations. When the expectations are not fulfilled, then enough of the audience opts for alternatives to make the program a losing proposition. The loss may be economic, as is the case with commercial television, or cultural and political, as is the case with public television.

In public television, the cause of documentary becomes a God and Babbitt problem. The financial basis of public television is a fragile mix of foundations, state and local governmental agencies, and contributions from viewers, or, as they are more genteely known, subscribers. Much of the best documentary programming has, in the past, come from the central public television *apparat*, first National Educational Television (NET), and more recently the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). The present situation of documentary on public television is very dour. Having successfully conquered that bogey-man centralization, the individual stations now vote on which programs they choose to support, and the voice of the Babbitt is heard from the land. Controversy is anathema to local bureaucracy, and the quality of discourse on public television is sliding inexorably toward the deepest depths of lower-middlebrow, toward the pasteurized nirvana of nostalgia, animal shows, cooking shows, canned concerts, and yumpekhably ekscented British pop history and Drahmah. All of this is, of course, undeniably cultural, and, for the bureaucrats in the local stations, magnificently suited to finesse yahoo questions about accountability from the state legislators or congress. Pretty much all of it is supported in part by grants from the usual foundations and, lately, the conscience money of several oil companies.

Eric Barnouw's history of the documentary is a helpful antidote for the spirit and good history in that it presents sign posts to where documentary could be, and hopefully, where it may emerge. His history of the genre, beginning with the Lumières, is that of a fascination with content, and with the film-makers as people whose work it was to make the implicit explicit. There is something enormously satisfying and perhaps even ennobling to an audience confronting a portion of the world's reality in a new way. Craft and style are useful and important, but the excitement exists just as much when one looks at the uncut workprint, or the unstructured archival materials. It is an aesthetic of content that drives the documentarian, and the rule that for the audience a documentary is as good as its content is interesting is difficult to falsify.

Barnouw's style has a clarity and precision that make his books delights to read. As in his three-volume *History of Broadcasting in the United States*, the facts and dates are all there, the interpretations are sane and serious, but in *Documentary* the scope and breadth of his concerns are amply illustrated with specific examples of films, film-makers, and the peculiar conditions of production of certain seminal films. The rub is that we cannot travel, as Eric Barnouw did, to many of the nations which produced the films, so that we could see them: many are not in distribution in the United States. This

is the problem of most books about films, and no solution is in sight, but unlike books about feature film-making, one is seldom concerned with descriptions of formal aesthetic qualities of the films. The excitement and attraction is in the description of their content.

—HENRY BREITROSE

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART

By Amos Vogel. New York: Random House, 1974. $15.00.

There's no doubt about it: Amos Vogel sees more films than anybody. In his capacity as founder of Cinema 16, an enormously successful and long-lived film society in New York, then as director of the New York Film Festival, as a distributor with Grove Press Films, and lately as a professor at Harvard and the Annenberg School in Philadelphia, he has had the energy and devotion to seek out films many of us only hear about secondhand. His book treats film as "subversive" in a catholic sense: political, moral, sexual, aesthetic, etc. Like the programs Vogel has presented for so many years, the book has something for the delectation of every taste, and either browsing through it or reading it straightaway will remind you of many extraordinary films—ones you have seen and half forgotten, ones you should have seen and missed, and most of all films you have never heard of and wish you could see. Vogel is indefatigable. He tells you about a Chinese documentary on surgical acupuncture, about an American sex comedy called *Electrosex* ("a sombre subversion of the genre"), about the Italian outrages of Carmelo Bene, about Donald Richie's incredible *Cybele,* and about the utterly beyond-all-taboos works of Otto Muehl (whose group we see, behaving rather decorously by their standards, in Makavejev's *Sweet Movie*). Vogel's descriptions are generally brief—I would guess that the book had its origins in the enticing program notes he has compiled over the years—but he is drawn into lengthier discussions about such matters as the undeserved reputation of *Last Tango* as a "sexual breakthrough," or the question of *Triumph of the Will*—which he admits must be included as "subversive" as well as "profoundly dangerous" for its fascist content; he is particularly interested in the achievements of Makavejev and the Czechs. Vogel has organized the vast mass of films he describes (which includes "standard" items as well as the more esoteric) by adopting a chapter scheme that makes good sense in the historical sections but inevitably bursts at the seams when it comes to more contemporary work: how can we really distinguish "the subversion of content" from "forbidden subjects of the cinema"? But the divisions mostly work well enough in practice, and the general discussions that introduce the various sections integrate the films discussed through larger stylistic, political, and philosophic analyses. (Each of these introductory sections offers a reading list for further exploration of the issues raised; this, and the excellent indexing to the book, give it lasting value for any serious film student. It is perhaps worth mentioning also, at this point when many potential buyers are finding book prices uncomfortably high, that the price of this volume is very reasonable, considering the steep rises in paper and printing costs over the past year or so, for a book of 336 double-column pages and 300 illustrations.)

A careless browser might put the book down as merely sensational because of its illustrations, which are often quite weird. That would be a mistake. Vogel has a sophisticated and humane approach to his subject, and a political background that has a way of putting films into useful new perspectives. He begins his note on *I Am Curious—Yellow* thus: "The historical task of the leadership, said Rosa Luxemburg, is to make itself unnecessary. This is precisely what happened to this legendary, much-maligned work." He is deeply and personally concerned about the limitations on personal filmic expression in so-called socialist countries. He knows, above all, that film works as no other art can quite do upon the nonverbal recesses of our systems, which is why it has such power to outrage and shock when it presents taboo subject matter; and this makes the process somehow very touching and precious. (Though often humorous as well—I think for example of the illustration showing James Broughton directing

is the problem of most books about films, and no solution is in sight, but unlike books about feature film-making, one is seldom concerned with descriptions of formal aesthetic qualities of the films. The excitement and attraction is in the description of their content.

—HENRY BREITROSE

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART

By Amos Vogel. New York: Random House, 1974. $15.00.

There's no doubt about it: Amos Vogel sees more films than anybody. In his capacity as founder of Cinema 16, an enormously successful and long-lived film society in New York, then as director of the New York Film Festival, as a distributor with Grove Press Films, and lately as a professor at Harvard and the Annenberg School in Philadelphia, he has had the energy and devotion to seek out films many of us only hear about secondhand. His book treats film as "subversive" in a catholic sense: political, moral, sexual, aesthetic, etc. Like the programs Vogel has presented for so many years, the book has something for the delectation of every taste, and either browsing through it or reading it straightaway will remind you of many extraordinary films—ones you have seen and half forgotten, ones you should have seen and missed, and most of all films you have never heard of and wish you could see. Vogel is indefatigable. He tells you about a Chinese documentary on surgical acupuncture, about an American sex comedy called *Electrosex* ("a sombre subversion of the genre"), about the Italian outrages of Carmelo Bene, about Donald Richie's incredible *Cybele,* and about the utterly beyond-all-taboos works of Otto Muehl (whose group we see, behaving rather decorously by their standards, in Makavejev's *Sweet Movie*). Vogel's descriptions are generally brief—I would guess that the book had its origins in the enticing program notes he has compiled over the years—but he is drawn into lengthier discussions about such matters as the undeserved reputation of *Last Tango* as a "sexual breakthrough," or the question of *Triumph of the Will*—which he admits must be included as "subversive" as well as "profoundly dangerous" for its fascist content; he is particularly interested in the achievements of Makavejev and the Czechs. Vogel has organized the vast mass of films he describes (which includes "standard" items as well as the more esoteric) by adopting a chapter scheme that makes good sense in the historical sections but inevitably bursts at the seams when it comes to more contemporary work: how can we really distinguish "the subversion of content" from "forbidden subjects of the cinema"? But the divisions mostly work well enough in practice, and the general discussions that introduce the various sections integrate the films discussed through larger stylistic, political, and philosophic analyses. (Each of these introductory sections offers a reading list for further exploration of the issues raised; this, and the excellent indexing to the book, give it lasting value for any serious film student. It is perhaps worth mentioning also, at this point when many potential buyers are finding book prices uncomfortably high, that the price of this volume is very reasonable, considering the steep rises in paper and printing costs over the past year or so, for a book of 336 double-column pages and 300 illustrations.)

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The Golden Positions: he is demonstrating a golf stroke to a plumpish woman, who is nude except for cap and shoes.) It is also, as Vogel points out, unending; for the subverters may obtain power, political or artistic, and they will then be subverted in turn. This book, then, is as much an incitement to the spirit of rebellion as it is a monument to the films that spirit has produced. —E. C.

THE ART OF THE AMERICAN FILM 1900-1971

By Charles Higham. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1973. $12.50.

The American cinema is a vast and elusive subject for the film historian. By all indications, there are more noteworthy films and film-makers in it than in any other national cinema, more perhaps than in all of the rest of world cinema. And yet the criticism in the field sometimes seems a veritable jungle: few if any of the film-makers have secure reputations, critically or otherwise; critics' preferences vary wildly; aesthetic and intellectual issues are often blurred by highly subjective reactions to all the things that "Hollywood" and "the movies" mean for various segments and generations of Western culture; the mass cultural considerations of the studio system raise complex questions about authorship and artistic integrity; sheer abundance of films and limited access to key works make full assessment of the field a gargantuan task; and despite the recent profusion of criticism in the area, it's still an open question as to how much of the American cinema ought to be taken seriously.

Just how seriously Charles Higham takes the American cinema in *The Art of the American Film 1900–1971* is, despite the ambitious title, open to debate. For, in many ways, this survey of American film is less a fresh look at the subject than a resurrection of familiar attitudes that much recent criticism has tried to transcend. Though he frequently refers to visuals, his tastes seem somewhat "literary": he shows little interest in genre films, especially westerns; he downgrades some controversial *auteurs* (most notably Howard Hawks and Otto Preminger) and neglects several celebrated "action" directors altogether (Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher, Don Siegel, Joseph H. Lewis, for example); and he asserts that Hollywood reached artistic maturity only after the arrival of various Broadway writers at the studios in the thirties. Among the directors he celebrates are some whose reputations have dimmed in recent years (William Wyler and Lewis Milestone in particular) and some who have received very little serious attention (Henry King, Clarence Brown, Michael Curtiz, Cecil B. DeMille, Edgar G. Ulmer, Henry Hathaway, Edmund Goulding, Tay Garnett and Victor Fleming). Still, the Higham hierarchy is fairly orthodox: Griffith, Lubitsch, von Stroheim, von Sternberg, John Ford, King Vidor, Cukor, Capra, Welles, Hitchcock and Wilder all get special attention.

Higham's prefatory remarks emphasize the collaborative nature of film-making and tend to undercut the mystique of the director-*auteur:* "It may well be argued that casting and a first-rate script are the most important ingredients of all. . . . " But he organizes his book around directors anyway and apologizes for that state of affairs with what is perhaps a better argument for the *auteur* approach than he seems to realize: "Actually the writer and cinematographer have been equally influential, but it has proved impossible to show a sustained line of thinking in the works of writers (with rare exceptions . . .) and a book following cinematographic personal expression should be an entirely separate volume." Higham does give some credit to various art directors, cinematographers, and writers along the way; but his consistently directorial framework looks like a rather curious cop-out alongside the team spirit of his preface.

