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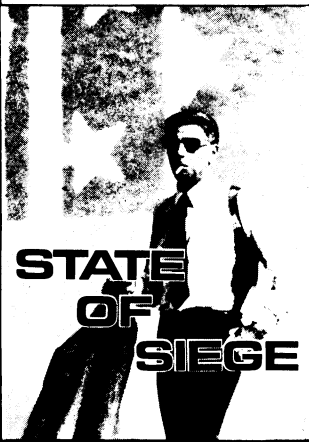
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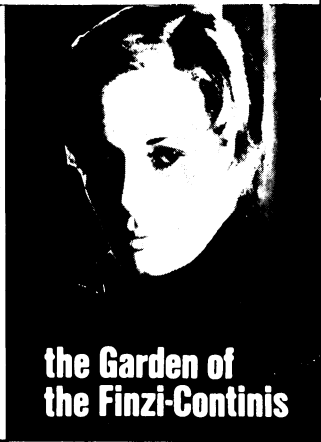
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The Burger court has handed down its long-dreaded decision on local control of "obscurity." Send not to know for whom this decision tolls: it's you and your local movie houses. As James Selvidge (a Seattle art-house exhibitor who has had his windshield shot out by people who didn't like his films) explains in *Movie-tone News* No. 24, the effects of the decision are already serious. *Last Tango* will be withdrawn from all but metropolitan circulation. The existing industry panic over X ratings will deepen, and the script control exerted by the Stern gang (rating administrator Stern's, that is) will grow. Theater fare will putrefy further; and someday, lo and behold, foreign "art films" will have to return to save us. Meanwhile, low-budget hardcore will flourish in the relatively permissive metropolitan areas, but Hollywood's increasingly perverse and grotesque violence pictures will be the main staple (if they aren't already) of your ordinary movie theater. In fact, outright sadomasochist pictures will do all right too, for a particularly exquisite reason: since they do not (like "normal" sex) appeal to the "prurience" of "the average person," law-and-order prosecutors will leave them alone. When decadence comes to America, as somebody once said about fascism, it will come under another name. Nominations welcome.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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forts to suggest the extent of this power. We get very little sense of either the politics of American imperialism, or the politics of the urban guerrillas. We have no sense of their strengths and weaknesses, or of the function of kidnapping and assassination in a larger political strategy.

The political strategy of the Tupamaros has been based on an analysis of the particular historical, social, and geographic conditions peculiar to Uruguay. It was adopted after lengthy debate over the question of whether Uruguay which, after all, was almost unique in Latin America in being a relatively stable liberal democracy with a highly developed welfare system and a bloated middle class, was ripe for armed struggle. The traditional left parties, members of the "loyal opposition," with the usual united-front perspective, said "No." The MLN decision to undertake armed struggle was at least partly based on a negative assessment of the shaky economic foundation upon which Uruguay's prosperity was based. The combination of a runaway inflation (136% in 1967), a banking crisis due to speculation, and a huge foreign debt\* led the regime to adopt a deflationary policy which in turn led to widespread discontent. The objective economic situation, the notion that armed struggle can itself create a pre-revolutionary situation ("Revolutionary action in itself, the fact of being armed, prepared, equipped, the process of violating bourgeois legality, generates revolutionary awareness, organization, and conditions") and the belief that the Uruguayan police and military were relatively weak (some 12,000 poorly equipped troops in the middle sixties) plus other factors like the strong tradition of militant trade unionism in Uruguay, all contributed to the MLN's decision to constitute itself as an armed vanguard.

This analysis raises several problems of the utmost importance, all of which Costa-Gavras ignores. Among them is the principle that selective acts of revolutionary violence directed at the ruling class strip the regime of its facade of

legal legitimacy and in fact raise the consciousness of the people, thereby creating the subjective and objective conditions necessary for revolution. The kidnapping of Santore brings down a heavy repression on the people of Montevideo, as the title of the film suggests, but there is no indication of how they react to this. Is the middle class radicalized by these events or do they blame the Tupamaros for their discomfort? The police who invade the university are mocked in the episode with the loudspeakers, but there is some reason to suspect that the regime used the kidnapping as an excuse to destroy pockets of traditional opposition, like the university, in order to consolidate its power. The fact that the repression in Uruguay, as elsewhere, has recently become so great as to seriously threaten the guerrilla forces, suggests doubt as to the adequacy of their analysis. As in *Z*, events which are subsequent to those which the film depicts, retrospectively call into question the politics of the film; yet there is no indication within the film, no internal examination of the film's politics, which might prepare us for this.

If questions like these are not raised, it is probably because they do not interest Costa-Gavras. He seems most interested in the forms these struggles take: assassination, investigation, confession. Indeed, in the interview referred to earlier, Costa-Gavras said that what interested him in *Z* was the "mechanics of political crime." The same might be said of *State of Siege*.

Nevertheless, *State of Siege* is an important film. For all its flaws, it will reach a large audience with a vital message. It performs a service to the people of Brazil, in particular, by calling attention to the barbarous practices of the present Brazilian regime, and to the people of Latin America in general by exposing direct American responsibility for the repressive and inhumane regimes which inflict American interests upon them.

—PETER BISKIND

*Ed. Notebook, Cont'd.*

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\*Carlos Nunez, *The Tupamaros*. New York: Times Change Press, 1972.

## Bergman and Women: *Cries and Whispers*

It is often claimed that Bergman, like Antonioni, is a director whose subject is Woman, that he has a unique affinity for portraying and understanding the female psyche. It is certainly true that many of Bergman's films focus particularly on women and how they come to terms with their lot in life. This applies to early works like *Summer with Monika* (1952), films of his middle period like *The Silence* (1963), and more recent films like *Persona* (1966), *The Passion of Anna* (1969), and *The Touch* (1970). Bergman's view of woman and her capacities for fulfillment is most explicit in his latest film, *Cries and Whispers* (1972).

Women are indeed frequently so significant to him as symbols of the dilemma of alienated, suffering human beings that Bergman employs them as spokeswomen to express his personal world-view—a world-view basically defined by the traumatic absence and silence of God, who has coldly abandoned us all to a cruel world. His women characters sometimes serve Bergman to express his agony over our ultimate inability to derive meaning from life except in rare moments of sensual ecstasy, soon contaminated by disgust over the bodily processes in which all experience is rooted. Yet if women occasionally are Bergman's vehicle for locating meaning, it is much more frequently male characters who pursue the ethical issues in his films which are not peculiar to either sex.

What is striking about Bergman's treatment of women is thus not the philosophical role they are called upon to play in his films. It is, rather, his treatment of their characters. Bergman offers a much different explanation for the inability of his female, as opposed to his male, characters

to find purpose in a universe without direction. His men fail largely because their pleas go unanswered or because, although they are full and vital human beings, they lack the capacity to care for others; his women are ensnared at a much more elementary level of human development. Their lives lack meaning because they are rooted in biology and an inability to choose a style of life independent of the female sexual role. In this sense Bergman is far harder on his woman than on his men. They are depicted as if on a lower notch of the evolutionary scale. Although the philosophical quest for an authentic mode of existence can hardly be limited by female as opposed to male hormones, Bergman insists that because of their physiology, women are trapped in dry and empty lives within which they wither as the lines begin to appear on their faces.

If the Knight in *The Seventh Seal* fails to achieve a sentient life because the cold abstractions by which he moves lock him into an ethical opacity, Ester in *The Silence* lives an empty, futile life because she has not accepted the demands of the female body, because she refuses the female sexual role. Her quest does not fail, as the Knight's does, because her intellectual or even emotional gifts are not rich enough, but because her body drags her down; she is punished for her revulsion by the odors of the sexual act. Her "disease," like that of Agnes in *Cries and Whispers*, is unlike that of the Knight, that of Tomas in *Winter Light*, or even that of old Johan Borg in *Wild Strawberries*. Ester is fixed

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This article is a chapter from *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film*, copyright 1973 by Horizon Press.

## BERGMAN AND WOMEN

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in her relation to physiology and in her refusal to assume the primeval, instinctual life of a woman.

Thus Bergman presents us with a double standard. His men move in an ethical realm, his women in a biological one. It is true that his films reveal that these men are frequently found wanting. They contribute little solace or transcendence to a world whose people have lost the capacity to care for each other. But the cause of their moral demise does not rest especially in their male physiology. Bergman's men are distorted human beings, but their intrinsic physical characters and the nature of their flesh are not presented as standing in the way of their redemption. They are not irrevocably limited by the nature of their participation in the sexual act, as are his women. Free of limitations which are defined as intrinsic to the species, there is the hope, at least implicitly, that these men can change.

Bergman's women, on the other hand, are too often creatures whose torment resides in the obligation to submit to the repulsive sexual act. If Bergman's men lack power because there is no ethical imperative rooted outside the individual to which he can respond, his women (like Anna in *The Silence* or Karin in *The Touch*) are powerless before the sway of their lusts. They are passive, almost somnambulist, in their search for a man with whom they can unite their flesh. This is the *raison d'être* of his *healthy* women—those who are presented as infinitely preferable to women who rebel futilely and self-destructively against this injustice visited upon them by nature.

This is the story of Ester in *The Silence* and Karin in *Cries and Whispers*, both played with hysterical frigidity by Ingrid Thulin—as well she might given the definition of the female Bergman continuously imposes upon her. Rebellion only leaves women like Ester and Karin exhausted and excluded from the flow of normal existence. Ester, in fact, must die for her rebellion. If she refuses to be a woman as Bergman defines woman—instinctual, passive, submissive, and trapped within the odors and blood of her genitals—there is no place for her in the



THE SILENCE: Ingrid Thulin as woman rebelling against her sexual fate; Gunnel Lindblom as woman somnambulistically searching for sex.



world. If a woman director were to present a male equivalent to Ester, most critics would be quick to infer that she hated the sex.

It might be argued that in our stage of cultural and psychological development this is how women are, that Bergman merely depicts what he sees. According to this view, one should not make the mistake of assuming that Bergman endorses this vision of woman as weak, pallid, and locked into her physiology. Yet Bergman's point of view is arbitrary, in willful ignorance of the long chain of revisions of the misogynist female psychology outlined by Helene Deutsch, which portrays women as by nature passive, narcissistic, and masochistic. Bergman's insistence upon maintaining this stereotype suggests that he has accepted an anachronistic view, without questioning how his adherence to the spirit of the Northern Protestant culture from which he emerges has shaped his understanding of the potential of woman. Absent from Berg-

man is any sense of how women can surmount and have transcended the norms of the ascetic and rigid late-19th-century philosophical milieu with which he has burdened himself. Far from understanding and showing compassion for the plight of women, Bergman creates female characters who are given the choice only—as in *Cries and Whispers*—to be a Karin (cold and frigid), or a Maria (mindless and promiscuous), with the secondary alternatives of being an Agnes (inexplicably non-heterosexual and insatiably in Angst) or an Anna (servile and bovine). And Bergman implies through the closed microcosm of human existence he presents that these will forever be our alternatives. This is surely a gross distortion of reality, for however copiously the world is populated with women like Karin and Maria, there are other kinds of women as well. Even Julie Christie's professional prostitute in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* has an intelligence and vitality absent from the entire range of Bergman women.

This is not how we are. The two basic types of women forever imposed on us by Bergman, beginning as early as *The Naked Night* (1953), arise out of a distinct and jaundiced sensibility. In either case woman's behavior is arbitrary and axiomatic, inexplicable because it is based upon an ordained mysticism of the female body—a view which most conscious women today would scorn. Alma, the wife of the clown, who bathes with a regiment of soldiers, represents irresponsible lust. Agda, on the other hand, the bourgeois wife of the circus owner, finds "peace" in renouncing her sexual role; she is the prototype of the cold and unfeeling woman who denies her nature and its imperatives.

In the later films, the motives of women like Agda are clothed in irrationality and mysticism. All we can observe is distorted behavior flowing from discontent with their biological natures, a limitation which Bergman presents as a given, rather than as an eccentricity. The typical woman of the more recent Bergman is Eva in *Shame* (1967) who cannot have children and who gives herself gratuitously to the Mayor more out of self-hatred and despair than from an instinct for survival. She is as amoral and

disoriented as Anna in *The Passion* who caused the automobile accident in which her supposedly "beloved" husband was killed.