Though he claims to be concerned above all with artists and personal expression, Higham's appreciations of technique make it hard to see personal elements of any sort. There is an almost infinite distance between Higham's director-technicians ("The job of seizing the audience's attention is the director's") and the personal visions of Andrew Sarris's *auteurs*

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("The director-*auteur* is not even a real person as such," Sarris wrote recently, "but a field of magnetic force around which all agents and elements of the film-making process tend to cluster. If his magnetic force is strong enough and selective enough, he can come to be regarded after a time as an authentic *auteur*."). Indeed, movies seen through Higham's eyes are curiously lacking in personal dimensions: his descriptions generally pay very little attention to human characters and concentrate instead on evocative photography and set design, "believable" recreations of reality, attractive landscapes and bits of atmosphere. These tributes to pure technique seriously undercut Higham's efforts to make a persuasive case for the directors in whom he is most interested.

While he does call attention to a great many films and perhaps creates interest in some which have gotten little or no previous discussion, the critical limitations of Higham's commentaries make his historical survey one which embraces much but says little. He gives signs, for example, of preferring Harold Lloyd to the other silent comedians (including Keaton whose career is "discussed" in a single page of plot summaries), but about all he can offer in defense of Lloyd is that his chases were "more expert than those of anyone else in his time" and that he also had a "more likeable masculine vigor than the other more passive clowns." And it's very hard to find the "greatness" and "genius" of Clarence Brown in this passage on *The Rains Came:*

> Brown's direction of players like Myrna Loy and George Brent is especially noteworthy. It would be difficult to improve on the direction of sequences like the outbreak of the monsoon, a curtain billowing in the breeze, a lamp casting a shadow of a latticework against white silk, servants scattering for cover; the death of the Maharajah; or the earthquake, a chandelier swaying as a pampered courtier (Joseph Schildkraut) shrinks back among his friends.

Higham's take-it-or-leave-it evaluations often ask us to put absolute faith in his judgment, as when he follows a plot summary of Milestone's *The Garden of Eden* with remarks like these:

> Deliciously absurd, this effervescent, utterly charming film is one of the best comedies ever made. It proved Milestone's command of expressive acting, of brilliant cutting, to be at least the equal of Lubitsch's. Not even the master could have improved on the direction of Kraly's final scene when Cinderella and Prince Charming are married literally in bed by an astonished preacher, or the evocation—aided by William Cameron Menzies' sets—of the Budapest de Paris and the Hotel Eden at Monte Carlo.

Such comments leave us very much on the outside looking in, with little or no idea of what has been expressed and evoked, let alone of what makes this film superior to the many other effervescent and deliciously absurd comedies which are graced by expressive acting, evocative sets, etc., etc. Lloyd, Brown, Milestone and many others may indeed excel in ways that previous critics have ignored or failed to see, but Higham's commentaries provide frustratingly few clues to any solid basis for re-evaluations.

This superficiality derives at least partly from Higham's apparent feeling that most American films are unworthy of close analysis. But, be this as it may, Higham tends to underestimate the complexity and significance of a good many films. Thus under his gaze, a rich and much-discussed sequence in John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* is reduced to an exercise in atmospheric grandeur: "The dedication of the Tombstone Church is the finest sequence in the picture. Here we see a square dance, bells ringing, stars and stripes fluttering, the sky washed out with light. It is a legendary archetypal scene of moving grandeur." The conflicts of civilization and wilderness, and of male and female, the delicate characterizations, the jubilant and unpuritanical religiosity, the archaic charm of the dance shared by Henry Fonda and Cathy Downs (and shared with a previous Ford-Fonda film) —none of these things are even alluded to in Higham's paragraph on the film.

Even with a well-made but obvious and fairly undemanding film like *Mildred Pierce* there are problems:

> Michael Curtiz increased his reputation still further with *Mildred Pierce* (1945), which gave Joan Craw-

> ford her opportunity for an Oscar-winning performance. It was the story, based faithfully in spirit on the novel by James M. Cain by Ranald MacDougall, of a hard-up suburban housewife who takes a job as a waitress to pay for her daughter's music lessons and by a rather startling series of maneuvers turns herself into a restaurant tycoon with a chain of medium-priced restaurants stretching down the Pacific coast from Malibu to beyond Santa Monica. This wish-fulfillment fantasy delighted millions of women, who, house-bound like the heroine and struggling with cramped wartime budgets, dreamed of escape to the sort of glamorous world that Mildred occupied. The film became an almost seminal work, expressing Forties romanticism at its height. Here were the glittering interiors, the sumptuous furs and silks, the handsome men, and pretty locations which women leafed through magazines to look for. Curtiz brought the whole thing to life with a Germanic, low-key flourish, and the music by Max Steiner, thudding away constantly behind the action, added an even further charge of Middle European Gothic extravagance.

Higham's plot summary makes the film sound like a success story when in fact its mixture of soap opera and *film noir* is concerned with a mother-daughter conflict, a murder, and occasional hints of perverse psychology. His armchair sociology (those millions of housebound women) seems plausible at first glance, even though it sounds like mere speculation, but in this case it is actually very inappropriate: the daughter's pathological hunger for the glamorous life makes her the unmistakable villain of the piece. Moreover, the film's romanticism is lavish and luxuriant in places, but as in so many Warner Brothers' films, it is the loyal, hard-working folk who are celebrated in the end. But Higham, typically, is too busy looking at the sets *and the glamor* to notice. This sort of thing, along with the pointless details (that chain of "medium priced restaurants" between Malibu and Santa Monica) and the awkward phrasing ("based faithfully in spirit on the novel by James M. Cain by Ranald MacDougall"), leave one wondering if even *Mildred Pierce* isn't more than Higham can handle.

Problems like these carry over into Higham's rather careless use of critical language. The previously quoted description of Clarence Brown's "direction" in *The Rains Came,* for example, focuses not on *mise en scène,* directorial style, or interpretative manipulation, but rather on mere events which, for all we are told, have no clear-cut connection whatsoever with the *act* of direction—let alone with originality, imagination, insight, etc. Similarly, the allegiance to "realism" that lurks behind many of Higham's judgments sometimes seems misplaced or poorly thought out. His implied complaint that *Sunrise* fails to "come to grips with the realities of the American poor" hardly seems relevant with a film which is far too stylized to qualify as realism of any but the most indirect sort. By the same token, a rather uncertain application of realist values makes Higham's praise of *Greed* equally dubious: *"Greed* is life itself . . . we seem to have eavesdropped on real lives." That a critic who admires the "horror and hopelessness of the human condition" in *Greed* can still muster the energy to write about the technical flourishes of Brown and Curtiz is in itself rather amazing. But to see von Stroheim's ferociously rhetorical views of people as "life itself" is to ignore the differences between caricature (however inspired) and documentary realism. Things don't get much better in chapters which give comparatively lengthy commentaries on Welles, Hitchcock, and Wilder. Negativism appears as a sort of *a priori* value with these figures too. *Citizen Kane* is "an anti-American classic" (though very American, for all that, as Higham cannot help but notice), Hitchcock's brilliance centers on "his mockery of human susceptibility," and Wilder is "together with Hitchcock, the English-speaking cinema's most persistently cynical director" while "his laughter at humanity" is "savage and wounding" in his best works. Alongside Higham's tributes to technique *in vacuo,* this tendency to equate truth with harshness looks very strange. It's almost as if the book has two forces at work in it—one a dilettante, and the other a puritan, with the latter implicitly contemptuous of the former's lingering for so long over so many trivial pleasures.

It is also rather disturbing that Higham seems

to have little concern with what has been written about the films he discusses. This seems more than a little odd in the writer of a book as ambitious in scope as this one, and in some specific instances it seems like a downright fatal error. When he wonders how anyone can see consistency in the Howard Hawks who has worked on "such a great variety of scripts," one can only conclude that Higham has neither made much of an attempt to read Hawks's critics nor viewed the films carefully enough to see that those greatly varied scripts have a good many similarities regardless of who is credited with writing them. Not liking Hawks is one thing, and failing to see the continuities in one of the most interrelated of all Hollywood careers is another. If Higham hasn't done his homework, then how much stock can we take in him as a historian?

This sort of thing may have special importance for *The Art of the American Film*—since it falls well short of the levels of critical perception frequented by Manny Farber, Otis Ferguson, Parker Tyler, Andrew Sarris, Raymond Durgnat, Robin Wood, Molly Haskell, Arlene Croce, Joseph McBride, Richard T. Jameson, Jim Kitses, Jonathan Rosenbaum, Peter Wollen, Colin McArthur, Gary Carey, Alan Casty, and others who have written incisively on American movies. Higham's book doesn't even begin to challenge the pre-eminence of Sarris's *The American Cinema* (nor does it compare very well with William Kuhn's affectionate and serviceable college text, *The Movies in America*). Sarris's maddeningly succinct essentializations of American directors look better and better as time goes by—careful viewing and reviewing of directors' *oeuvres* often reveals that Sarris's epigrammatic pronouncements are startingly accurate. Some prove arguable too, of course. But Sarris's book is infinitely more valuable than Higham's because its comments represent the end-products of carefully considered reflection and analysis, while Higham's seem largely the impressions of an indefatigable film buff with little real interest in genuine criticism.

—PETER HOGUE

GRAHAM GREENE ON FILM: COLLECTED FILM CRITICISM 1935-1940

Edited by John Russell Taylor. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972.

GRAHAM GREENE: THE FILMS OF HIS FICTION

By Gene D. Phillips, S. J. New York: Teachers College Press, 1974.

Between 1935 and 1940 Graham Greene reviewed 400 films for the *Spectator* and *Night and Day*, and now they appear collected in *Graham Greene on Film*. An able and busy novelist, why did Greene see almost every new film for four and a half years—some good, some just plain dogs like *Son of Mongolia, Elephant Boy, The Jungle Princess?* He answers the question in his introduction—as an Escape, an escape from the daily struggles of novel-writing. Yet even as he reviews the best and the worst of films, he continues to hone the razor edge of his style.

To our advantage, because the effect of this compact, alacritous style recaptures something of the freshness which these films had when they were released. We feel as though we have just only seen *Fury*, "Herr Fritz Lang's first American picture." *La Bête Humaine* is a new Renoir film adapted from "Zola's story of a sadistic maniac." And we mustn't miss Mae West, "the big-busted carnivorous creature," in *Klondyke Annie:* "Ah'm an Occidental woman, In an Awriental mood."