Even those women who succumb to the dictates of their biological role fail to find peace or meaning. Releasing themselves to lust makes them feel only unsatiated and demeaned. It is indeed largely through his false dichotomy, the two definitions of "woman" as the hot and the cold, that Bergman sustains his theme of the human being as a humiliated, pathetic creature ruled by impulses which he lacks the power to satisfy.

For Bergman's women in general the body and its demands are insatiable. When bodily urges are unacknowledged, rage and frustration follow the denial. When they are gratified, the mind and sense of middle-class decency are outraged, possessed by feelings of disgust and self-hatred. But denied women become stifled, emotionally dead, or harsh and perverse. From the double-bind that Bergman thus imposes on his women, only grace from God (who must be cruel and unfathomable or he wouldn't have so afflicted us) could bring respite; and the heart despairs over such absolution from their deity. Part animal and partially aspiring to transcend her animal nature, Bergman's woman can never be content.

"I think it's terribly important," Bergman has said, "that art expose humiliation, that art show how human beings humiliate one another, because humiliation is one of the most dreadful companions of humanity and our whole social system is based to an enormous extent on humiliation." It is largely through woman, the creature tied to her flesh, that Bergman pursues the theme of man as humiliated victim of a cosmic joke whose dictates can never be transcended nor its purpose fully grasped or accepted. The debasing sexuality of his woman is fated as long as there is a human race. They are powerless, inherently unable to organize their lives differently, as with the young girl in *The Virgin Spring* (1960) whose rape signifies the destiny of all women. Despite the girl's narcissism and self-satisfaction it seems absurd to argue that faults of her ego brought her as a flawed indi-



vidual to this end. A spring is discovered where the girl was murdered partly because in the morally inexplicable universe which torments Bergman, fertility and the reproduction of the race require the violence visited upon women. It is another harsh paradox of human existence from which Bergman's women can never escape.

Discussing *Cries and Whispers*, Pauline Kael recognized the psychological and clinical distance of Bergman from his woman characters, his sense of "women as the Other, women as the mysterious, sensual goddesses of male fantasy." But this considerably underestimates the meaning of Bergman's distance from his female characters. Seeing women as "different" and "Other" amounts in Bergman's films to their utter dehumanization.

*Cries and Whispers* is an extreme manifestation of this emotion and perception of women. Agnes, a dying woman, represents primarily the condition of women, if also that of mankind. She is shown in constant close-up in the sheerest animality of ailment: puking, rending and biting her lips, and racked by asthmatic gasping. There are buckets of sweat, vile secretions and contractions. The full ugliness of the body dominates. Bergman's disgust becomes objective and aesthetically repellent to the subject herself, adding to her malaise. Stripped of its cumbersome and portentous metaphysics, this portrayal reveals in Bergman a man for whom not only sexuality or its intimations of need are vile, but particularly the female functions.

Woman, whose behavior flows from the mysteries of her organism, is at best patronized. This seems true of Bergman's early women characters played by Harriet and Bibi Andersson, but particularly of the Eva Dahlbeck persona who, despite an ease with her sexuality, is never quite taken seriously. Bergman's intellectual women are vastly less attractive than his spiritually questing men. One is ineluctably brought to the conclusion that for Bergman it is not woman's role to quest after meaning. When she does, it is forced, unnatural, and with far less grace, finesse, or hope than with men. The most appealing of his women are those played by Liv Ullmann. Since *Persona* she has represented in



Liv Ullmann in *CRIES AND WHISPERS*: her sensuality at least attempts style.

his films a sensuality which, while it does not transcend its torments, at least attempts style. But even in the Ullmann characters it is a fate particular to woman that she is locked within the essential vulgarity of her flesh.

*Cries and Whispers* presents four women ensnared for the time period covered by the film into obsessive relationships with each other, excluding except in flashback men, children, and parents. It presents an unmistakable culmination of Bergman's sense of how women are inexorably and particularly limited by the physical shells in which their souls have been encased by that absent, unintelligible, godhead who has left us so alone without communication, solace, or release.

The set design of *Cries and Whispers* is a decaying mansion suggestive of a cocoon walled by red velvet and red brocade. The frequent fades to red with which Bergman moves from one character to another convey how every woman acts out a facet of the character of each. This red comes to represent not only their shared blood, but the way in which each sister, in enacting aspects of behavior which is potential, or at other moments actual in them all, exhausts the nature of woman, her soul colored by her physiological being. "Ever since my childhood," Bergman says in the treatment for the film which

he published in *The New Yorker* (October 21, 1972), "I have pictured the inside of the soul as a moist membrane in shades of red." Yet in *Cries and Whispers*, this color of blood stands more for the body of woman. An image of her biology, like a "moist membrane," it defines her however she struggles to elude its grasp.

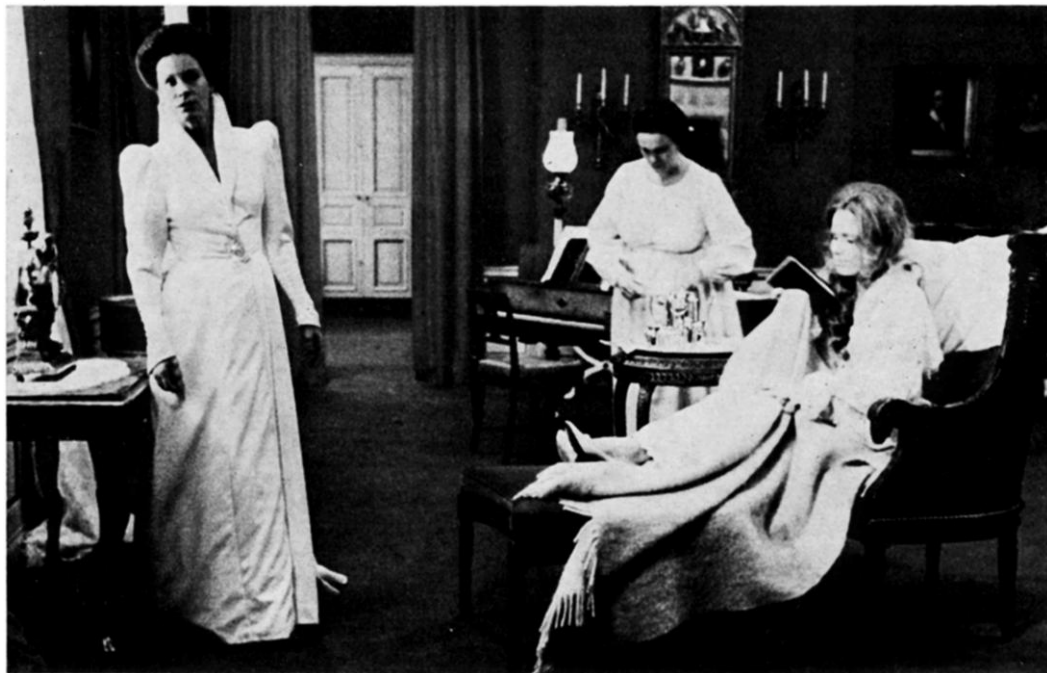
The four women are the dying Agnes, her sisters Karin and Maria gathered at her deathbed, and a servant named Anna. Although Agnes is very emaciated, writes Bergman in the treatment, "her belly has swelled up as though she were in an advanced state of pregnancy." She is dying of cancer of the womb, at once the disease of being a woman and of not fulfilling a woman's function by bearing a real child.

Karin, the eldest, despises her sexuality. Her husband, writes Bergman, "is repulsive to her physically and mentally." Although she has five children (whom, significantly, we never see, not even in Karin's own flashback) she is tortured by her sexuality and hates being a woman. In the treatment (although not in the final film version) when Karin speaks of an affair she is having with another man she refuses to associate it with love: "It's a dirty itch and a few moments' oblivion." The reference may not have been

incorporated into the film because Bergman wished to stress Karin's frigidity and a total abstention from the physical life of her sex.

Only apparently an opposite to Karin, Maria uses her body to pursue "pleasure," promiscuously. She is utterly unmindful of moral categories or distinctions. Her body is not merely indulged but assimilates all experience to its demands. The doctor with whom she once had an affair has since discarded her; he comments on the deterioration of her physicality. She stands before the mirror that exposes to all women the pursuit of age. Just as Karin is humiliated by being a woman, the doctor, and Bergman, try to humiliate Maria for losing what has always defined her: physical perfection as a woman.

The fourth woman is the servant Anna, heavy and silent. Having lost her child, her entire sensual life is devoted to the love and care of Agnes. At no time in the film is she revealed in any physical act of love other than when she climbs into the bed of the dying (or dead) woman and cradles her to her ample breasts. She is the character most capable of loyalty and love in the film, yet her love amounts only to the animal consolation of physical nearness—all, Bergman



says, of which woman is capable. (Bergman's men frequently cannot give even this much.) Comfort is possible in this film only from another woman, although even this is extremely rare. Most women, like most people for Bergman, cannot reach out and offer any love or kindness to another except in the easiest of circumstances, or out of lust.

All these women suffer deeply. The hurt of all is symbolized by the agony of Agnes, in her torment and struggle. Her lips are bitten, her skin sallow, her hair lank, her teeth yellow, her nostrils distended with pain. She is woman stripped of allure, bared to the repellent essentials of a body in decay.

The women are dressed in white, expressing their unconscious wish to return to the virginal and to exclude men entirely from their lives. All the men in the film—the pompous, self-satisfied doctor, the sardonic, sadistic husband of Karin, and the weak, pallid, plump husband of Maria—are pathetic figures, less physically vibrant than the women. Woman is thus defined at once by being physical and unsatisfiable, a judgment validated by the inadequacy of the men Bergman chooses as their husbands and lovers.

All the women in *Cries and Whispers* yearn to remain children and suffer for being adult

women. The first shots of Maria show her as still a small girl lying next to the dollhouse of her childhood with a doll beside her. With Karin, Bergman focuses in close-up on her large white hands, cracked and chapped. Their dryness seems to express the price she has paid for her refusal to assume her role as a woman, as well as the brutal onset of an unattractive middle age. Anna is childlike with a continuing faith in God. She thanks God for his all-knowing kindness in taking her baby daughter as she still prays to him. Agnes has had no man in her life, which has been centered on her mother who preferred the pretty Maria to the more austere, deeply loving Agnes.

Bergman focuses on an extreme close-up of each woman to introduce the defining flashback of her life. Simultaneously (and awkwardly) a narrator in voice-over informs us of the lapse in time and why the characters happened to be at the original mansion in which they are now gathered. The first such flashback has Agnes remembering a mother whose love she could never win. Her mother is a woman plagued by "ennui, impatience and longing," who could be "cold," and who always made Agnes feel left out. The high point of Agnes's life was a moment when she was permitted to touch her

*CRIES AND WHISPERS.* Left, Karin, Anna, Maria. Right, Anna and Agnes.



mother's cheek. Through this gesture she could express how deeply she felt, although only now, too late, can she understand her mother's ennui and loneliness.

Their mother, who doesn't speak a word in the film, is a woman very much like her daughters, and like all of Bergman's women. She felt in the very sight of Agnes the futility of her aspiration to be more than a reproducer. The more Agnes craved her mother's love, the more oppressed her mother felt. Maria, even as a child frivolous and unperceptive, was paradoxically easier for the mother to be with than the daughter who understood too much. To give love in Bergman is to be reminded of one's despair. This is so painful that it is easier not to love. And without love, life is empty. The emotions of Agnes repeat those of her mother, and of all women. This memory, culminating in touching her mother's cheek, is all that remains to the dying woman whose mother has been dead for twenty years. And it is on Agnes, who longed for more love than life offered, that Bergman inflicts a Kierkegaardian sickness unto death. Her disease is almost a direct consequence of her greater perception of God's brutality and man's hopeless self-hatred and sense of futility.

The whisper Agnes hears as she returns to the present is not a cosmic echo, but the entrance of the doctor. Like Bergman's God, this healer cares little for his patients and does not in fact heal at all. In the course of the film two of his patients die—Agnes and the little daughter of Anna. Maria hears her own cries and whispers, the frustrations defining her past, just as Agnes has been tortured by an unuttered cry—her never having had the opportunity to tell her mother how well she understood her.

The camera focuses on the doctor's graceless manners as he eats his dinner. And it is by this repellent act of eating that Maria, watching him, is aroused. While she lusts after him, he, like a cunning animal, is cold and indifferent, contemptuous of her because of his power to arouse. His inaccessibility makes him more desirable. Bergman's women persistently direct their lust toward men who care little for them, who in

fact mix their passion with contempt.

The next morning Maria's husband Joakim, having returned, guesses at her infidelity as she sits whispering to her daughter. In chagrin, Joakim the weak stabs himself. Then, in tears, sobbing pathetically, he cries out for help. His wife eyes him with revulsion as the screen fades to red. Maria's contempt for her husband thus punctuates the flashback, defining the relationship.

In the original treatment Bergman has Maria indulge at this moment in a fantasy of "forcing the knife deeper into her husband's chest with all her strength, in a moment of stinging satisfaction." In the final version we are left with her scorn, the sneering for which the doctor had reproached her only the night before. The hatred of women for men is unabated throughout the course of this film. It is as irrevocable and inevitable as life, as the blood red fades to the "normal," pointing to woman's special shame.

Anna bares her breast to the dying Agnes whose death agonies grow louder and deeper. The disease in its vileness conveys the horror of our existence on this "dirty earth," as the Pastor will refer to it. Yet Bergman strongly suggests it is no worse than we deserve, so essentially incapable are we even of gestures of kindness and selflessness. For every scene in the film in which Karin and Maria are gentle toward Agnes, there is a companion scene in which they retreat in revulsion before her yellow hands and insatiable demands. The scene of Maria and Karin washing Agnes and of Maria reading her the *Pickwick Papers* is paralleled by the refusal of each sister in turn to comfort the dead woman, who cries that she cannot yet go to sleep so attached has she become to the living.

The dying cry of Agnes is "Can't someone help me?"—Bergman's metaphysical lament which forever goes unanswered, an ungratified hunger beyond the reach of family or society. Bergman has in fact reified this feeling into a fatality and a principle of the universe; in this sense Maria and Karin must remain impotent to comfort their dying sister, despite their partial desire to help.

No stronger than the husbands of Karin and Maria or the doctor is the pastor who asks the dead Agnes to intercede for him and all the living with the God who has taken her. Surely speaking for Bergman in reiteration of the themes which have run through so many of his movies, he begs Agnes to "pray for us who are left on this dark, dirty earth under a cruel, empty sky . . . to free us from our anxiety." Ask him, the preacher exhorts Agnes, "for a meaning for our lives . . . plead our cause." At this point we can hardly fail to conclude that the individual woman Agnes is sacrificed by Bergman in a primitive ritual (again explaining the omnipresence of the color of blood) in the hope that this time God will answer. Bergman must have been unaware of the depth of his philosophical commitment to the theme of man's abandonment by an overbearing superior being when he said after the production of *Winter Light* (1962) that he had finished with the theme of the silence of God.

Yet *Cries and Whispers* is broken in half by the reiteration of this very theme, which remains as integral to Bergman's work as his sense of the absence of free will afforded by the universe to human beings. It is expressed in his depiction of women as "classical" examples of beings limited by the shape God has given them and powerless to do anything but act in reaction to repellent biological drives.

Thus, concealing a shard of jagged, broken glass, Karin murmurs, "It's nothing but a tissue of lies," a statement that could stand for the disillusionment of all of Bergman's characters. The phrase is repeated three times as she thrusts the glass into her vagina, finally drawing blood which has metaphorically dominated the *mise-en-scène* throughout the film. It is the blood of being a woman, drawn with the special perverse satisfaction that comes with a revenge on men. In a scene of gross exaggeration, Bergman has Karin in bed spread her legs exposing the bloody mess to her prissy little husband in his fur-trimmed smoking jacket. Smearing blood on her face, she proceeds to lick it off, reveling in her own degradation and in the degradation of her sex. But such revenge in-

volves only self-mutilation. The fade to red comes this time indubitably as a humiliation.

The last third of the film reveals Bergman's belief that women are not necessarily capable of greater gentleness and feeling than men. It denies that they alone have retained the power to "touch" each other. Two overtures occur. The first is made by Maria to her sister Karin that they "be friends." She is sorry that they never "touch each other." She urges that they "laugh and cry together." The second overture is made by the dead woman toward her two sisters and her friend. Only Anna, the deprived, working-class woman who possesses nothing of her own, retains the capacity unselfishly to feel concern for another.

Karin finally accepts Maria's touch, although hatred has so locked her into her own life that she abhors anyone's touching her. She is deeply aware of the pain of losing contact after yielding to the need for it. Finally, she retreats murmuring, "I can't. I can't. It's like hell." Life is "disgusting, degrading." She tells Maria that she has often thought of suicide and that she hates Maria with her "coquettishness and wet smiles." Yet she is correct about the "false promises" of Maria, as the film will reveal.

Karin's horrid and fought-off emotions are the most deeply felt and are presented as the most authentically derived from experience. At last Karin yields to Maria's embraces only to discover her own awakened needs and feelings unreciprocated at the end of the film. It is only when Karin is physically and sexually aroused by Maria that she responds to her caresses. This summons in her only the return of anxiety, disgust, and self-hatred. Feeling for Bergman, between women as between men and women, has its origin in lust, although rejecting such love as unclean brings only loneliness. After much self-torture, Maria and Karin share one brief moment of tenderness and pure feeling, expressed by the haunting cello, the only sound we hear. It is a redeeming moment, all that life can offer. But great agony precedes the experience in which we are made vulnerable. And once the moment passes, despair and self-hatred return with a vengeance.

Because *Cries and Whispers* moves on so non-naturalistic a level of abstraction, so doggedly leading from its *mise-en-scène* to generalizations about the human condition, the scene in which the dead Agnes makes overtures to her companions does not strain the credibility of the film. The mood of Kierkegaardian despair (before the leap to faith) has so ominously prevailed, and the imagery of the film has so statically illustrated preconceived values in the obvious hand of the director, that we do not suffer a shock upon discovering that the corpse cannot fall asleep. Agnes's corpse becomes another of Bergman's props, helping him to show (in a sequence redolent of ritual) how, lacking a God, even in the presence of the beyond we can only repeat the paltry whimpers of the ego.

The corpse of their sister (like the women who come to lay her out) remind Karin and Maria of their feeling of repulsion toward being women who must lose all as they age, and indeed toward being people who must ask for gestures of warmth from others. In *Cries and Whispers* the need for love, the moment of asking, is tied to putrefaction and physical decay, as if to make clear that the denial should have been foreknown. Even death is not a great enough shock to jolt the sisters into communion—a point Bergman beautifully conveys by allowing his audience to respond rather matter-of-factly to a corpse come to life.

When they were young, the sisters competed for the love of their mother. Time has withered them while at the same time forcing them to retain (and even to nurture) a feeling of such Nordic "otherness" toward each other that Agnes's request, so pathetic and so purely an expression of the unconscious needs of them all, must go unanswered. The testing of her sisters by the corpse is a means Bergman uses to illustrate what his women have become: selfish, unable to respond even at a moment that breaks the bounds tying us to the normal, the mundane, the pragmatic.

The servant Anna opens and closes the door, like a medieval messenger of the Gods; she represents the director in carrying out the terms of the test. And it is she who responds to the

pleas of the corpse for warmth. The hands of Agnes which are now spotted do not fill her with the revulsion they evoke in Karin and Maria, members of a decadent bourgeoisie who, the sequence reveals, have long since begun their decay as human beings. If Anna is bound by the same biology, her role in the social order has not caused her to become ungenerous and exploiting.

Anna responds because even in *Cries and Whispers* and under the most grotesque of circumstances, Bergman does not wish wholly to renounce the human capacity to feel. (Films as disparate as *Wild Strawberries* and *The Touch* make this clear.) Yet Anna's warmth also seems to involve an obliviousness to life's horrors, a limited capacity to register what life is. She cannot, for Bergman, represent a viable alternative to the self-centeredness of Maria and Karin. To Anna, Agnes is like the sick child she has lost. Her simplicity is the result of not asking too much of the world, especially of not questioning for the purpose of things. It is only she, not the actual, intellectual mother of Agnes, who is capable of mothering. The perpetually dumb, accepting and serving Anna is a symbol of what God's servant has to be.

Near the end, Karin tests the earlier sensual overture of Maria. "Do you mean to keep your resolutions?" she asks. But it has all meant nothing to Maria, who carelessly replies, "Why-ever not?" Her mind wanders to Joakim waiting impatiently outside, and when Karin asks about her thoughts, she becomes hostile. For Maria, Karin is asking too much. "You touched me," Karin reminds her, "don't you remember?" "I can't remember every silly thing," is Maria's reply. She becomes as cold and vengeful as Karin has been throughout the film. Rejecting the perfunctory, superficial embrace Maria offers, unwilling to take less than what she needs, Karin is left as alone at the end as she was at the beginning.

The crowning irony of the film is reserved for the conclusion. As a further expression of her devotion, Anna has secretly chosen her own keepsake—the diary of Agnes. She opens it and we read of the day when Karin and Maria first

came to sit by the side of Agnes. The same woman who later, in her greatest need, will be rejected by both her sisters has written:

. . . the people I'm most fond of in the world were with me. I could hear them chatting round about me; I felt the presence of their bodies, the warmth of their hands. I closed my eyes tightly, trying to cling to the moment and thinking, come what may, this is happiness.

Agnes writes, ironically, not of Anna and her love, but of the sisters who abandon and betray her and who recoil when her need in death is greatest. And it is Anna and not her sisters who must read these words. Love among these women is not recognized or valued when it is present. After all of Anna's devotion and Agnes's dependence upon her comforting, not a syllable registering her feeling for Anna is present in the diary. She has left Anna as little as her sisters have, and equally rejects her, if by default. Thus Agnes too partakes of the natures of her sisters.

The park around the house is still green as the women in white go out to the swings. "For a few minutes I can experience perfection," Agnes writes; it is only these few moments that will be granted her during her entire life. She feels a gratitude for life that seen in flashback seems to represent a pre-experience, the film before it began and before either we or Agnes learn how little Karin and Maria are capable of giving. That all was illusory is stressed by Bergman in juxtaposing Agnes's words with all that has come after.

There is a bitter disparity in *Cries and Whis-*

*pers* between the richness of color, the purity of the white against red, and the absolute degradation visited upon these women, who have been deprived of every saving grace, even the mythical "gentleness" that is said to belong to females but be denied the male. Women are in reality far from being Bergman's "favorite people," as one feminist critic supposed. Bergman exposes himself once again as one of those film-makers most hostile to a vision of women as free, creative, autonomous, self-sufficient, productive, satisfied, or, indeed, gentle. His women, rather, are chained to bodies which leave them little freedom or opportunity to transcend the juices, demonic drives, and subordination peculiar to their gender. Paradoxically, their bodies even deprive them of that sensitivity frequently attributed to women. *Cries and Whispers*, in fact, provides one of the most retrograde portrayals of women on the contemporary screen. Despite the plethora of women inhabiting the director's world, Bergman, as one of the great (if cult) figures in international cinema, stands in the way of a liberated film image of women. His rigid, determinist misogyny ought not to escape notice because it is rooted in a pseudo-philosophical *Angst* which passes as profundity. There is something both inauthentic and suspect in an artist who delights in enclosing his women characters in a cycle of pain based on physiology at a time when many women are examining and discovering the means by which they can move beyond what they have been. In fact, Bergman has made victims and martyrs of his women at precisely the moment when real women are rapidly rendering obsolete his vision of their "natures."



**FRED SWEET, EUGENE ROSOW,  
ALLAN FRANCOVICH**

# PIONEERS

## AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM BRANDON

*Although it is unknown to most present-day film enthusiasts, the great contemporary wave of serious interest in film as an art has its immediate historical and practical roots in radical film projects and film groups of the Depression period. Tom Brandon, known for much of his life as the founder of one of the largest distributors of 16mm features and documentaries, began his involvement with film in the thirties. The following interview, which has been condensed by the interviewers and checked by Brandon, provides hitherto unknown background information on this seminal epoch in American film culture.*

SWEET: Just to begin, could you give some of the background, some of the reasons for the formation of the Worker's Photo League and the early history?