Although the reviews are seldom over 500–800 words, Greene never seems pushed. His capacity for visual description is one that any critic could envy. For example, the characters in *Pépé le Moko:* [the man] "generous, natty and common, his pockets choc-a-block with fags and revolvers . . . the women acquisitive, prehensile, risen from the ranks, and groomed for chromium concubinage . . . "

The reviews show an acute eye, sensitive to the principles of motion and continuity. Greene recognized remarkably early that the cinema "is a director's art, neither an author's nor an actor's." He knows film technology, talking easily about montage, panning, trucking. Many of his reviews withstand 30 years of hindsight. By and large, they give proper credit to films that are

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now considered classics by serious film students —*La Femme du Boulanger, Young Mr. Lincoln, Fury.*

Greene's strong personality at times makes him overbearing. Some reviews are not so much about a film as about a prejudice that a film may have aroused. He is irritably conservative. The advent of talking pictures was a source of annoyance to him, and Technicolor provoked him, too, because it caused women's faces, young or old, to look "weatherbeaten." Could color, he asks superciliously, really capture the patina of age or the glossiness of an oily hat?

Greene's irritability is often expressed as sarcasm. His remarks have the potential, like the skillful thrust of a fencer, of drawing blood. Generally, however, the *épée* is bated, and his sarcasm is in good fun. He says of Fred Astaire in *Top Hat:* "Mr. Astaire is the nearest approach we are ever likely to have to a human Mickey Mouse; he might have been drawn by Mr. Walt Disney, with his quick physical wit, his incredible agility." He touches but does not break the skin.

But occasionally Greene's sarcasm becomes excessive. He is extremely pettish about actresses. He may criticize an actor's performance, say, one by Laurence Olivier, or an actor's particular mannerism, such as Charles Laughton's "hamming," but his remarks concerning actresses tend to be too pungent, often focusing on physical attributes. Speaking of Harlow in her last film, *Saratoga,* he is particularly offensive: "There is no sign her acting would ever have progressed beyond the scope of the restless shoulders and the protuberant breasts: her technique was the gangster's technique—she toted a breast like a man totes a gun"; of *Tales from the Vienna Woods,* "Magda Schneider's trim buttocks and battered girlishness"; of *The Rich Bride* (USSR, 1938) "that awful acreage of stout female flesh . . . "; of a Fernandel comedy, *Ignace,* "the Colonel's wife, a great brawny woman with hips like the horses she rides . . . "; of Marlene Dietrich in *Destry Rides Again,* "time tells ungallantly in the muscles of the neck . . . " Greene is solemnly against woman, "the old intruder," out of her place. The baldest remark is made *à propos* of *Bengal Lancer:* "I can't remember the women's names . . . I, too, much resented their presence."

Indeed, his cranky distaste for females (simply portraying images that the box office demanded of them) in films extended to tiny Shirley Temple. A review of *Wee Willie Winkle* brought him a troublesome libel suit from 20th Century-Fox. Although this review has not been included in the collection, his writing on *Captain January* suggests its probable flavor: "Her popularity seems to rest on a coquetry quite as mature as Miss Colbert's and on an oddly precocious body as voluptuous in grey flannel trousers as Miss Dietrich's."

If Greene's collection of reviews is an example of occasionally venomous but efficient criticism, Father Gene D. Phillips's book, *Graham Greene: The Films of His Fiction,* is an example of verbal milquetoast, as though the Jesuit priest were timidly reticent about making any judgment on his subject's work. Regrettably, the book does little more than summarize the plots of films. Thus one of the more interesting pages is the table of contents which distinguishes the films adapted from Greene's fiction by other screenwriters from those the author adapted himself. Phillips further subdivides, according to Greene's own distinction, between "entertainments" and "serious" fiction.

The only critical term of Greene's that Phillips chooses to discuss in detail is "poetic cinema." This is unfortunate, since neither writer has managed to explain its meaning. Greene took the term from a remark by Chekov that the ideal function of the novel was to show "life as it is, life as it ought to be." He admires Chekov as a writer and also believes that good cinema can serve this function. But how? Nowhere in *Graham Greene on Film* is there a clear example, although the piety appears at least three times. Phillips attempts for several pages to explicate Greene's use of the concept, but he too has difficulty in finding illustrative instances. The best interpretation the father can provide

is: "life as it is" applied to film means realism, and "life as it ought to be" means poetry. But what *is* "film poetry" or "poetic film"? It seems as if Greene merely used Chekov's phrases as a kind of aesthetic rabbit's foot, *faute de mieux.*

—ELAINE CHEKICH AND SEYMOUR CHATMAN

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When Barna does venture a judgment of his own, the result is not apt to be helpful. In his discussion of Eisenstein's decision in 1918 to leave his architecture studies and enlist in the Red Army, Barna writes: "Even then the decision seems not to have been his own, but a collective one taken by the students *en bloc,* the Institute closing down as a result. For the first time in his life Eisenstein savoured the freedom of deciding his own destiny." The author is unaware of his own confusion. Another time we are told that "a basic theme that recurs constantly [in Eisenstein's films] is that of life and death." In the absence of a supportive and sophisticated critical context there is nothing to rescue this statement from its inherent triteness.

There are a few illuminating passages to be found in *Eisenstein.* Barna convincingly argues that the tragic aspects of *Que Viva Mexico!* should not be allowed to overshadow the positive creative upheaval Eisenstein experienced in Mexico. In his discussion of *Alexander Nevsky,* he clearly shows how Eisenstein's theoretical conception of the historical film shaped the film's narrative and visual style. Nevertheless, throughout most of this biography, my mind kept returning to a self-caricature drawn by Eisenstein that is reproduced early in the book. It is a sketch of a rotund little man wrapped in a greatcoat, wearing a floppy hat, and standing alone. The hands are buried in pockets and the brim of the hat covers most of the face so that all one can really see of the man himself are a few coils of wiry hair and a shy smile. Here, clothed in elaborate self-protection, is a personality who cares to show very little of his inner self. Yon Barna lifts the brim on the little man's hat just enough to reveal a sly wink.

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VIOLENCE IN THE ARTS

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Because violence in films and in the other arts is an issue so pervasive and difficult to deal with, John Fraser's little book deserves to be read widely as an important contribution to our ongoing thought and debate. He defines an evolving genre, "the Violation Movie" (e.g., *Straw Dogs*), in which rape is the ultimate "invasion of the privacy of 'decent' people by violent men." Since Fraser analyzes recent controversial films with the aim of establishing principles of an aesthetics of violence, his discussions are not limited by the fact that new violent works of art and events in actual life continue to assault us and capture our attention. Thus if Fraser is not more timely than *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Godfather,* we can add such current examples as *The Exorcist, Going Places, Death Wish, The Klansman,* or others fitting the definition of Grand Guignolesque shockingly detailed violence, gore, and flowing blood (for a new appraisal of this genre named from "Théatre du Grand Guignol," see F. Déak in *The Drama Review,* 18 [Mar. 1974], 34–43).

Violence in the Arts does not treat film or any other medium in isolation; however, Fraser neatly states the central importance of film in discussions of contemporary culture: "I have taken a good many of my examples from movies, since these days movies are what classical Latin literature once was to educated people—the one cultural topic that they almost all have in common and feel strongly about." The strength and insights of Fraser's book are the result of the breadth and depth of knowledge of the arts that he brings into focus and highlights with appropriate social and political analysis. The span of his reading and viewing encompasses G. Legman and Hannah Arendt on violence, Susan Sontag on pop culture, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, gangsterism, Nazism, and political torturing, de Sade, Céline, Goya, Orwell, Godard, Peckinpah, Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai,* detective thrillers by Ambler, Household, and MacDonald, *Les yeux sans visage* by Franju (who is, to Fraser, "the most distinguished living French director, next to Renoir").

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SHORTER REVIEWS

Critical Studies of Film-Makers

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not have read or films not seen, but rather by his approach to the issue of violence. He calls the book "a personal essay." It is written simply and engagingly; at times it is idiosyncratic, yet it always exhibits a discriminating critical intelligence. The book succeeds precisely because this difficult cultural and social topic is filtered through the mind of an alert and sensitive humanist. This approach is certainly equal to, if not more valuable than, data gathered by behaviorists, testimony given to congressional committees, experiments on audience responses, and heavy-handed moralizing or politicizing. —NATHANIEL TEICH

SHORTER REVIEWS

Critical Studies of Film-Makers

THE WESTERN FILMS OF JOHN FORD

By J. A. Place. New York: Citadel, 1974; $12.00.

This intelligent survey is the first in a two-volume study of Ford. It primarily employs a narrative-thematic approach, but there are occasional pieces of stylistic analysis also. The discussion of Ford's stories and themes is thoughtful and careful, and the book comprises an authoritative guide to the structures and bearings of the films. It is, however, extremely respectful and accepting, and its perceptions about race in Ford, for instance in comparing *The Searchers* and *Two Rode Together,* are never pushed to much incisiveness; so that on both race and the westernization mythology generally Place comes off as rather bland. It is easy now (too easy!) to say that anybody eulogized by Richard Nixon can't be all good, but the fact sets the problem: Ford's quintessential true-Americanism, which will doubtless be seen in time as both his curse (artistic and social) and his glory, badly needs serious re-examination. But that is to ask for another book.

MARVELLOUS MELIES

By Paul Hammond. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975. $10.00.

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Histories

THE LONG VIEW

By Basil Wright. New York: Knopf, 1975. $15.00.

General film histories have not been something that English or American writers have been eager to undertake in recent years. The task is, of course, daunting, whether it is undertaken in a relatively restricted films-only sense, or as an attempt to write film history as a part of a larger cultural stream. The French have not been so intimidated, and have produced several ambitious (in several cases multi-volume) histories; but these do not really fit our needs, and publishers have been hesitant to simply translate them.

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To give coherence to a book of 700 pages, a chronological scheme is employed, but the periods are loosely and readably treated (the chapters are prefaced by "signposts," citations of outstanding cinematic events of that period). There is a good index.

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Biographies, Autobiographies, Case Histories

DON'T LOOK AT THE CAMERA

By Harry Watt. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974. $6.95.

It was Cavalcanti, who remains so far the ghost in the hidden corridors of British documentary, that said "Harry Watt put the sweaty sock into documentary." And to judge by this raucous, crotchety, manic book he was probably right. Watt too came from non-working-class origins (his father was a lawyer and MP, though apparently a horribly sporting one) but he seems to have fought them rather more successfully than his colleagues. A lifetime of scrabbling through on miserably tiny budgets, encountering everything from the demonically anti-film English weather to the dictatorial fancies of John Grierson, has left him cheerfully cynical: "If one accepts film as an art, then it must surely be the only one that is, almost invariably, being debased from the moment the idea is conceived." The book includes, of course, a fascinating account of the making of *Night Mail,* which remains Watt's greatest claim to fame. But one gathers that he enjoyed life too much to worry unduly about art. What he liked most was to drop into a pub, have a few, and get into some weird kind of adventure; his story of one such whets my appetite to see *The Saving of Bill Blewett,* Blewett being the rum-drinking postmaster in a Cornish village called (I hope Watt isn't faking this, as he admits faking so much in his films) Mousehole. There is an enormously charming British vitality in the man, and he picked it up in the country. He recounts a conversation over rushes with editor Stewart McAllister, "exceedingly scruffy, very hairy, very rough, and completely anarchistic":

McALLISTER: What am ah supposed to dae wi' that load of crap?

WATT: Cut it, you Scots clot.

McALLISTER: Ah can tell ye ten places where it'll no' cut.

WATT: If you can't cut that, you'd better go back to scratching your arse in a Glasgow close-mouth.

McALLISTER: Aweel, ah'll just hae to try, but (pointing fiercely) ah'm no promisin' anything.

WATT: Piss off.

And, ham though he is, with relish and sauce all the way, Watt's portrait of the film-making process is nearer to the reality than any amount of theorizing can get us. Here he is on seeing rushes:

> That is the moment of truth. There are no more alibis. You may have compromised with sponsors, producers, budgets and the weather; you will have battled with blasé technicians, uncooperative actors, and the endless mechanical problems that constantly bedevil the translation of an idea into a moving piece of celluloid; you will certainly have expended an enormous amount of physical and nervous energy. But finally you will have said, "Cut and print," and then you are on your own. It is your decision, and yours alone. This incoherent jumble of shots, full of false starts, flashes, and *non sequiturs,* is your painting, your song, your poem. You imagined them and you created them. And always, before they start, you are alone.

Isherwood would not have been ashamed of that.

Boris Karloff and His Films. By Paul M. Jensen. New York: Barnes, 1974. $8.95.

Don Siegel, Director. By Stuart M. Kaminsky. New York: Curtis Books, 1974. $1.50. Perfectly appropriately, this book is issued in sleazy paperback format. This

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It was Cavalcanti, who remains so far the ghost in the hidden corridors of British documentary, that said "Harry Watt put the sweaty sock into documentary." And to judge by this raucous, crotchety, manic book he was probably right. Watt too came from non-working-class origins (his father was a lawyer and MP, though apparently a horribly sporting one) but he seems to have fought them rather more successfully than his colleagues. A lifetime of scrabbling through on miserably tiny budgets, encountering everything from the demonically anti-film English weather to the dictatorial fancies of John Grierson, has left him cheerfully cynical: "If one accepts film as an art, then it must surely be the only one that is, almost invariably, being debased from the moment the idea is conceived." The book includes, of course, a fascinating account of the making of *Night Mail,* which remains Watt's greatest claim to fame. But one gathers that he enjoyed life too much to worry unduly about art. What he liked most was to drop into a pub, have a few, and get into some weird kind of adventure; his story of one such whets my appetite to see *The Saving of Bill Blewett,* Blewett being the rum-drinking postmaster in a Cornish village called (I hope Watt isn't faking this, as he admits faking so much in his films) Mousehole. There is an enormously charming British vitality in the man, and he picked it up in the country. He recounts a conversation over rushes with editor Stewart McAllister, "exceedingly scruffy, very hairy, very rough, and completely anarchistic":

McALLISTER: What am ah supposed to dae wi' that load of crap?

WATT: Cut it, you Scots clot.

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And, ham though he is, with relish and sauce all the way, Watt's portrait of the film-making process is nearer to the reality than any amount of theorizing can get us. Here he is on seeing rushes:

> That is the moment of truth. There are no more alibis. You may have compromised with sponsors, producers, budgets and the weather; you will have battled with blasé technicians, uncooperative actors, and the endless mechanical problems that constantly bedevil the translation of an idea into a moving piece of celluloid; you will certainly have expended an enormous amount of physical and nervous energy. But finally you will have said, "Cut and print," and then you are on your own. It is your decision, and yours alone. This incoherent jumble of shots, full of false starts, flashes, and *non sequiturs,* is your painting, your song, your poem. You imagined them and you created them. And always, before they start, you are alone.

Isherwood would not have been ashamed of that.

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The Shadow of an Airplane Climbs the Empire State Building: A World Theory of Film. By Parker Tyler. New York: Doubleday, 1973. $7.95. What kind of "theoretical" work can it be that does not mention Bazin, Arnheim, Balász, Mitry? Tyler has put together a rambling series of reflections, connected in a more or less free-form way with various observations (many of them acute enough, especially in the psychological area) about individual films. His notion of theory has to do, it appears, with rather grandiose and often vacuous pronouncements: "Art not only synthesizes itself, it also synthesizes religion," and so on.

Biographies, Autobiographies, Case Histories

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Gable & Lombard: A Biography. By Warren G. Harris. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974. $7.95. Will revelations never cease? The great chauvinist sex idol was pathologically dependent upon Carole Lombard and was not terribly good in bed. They called each other Ma and Pa and had a combined yearly income of nearly one million dollars. Gable was Hitler's favorite actor and his original family name was Goebel; he flew five bomber raids over the Reich. Superficial and trashly written, this one is a mine of such anecdotes, all respectfully compiled.

Good Dames: Virtue in the Cinema. By James Robert Parish. New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1974. $15.00. Detailed biographical treatments of Eve Arden, Agnes Moorehead, Angela Lansbury, Thelma Ritter, and Eileen Heckart. Uncritical, but useful for the understanding of these talented character actresses.

Holly-would. By John Milton Hagen. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1974. $7.95. A collection of Hollywood press-agentry tidbits, "a selection of the Nostalgia Book Club," and a repulsive document.

Jayne Mansfield and the American Fifties. By Martha Saxton. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975. $8.95.

Little Girl Lost: The Life & Hard Times of Judy Garland. By Al DiOrio, Jr. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1974. $8.95. A fan biography.

The Magic of Rudolph Valentino. By Norman A. Mackenzie. New York: International Publishing Service. 114 East 32, New York 10016. $10.00.

Paul Muni: His Life and His Films. By Michael B. Druxman. New York: Barnes, 1974. $10.00.

The RKO Girls. James Robert Parish. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1974. $14.95.

Shooting Star: A Biography of John Wayne. By Maurice Zolotow. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974. $9.95. Wayne is the most important American actor in the same way that John Ford was our most important director. This book, while written in the flashy Hollywood-biography style (who buys those books, anyway?), gives a full and not slavishly approving account of Wayne's life; as is usual in the genre, little attention is paid to the pictures—though here, as if to demonstrate his independence, Zolotow goes out of his way to agree with Renata Adler's savaging of *The Green Berets.*

A Short Time for Insanity: An Autobiography. By William A. Wellman. New York: Hawthorn, 1974. $10.00. Unusual among Hollywood autobiographies for having been written under codeine, while Wellman was in hospital for his broken back, but not much else.

Reference Works

INTERNATIONAL INDEX TO FILM PERIODICALS (1973)

Edited by Michael Moulds. International Federation of Film Archives. New York: R. R. Bowker, 1974. (No price given.)

This professionally managed index project covers the major established film periodicals of the world (from 1974 onward certain publications principally of filmographic value, such as *Monthly Film Bulletin, Film Facts,* and *Variety,* will also be included). Indexing categories include various subject-matter ones (film industry, society and cinema, film education, etc.) and two very large categories (reviews and articles on individual films, and "biography," which is practically any kind of material on directors or other film-makers). This is a fundamental research and reference tool, and belongs in all libraries with any concern for film.

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Technical Manuals

Basic TV Staging. By Gerald Millerson. New York: Hastings House, 1974. $10.95. Despite the vaunted flexibility, low-light "seeing" capacity, and portability of modern video equipment, almost all non-series material you see on TV is staged in studios. Thus the hemmed-in, constricted quality of early films has been recreated in the new medium, and shows no sign of abating, while films are increasingly shot in real surroundings, both taking advantage of the inherent interest of real places, and deriving tension and variety from the problems that real-setting shooting always presents. This manual tells you, in mundane but practical detail, how to get by in studio situations, where money and time are always in short supply, disorganization is often the order of the day, set materials are recirculated frantically, and you can consider yourself lucky if any visual force gets through into the image. Since young aspiring film-makers could do worse than apprentice themselves in television for a while, the material is useful.

Computer Animation. Ed. by John Halas. New York: Hastings House, 1974. $20.00. Highly technical discussion (for the most part) of the mathematics, programming techniques, and hardware being utilized in efforts to harness computers to the tasks of not only "in-betweening" (as the old human-type language would have it) but also actual drawing of animated material. It is anticipated that in a few years many TV serials will be mainly computer-produced. The computers haven't quite reached the stage of Winsor McKay yet, but they're gaining fast. And of course there seems no reason why the voices can't be mechanized too (in fact on programs like *The Flintstones* they already seem to be); which leaves only the writing still touched by more or less human hands. Logic, not elegance, is the forte of such dismaying but doubtless useful works as this one. Unless you can savor such passages as "The association of an associator pointing to a point, in a macro [, ?] is a pointer to the instance in which the point is referenced," leave it alone.

Film Design. Compiled and edited by Terence St. John Marner. Screen Textbooks. New York: Barnes, 1974. $3.95. Much useful information on "perspectivized" backgrounds, miniatures, etc., as well as set-design proper.

Filmmaking for Beginners. By Joan Horvath. New York: Nelson, 1974. $5.95. Elementary text.

TV Camera Operation. By Gerald Millerson. New York: Hastings House, 1975. $10.95 cloth, $5.95 paper. Brief and very elementary.

Teleproduction Shortcuts: A Manual for Low-Budget Television Production in a Small Studio. By Bob Westmoreland. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974. $10.95. Lots of clever ideas for making do.

Television Newsfilm Techniques. By Vernon Stone and Bruce Hinson. New York: Hastings House, Publishers, 1974. $4.95.

Van Nostrand Reinhold Manual of Film-making [sic!]. By Barry Allaghan. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1974. $8.95. A British textbook; complete and informative, if a little stuffily written, but no competition for Lipton's *Independent Filmmaking* as a beginner's text.

Videotape Recording. By Joseph F. Robinson. New York: Hastings House, 1975. $18.50. A technical treatise that is abundantly and skillfully illustrated and written with admirable clarity; a basic text for anyone needing to understand the technology.

Your Film and the Lab. By L. Bernard Happé. New York: Hastings House, 1975. $11.50 cloth, $6.50 paper. A clear concise summary of what you need to know technically in order to deal intelligently with a laboratory.

Miscellaneous (Genre Studies, Text Books, Teaching Guides, etc.)

CLOSELY WATCHED FILMS
The Czechoslovak Experience

By Antonin J. Liehm. White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, Inc., 1974. $15.00.

This collection of interviews with virtually all the major, and a good number of minor figures from the Czech new wave is an excellent companion to Skvorecky's *All the Bright Young Men and Women.* The film-makers are witty in the wry Czech way (even the glum Schorm, the Eeyore of the industry) and their adventures and misadventures throw more intimate light on the fate of film in postwar Eastern Europe than those of film-makers in other countries: the Prague Spring provided a kind of critical experiment which was exhilarating to live through and is obviously (judging by Liehm's postscripts

Technical Manuals

Basic TV Staging. By Gerald Millerson. New York: Hastings House, 1974. $10.95. Despite the vaunted flexibility, low-light "seeing" capacity, and portability of modern video equipment, almost all non-series material you see on TV is staged in studios. Thus the hemmed-in, constricted quality of early films has been recreated in the new medium, and shows no sign of abating, while films are increasingly shot in real surroundings, both taking advantage of the inherent interest of real places, and deriving tension and variety from the problems that real-setting shooting always presents. This manual tells you, in mundane but practical detail, how to get by in studio situations, where money and time are always in short supply, disorganization is often the order of the day, set materials are recirculated frantically, and you can consider yourself lucky if any visual force gets through into the image. Since young aspiring film-makers could do worse than apprentice themselves in television for a while, the material is useful.