BRANDON: The Worker's Film and Photo League grew out of the Photo League, which was stimulated by the existence of the Japanese Worker's Camera Club. All were labor-based organizations which responded to the need to use still pictures and motion pictures to inform the people of the reality of the thirties—effects of the economic crisis and the developing struggles. It had a firm alliance with (in fact it was affiliated to) a mass working-class organization called the Worker's International Relief which was the working people's and the unemployed's own Red Cross. The WIR, while not favoring private charity, did go to the community for support, material support, for those engaged in struggle, such as textile workers in the late twenties (Passaic and Castonia and New England), the miners, especially the miner's strike, 1931-32, the people in the struggle for home

relief and against evictions and in support of the big planned hunger marches in the struggle for immediate relief, Federal job programs and unemployment insurance. Because the Film and Photo League was working with the WIR it was possible for the Film and Photo people to be very close, to be part of the developing struggles. It achieved a kind of polarity as against the lack of any pictorial information in the commercial media depicting the conditions of the thirties. There was no March of Time even to simulate the reality of the early thirties in film. The newsreels were purposely avoiding these struggles and these conditions, and in fact Terry Ramsaye, formerly chief editor at Fox Movie-tone, later editor of Pathé News and ultimately editor in chief of all the Quigley Publications, said and wrote the equivalent of these words: that these developments are exactly the kind of thing that the newsreels shouldn't do, it's none



of the movie industry's business or responsibility to deal with the ugly facts.

So the newsreels avoided these subjects or if they dealt with them there was distortion. Hollywood feature film treatment always lagged in topicality. We are given to thinking now, 35 years later, that the Warner Bros. films were right on time with each important, newsworthy subject; it isn't entirely so. Take unemployment. The big crisis came in 1929. The first treatment of unemployment in these films began around 1931 only to ride or dance with the blow, so to speak, in *Golddiggers of 1933*. There were some serious films and some comedies which also distorted hunger and unemployment. Not til late 1933, '34, '35 did we have *Easy Money*, *Easy Living*, *My Man Godfrey*, and only a few others. Another instance of topical lag is the treatment of Nazis. Hitler came to power in January 1933. He had loomed as a threat earlier; now he was a serious world menace. The media knew that fascism was spreading and that there had been a big struggle for several years, and yet the first American feature film that dealt with Nazism was in 1939—*Confessions of a Nazi Spy*. Of course the gangster cycle *seemed* to be a quick response. While there were some gangster incidents going on currently with the films being made, which gave it a sense of topicality, actually the big actions, the big impact of the gangsters was in the twenties. There was always a lag in Hollywood, as we see again and most gloriously, in the current lag concerning US intervention in Vietnam. Our active role dates back at least 10 years and different phases of it go back since Nixon's first efforts as Vice President to push President Eisenhower into the war when the French were forced to leave. Now this is a long long time for this topic to be around and yet the only film from Hollywood that dealt directly with the subject was what? *The Green Berets*. Two other films had a bit of an anti-war feeling but the protagonists were out of their minds!

In the early thirties the media were distorting, blurring, or avoiding the problems of unemployment and hunger. Not only the media but the US government and the American Federation

of Labor, until 1932, issued no statistics on unemployment (perhaps it was late in 1931, but in 1929, 1930, and early 1931, there were no official statistics given out on how many were unemployed). It was not until late '31, about the time or shortly after the time of the first big national hunger march, that they began to admit the numbers of unemployed, and by that time it had gotten to be about 16 million. With no statistics, no figures from the government, with the AFL opposed to unemployment insurance, Matthew Woll making speeches against it, Green making speeches about this un-American thing: here were the people without any conventional means of expressing their needs. The Worker's Photo League responded to these needs and by achieving this kind of polarity it attracted the attention of interested workers, students, supportive professional people, and individuals trying to find their way. It was part of the big upsurge in the early thirties when the middle-class professionals, artists, writers and other intellectuals, seeking answers to the terrible contradictions that were for the first time looming, beginning to turn their lives, turned to the left in general and those who had some interest in pictures came and supported meetings and the showings of the Worker's Film and Photo League. They did not lead it, they did not run it, they were attracted to it and the League perhaps affected them at that time. We know that these talented people responded to appeals for public intervention and formed various ways of participation — task forces, flying squadrons. The Theodore Dreiser Committee went to the Pennsylvania coal mines, Waldo Frank went to Kentucky with a delegation, Malcolm Cowley I think was arrested in West Virginia, Sherwood Anderson, Charles R. Wallser and many others were there, right in it. Film and Photo League people were part of these committees and were called in because there was always a possibility of sending camera crews along. In the miners' strike and to some degree in the hunger struggles, a Film and Photo League cameraman went with a writer. One writer, Alan Max, went with a cameraman to interview Bruce Crawford (a very courageous liberal publisher in the South).

on the way to Harlan County. He sent back the first roll of film which showed him getting out of the car a little distance from Bruce Crawford's office, walking up the road toward a figure staring at him. This roll disclosed his first sequence: the figure that got bigger and bigger as the cameraman approached him finally reached out for the camera: he had "shot" a sheriff arresting him! Luckily the police didn't destroy the film and when they got the camera back, they sent the roll.

SWEET: The films were shot in many locations. Were they then edited in the community and sent as finished films for distribution in New York?

BRANDON: The arrangement that was developing was for each local place to make its own film that reflected a local need and film people's interests. They'd finish something or almost finish something and then often exchanged prints with the New York group. Then they borrowed programs, whole programs, from the New York group, especially when there were opportunities to show the programs in connection with the activities of some organization engaged in the actions covered by those films. For instance they would get a whole program of newsreels or the feature film on unemployment, *National Hunger March*, and use it for, with, and on behalf of the unemployed Councils, and for the National Miner's Union. As there were few independent unions the films were used wherever there was interest in developing a rank-and-file movement in the AFL. And there was

not yet developed a system of exchanges to serve spectator groups (the spectator group as it exists now was not yet established), people assembled to see a program of interesting movies apart from the rest of their lives or apart from the daily actions.

SWEET: Could you talk a bit about funding? Where did these people get their money during the Depression, or equipment? What would be the cost of an average fifteen minute newsreel, how much would the cameras cost . . . ?

BRANDON: Several members of the Film and Photo League in New York owned DeVry cameras; one, I think, maybe two, owned Bell and Howell Eyemo's. Sidney Howard the playwright was greatly interested in the work of the Film and Photo League. He said to me that frequently he came back from Hollywood or from Broadway and would go to see our work and listen to our programs "to get a breath of fresh air." He wrote an article, a satirical piece about Hollywood for the *New Republic*, then they sold reprint rights to *Reader's Digest* and he gave that money plus a little more to buy an Eyemo camera for the Film and Photo League. The other equipment was modest; we didn't have any sound, most of it was exterior work and so we didn't own much of lighting equipment; there were splicers and rewinds which we managed to buy. People didn't get paid for making films, most of us were working or on relief and we got raw stock and developing from the Film Department of the Worker's International Relief. Travel expenses always were a prob-



lem. Our people often went on the trucks of those engaged in battle and sometimes somebody loaned us a jalopy. For the most part we were put up by people engaged in the activity, occasionally there were cheap hotels. Money was supplied by the Worker's Film and Photo League for rent money for the loft that it leased, and incidental expenses came out of the showings and photo exhibitions arranged by the League.

SWEET: What were some of the aesthetic and political discussions among the group members?

BRANDON: I'd like to tell you of one incident that occurred, I think it was in 1934. A Film School was formed, the Harry Alan Potamkin Film School, where the classes would assemble evenings, because people worked or were looking for work or were working on Film and Photo League things during the day. Many years later Sidney Meyers told this of this incident with some exaggeration but with fond remembrance, and it's indicative of the tension at the time. He said, "I wanted to work on films, either teach or learn, and I went to the Harry Alan Potamkin Film School, and every time I would go there and start to discuss the work or pull out some equipment, the head of the school would say sorry classes are called off, we're demonstrating in front of a movie up on Broadway, class will be conducted tomorrow. Night after night I went to make a film or to teach, and night after night they said no class, there is a fascist film, or there was some kind of deadly film to counter, or some mass meeting. I never had a chance to

work on any films."

I could say that there was a strong tug by some people, who wanted to work in sound, who wanted to work in other forms, including re-enactments, and some of them turned away from the Film Photo League and created another group to work in that manner. Some wanted to form a group that would solicit funds, to work as a team or a revolving team. One group was Nykino and they made *Pie in the Sky*. And then some of these people developed a non-profit film company called Frontier Films, which made the most important independent social-political documentaries of the decade: *People of the Cumberland*, *Heart of Spain*, *China Strikes Back*, *Return to Life*, and *Native Land*. They also made an educational film, *White Flood*.

The major *theoretical film questions* were (1) Should the League follow the daily struggles with whatever means we had: creation of newsreels, short documentaries, compilations, review films, satirical short shorts or parts of newsreels; occasional documentary features (which *analyzed*, as did the shorts, besides describing as did the newsreels)? Or (2) should the League turn to developing techniques, explore different forms, work with actors, lip synchronization, etc.—even at a delayed rate and timing of production?

During the life of the film phase of the League, 1931–1935, the intensity of the daily pressures determined the choice. The League also went in for a program of studies, lectures, publica-



Left to right: (1) WORKERS' NEWSREEL No. 12 made by the Film and Photo League, showing the National Hunger March of December, 1931. (2) The giant demonstration in Washington, DC, December, 1932, which demanded immediate winter relief, a federal jobs program, and unemployment insurance. Camerawork by Leo Seltzer, William Kruck, Leo Hurwitz, Robert Del Lucca, Irving Lerner, Alfredo Valente, Sam Brody, and many others. (3) AMERICA TODAY, a review film by the Film and Photo League, edited and partly photographed by Leo Seltzer, using material culled from commercial newsreels. All stills courtesy Film and Photo League, Brandon Photo Collection.

tions, viewings of varied film forms and experiments, demonstrations and classes to improve photographic and editing skills (for members and others): and political and conceptual consciousness of the chosen role. The League did not choose the British path of obtaining access to techniques by dependence on government and industrial sponsorship. The League chose the hard road of independence from such support.

In 1935 some important League members, with others, created Nykino, a new production group which set out to explore different techniques, forms, and approaches—with the use of actors, professionals, as volunteers, and non-actors. It tried, successfully, *improvisation in Pie in the Sky*, *re-enactment in the March of Time-like The World Today* (only one issue, two parts—*Sunnyside*, and *The Black Legion*). The first was limited in its circulation, unpublicized and for closed showings—probably due to its anti-organized-religion theme—and the second came out before film spectator groups existed widely enough. Both stand up in the '70's on their own, especially for film viewing groups.

*Pie in the Sky* appeared about 30 years before John Cassavetes' interesting improvisational films, and about 35 years before Norman Mailer's impotent narcissistic and cement-laden feature-length efforts at improvisation in films. People in Nykino then, with others, formed Frontier Films, probably the most accomplished social-political film producing organization of the decade. Their remarkable work was plagued by long long delays due to fund-raising needs and also the time needed for the painstaking efforts involved in developing their creative talents. *Native Land* (in my opinion the most important US independent thirties feature) was started in 1939 when its major subjects, labor spies and the fight for the Bill of Rights for all, were of most urgent public concern. It was ready for release three years later, in 1942, in a different historical period when the major public concern was the fight for unity in the struggle against international Fascism.

The major *political question* was: Should the film work and public film education efforts be

based on recognition of the class struggle? Should the League concentrate on developing the use of films in the service of the working class and its allies? There were discussions of this directly and also in context with selection, production, public events, etc. There is no question whatsoever about the position taken and carried on as a regular daily inseparable part of the lives of the active members—full agreement on *Yes* that this was the position and the basis for all work. The ongoing question, discussed in meetings and the left film press was: how best to make our contribution with the means available?

This may not have been the full position of the casual members or even the interested supporters; but other people knew the League's position and were interested, nevertheless, in support and participation on some level and many others developed fuller agreement in time.

Did the League make a substantial contribution? Organizations and people in the struggle surely thought so. Did it make memorable works of art? Effective "public affairs" communication? Presentation of the working-class side of the great issues of the time? In the area of its chosen objectives, the members and critics of that period thought so of some of the work. Forty years later it is hard for new generations to judge, for many reasons including the loss (as of now) of some of the principal films and the main bulk of the films. People of the seventies will be able to judge for themselves the residual values in these works and possibly guess as the values to the period—when more of the films and yes, the photos too, are found. Evaluations of the total contribution of the League may be more feasible when scholars dig into the left film criticism and polemics of the period: when for example the great bulk of Harry Alan Potamkin's written work is republished;\* when more is known about the beginnings of mass nontheatrical distribution, learned in a relatively technologically undeveloped time; when more is

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\**Selected Works of Harry Alan Potamkin*, edited by Lewis Jacobs, is scheduled to be published by Columbia Teachers College in 1974.

## BRANDON

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known as to where and how the beginnings of the real fight for a free screen developed; and when more is known of the League's genuinely pioneer work in the public study of world cinema is known (its early relation to the later "film explosion").

Meanwhile, I think the found films merit some attention from film scholars, film-makers; political science students, American problems students, and perhaps some of the new historians.

ROSOW: Did Workers Film and Photo League take part in any election, or support elections either in '32 or in subsequent elections?

BRANDON: The elections in '32 were not fully covered as a whole, but sections of some newsreels attacked Hoover *and* Roosevelt. In the newsreel coverage I don't think they dealt with the Socialists, but referred to the need for a socialist program for the country. In '36 Film and Photo League did not make any election film but one of the members produced a magazine film, with different forms and parts that added up to about 35 or 40 minutes, for Foster and Ford against Landon and Roosevelt for the '36 campaign. One part was a chalk-talk instead of the animation we couldn't afford, (It wasn't the Film and Photo League, you must be very definite about that.) It had an interview with the candidates; it had a documentary on conditions and it was going to have a musical part, I think, but they never got around to that. It was against both major parties. The left worked on films in elections in later campaigns; the Film and Photo League was interested in the issues of the campaigns.

SWEET: Were there women and blacks and other minorities involved on the crews of the early films?

BRANDON: Women yes, one woman made a feature film after having been in the Film and Photo League for some time, about farm workers, *Sheriffed*, and her name is Nancy Naumburg. There are others who did editing, others who used a camera. There were people from different nationality groups, minorities in that sense. There were no blacks working on the Film and Photo crews that I remember. My



CHINA STRIKES BACK (1936): Red Army passing through a village outside Yanan. Courtesy Harry Dunham, Frontier Films.

recollection is that black people who were active at that time moved closer to the front than to camera work and they are the stars of some of our films.

SWEET: Was there any resentment that people were spending money to make films at times when money was very scarce for let's say food or other forms of struggle?

BRANDON: We spent so little, we were in such desperate need that there was no resentment, and many people welcomed these films. You couldn't tell an unemployed person who saw himself and his family and his neighbors in an action like the Hunger March film that that was a waste of footage.

SWEET: Was there an attempt on the part of the film-makers themselves to put the cameras in the hands of the people to express their own views?

BRANDON: It's hard to give an answer to that without coping with the tendency nowadays to exaggerate the place of film-making in our society. The whole tendency that flows in a sense from McLuhan, you know, the picture has replaced the word and pretty soon in effect people

## SPAIN IN FLAMES



will not only not read but they won't talk. Everything will be exchanged and communicated with film and cameras should be everywhere, and it's silly for people to learn how to read and write when really you ought to learn how to use a camera. That is a kind of demagoguery in my personal view—a misunderstanding and misapplication of the nature of film, and its place in society. It's hard to answer that because the Film and Photo League in trying to get accurate coverage, tried to find miners, unemployed, union people who knew something about a camera or had a camera to be correspondents to participate and to be on the watch for material, but it never took a patronizing, fake, demagogic approach to try sententiously to find people who would express themselves in either facing or avoiding some desperate battle. When we tried to find somebody to cover something like the Ambridge attack or the Ford Massacre or Chicago Steel slaughter it was not on the grounds that there might be a camera in every garage for self-expression. If there were people who were ready or had the time who were not on the picket line or preparing food or support for the action, we sought their participation. We would try to find somebody who had an interest and had a camera, but not under the philosophy that is implied in the question, that is so prevalent today.

Rosow: You seem to be saying that in the early thirties there was not a dichotomy of film and politics, there was not an objectification of film-making as something separate from political activity, and in a way that's as important or more important than a lot of other things about film culture. Films aren't something you go to in the evening as entertainment but films are an integral part of the political process. Could you describe how the film-makers worked together, in deciding what films to make?

Could you discuss how the subjects were chosen and the method in which they chose to film? How were they edited?

BRANDON: Recall that in those days there was wide public discussion, in the labor and left periodicals and in the organizations, of the big issues of the day. We know that in recent years

the major subjects are the invasion and the war in Vietnam. In recent years it's the Nixon program and game plans, and we know that it's the role of the United States in Latin America, in the Middle East; we know that at home the big questions are still the rights of black people and Chicanos and minorities, and the repression of all dissidents. There's no mystery about what are the big issues. In those days the film people not only read the papers and thought about them and talked about them, it was part of their life, part of what gave meaning to their lives, part of why they assembled: all this so that we could work out programs of study, discussion, for us to see what we could do, and above all action. So aside from direct political affiliations, these issues were the stuff of life for aware people at that time. In selecting subjects it became a question of what we thought was most urgent and what we could get at, and also what we could get some support for from WIR and other organizations. And also where the pressure was strongest. The unemployed were hollering, hey we got something going, and this helped us to shape up our decisions—just as if the people of North Vietnam were here and said: this is what was done to our hospital, we need help to rebuild it—perhaps that would help, let us say, a Bay Area film group to determine which subject they want to handle! It's a pity that the Vietnamese are not here now to talk about the re-building of the hospital in Hanoi, because if they were, if there were a direct appeal maybe there would be some joint unified effort to support a real powerful film on that just like there was once a film called *Heart of Spain*. But I don't want to imply that our way of selecting was better than the way things go on now; I keep stressing that it was *different*; there were more unified groups facing terrible struggles at that time and although there were divisions and differences, there were not major differences on what the main subjects were and it was agreed that the differences were not such that there was paralysis in activity, or stasis, which I'm not entirely sure about now, but from the little I've seen there's a considerably widespread stasis among let us say students and intellectuals on the very

question of what's the most important thing to do—when the country's falling apart and it's not hard to figure out what's important to do.

At that time people living in the midst of it didn't have the benefit of hindsight. We didn't know for sure what would happen from the struggles. The movement was ostracized and condemned, pilloried and given no space in the papers, and so, the financial resources were very meager. And so the atmosphere in the film production selection and planning was not that of planning a course today in history. Sometimes it was improvisation, sometimes conscious choice as a planned part of a campaign, sometimes under the pressure of a great need, a cry for help would upset a whole discussion and a plan of what we were going to do for the next month, something came up and then planned activities did not materialize. (Lewis Jacobs and I went to Alabama, Tennessee and Georgia to explore making a film on the exploitation of black people—but we turned it into the beginning of a film on the Scottsboro Boys!) Now to give you one example of a planned activity. I think it was early in 1933 that the very gifted young cameraman and editor Leo Seltzer by agreement by our board went to the Dakotas to do a film on the farmer's reaction to their plight. And with him went the very sympathetic, gifted playwright Sidney Howard. Mr. Howard and I went to see William Allan White—he was the famous editor of the *Emporia Gazette*, very knowledgeable about the whole area—to find out where would be the best place to go. I remember the meeting and the board and I and Leo planned this as our next project, to get some footage and then see where that would lead us. There was no script but to cover a trial and what the conditions were and what the reaction was, what organization, what the struggle was like. They were out in the Dakotas for maybe ten days when I received a telegram from Sidney Howard saying RETURNING FRIDAY, THERE IS NO THIRD ACT TO THE AMERICAN FARMERS. This is the playwright talking in his jargon about nothing going to happen out there. Well, within two months after this project had failed, the Penny auctions began in Pennsylvania and in the Mid-

west, the Milk Strike began in the center of the country, Illinois, Indiana, and so on, and hell broke loose with the allegedly quiescent American farmer who not only resisted but unexpectedly to many displayed a most militant and violent reaction to his plight. So that was planned but the conditions didn't permit it. Now in general the position was that there was a production committee of the Film and Photo League which discussed what kind of projects, and were generally responsible for the finish of films as a committee. Everybody saw rushes and their talk about it was not necessarily talk that determined frame by frame the making of a film. But people who were in charge, the people who were actually working on the film, they made the film. There was an effort not to decimate their time and their momentum. They wanted to have the film ready, say, for three weeks from now because the unemployed want to have a giant meeting. So what may have been lost in mass discussions of group editing, group cutting, was gained by having people who were working on the film discuss what they were doing with the rest of the production committee. There might have been three people working on a film, but seven or eight were on the full committee. A production committee brought in proposals for what kind of films we were tentatively scheduling, thinking about, because the scheduling was a product of what funds were available for what, what the most pressing issues were that we could cope with. And also a subjective factor of which people would like to work on what. So through all of these relations and mainly through the pressure of the needs of the time we developed a program, which perhaps is not the best way but that's the way it was, whatever we felt about it, that's the way the conditions shaped it. Later on Frontier Films functioned in a different period, labor and the people had won a breathing spell and so through a combination of what projects came forward to them, like the *Heart of Spain* material came and they asked if they would make it into a film. Herbert Kline couldn't, just couldn't do anything with it. He wasn't that developed and capable a filmmaker. That stopped everything else, so that

Leo Hurwitz and Paul Strand could work on *Heart of Spain* when the Spanish Republic needed support, needed blood, needed medical equipment—you see that had a tendency to shatter plans. *China Strikes Back* in a similar way but not with the same intensity. Few in this country knew anything about those people up in Shensi Province. Frontier Films felt it was of great importance; the distributor made it a concentrated project. Part of *Native Land* was discussed as soon as there was a Senate Civil Liberties Committee, before its final report was out. They all agreed this was it and they put in several years and put everything in it. The programming, the funding was a direct co-efficient of the pressures and needs and available resources of the time. We had certain priorities in mind, not always realizable, for example, we felt that the plight of the children was really a terribly important subject and for three years we had that in mind and had it scheduled but we couldn't get to making a film on it. The resources were not available for it, and other campaigns, that organizations could do something about, apparently pre-empted that. But I remember at almost every meeting getting up and asking, where are we on this thing, what about the script—we never succeeded and yet everybody agreed it should be done.

SWEET: What kinds of films were Film and Photo League people seeing?

BRANDON: As part of the League's thinking about the film as a whole, not only with their love and dedication for making films but out of their interest in deepening their understanding and knowledge of film, they created very innovative programs of feature films and interesting



short films from wherever they could get them all over the world. In my view those early organized systematic showings of films of René Clair, Pabst, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, some of the other silent classics from the Soviet Union, such as Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, constituted the first organized effort at what turned out to be a base for the developing quest for world cinema culture. Not from the universities, not by graduate students, not for doctoral theses, but from the people in struggle who were deeply concerned with the meaning of film, the nature of the whole thing, did these organized efforts a world cinema viewing, study, criticism and exploration evolve in the US.

Perhaps the Film and Photo League didn't spend a lot of time making experimental films, because unlike the film-makers of the sixties and seventies we were really "independent" (independent of commercial and government sponsors and grants) and our films just had to have a social use. We saw the works of the experimental film-makers in Europe so far as we were able to get prints, and we read about these works and felt no compulsion to reproduce these experiments ourselves in the way that the avant-garde film-makers have been doing endlessly since the fifties. Perhaps if the American avant-garde film-makers in the fifties, sixties and seventies had seen and studied some of the work done in Europe, they would have felt that they were not embarking on a world of innovation and would have gone on to make films about people and the nature of our world, as did the bulk of the experimental film-makers eventually in France, in Belgium, in Germany, and Italy. We saw some of the early work of Ivens, Richter, some of the early work of the British, the whole gamut of French experimental film-makers and a few of the off-beat innovative works from the Soviet Union. We learned from these examples of film culture which provided stimulation by example in a historical sense.

People from the Workers' Film and Photo League then developed one of the large early film societies in New York called the Film Forum, of which Sidney Howard was the president and one of our people was the executive



director. Jay Leyda worked on the programs and in 1934 this group ran a series that introduced, I think, one of the first showings of *Maedchen in Uniform* and *M* and a revival of *Mother*, Dovjenco's *Ivan* and others. Some of us toured these programs to widen the scope of the film field, film culture; we traveled in 1934, '35, '36, to Detroit, to Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Chicago and some other places and created large-scale film societies which were really semi-theatrical as in the case of the Detroit Cinema Guild which showed at the Detroit Art Institute a very first series in a 1200-seat auditorium, one showing each time, then wound up each of the two seasons with a full week's run at this 1200-seat house. This encouraged the local art theater, which had been fumbling in its programming, to concentrate on worthwhile artistic films. People from the Film and Photo League went out and undertook circulating efforts and film-society efforts and the showing of high quality films to raise funds for activities that I believe were one of the foundations for what developed 30–35 years later to be the "film explosion." People from the Film and Photo League then went into small distributing companies which specialized in collecting the best in the world to make available alternate choices in the development of taste, and eventually the biggest collections of the most significant films were promoted and circulated by people who had been in the Film and Photo League 10 or 15 years earlier.