Computer Animation. Ed. by John Halas. New York: Hastings House, 1974. $20.00. Highly technical discussion (for the most part) of the mathematics, programming techniques, and hardware being utilized in efforts to harness computers to the tasks of not only "in-betweening" (as the old human-type language would have it) but also actual drawing of animated material. It is anticipated that in a few years many TV serials will be mainly computer-produced. The computers haven't quite reached the stage of Winsor McKay yet, but they're gaining fast. And of course there seems no reason why the voices can't be mechanized too (in fact on programs like *The Flintstones* they already seem to be); which leaves only the writing still touched by more or less human hands. Logic, not elegance, is the forte of such dismaying but doubtless useful works as this one. Unless you can savor such passages as "The association of an associator pointing to a point, in a macro [, ?] is a pointer to the instance in which the point is referenced," leave it alone.

Film Design. Compiled and edited by Terence St. John Marner. Screen Textbooks. New York: Barnes, 1974. $3.95. Much useful information on "perspectivized" backgrounds, miniatures, etc., as well as set-design proper.

Filmmaking for Beginners. By Joan Horvath. New York: Nelson, 1974. $5.95. Elementary text.

TV Camera Operation. By Gerald Millerson. New York: Hastings House, 1975. $10.95 cloth, $5.95 paper. Brief and very elementary.

Teleproduction Shortcuts: A Manual for Low-Budget Television Production in a Small Studio. By Bob Westmoreland. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974. $10.95. Lots of clever ideas for making do.

Television Newsfilm Techniques. By Vernon Stone and Bruce Hinson. New York: Hastings House, Publishers, 1974. $4.95.

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to his interviews) proving miserably difficult for its participants afterwards. Liehm likens the submergence of the Czech talents to the disappearance of Atlantis; but those of us who have the suspicion that small countries are best may less grandiosely hope that the remarkable experiences documented in this book can inspire other film-makers, east and west, to realize what can be done even in a compact and even somewhat isolated culture. Massive scale does not necessarily correlate with artistic sophistication.

FILM: SPACE, TIME, LIGHT AND SOUND

By Lincoln F. Johnson. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1974. $12.95.

Johnson says in his preface that his purpose "is much the same as that David Wark Griffith, no doubt, had in mind when he said 'What I want is to make you see.' " In many ways Johnson's text accomplishes this. By enumerating, defining, and illustrating certain formal elements of film, he emphasizes the primacy of the visual-acoustic experience and encourages perceptual training as a major prerequisite to sensitive and informed film viewing.

But there are ways that Johnson simply tries to do too much. And, in so doing, ironically he lessens, rather than augments the value of his text.

Most of what I would recommend about the book relates to the first half which is organized, in a manner implied by the title, into chapters on such concepts as frame composition, movement, time, color, sound, etc. In this section, Johnson stresses a descriptive approach to film and establishes quite clearly its formal elements. In defining his terms he is extremely cautious and tries always to relate them to specific filmic cases. Refreshingly, he manages to do so equally in terms of non-narrative as well as narrative film. The format of the book is handsome and offers visual documentation through plentiful frame enlargements as a useful complement to the written text.

The one major weakness with this segment of the book is that at points, in trying to communicate the expressive possibilities of formal elements, Johnson falls into the trap of overrigidity. Thus, in establishing categories of frame composition, he writes: "Each of the types carries overtones of feeling that seem inherent in the form; closed form is constrictive while open is free; closed form suggests rational calculations, open, spontaneity and immediacy." (24) Clearly, such axiomatic statements prove incorrect and only encourage knee-jerk responses to visual material. Luckily, they are rare in Johnson's text.

At times, however, he misleads by attempting to explicate, in a few paragraphs, concepts to which one might humbly devote entire texts. The most glaring instance of this occurs in his superficial treatment of Eisenstein's theories of overtonal and intellectual montage.

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My response to this is to ask, why bother, and to question the usefulness of such vague categorizations which may mislead rather than enlighten. For if we are, in fact, to teach people about film, to make them *see*, it is important to keep the field of vision wide open. So while certain things remain vague notions we'd best resist the temptation to invest them with the solidity of aesthetic categories.

When Johnson's text confines itself to explicating the tangibles of filmic construction, it illuminates, indeed is probably the best book of its kind. But when he ventures into the broader areas of film theory, he sacrifices the clarity of vision which he seeks and ends up by obscuring the issues. —LUCY FISCHER

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Chitra Bani: A Book on Film Appreciation. By Gaston Roberge. $7 from 76, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, Calcutta 700 016, India. A basic textbook for Indian film people, written by a Canadian. Includes a chapter by Kironmoy Raha giving a factual survey of Indian cinema, past and present.

Cinema Beyond the Danube: The Camera and Politics. By Michael Jon Stoil. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974. The author correctly diagnoses a problem of film history: that Eastern European film has been written about both by film people who tend to neglect the particular political circumstances and content of films, and by political people (including "political scientists") who tend to neglect the cinematic nature of films, but never by writers who satisfactorily combine both types of concern and background. Unfortunately, however, Stoil himself turns out to be mainly a political person. He briefly outlines the production system of the Eastern European regimes and their associated institutions, and gives a sketchy account of selected films from 1919 through 1971. While a few of the comments are valuable, the level of understanding and writing is often deplorable. The complex story of Eisenstein's venture to Hollywood is written off thus: "In the late 1920's, when Eisenstein attempted to work in the United States, the propaganda element of his films rebounded against him. Before he could complete a single feature, he was blacklisted and a pamphlet damning him as a Bolshevik Jew circulated among film distributors, forcing his return to the U.S.S.R." Stoil's comments on films are never penetrating and not always accurate. The young hero of *Closely Watched Train* is hardly "in search of an end to his virginity," for instance; Stoil thinks *Knife on* [sic] *the Water* is "highly experimental," and that Jancsó's *The Confrontation* has a "newsreel" style. He does not seem to be familiar with the works of Has, Kawalerowicz, or Tarkowsky; he considers Makavejev's *WR* to be "flagrantly anti-Communist," and in general his level of political discussion is lamentably unsophisticated. (He seems totally ignorant of periodical literature, Eastern or Western.) In short, despite the author's efforts—which may have well begun as a dissertation—this book's shortcomings vastly overweigh its occasional virtues, and we shall have to wait for the appearance of Antonín and Drahomira Liehm's *The Most Important Art* for a definitive treatment of the East European cinema.

Contemporary Erotic Cinema. By William Rotsler. New York: Ballantine, 1973. $1.50. Capsule history of the main forms of so-called erotic films, interviews with their makers and performers, and comments on major films. The author is a pornie-maker himself, and his interviewing is usually refreshingly cant-free.

The Count: The Life and Films of Bela "Dracula" Lugosi. By Arthur Lennig. New York: Putnam, 1974. $10.00. This is a fan bibliography that is unusual from two angles: its author is a respectable critic (he has been writing, especially about silent films, for several decades) though he was also a Lugosi fan from a tender age; and its attention to the subject is especially full, and depressing, in Lugosi's last years.

Film Fantasy Scrapbook. By Ray Harryhausen. New York: Barnes, 1974. $15.00. Second edition of Harryhausen's favorite special effects achievements, from flying saucers to the four-armed goddess Kali (he gave her six, for good measure) in *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad.*

Film and Reality: An Historical Survey. By Roy Armes. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1974. $1.95. A lightning survey of various schools, film-makers, problems, issues, genres, trends, etc.

Film: Encounter. By Hector Currie and Donald Staples. Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum, 1974. A series of stills, with evocative captions seeking to make some of the secret connections that films themselves make in our minds. Printed, unfortunately, in the rather grey offset that is the misguided ideal of printers and by destroying the blackness of the blacks, leaves stills lifeless.

Focus on Film and Theatre. Edited by James Hurt. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974.

The Great Spy Pictures. By James Robert Parish and Michael R. Pitts. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974. No serious attempt is made to define the "spy" genre, and as a result not only James Bond but *The Conformist* and *The Confession* are included. Useful for credits and synopses, however.

HAL in the Classroom: Science Fiction Films. By Ralph J. Amelio. Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum, 1974. $4.95. A collection of articles for class use.

Heroes of the Horrors. By Calvin Thomas Beck. New York: Macmillan, 1975. $12.95 cloth; $7.95 paper. Studio of the Chaneys, Karloff, Lugosi, Lorre, and Price.

Images of Man: A Critique of the Contemporary Cinema. By Donald J. Drew. Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974. $2.95. A Christian tract. "Pornography is that aspect in any medium which approves of or encourages obscene or perverted behavior," etc.

Latin American Cinema: Film and History. By E. Bradford Burns. Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center, 1975. $3.95. A guide to the use of films in history courses.

Sinema: American Pornographic Films and the People Who Make Them. By Kenneth Turan and Stephen F. Zito. New York: Praeger, 1974. $8.95. Thoroughly researched history of softcore and hardcore; interviews with practitioners, ranging from intellectual Mary Rexroth to Ivory Soap girl Marilyn Chambers to the boys in the sand; relatively sophisticated and nonsniggery, if still rather journalese, discussion of trends in erotic filmmaking, but does not really deal with the interesting possibilities of films about erotic relationships that could be made if film-makers of major talent took up the form. And when the authors conclude that "these films have created a new image of the erotic that, liberated from localized phallic sexuality, transcends the limits of the copulative act and becomes symbolic of larger human consciousness and feeling," they are writing out of what remains wishful thinking.

Star Quality: The Great Actors and Actresses of Hollywood. By Arthur F. McClure and Ken D. Jones. New York: Barnes, 1974. $15.00. Picture book with brief biographical notes.

Teaching History with Film. John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson. Richmond, Virginia: William Byrd Press, 1974. $1.00.

Themes Two: One Hundred Short Films for Discussion. By William Kuhns. Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum, 1974. An eclectic collection of non-feature films, discussed in capsule summaries. Useful to redress the balance that runs so heavily against non-narrative films.

The War Film. Ivan Butler. New York: Barnes, 1974. $8.95.

Women in Focus. By Jeanne Betancourt. Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum, 1974. Cloth, $14.60; paper, $10.00. Not always perfectly accurate (Max Rafferty in the film *Angela Davis* is described as the chairman of the UCLA philosophy department—an elevation approximately equivalent to making Nixon a professor of ethics) this is nonetheless a quiet, careful, honest series of annotations of films that are useful in women's consciousness-raising, teaching, etc. The selection of films is catholic, from Maya Deren through workaday documentaries to classics like *Bed and Sofa.* With suggested feminist readings appended to each entry, and a bibliography.

PERIODICALS

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Films

THE PASSENGER

Director: Michelangelo Antonioni. Script: Mark Peploe, Peter Wollen, and Antonioni. Photography: Luciano Tovoli. United Artists.