Rosow: In the thirties the left films, like the workers' newsreel films, were considered propaganda, whereas entertainment films and ordinary newsreel films — which really *are* propaganda — were not considered propaganda. Gifford (the president of AT&T that Hoover put in charge of unemployment) said what we ought to do is give free film tickets to everyone so that the unemployed can go watch movies and be pacified. Behind food and lodging the third most important thing in the country that people need is movies, movies, movies. Were these people criticizing Hollywood films?

BRANDON: I surely think that the social historians ought to get to work on the artifacts of

this archeological dig, the thirties, because despite the statement that the materials are available for study, the basic materials have not been gathered and recognized as relevant to the studies of the thirties. Certainly not in film, for example not until Stanley Kauffman and Bruce Henstell published a collection of American film criticism, only a few months ago, did we have anywhere in these times any of the work of the left critics of the past, when the United States produced a number of critics, one in particular, Harry Alan Potamkin, whose whole writings merit republication and study and discussion and use as one pole for measuring conventional criticism. A man who wrote in a very light vein, Robert Forsythe, also has a couple of pieces reproduced in the Kauffman book. But there are other articles and publications and I invite people to look into *New Theatre Magazine*, which ran a number of pieces that took on the positions of the critics and the industry of the thirties; *Experimental Cinema* (which ended about 1932) the most beautiful and effective film publication in the US in the thirties, with David Platt and Lewis Jacobs—both of the League—and Seymour Stern as editors; *Film Front*; and *Film Survey*. So there was a body of criticism, a body of polemics, as part of the life of the times, expressing the way the people of the League thought about the medium and the period. There was Hollywood and its effects, plus and minus. There was the actual coverage of newsreels and the lack of coverage and distortion and there were the critics. There was also the positive aspect of showing, of breaking through the mold and showing world cinema, not only US cinema; these were the ways of participating in the medium as a whole. I don't know whether Newsreel does any of these things and maybe the forthcoming book by Bill Nichols on Newsreel, which I understand is a very detailed study of all its practices, may tell us more about what their whole attitude is toward cinema and to audiences, and what lessons Nichols draws from their history.

Rosow: Were you active as a film-maker in this period?

BRANDON: First I would like to make very

clear that I didn't consider myself a film-maker. I saw certain needs and I learned how to use a 35mm camera and I went and covered some important things because I knew nobody else was doing it. And these materials were then placed in the hands of the production committee of the Film and Photo League who finished them. Later on, much later on, I produced several films. One is a long animated film on the Bill of Rights called *The Great Rights* and one a film on the position on the trade unions and their big strikes in 1946 in the postwar period called *For the Record*.

SWEET: So how did you get involved in distribution?

BRANDON: Forty years ago I decided to concentrate on learning how and trying to build independent distribution so that independent film-makers working in the public interest could sustain their work. I, like the other folks in the Film and Photo League, was always aware of the need for having the films shown and developed an attitude about distribution that could be described as a campaign attitude. Every film, I felt, and still believe, has a life of its own. The approach in distribution, in order to make impact, had to have a campaign aspect, as though we were launching a national, a general strike, or a national election campaign. Everything that could be thought of should be attempted and coordinated to help make a place for it. And with the development of the technology in the field, the development and expansion of spectator groups, the use of the medium as means of studying society, this approach persisted.

In the beginning we chose 35mm equipment because we had to cope with existing 35mm projection equipment; there was a theater in New York that was willing to play every picture and kept calling up and wanting to know when the next one would be ready—the Acme Theater on 14th St. in Union Square and then later when those people owned the Cameo Theater on 42nd St., they again wanted to know when the next one was coming. They even gave us the \$25–\$50 in advance so they could push us—and there was a place in Los Angeles, but

mainly it was in the meeting halls of the nationality groups that had 35mm silent equipment from the twenties and earlier, where they showed nationality films, Italian films, Hungarian, Polish, such as they could get, and some other kinds of travel and entertainment films, “refreshment” programming. So we went with the facilities that were available to us, and this was places where the workers were and where the workers were aware—the foreign-born in America, where they gave us a truly heart-warming welcome.

ROSOW: How did you publicize those showings? Did the national groups do that for you?

BRANDON: They, through their own nationality publications, and we with leaflets, window cards, announcements at mass meetings, etc.

ROSOW: The daily newspapers were closed?

BRANDON: Well, the *Times* would always give a little stick of news as an oddity and the liberal weeklies reviewed. I've just been going back in 1936 *Nations*, to Mark Van Doren's review of *Millions of Us*. So it was through the little liberal papers, the left journals, the left trade unions, but mainly through the nationality papers by the nationality groups themselves. That meant that the miners were able to see the films. big sections of farm areas had Scandinavian co-ops, the Finns and Swedes particularly, upstate New York, at Spencer, New York the co-op showed everything we ever made. We tried to get them into theaters, and we never gave up, but we didn't succeed until Frontier went into sound films and then we had a great deal of enjoyment and it was part of the great excitement and the elan of the later part of the thirties, but the silent 35mm limited the theaters open to us. Later some 16mm prints were made and exchanged with the other groups. But spectator groups interested in film-making per se and in studying the medium, using these kind of films for entertainment, had not yet developed, so that while the subject matter still had validity the emphasis and priorities went on to next phases. The people had achieved unemployment insurance and a federal program of jobs—while historically it was interesting to show the unemployed and the films about the unemployed

and the fight for unemployment insurance, it wasn't the kind of thing that could be programmed by the groups then in action, when they were struggling to build the CIO. So the 16mm distribution aspect of the early newsreels and documentaries never went very far, but with the coming of the sound films, *Millions of Us*, *China Strikes Back*, *Native Land*, it was a different thing. With 35mm sound we went wherever we had manpower *to the community*, to those of the community who were more aware and very interested and we developed it so that the theaters demanded it from their booking service. The theater managers didn't know what it was. We can't say that we educated the theater world (they are not subject to education so easily—that is, most exhibitors). We showed *China Strikes Back* in 204 theaters out of 700 something in the New York area. We made it into a regular part of the theater fare. Not much crush resulted—204 times \$3.00! Independent short subjects are not viable in theaters, had no serious income potential then or now, and serve only to provide some sticks of reviews or notices that are useful to film-makers in launching their careers and in other areas of distribution, 16 or something else, or to show future prospects that their film made the grade. But with the exception of something extraordinarily sensational or accidentally of some topical interest, short subject distribution in theaters is an area of frustration, a false lead, and the undoing of independent film-makers because they tend to shape the picture for the conventions of the theater and they lose the point of being an independent. So even if it is not sponsored, to shape it for the theater is to undo the independent quality, and in my definition of independent film it's not really independent if it's dependent on the theater conventions and mentality, just like shaping it with an eye for getting it on television. In the production prospectuses going around—"We're going to show it in the art theaters, we're going to show it on television, we'll show it to the schools, we'll show it to the community," etc.—well, by the time you've finished shaping a multi-purpose film, you have as a result a film with no purpose.

We were learning the limits of distribution and in *China Strikes Back* we had a very good time; it was a jumping period and the people of Frontier enjoyed this; it was all over the neighborhoods. Although it was not the biggest national issue it was hooked up with something that was developing and that was the boycott on the sale of scrap metal to Japan. That's the nearest to a contemporary issue, and it led some of us to go to a big conference of organizations interested in developing public education on the question of Japan and China, and developing for them a motion picture format campaign book for carrying out a campaign on not selling the New York El to Tokyo and other scrap metal and the boycott of the scrap-metal ships here in San Francisco and in Seattle. It was part of the thinking of film in relation to society. But in *China Strikes Back* the money income was nothing because short subjects were and are sold as part of an annual package of films by the major companies: one salesman, one visit, 30 features and 30 shorts; so even if they got \$3 a week for the shorts, even though that money was little per theater, at that time there were 8,000 theaters so at \$3 that made \$24–\$25,000 domestic gross on shorts which may have cost them \$10,000 dollars. So that was not bad for Hollywood. But \$3 a week or \$2.50 a week in 204 theaters for *China Strikes Back* didn't amount to very much; it wasn't significant but it was a try and we learned from it. *Heart of Spain* got into a few theaters, maybe 30–40 first-run theaters in the country, but the main distribution was non-theatrical. That's where a great deal of experience was developed in mass distribution.

SWEET: How many films actually survived of those that were finished?

BRANDON: From the early silent period five films survive, as of today, but we have leads to many others. Production totalled roughly sixteen issues of Worker's Newsreel, three feature-length documentaries, one 40-minute documentary and 18–20 short films, plus never-counted sets of regional newsreels, and parts of newsreels and footage in Boston, Baltimore-Washington, Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco,



NATIVE LAND. (See also review p. 60.)

Los Angeles, Seattle; there never was a complete inventory of those from the local Film/Photo Leagues or individual correspondents.

ROSOW: Every time people see these films they walk out with an awakened look in their eyes. Part of the important need is not only coverage in magazines, the real film education is in getting these films shown. Do you have plans for distributing them?

BRANDON: For the silent period, and certain of the silent films, we're trying to get clearance from the estates and families and enough of the participants to be able to do it, to develop a program. The program, I am sure, will be non-profit and based not on general circulation but on some format to enable regional use for study both for the content in context with studies in labor history, politics, American history and American problems and also for film students and scholars. But we're not now thinking of

re-cutting them as shorts or re-cutting them into a feature-length compilation film. Features are going to be made on the subject of the thirties, but this material I think should retain its own tone, with credits, with tracks, or tape provided for background and explanation. A couple of the later films are in circulation now: *People of the Cumberland*, through Macmillan-Audio-Brandon; *Pie in the Sky*, Museum of Modern Art; the others, there are different studies about how to clear them and how to make them available on behalf of the different people involved. *Native Land* plans will soon be announced on behalf of Frontier Films. I will do everything I can to search for the others and make them available eventually with full documentation. Any fees that I might get for my lecture-showings will go to a non-profit fund for finding more, preservation, making negatives and printing utilization materials.

BRIAN HENDERSON

## Critique of Cine-Structuralism (PART 1)

Several recent texts put the question of structuralist study of cinema back on the agenda: Charles W. Eckert's *Film Comment* article, "The English Cine-Structuralists"; the new edition of Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, which reconsiders aspects of the 1969 original; and the *Screen* translation of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* collective text on *Young Mr. Lincoln*.<sup>1</sup> The latter is explicitly a critique of structuralism and itself a post-structuralist work. It appears in English with an afterword by Peter Wollen, which provides the occasion for a specific confrontation. These critical texts are more readily comparable in that they all deal, directly or indirectly, with a common object, the films of John Ford. According to *Tel Quel*, "the exact value of a text lies in its integration and destruction of other texts."<sup>2</sup> The texts we are concerned with have value by this test. Wollen's book destroyed and/or integrated in whole or part many previous film-critical texts. Eckert partially destroys the auteur-structuralist texts, even as he seeks to valorize them. The *Young Mr. Lincoln* text lays waste four entire areas of film study. The present text seeks to integrate and destroy these texts in turn; more precisely, it inaugurates this task. This is its only praise, for most film-critical texts are not worth destroying and are certainly not to be integrated.

Eckert's article concerns those English critics who refurbished the *politique des auteurs* with the critical apparatus of structuralism in the late sixties: Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Peter Wollen, Jim Kitses, Alan Lovell, and Ben Brewster. He distinguishes three forms of structural criticism of special interest to film critics: (1) the study of linguistic structures in narrative (Todorov and Barthes); (2) the semiological study of the language of cinema (Metz, Pasolini, Eco), which attempts to determine how cinema signifies and whether it can be analyzed like a lan-

guage; and (3) Levi-Strauss's study of the underlying structures of thought and of the codes employed in the dialectical systems which operate in mythic thought. The last form of structural study most closely approximates that used by the auteur-structuralists and is the one Eckert concentrates on. (He finds the other two studies "unpromising" and "limited in scope and in the applicability of the insights they achieve."<sup>3</sup>) Eckert proposes to assess the work of these critics by comparing their methods with those formulated by Levi-Strauss and then to define the achievements and the promise of auteur-structuralism and of structuralism in general.

The first influential work in English cine-structuralism was Nowell-Smith's *Luchino Visconti* (1967).<sup>4</sup> The purpose of criticism, according to it, is to uncover behind the superficial contrasts of subject and treatment in a director's work a structural hard core of basic and often recondite motifs. The drawbacks to this approach, noted by Nowell-Smith, were the possibility of variable structures due to changes in an author's work over time and the temptation to neglect the myriad aspects of a film's production and aesthetic effect that a study of motifs does not impinge upon. Indeed in his own study, Nowell-Smith does not find a simple and comprehensive Visconti structure because the latter developed over the years and adopted many styles of film-making. His book also studies many aspects of production, history, and stylistic influence that have no bearing upon structure. Nevertheless, Eckert's dominant impression of the book is that structural themes are indeed at the core of Visconti's enterprise and of Nowell-Smith's critical interest.

Wollen's *Signs and Meaning* quotes Nowell-Smith's theory of criticism then takes up the films of Howard Hawks as a test case for the structural approach. He dichotomizes Hawks's

films into two categories, the adventure drama and the crazy comedy. These types express inverse views of the world, the positive and negative poles of the Hawksian vision. Wollen cautions that an awareness of differences and oppositions must be cultivated along with the awareness of resemblances and repetitions usually found in thematic or motif-seeking criticism. He then cites the main sets of antinomies in Hawks's work and notes how they break down into lesser sets, any of which may overlap or be foregrounded in different movies. But Wollen's "most intensive criticism" is saved for John Ford, in whose work he finds the master antinomy of wilderness and garden (terms derived from Henry Nash Smith). His analysis of Ford reaches its principal conclusion in this statement: "Ford's work is much richer than that of Hawks and . . . this is revealed by a structural analysis; it is the richness of the shifting relations between antinomies in Ford's work that makes him a great artist, beyond being simply an undoubted auteur." For Eckert, this statement captures the essence of Wollen's species of structuralism, just as the search for a hard core of basic and recondite motifs defines Nowell-Smith's.

Both definitions were harmonious with the intentions of Jim Kites's *Horizons West*.<sup>5</sup> To him, the auteur theory meant the idea of personal authorship in cinema and the concomitant critical responsibility to systematically examine all of a director's work, in order to trace characteristic themes, structures, and formal qualities. Kites also takes from Henry Nash Smith the insight that the image of the West has a dialectical form. Central to the form of the Western is a philosophical dialectic, an ambiguous cluster of meanings and attitudes that provide the traditional thematic structure of the genre. Kites lists the principal antinomies involved and notes that polar terms may be transposed in the course of an auteur's development. (These three books led to articles by other English critics, some favorable to structuralism [Alan Lovell and Ben Brewster], some unfavorable [Robin Wood].)

Following his review of these texts, Eckert does not proceed immediately to the promised

evaluation of the auteur-structuralists. Instead he returns to Levi-Strauss, nominally to derive the principles with which to conduct this assessment. "I will take up the most provocative of Levi-Strauss's insights in the general order of their importance and breadth of application." The oddity of this long section is that Eckert uses only two of the many points it develops in his subsequent return to the auteur-structuralists. These are: that every myth is only a limited application of the pattern that emerges as the analysis of a body of myths proceeds, hence many myths must be analyzed before a valid structure can be discerned; and that figures in myths have meanings only in relation to other figures in that myth, they cannot be assigned set meanings.

Nowell-Smith makes a careful analysis of relationships in individual films and is especially attentive to the shifting nature of these relationships and to dialectical progressions, but his initial premise is that Visconti developed too much as an artist to make a comparative study of his films possible. Hence he considers each film singly, attempting to bring out its relationship, hidden or overt, to the rest of Visconti's work. The absence of a thoroughly comparative method not only qualifies Nowell-Smith's structuralism, it raises the issue whether or not the body of films produced by a director can qualify as a set of myths. Kites does analyze a director's work as a single body of myth, but his individual figures are defined in archetypal and iconic terms; their meanings are traditional rather than dependent upon relationships within each film. Only his emphasis on the dynamic interaction of the figures and their tendency to form antinomic pairs resembles Levi-Strauss's analysis. (Lovell's method is very close to Kites's, employing a mixture of archetypal and structural insights.) Peter Wollen shows the closest familiarity with Levi-Strauss's writings. His analysis of Hawks and Ford, though only intended to be exploratory and suggestive, (1) is less attuned to archetypes and is thoroughly directed at bundles of relations, and (2) is founded on the premise that it is only the analysis of the whole corpus which permits the

moment of synthesis when the critic returns to the individual film.

Eckert enlarges upon the two principles before concluding. Levi-Strauss's "The Structural Study of Myth" settled that meaning in mythology cannot be found in the isolated elements which enter into the composition of the myth, but only in the way those elements are combined. So much (Eckert adds) for father figures, traditional icons, and wilderness and garden. Accepting such set meanings may blind us to important shifts of relationship and commit us to the surface meaning of the myth. Traditional meanings may well emerge from the process of analysis, but the point is that they will be discovered rather than established a priori. The question of the degree of unity in an auteur's work is less easily resolved. The main premise implicit in the auteur theory is that a director's body of work possesses unity. The alternative notion, that an artist evolves through stages of thought and technique, is a nineteenth-century conception, attuned to purposive evolution. The modern study of myth has attacked evolutionary schemes in favor of synchronic studies of motifs, types, and forms. We must use judgment in deciding to what degree a director conforms to unity and invites a mythic analysis; and we must anticipate that an apparent evolution in style and theme may only mask what is recurrent in a body of work. Eckert concludes overall that the structural method will probably be productive in proportion to the discretion and intelligence with which it is applied. Its promise, however, is undeniable. "There remains much to be done beyond what current auteur-structuralism has suggested."

Why does Eckert return to basic Levi-Strauss between his review and his evaluation of auteur-structuralism, when so much of what he develops seems non-operative in relation to that project? Why, in defending auteur-structuralism, does Eckert begin again from zero by asking whether "film can be equated with myths" and questioning "the suitability of a structural study of a director's body of work—or of films in general"? Either the auteur-structuralists have

covered this ground before or they haven't. If they have, then Eckert's reconsideration is either repetitious or it is a critique of their foundational work, apparently a covert critique as this section makes no reference to their texts. If they have not covered this ground, then Eckert's defense of the auteur-structuralists uncovers an absence vastly more important than the virtues he finds in their work—their failure to found their criticism theoretically, the absence of an auteur-structuralist epistemology. In activating these texts, Eckert has activated the scandal of their lack of foundation. Attempting to integrate them, they have come apart in his hands. The middle section of his article is then a kind of glue or bricolage which attempts to put them back together.

Eckert's text provides a cue, in the form of a speech against itself, which turns us back to the original texts. Neither Kitses nor Nowell-Smith discusses Levi-Strauss. Wollen does, to be sure, but in ways which avoid rather than confront the problem of founding the method he proposes. This avoidance is inscribed in the rhetoric of Wollen's second chapter, "The Auteur Theory." The latter begins with the historical origins of the auteur theory, then quotes Nowell-Smith and applies the structural method to Hawks. It is only then that it discusses foundations—in two paragraphs squeezed between Hawks and Ford, a foundational discourse in the form of a transition between main headings and delivered on the run.

Something further needs to be said about the theoretical basis of the kind of schematic exposition of Hawks's work which I have outlined. The "structural approach" which underlies it, the definition of a core of repeated motifs, has evident affinities with methods which have been developed for the study of folklore and mythology.

There is a danger, as Levi-Strauss has pointed out, that by simply noting and mapping resemblances, all the texts which are studied (whether Russian fairy-tales or American movies) will be reduced to one, abstract and impoverished.

This means of course that the test of a

structural analysis lies not in the orthodox canon of a director's work, where resemblances are clustered, but in films which at first sight may seem eccentricities.

The protagonists of fairy-tales or myths, as Levi-Strauss has pointed out, can be dissolved into bundles of differential elements, pairs of opposites . . . We can proceed with the same kind of operation in the study of films, though, as we shall see, we shall find them more complex than fairy-tales. It is instructive, for example, to consider three films of John Ford and compare their heroes . . .<sup>6</sup>

In the four passages quoted, Wollen's text proceeds from a notation of similarities to a tenuous equation to an achieved integration to a wholesale importation which moreover cautions itself to proceed carefully. Needless to say, each of these stages is unearned, including the first, a notation of affinities at the phenomenal level which asserts its own evidence. The apparent progress of the passage is a feat of rhetoric. The fundamental questions—whether films are like myths, whether modes of myth study are applicable to film study, and whether the auteur theory is compatible with Levi-Straussian structuralism—are avoided by Wollen, elided by a skillful rhetoric which seems to answer them.

There are some theoretical passages following the discussion of Ford but they do not return to the problem of foundations. Here Wollen discusses the "noise" of camera style and acting, arguing that films, like myths, exist independently of style. Hence, despite noise, "the film can usually be discerned," "film" here meaning auteur-structure. Pivoting on the sentence: "It is as though a film is a musical composition rather than a musical performance . . .", Wollen then launches into a dazzling essay on the distinction between composition and performance in music, painting, and theater as they developed over several centuries. Following this he concludes that the director is not simply in command of a performance of a pre-existing text, but himself a composer also. The incidents and episodes of the original screenplay or novel are

the agents which are introduced into the mind

(conscious or unconscious) of the auteur and react there with the motifs and themes characteristic of his work. The director does not subordinate himself to another author; his source is only a pretext, which provides catalysts, scenes which fuse with his own preoccupations to produce a radically new work. Thus the manifest process of performance, the treatment of a subject, conceals the latent production of a quite new text, the production of the director as an auteur.<sup>7</sup>

The chapter concludes with a reminder that the task begun by the original auteur critics is still far from completed.

Founding auteur-structuralism would mean beginning with structuralism and its foundations and moving from it to film study, specifically to the study of auteurs, deriving the principles of the latter study from structuralism. As has been seen, Wollen does not do this. Instead he begins with auteurism, establishes it as an ongoing activity, then turns to structuralism as another ongoing activity, and then discovers affinities and similarities between the two.

Let us look more closely at these "affinities" and at the text's "discovery" of them. We note first that at least four different senses of "the auteur theory" may be distinguished in Wollen: the French original, Nowell-Smith's transformation, Wollen's transformation (1969), Wollen's transformation (1972). Yet Wollen refuses to differentiate these senses, speaking at all times of "the auteur theory," as though it were one thing now and had always been one thing. Besides blurring the first two senses, Wollen himself redefines the auteur theory, even as he affirms its singularity of meaning. Most readers may be aware that Wollen is transforming the auteur theory, not merely expositing it; but they may not be aware of how this device affects his argument, precisely because the rhetoric which this collapse of multiple meanings permits is so persuasive. So we ask—why does Wollen's text deny that it is altering the auteur theory as originally developed? Why does it pass off its transformation as a "discovery" of what already exists? That is, *why does it deny its own work?* The collapse of multiple meanings takes place



in several stages. First, by presenting Nowell-Smith's definition of the auteur theory as a "summary" of it "as it is normally presented today,"<sup>8</sup> Wollen denies the latter's transformation of the auteur theory even as he imports it into his own discourse. Not long after this Wollen discovers affinities between the auteur theory and structuralism. Since it is obvious that Nowell-Smith's 1967 book was already influenced by Levi-Strauss and his followers, this "discovery" is less than fortuitous. Wollen has already imported a basic structuralism on the "auteur theory" side of his exposition. As the essay proceeds, he brings this structuralism more specifically into line with the Levi-Strauss original, though still under cover of expositing a singular and constant auteur theory. What Wollen's assertion of constancy entails, at this point, is not only that auteurism and structuralism are literally the same thing, but that *they have always been the same*. It is only this impossible contention which relieves Wollen from having to provide foundations for auteur-structuralism. If he admitted that he was transforming the auteur theory, specifically that he was seeking to merge the auteur theory with structuralism, then he would have had to found or justify his action theoretically.