Since his departure from Italy in 1965, Michelangelo Antonioni has become an international artist, drawn to the most contrasting corners of the world in search of new landscapes, new faces and new styles of living. Although under contract to Carlo Ponti and MGM, the cinema's Michelangelo has managed to retail his individuality and integrity in choice of subjects and manner of treatment. The circumstances surrounding the production of his latest film are, however, unprecedented in his career.

In a revealing report for *Sight and Sound* (Winter 73/74), Philip Strick hinted at the capricious motives of Ponti in cancelling Antonioni's cherished Amazon project, *Technically Sweet,* to which he had devoted two years of preparation following his television documentary on China.* With the aid of a new color telecamera system, able to transform an image's color values with the turn of a dial, Antonioni planned to pursue the expressionistic color explored preliminarily in *The Red Desert.* At the last minute, Ponti apparently lost faith in the project and asked him to consider instead an original story by Mark Peploe, a suspense thriller set in various international locales about a man who changes his identity. Unsettled by this drastic proposal and finding the story of no personal interest, the director hesitated, then instinctively feeling that the events recalled something of his past, commenced shooting with only six weeks for revising the script, casting and selecting locations.

"For the first time, I found I was working more with the brain than with the stomach," he

*Remembering the budget problems incurred by location filming in *Zabriskie Point*—which proved unsuccessful with audiences and most critics—Ponti foresaw similar difficulties with shooting on jungle locations.

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says. "I changed the ending of the film compared to the version Mark wrote. Also the beginning, and a lot of other things. I had to make the film closer to my own nature, of course . . . little by little, I got more and more involved in it and I began to rationalize everything, to try to understand *myself* in this story, to put myself into the story."

As usual, Ponti allowed Antonioni freedom to make the film his own way, suppressing any information about the details of the narrative. Then, when the Italian press showered *The Passenger* with its highest praise, acclaiming it one of Antonioni's great and most mature works—as if the trilogy which began with *L'Avventura, The Red Desert,* and *Blow Up* were not the masterpieces of an artist who had already reached a peak—MGM executives, unhappy with the film's slow movement, immediately lost their qualms about releasing it in the US after holding it back for almost a year. Surprisingly, most American reviewers have hailed it with equal enthusiasm. This seems to me an overreaction to what is certainly a minor, uneven work in the Antonioni *oeuvre*. After much vehement opposition and blatant misunderstanding from unsympathetic voices, Antonioni is certainly due recognition as a master film-maker, but in the case of *The Passenger,* it is misplaced and tends to ignore the weaknesses of a work that exhibits an uneasy blend of commercialism and art, ultimately satisfying the demands of neither.

Critical approval from the establishment press has emerged, I suspect, because for the first time Antonioni has dealt with what appears to be a straightforward, linear adventure story. Certainly, every attempt has been made to bolster its commercial appeal with picturesque, exotic locations ranging from Algeria and Spain to England and Germany; and most significantly, the casting of a popular American actor in the leading role, along with Bertolucci's discovery, Maria Schneider, from *Last Tango*.

The Passenger nevertheless remains, if only in part, a meditative exercise that deliberately avoids the mechanics of suspense so masterfully deployed in *Blow Up*. Peploe's original story,

THE PASSENGER

entitled *Fatal Exit,* resembles the early stories of Sartre and Camus that utilize melodramatic fiction to convey existential concepts. Its closest filmic counterpart is perhaps in Godard and Truffaut, who successfully infused their own personal visions and cinematic vitality into the thriller format with *A Bout de souffle* and *Tirez sur le pianiste*. Antonioni, on the other hand, has never demonstrated any genuine interest in this sort of material. Even in *Blow Up,* where the "who-done-it?" framework seems most relevant, our attention is constantly deflected toward the values implicit in the photographer's behavior and his problem of grasping an objective view of reality. Here, the conventional suspense elements are perfectly in accord with Antonioni's subject and method, but in *The Passenger* this is not always the case.

Looking back on his recent work, Antonioni sees his own role as that of an observer, using the camera in the "objective" manner of a reporter (the film's working title was *Profession: Reporter*) but with a personal viewpoint which is carried over into *The Passenger*. Rather than produce a fast-paced thriller with existential undertones, Antonioni gives the story a languid, leisurely ambience, dwelling on existential motifs exteriorized through psychological behavior. Jack Nicholson's world-weary journalist is seen as symptomatic of the modern man who reaches a point of no return and "feels the need for a personal revolution."

Nicholson is David Locke, an American-educated, British-based television reporter preparing a documentary on nationalist movements in

the North African desert. Unable to bear the frustrations of abortive missions into the desert and the prospect of returning to an unhappy marriage in London, he assumes the identity of Robertson (Chuck Mulvehill), an Englishman who closely resembles him, who dies of heart failure in a desert inn. Exchanging passport photos and personal effects, Locke makes a clean break with his past. Though totally ignorant of Robertson's affairs, he decides to follow up the dead man's appointment book to Munich and Barcelona, where he learns, to his amazement, that he is (was) involved in secret gun traffic with African guerrillas whose cause Robertson apparently believed in. Thus, in escaping his past, Locke has inadvertently placed his own life in serious jeopardy. Pursued by his wife—who learns of the deception—the Spanish police, and the African nationalist contacts who feel he has betrayed him, Locke becomes the traditional man-on-the-run, encountered so frequently in the detective and gangster film. But it is not until the film's final reels that the chase element begins to surface when Nicholson, freaked by the sight of his wife in a hotel lobby, drives out of Barcelona at breakneck speed, then is actually pursued by a highway patrol car. The momentum generated is that of a well-made commercial thriller—which is probably what Ponti wanted —but a jarring contrivance to Antonioni's otherwise carefully calculated rhythms.

The opening sequence, for instance, is pure Antonioni, concentrating on silent visual themes amid the slow, hypnotic pace of life in an African desert village. Impatient with this environment, Locke manages through crude non-verbal communication to locate an English-speaking tribesman who agrees to guide him to a secret military camp. Frightened by a caravan of Bedouins, the guide leaves Locke stranded and when his jeep also fails him on a sand dune, he surrenders with an anguished cry, "All right! I don't care!" Like Camus's Orestes in *Les Mouches,* he has reached "the far side of despair" and consequently feels a need for change. With images that recall *The Red Desert* and its theme of internal crisis, we follow Locke back to the crude village hotel where he discovers Robertson's corpse. Antonioni shows his deliberating after the initial shock, speechless, deciding his course of action, and for some time studying the dead man's physiognomy. With close-up scrutiny we are made fully aware of his intentions of switching identities with Robertson; then, a tape-recorded conversation between the two men fills in their respective backgrounds, leading to a restaging—within the same shot—of a past encounter in the same hotel room. Robertson's life seems carefree and contented when Locke compares it to his own frustrations, both personal and professional. The temptation is obviously overwhelming, since the men are look-alikes; thus Locke courageously takes on the destiny of an unknown future and like the classic existential hero chooses to live for the moment in relation to a given situation. We are unaware at the time of the illusions to be encountered through this new freedom and Antonioni takes his time about revealing them, introducing fragments of the past as ironic commentary on Locke's personal and professional life.

The central character's involvement in Third World politics is seen by Antonioni as representing a strong political viewpoint, since Locke is a film-maker working on a film about Africa. This film, however, suggests that Locke's political consciousness is of a rather low level. Following the presumed death, Martin Knight, a British television producer who wants to construct a testament to David's career with the remaining African footage, consults David's wife, Rachel (Jenny Runacre), who remains unmoved by her husband's death. While viewing some interview footage of stock, deceptive responses from an African minister, she recalls visiting David during the filming and later reproves him for not taking issue with man's obvious lies; but he prefers to play the safe, uncontroversial position of "objectivity," which she resents, and which affects their already strained marriage relationship.*

*Later, during a wedding ceremony in a Munich church, an oddly constructed flashback (the first use of this technique in all of Antonioni's films) suggests a tele-

In another interview, with a young African witchdoctor, David begins by interrogating him off-camera about his education in the West and how he has reconciled it with native cultural tradition. Piqued by the unequal conditions of the interview and the indifferent tone of questioning, the witchdoctor replies that while the questions have good answers they are more revealing of Locke than anything else and swings the camera around to capture David's amused, puzzled reaction. Rather derivative of Godard's self-reflexive rhetoric, the device nevertheless pointedly expresses the poverty of David's inner resources and his inability to cope effectively with intercultural situations.

Another fragment of the African footage throws a different light on the matter. It is a roughly photographed document of the events leading up the firing squad execution of a black revolutionary; shot by someone else, not Antonioni, it has a convincing look of authenticity with a grainy, unfocussed, hand-held camera texture. There is no verbal commentary and the final shot, a sustained image of the victim after receiving a full round from the firing squad, shows a momentary recovery and his eyes briefly flicker with a fiery intensity that suggests a continuation of the struggle beyond his ultimate death. Rachel reacts strongly to the images and turns away, frightened at this revelation, contrasting so strongly with the bland, uncommitted stance of the interviews, and prefiguring the actual death of her husband.

When speaking of his character's need for a "personal revolution," Antonioni cannot, I think, be implying that he acts out of a change in political perspective. The film's evidence simply does not support this view. Locke does not assume Robertson's identity for any other reason than to escape his past, and in doing so he acts out of "bad faith," refusing to accept responsibility for the situation in which he finds himself. Furthermore, he acts out of ignorance of the dead man's existential situation. All this seems to complicate matters for the sake of narrative intrigue, but Antonioni seeks to put matters into perspective through the introduction of a young girl Locke meets casually in Barcelona, who aids him in escaping, partially for the adventure, and partly out of loneliness. Contrasting with Jenny Runacre's glacial beauty, Maria Schneider's freshness and vivacity, humor and physical charm, reawaken David's sense of purpose and seem, for the moment, to offer an opportunity for love. When she asks David who he is running from while they are driving through an orchard in Spain, he has her turn and face the roadway passing into the distance, a reflection of the emptiness that has haunted his past. When he suggests that he might become a waiter in Gibraltar, she replies, "Too obvious." "Or a novelist in Cairo?" "Too romantic." But when he proposes becoming a gun-runner in Africa, she half-playfully responds: "I like it!" Her main function, however, is that of a catalyst, a positive force moving David forward from the impasse in which he finds himself. While he lacks sufficient resources to deal with his new identity, she convinces him that he must continue with the mission in which Robertson believed and go to the Hotel de la Gloria as noted in Robertson's appointment book, which he does.

By making the girl an architecture student, Antonioni is able to explore violently contrasting architectural styles: spare, dusty, adobe dwellings in Algeria and Spain; the dazzling rococco interior of a Bavarian church, where Locke meets the African agents and is paid off handsomely for his "services"; the mysterious dreamlike Palacio Guell (designed by the Spanish architect Gaudi) where Locke and the girl have their initial encounter. There is even a direct quote from *L'Avventura* in the plaza of a glistening white deserted city, where the lovers pay a brief visit. But whereas in past films, Antonioni chose locations for their integral, expressive value, here he more often uses them as simply attractive backgrounds for the action, attempting to make the urban sequences as

pathic communication as David recalls his wife's amazement at his burning leaves in the yard of their London residence. There is a cut from the past to Rachel gazing at the new empty spot, then to David in Munich, linking them, yet suggesting their emotional/physical distance from one another.

visually seductive as possible to contrast with the stark moments that open and close the film.

Antonioni has always stated that because of his intuitive, evolving conception of working, he is unable to understand a particular work fully until he has finished it. Here, discrepancies appear because he has begun with a *finished* story and rationalized himself into it rather than letting his expressive needs grow out of the material. Altering it to suit his own nature, he has succeeded in creating some memorable sequences that are in themselves noteworthy but do not contribute to the underlying conventions of the story in an effective manner. Consider, for example, Nicholson's performance (or, more accurately, his function) and the concluding sequence which has elicited such exceptional critical admiration.

Although he is a sensitive and intelligent actor, Jack Nicholson is primarily a direct man in action and speech, and it is evident that he is uncomfortable with being used as a relatively static, inert element of the image which is what is required of him in *The Passenger.* One senses that Nicholson understands the script but not what Antonioni is making of it. This confusion —documented in Nicholson's painfully contracted movements and strained bits of dialogue —is transmitted to audiences who have become familiar with his personality through *Five Easy Pieces, The Last Detail,* and *Chinatown,* and who are largely being misled by publicity hailing the new Antonioni as a "suspenseful masterpiece," a phrase more accurately descriptive of *Blow Up.* Submitting to Antonioni's image of a brooding, contemplative, anguished reporter whose liberation ends in a cul-de-sac may have provided a challenge for the energetic, straightforward actor whose natural screen persona emerges only briefly in his more relaxed, carefree moments with Maria Schneider in Barcelona; but the resulting discipline is unsatisfactory.

Beginning with *L'Eclisse,* Antonioni has exhibited a strong predilection for indirect, symbolic finales of a virtuoso order, and although experimental and poetic in structure, related directly to the theme or underlying premise of the film. This explains why the director imposes a similar ending on *The Passenger.* In an interview with Kevin Thomas of the LA *Times,* Antonioni was very precise about his reasons: "I didn't want to show the actual killing of the man at the end. He's already dead. I didn't need to follow it through, which is what usually happens in this kind of movie. But I was upset, I didn't know how to do it."

The setting is the Hotel de la Gloria, at the center of a bleak, dusty plaza on the plains of Andalusia, where Locke/Robertson goes to confront the African agents and to his surprise once again finds the girl has followed him. The moments preceding Locke's death are devoted to the theme of human perception, in preparation for the final, inexorable movement of the camera. Locke, lying on the bed before an open window facing the plaza, asks the girl twice what she can see from the window. Her replies are meaningless, but accurate: "An old man scratching his back, a boy throwing stones, a dog, dust. . . . It's very dusty here." This is followed by her comment, "It must be terrible to be blind," prompting Locke to recount the history of a blind man who regained his sight at 40. Initially elated at the visual world denied him, he soon becomes aware of the ugliness and blight of which he had been oblivious, and ultimately retires to a darkened room where he dies. Antonioni includes this crude narrative device, suggesting Locke's imminent death because he has elected not to show it at all. Rather, with the aid of a unique camera, mounted on a gyroscope, he creates a sustained seven-minute tracking shot that moves through the grillwork of the window to observe the old man and boy, the girl crossing the plaza, the arrival of the African agents, then the police, and then with an about-face, it follows Rachel and the Spanish police as they all discover David's body, seen through the still open window. When questioned about his identity, Rachel replies, "No, I never knew him," though her initial concern suggests otherwise. The girl, however, identifies the body as that of Robertson. Following their departure, Antonioni's camera pulls back, holding on the hotel facade as night slowly falls.

Most critics have applauded this concluding sequence as a cinematic landmark. Andrew Sarris has called it "one of the greatest conjunctions of cinema as narrative and cinema as art object." Enraptured by the magical appeal of its choreographed subject and camera movement —undeniably beautiful in itself—none of these writers have satisfactorily provided an interpretation for this technical ploy. As expected, Antonioni is evasive on the matter. "If it looks fantastic, then there is something in it that is fantastic! . . . This ending is as ambiguous as life itself. I don't know what's going on behind my shoulder." If there is, indeed, any definite meaning to the sequence aside from its literal content, it lies buried in the director's unconscious, creative intuition. But I strongly suspect that it is quite simply an elegant stylistic strategy devised by Antonioni to satisfy his need for oblique expression and thereby give what is hardly an ambiguous story an unusual twist.

If we compare this sequence with the mimed tennis game which concludes *Blow Up,* and so movingly suggests the photographer's impoverished values, or the apocalyptic fantasy of the heroine, expressing her ultimate disillusion with American capitalist society, in *Zabriskie Point,* the virtuosity of this extended take appears like "The Emperor's New Clothes." If we are to assume that the central character's death has any significance, why does Antonioni go to such pains to avoid it? Because he wants to create an aura of suspense—very much in the manner of Hitchcock in *Rope*—to enliven the final moments of a story, and a character, which do not particularly interest him. As a result, Locke's death does not acquire any existential meaning and the final shot suggesting the continuity of life is merely an added afterthought rather than a meaningful gesture. Its resignation is that of a master film poet who has just completed an assignment full of beautifully conceived moments that fail to cohere into a satisfying artistic whole.

—LEE ATWELL

SHAMPOO

Director: Hal Ashby. Script: Robert Towne and Warren Beatty. Producer: Warren Beatty. Photography: James Wong Howe. Columbia.

"Shampoo is a smash!" scream the ads, and it's easy to see why. The past year or so has seen dirty linen going public on an unprecedented scale. Is there a skeleton left rattling in the closets of the rich and powerful? You guessed it—Sex. At first the film seems little more than boudoir farce with all the requisite slammed doors, hairbreadth escapes, and motivational confusions. But at the climax farce gives way to drama, and not with the sudden jolt of sixties "black comedy," but with absolute smoothness and control. The film is 24-hours-in-the-life-of George (Warren Beatty), a hairdresser of conspicuous heterosexuality, who though engaged to Jill (Goldie Hawn) still sleeps with Felicia (Lee Grant) a client whose rich husband Lester (Jack Warden) might be willing to put up the money for George to start a salon of his own. But then George becomes sexually re-entangled with Jackie (Julie Christie) an ex-girlfriend who is not only Jill's best friend but Lester's current mistress—and that's not to mention George's "quickie" with Lester's daughter (Carrie Fischer). If this were all the film-makers had on their minds, *Shampoo* would be nothing but a *What's New Pussycat?* for the seventies. But the film isn't set in the seventies at all—it's 1968, on the eve of an election that will see Richard Nixon made President. Obviously something other than just laughs are intended, and this curious choice of context has raised the hackles of many who've seen the film as a presumptuous attempt to pass off a "dirty joke" as if it were *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* But the parallels drawn between misconduct in high and low places proceeds from attitudes considerably more complex than the sort of A-follows-B simplicity the film's detractors accuse it of.

To start with there's the formal question. If this is farce, then it's farce that breaks just about every rule in the book. Classic farce demands an almost hermetically sealed interior in which to operate—*Shampoo* takes place all over L.A. As if to make up for this, the characters interact with an almost incestuous closeness. But the

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initial formal violation dislocates it—and there are other violations as well. In farce, as characterization decreases plot complications increase, and as these complications unfold a recognition of universally accepted laws of conduct and decorum must be displayed by all parties—even as the characters are in the process of transgression. *Shampoo's* people know all the loopholes of societal rules and regulations, and the disclosure of their anarchic designs is accompanied by the revelation of personalities far too detailed for farce. There aren't any "deep" thoughts or "big" speeches to be found here, there aren't even very many clever lines. The wit's not in the words themselves but what lies between them—intonations, gestures, glances. The film is full of situations in which people, even though speaking on the same wavelength, are *thinking* at cross purposes. Generally this sort of thing has been done in the manner of Robert Altman—characters and situations, and the images and sounds that contain them, drifting hazily across the screen, lapping up against the viewer's consciousness. But Hal Ashby's direction of a screenplay by Robert Towne and producer-star Warren Beatty suggests the kind of disciplined craftsmanship of Cukor armed with a Garson Kanin script. What *Shampoo's* collaborators have discovered is how innovation can be forged from *within*—by exploring the dark corners and undiscovered gaps of "classical" construction.

On one level this means an emphasis on "privileged" moments that stretch them into minutes, disrupting the supposed "meaning" of scenes and unearthing new ones. The way the camera stays on Goldie Hawn's face in an early scene reminds one of two contrasting methods: Bresson and Straub's lingering on spaces their characters have vacated, and Godard's discovery of Nicholas Ray's manner of "cutting on a glance"—it's something between the two. On another level one often gets the impression of the film's invasion of certain areas that have heretofore remained off-screen, such as the scene where Julie Christie takes her time in answering Warren Beatty at the door. There's no apparent reason for it, nor does her action "reveal" anything about her character in any future context—it's just there to keep certain elements (not plot related) from jamming up on one another too much; it allows the characters some space (in what is after all a tightly controlled narrative) to "breathe." It's moments like these in which the film really communicates—restructuring itself into a progression that is not only forward but "sideways." The backgrounds speak volumes too, like the honeyed glow of Lee Grant's palatial home, or the way the blue and white of Julie Christie's pool and patio "bleed" into each other. But the camera doesn't linger in production designer Richard Sylbert's creations in Visconti-like reverie, it's too busy jumping from the white-trellissed chintziness of the beauty salon, to the bland messiness of the hero's bungalow, to the squeaky-clean mod-ness of his girlfriend's flat, to the sterile modernity of banks and offices.

Through these sharply defined atmospheres march an army of the brittle, ruthless, driven, and spoiled. There hasn't been such a jolly bunch of monsters since *All About Eve!* But *Eve's* verbal wit has no place here—when people speak it's either for purposes of mystification (a director of television commercials when asked if he's married replies "Sometimes . . . ") or in the hope of somehow eliminating language altogether (the word "great" is uttered so many times, in so many contexts, with so many intonations, that it gradually loses all meaning). What matters to these people is power, be it monetary or sexual, and as appearance is the emblem of identity (and thus the key to power), getting one's hair done assumes the importance of the ritual and ceremony of the court of Louis XIV. When this life of surface as essence is set off in the context of boudoir farce, the contrasting qualities of L.A. living form a network of tiny upsets and inversions that seem part of the trappings of form as much as observed detail of contemporary society. The *trompe l'oeil* of Julie Christie's dress, making her appear clothed from the front and nearly naked from the rear, is echoed in other aspects of the plot: the "gay" hairdresser is really straight, Beatty's being caught by Lee Grant with the latter's daughter

makes her passionate rather than enraged, and at the film's climax a man is caught with his pants down by *another* man with his pants down (farce squared).

Dealing with characters like this in any fashion is a risky business. How can they be rendered credibly without alienating huge segments of a potential audience? In the past Hollywood has found it prudent to temper its exoticism with dollops of (alleged) middleclass "values," either through direct speech (like Katherine Hepburn being "told off" by Cary Grant in *The Philadelphia Story*), or through plot contrivance (Lauren Bacall and Rock Hudson as *petit bourgeois* balance to the *haut bourgeois* decadence of Robert Stack and Dorothy Malone in *Written on the Wind*). But in the past twenty years or so, that vast interconnecting network of communication known as "The Media" has developed to a degree that has made a once close-knit public all too aware of the *lack* of homogeneity of outlook at large in the world. Increasingly trendsetting films of the sixties like *Blow Up, Easy Rider* and *Midnight Cowboy* underscored that what was going on on the screen was happening to "them" rather than "us." The outcome of these films, however, tended to restore the status quo through dénouements of apocalyptic comeuppance with protagonists either eliminated by violent death, or left with dreams shattered, drifting in madness and despair. *Shampoo* breaks with all this, for it's discovered that the requirements of farce are more than enough to maintain involvement with the characters—though keeping at proper remove from them—while at the same time steadily moving toward a conclusion involving neither alien moral precepts nor gratuitous spectacle. It all hinges on the tension the film sets up between the satirical exaggerations portrayed, and the "real-life" parallels they relate to. Real life has to be put in quotes, but not simply as a result of skepticism concerning the supposed "reflection of reality" of which film is (or isn't) capable. These characters are of the sort that wouldn't exist at all if they hadn't read about it somewhere first. What takes place on screen is not a depiction of the "truth" about Beverly Hills, but a play of mirrors around the possibility of capturing that "truth."

The setting of all this on election eve is the film's greatest *coup*. To many, it was quite a surprise that an era awash in the "counter culture"—a vision of an America transformed by legions of blue-eyed, blue-jeaned, dope-smoking Arcadians—would come to a close with the election to office of the man who symbolized all that opposed it. But saying with John Ford, "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend," is just another way of giving credence to the adage, "Lie long enough and it begins to sound like the truth." That was the sixties all over, and never more so than on the screen, where the two most noteworthy "heroic" images were the uncommitted cool of David Hemmings in *Blow Up* on the one hand, and the frenzied emotionalism of Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate* on the other. Warren Beatty's George suggests a life-style modeled on both characters at once. He's smoothness incarnate, always on the go and never without a woman when he gets there. But at the same time he's much too involved with them all for the "cool" exterior to make any sense. In his inability to distinguish casual promiscuity from deep emotional commitment, he presents a head-on collision of the Hemmings and Hoffman personae.

If George stands for one sort of lie we allowed ourselves to believe about the sixties, Lester is another. For a figure supposedly representing the "establishment" and all the "square" values that go with it, it is *he* rather than George that shows the greatest propensity for growth, development, and openness to experience. He exhibits few inhibitions when confronted with a convocation of "under thirties" in the climactic party scene, and is quite willing to join in a bit of skinny-dipping. On learning that he has been thrice cuckolded (wife, daughter, mistress) by George, he's able to sit down calmly with him and review the good and bad points of the situation. Through neglectful of his women, he really does care about them (in his fashion) and will do "right" by them—at least monetarily, which is perhaps the only way he, or anyone else in the film, knows in a manner George could not even

begin to approach. But in spite of all of this, the film-makers never let us forget who he really is —a Nixon supporter and a major cog in the wheel of the power structure. After all when he comes to see George for a heart-to-heart, he's accompanied by two paid thugs who *could* have beaten George up should it prove necessary. The necessity never arises, but the ability to act upon it is what counts—what defines the terms of power, who has it, how they use it.

It's this understanding of power, its meaning and method, that motivates Jackie in the film's conclusion. She's not like George's steady Jill, who could take or leave the prospect of a modeling job that would mean a free trip to Egypt. She's a lot closer to Lester's wife Felicia, a tough cat willing to fight for what she wants and come out on top. But Felicia has run amok with her privileges (at one point she notes ruefully, "You indulge me so, Lester"). Jackie steps over the line, too, getting drunk and embarrassing Lester at a VIP election-night get-together, but after a final confrontation with George it would seem that she has found security preferable to chaos. Bouncing between Jackie and Jill through the course of the film, George has come to the conclusion that as he has lost Jill in the process, Jackie is "it." But it's too late. On a hill overlooking all Los Angeles George bleats out his "love" to Jackie. But we know and Jackie knows that George doesn't know what love is. Lester probably doesn't either, but he *does* know what responsibility is. Walking toward him with absolute confidence, Jackie embraces for the first time in her life a *certain* future. George can only look on sadly, but it is a sadness we do not —*cannot*—share. In *Before the Revolution* in a finale of striking similarity, Bertolucci asked his heroine (and us) to weep buckets of crocodile tears over the spectacle of his hero's surrender to a safe, comfortable, *bourgeois* marriage. Ashby, Beatty, and Towne are too smart for that sort of thing. "Wouldn't it be Nice?" coo the Beach Boys as the end credits roll. Yes, it would, but things don't work out that way. The film hasn't gotten this far only to kid itself in the end. We may have begun with Feydeau but this "readjustment of priorities" brings us to a conclusion far more in keeping with Racine or Corneille.

The sixties framework simply drives the irony home all the harder. Things have changed so rapidly in the last few years that a world of vinyl boots and mini-skirts seems part of a *very* distant past. The final party sits like a remote funhouse—an anti-Disneyland where strobe lights flash and clouds of pot fill the air while the sound of *Sgt. Pepper* covers everything in a promise of liberation and freedom. But things were never liberated and never free, and as George runs madly back and forth in vain pursuit of the people who were to him no more than "heads," that he claimed to love because they made him "feel that I could live forever," he is not unlike Jerry Lewis—another Ladies' Man lost in a funhouse of sexual trauma. For George (like Jerry) there's always hope, and Jackie's blowing the whistle on the whole thing was the only sane course to take. *Shampoo's* greatest inversion is its final one—what does not seem so at first, but is in fact in the long run a very *happy* ending.

—DAVID EHRENSTEIN

Short Notice

"Quincy, Massachusetts, 1967" reads the opening title of Richard Rogers's short documentary film **Quarry.** That summer saw two phenomena of change in America. It was the "summer of love" in the Haight-Ashbury, the East Village, and the innumerable hippie enclaves which sprang up in cities and towns across the country. Fifteen-year-olds ran away from home searching for alternatives to Growing Up Absurd. It was also "Vietnam Summer." College students returned home to try to convince their parents and communities that the war must be stopped. Neither movement revolutionized societal values nor politicized the bulk of middle America, as this film, a visit with white, working-class youths demonstrates with a power, clarity, and beauty I have rarely seen in a short independent film. Rogers's work has much in common with the socially committed still photography of Danny Lyon. *Quarry's* structure is based upon a series of superbly composed, black-and-white, fixed-focus shots —a mosaic of moving stills. As with Lyon's "The Bikeriders," its strength lies in the duality between the beauty of its subject—youthful, half-naked bodies swimming in a magnificent old marble quarry—and the intellectual and emotional ignorance and brutality they

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Short Notice

"Quincy, Massachusetts, 1967" reads the opening title of Richard Rogers's short documentary film **Quarry.** That summer saw two phenomena of change in America. It was the "summer of love" in the Haight-Ashbury, the East Village, and the innumerable hippie enclaves which sprang up in cities and towns across the country. Fifteen-year-olds ran away from home searching for alternatives to Growing Up Absurd. It was also "Vietnam Summer." College students returned home to try to convince their parents and communities that the war must be stopped. Neither movement revolutionized societal values nor politicized the bulk of middle America, as this film, a visit with white, working-class youths demonstrates with a power, clarity, and beauty I have rarely seen in a short independent film. Rogers's work has much in common with the socially committed still photography of Danny Lyon. *Quarry's* structure is based upon a series of superbly composed, black-and-white, fixed-focus shots —a mosaic of moving stills. As with Lyon's "The Bikeriders," its strength lies in the duality between the beauty of its subject—youthful, half-naked bodies swimming in a magnificent old marble quarry—and the intellectual and emotional ignorance and brutality they

reveal. *Quarry* recalls Lyon's photographs of motorcyclists and prisoners in terms of its subject (young, working-class men involved in predominantly male-oriented activities) and its stylistic approach (a series of individuals and group portraits accentuating the physicality and sexuality of the men as well as their latent violence). The underdog appears beautiful and his values justifiable; in the case of Lyon's work, the rebellion of the outlaw; in Rogers's film, his defensive relationship to the institutions of marriage, the military, and the factory. The controlling institutions of Western civilization (the school, the prison, the home, the factory, the army) lurk just below the surface of both men's art.

The first few moments of the film are a micro-history of the locale. A single raindrop falls, then multiplies. A pick is heard chipping away rock as if from a distance of years. The iron artifacts of the quarry's working days are noted. With a burst of rock-and-roll music its austere past transforms into a graffitti-strewn swimming hole, filled with the shouts of young men who, like raindrops, hurl themselves into the water. With camera focus fixed, all action is left to the subjects as they float upon logs, lather themselves up before a swim, dive, clamber up the rocks, dry themselves, guzzle beer, smoke cigarettes, play cards. Their enjoyment is exhilarating, humorous, and infectious. The sound track is composed of three elements which Rogers interweaves with subtle skill: the raucous energy and comic-book ideals of rock and roll; the high-power sales pitch of radio announcers exolling the virtues of a Chevy Impala; and the personal anecdotes of the young men told in voice-over monologue: "The VCs are so sneaky they'll hide in the water with their reeds and breathe through the reeds . . . see a reed move . . . pump a few shots" . . . "I have a good marriage. My wife is a very good woman. She takes care of my children and she takes care of me. I'm happy . . . when you work for a factory one of the things you look for is the benefits" . . . In the midst of this dense tableau of working-class values and loyalties the lyrics from "Hang On Sloopy" (the story of a love affair bucking the system: "Sloopy, I don't care what your Daddy do . . . you know Sloopy girl I'm in love with you") becomes a dark joke. Simultaneously its upbeat rhythm and pseudo-idealism continue to seduce the listener, and despite the new associations with which we view the swimmers, they remain tremendously attractive. Rogers plays upon the polemic he has created. The diving bodies now drop from the cliffs like lethal bombs.

The dichotomy between life and death energy is epitomized in the women in the film who appear at one moment vulnerable and sexy, at another fairly repulsive. One wet-haired beauty sits alone. Another emerges with a head full of curlers. The immediacy and poignancy of a couple kissing is followed by a look of confusion and disgust on the woman's face. The lives wasted in war and the lives wasted in living are not so far apart: a man who can be no more than thirty, beer bottle in hand, has a belly distended by years of drinking. The energetic water antics and the naive, blaring rock and roll take on dangerous connotations. The beer bottle becomes a pollutant floating in the water. But the rock and roll music blares its friendly and ironic lyrics: "We're going to the chapel and we're going to get married . . . We'll love until the end of time and we'll never be lonely anymore." This naive optimism is mirrored in the final speech of the film: "There's no place left where quarries are concerned . . . I don't think they'll fill it up. It's 200 something feet deep." Rogers's final shot is a pan of the now silent, snow-covered quarry. The camera seems to be saying farewell to what has become a noiseless and motionless vision, a surrogate for death in the landscape of the mind.

—KAREN COOPER