Wollen says at one point:

There are other kinds of code which could be proposed [besides that of auteur-structure], and whether they are of any value or not will have to be settled by reference to the text, to the films in question.<sup>9</sup>

Several other passages put the emphasis on results. There is a way of reading Chapter Two which says: all questions of logic and foundation aside, auteur-structuralism is justified because it works—that is, because it produces (excellent, true) results when applied to films. This reading of Wollen's text is supported by its rhetorical organization. Auteurism is established by the Hawks discussion before Levi-Strauss and structuralism are introduced; then, after two paragraphs, it turns to an even longer discussion of Ford. (Auteur-structuralism is happier in the field than in the theoretical laboratory.) The organization of the chapter makes these critical

discussions carry the principal weight of its argument. To a considerable degree, they *are* its argument. Leaving aside the merits of Wollen's results, let us look at this argument itself. What can be said against the argument of good results? Marxist theory, philosophy, and semiology have operated singly and conjointly to dismantle the ideological, conceptual, and linguistic foundations of empiricism. Any system of interpretation *generates* its own results. Every system of interpretation will produce "results" which are in full accordance with its methods. Hence justification by results is circular. As Roland Barthes says in an early text,

One seeks, and naturally one finds . . . We must not complain about this—the demonstration of a coherence is always a fine critical spectacle—but is it not evident that, though the episodic content of the proof may be objective, the postulate that justifies looking for it is utterly systematic?<sup>10</sup>

Even more importantly, any system which simply produces results as a kind of spectacle, that is, without dismantling and questioning its own foundations, assumptions, problematic, and operations (the means by which it produces results), is necessarily and entirely ideological.

The explanation of Eckert's middle section, too long and wandering for the project proposed in the first section and concluded in the third section, is that it attempts to provide for auteur-structuralism those foundations which the latter does not provide for itself. In doing so, it answers a question which it does not ask, which it cannot ask without calling attention to the scandal of its absence in the work of the auteur-structuralists, thereby undermining their work and possibly itself also. What of Eckert's foundational attempt? In fact it is no more than a sketch, far from the systematic and thorough study that would have been needed to carry its project. Still, it is interesting in several respects. It is genuinely foundational in that it grounds itself in Levi-Strauss and attempts to move forward toward auteurism. It proceeds in this task only by constructing a highly fragile latticework of premises, inferences, evidences, and connections, many of which are questionable yet each

one of which is necessary to make the link which Eckert seeks.

Whether these codes [of physical objects and of qualities in films] are part of a careful, logical system can only be established through research. My own preliminary attempts at analysis suggest that they are—<sup>11</sup>

The most interesting aspect of the section is that it moves in a direction nearly opposite to that of auteur-structuralism, toward a criticism of the *many* codes of cinema (most of which Wollen dismisses as “noise,” “inaccessible to criticism”<sup>12</sup>) rather than the single code of auteur-structure, and toward an understanding of cinema as myth very different from that of auteur-structuralism:

The dioscuric union of film-makers and their audience produces a strange Janus of art—myths made by mythmakers that are only certified as true or untrue after they have been created. Perhaps the best index to authentically mythic films, then, is the yearly box-office ratings.<sup>13</sup>

This is very nearly the antithesis of auteur-structuralism. Having reached this point, how does Eckert rearrive at auteur-structuralism, as promised in the first section? He does so only by an authorial *coup de force*—through an abrupt discontinuation of the foundational discourse, which amounts to its abandonment if not its repeal, and an arbitrary jump back to the original discourse. All of which constitutes an extreme and uncharacteristic scriptural violence and the second major way in which Eckert’s text criticizes itself, effectively demonstrating the impossibility of arriving at auteurism through a Levi-Straussian discourse. Immediately following the “box-office” statement Eckert says, “Two more of Levi-Strauss’s stipulations deserve brief consideration,” whereupon he adduces the two principles discussed above, which have no connection with his foundational discourse nor with the point at which he arrived in considering the box-office, but which provide the occasion for a none-too-smooth return to the auteur-structuralists.

“The issue of how figures are to be interpreted takes us to the heart of the whole enterprise I

have characterized as auteur - structuralism.”<sup>14\*</sup>

We have let the auteur-structuralist texts speak for themselves and in speaking, through their gaps, omissions, rhetorical strategies, and contradictions, destroy themselves. We have seen not only that the auteur-structuralist texts have no theoretical foundations, but also that what is present in these texts, their specific traces, can only be understood in relation to this absence. That is, these texts as they exist constitute themselves as an ersatz built over and in relation to this absence, which nevertheless warps them from the inside. We have not asserted positively that auteurism and structuralism are incompatible, that they *can not* be combined. Nor do we intend to do so, for that would involve first constructing such a foundation as we have demanded and then destroying it, a useless operation. Nor do we suppose that we would do a better job at this than the auteur-structuralists. On the contrary. In relation to the practical problem of directing film critical energies, however, we will consider briefly the problems faced by anyone attempting to do this. This will also help explain the failure of the auteur-structuralists, for they are clearly not unintelligent. The

\*Eckert’s text criticizes itself only covertly and unconsciously. At this point we are reminded of Nowell-Smith’s book, which (as Eckert himself presents it) contains an explicit critique of structuralism even as it seeks to apply the method. Nowell-Smith’s text is demoted by Eckert for its failed structuralism; but when we move outside of the Wollen and Eckert problematic (based on commitment to auteur-structuralism and, in Eckert’s case, on the question of which auteur-structuralism most closely resembles Levi-Strauss’s method) and raise our own questions, we are not bound by Eckert’s evaluation (which is consistent with his premises). Then we are free to reconsider Nowell-Smith’s text and perhaps find it the most interesting of the three, in part for its explicit critique of structuralism, both theoretical and practical. To another problematic it is considerably less disappointing that Nowell-Smith found himself unable to exclude “many aspects of production, history, and stylistic influence that have no bearing upon structure”<sup>15</sup> in considering Visconti’s films.

difficulty lies in the contradictory project of auteur-structuralism itself, which exists in its purest form in Wollen: the attempt to merge auteurism with structuralism *without altering either in the process*. But, as Eckert's middle section indirectly reminds us, for Levi-Strauss myths have no origins, no centers, no subjects, and no authors. Bodies of films organized by auteur signature are obviously defined by their origin, which is a subject and an author as well as a definitive center. Wollen attempts to deny this or at least he considers it important when he says, in the 1972 edition of *Signs and Meaning*, that the auteur is not a conscious creator but an unconscious catalyst and even (revising his theory of "noise") that the auteur-structure is only one code among many which are discernible.

What the auteur theory argues is that any film, certainly a Hollywood film, is a network of different statements, crossing and contradicting each other, elaborated into a final "coherent" version. Like a dream, the film the spectator sees is, so to speak, the "film facade," the end-product of "secondary revision," which hides and masks the process which remains latent in the film "unconscious." Sometimes this "facade" is so worked over, so smoothed out, or else so clotted with disparate elements, that it is impossible to see beyond it, or rather to see anything in it except the characters, the dialogue, the plot, and so on. But in other cases, by a process of comparison with other films, it is possible to decipher, not a coherent message or worldview, but a structure which underlies the film and shapes it, gives it a certain pattern of energy cathexis. It is this structure which auteur analysis disengages from the film.<sup>15</sup>

The structure is associated with a single director, an individual, not because he has played the role of artist, expressing himself or his vision in the film, but because it is through the force of his preoccupations that an unconscious, unintended meaning can be decoded in the film, usually to the surprise of the individual involved. The film is not a communication, but an artifact which is un-

consciously structured in a certain way. Auteur analysis does not consist of re-tracing a film to its origins, to its creative source. It consists of tracing a structure (not a message) within the work, which can then post factum be assigned to an individual, the director, on empirical grounds.<sup>16</sup>

Wollen twists and turns and makes vocabularic concessions to recent theoretical work, but he does not escape the criticisms he is aware of because he retains the subject as producer of unique or distinctive meaning. In the passage above, Wollen confuses a methodological point with a foundational one. Since auteur-structuralism works empirically (from the works to the director, rather than a priori, from the director to the works) and since it is not interested in the person of the director (his condition as actual subject—biography, psychoanalysis, personal ideology) but only with the structures which are labelled with his name, Wollen supposes that he has solved the foundational problems of auteur-structuralism outlined above. But he has not. To do so, he would have to explain how it can be that individual subjects produce unique or distinctive meanings (structures), which moreover have the integrity and constancy of mythic meanings and can be studied in the same way. In short, he would have to provide that theory of the subject which Levi-Strauss deliberately and systematically omits, because his work is founded upon the interchangeability of subjects in the production of meaning. The contention that (some) individual directors can and do stamp their films with a distinctive or unique meaning (structure) cannot be grounded in Levi-Strauss. Nor is the problem overcome if it is stipulated that the auteur-structure is only one meaning among many, for the problem of accounting for the production of this meaning remains.

Wollen is, in any case, ambiguous about his opening out to other codes and the implications of this opening for his method. The greatest source of ambiguity is that the 1972 edition of *Signs and Meaning* reprints chapters 1-3 *without change* but adds a new conclusion which seems to reconsider several issues, yet explicitly re-

tracts nothing bearing on auteur-structuralism, neither critical discussions nor theoretical formulations. Wollen continues to speak of "the auteur theory," even though he makes a few changes of emphasis. Now the director's structuring activity is unconscious whereas before it was "conscious or unconscious." Before it was the script or novel which acted as catalyst to the director, now it is the director who acts as catalyst to his materials. As noted, however, Wollen retains auteur-structure, nominally as one code among many, but really in a privileged position as he continues to identify structure with auteur-meaning and therefore meaning with auteur-structure. Above all, there is nothing in the 1972 edition which recants or revises the fundamentals of auteur-structuralism or overcomes the latter's foundational lack — its disconnection with Levi-Strauss. The latter's name is not mentioned in the new chapter. Wollen wishes to retain his critical achievements and his critical method, though he is willing to change his vocabulary to facilitate this. Hence the long reaffirmation of the auteur theory (pp. 167-173), which is not at all retracted in his remark that chapters 1 and 3 (not 2) are "the most valuable sections" and his remark that "I do not believe that development of auteur analyses of Hollywood films is any longer a first priority." This does not mean abandonment of his previous auteur studies, indeed it freezes them in the eternity of a completed auteurism. As he says in the next sentence, "This does not mean that the real advances of auteur criticism should not be defended and safeguarded."

The questions Can modes of myth study be applied to film study? and Can structuralism be merged with auteurism? are *not identical*. Both Wollen and Eckert assume this identity, though Eckert strains against the assumption and his text cracks on it. Auteur-structuralism treats the two questions as one; specifically, it reduces the first question to the second. It thereby makes the study of films as myths dependent upon the fusion of auteurism and structuralism and effectively rules out other modes of study. In this way it seeks to take over and occupy this field of study entirely. In English-language studies

so far, it has actually done so; the auteur-structuralists have succeeded in identifying their methods and concerns with the very notion of a study of films as myths. Having critiqued auteur-structuralism, we are in a position to reconsider this relationship and to disentangle these questions. When auteur-structuralism is destroyed, it is by no means the case that the study of films as myths is destroyed also. Indeed, it would seem that *only* the destruction of auteur-structuralism *liberates* the other question, that is, allows it to be asked and answered.\* Since prospects for the merger of auteurism and structuralism are not promising, it seems that film criticism would do better to look for other possibilities. Eckert's aberrant middle section suggests a non-auteurist structuralism, one neither dependent upon auteurist epistemology nor organizing its materials by auteur signature. It also suggests, apparently reinstating Metz, Eco, *et al.*, semiological study of cinematic codes of expression.

But before embarking on such studies, we should consider certain important criticisms of structuralism, which also apply to some practices of semiology. These criticisms derive from the wide-ranging theoretical developments inscribed in the texts of Derrida, Kristeva, Lacan, and many others. These criticisms have shaken structuralism to its foundations, or rather, shaken it *at* its foundations (and therefore everywhere) for it is a specifically foundational and epistemological critique. If course the texts concerned are far from complete agreement with each other, even in regard to the defects of structuralism. This polyphony, which includes repetition as well as discord, relieves the present text from the need to speak for or from any other particular text, which would in any case be foolhardy. Its list of criticisms of struc-

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\*The problematic of a text is not only the questions which it asks, but the questions which it does not ask. Specifically it is the relationship between these, for a text raises certain questions only at the price of not asking others. The relationship between questions asked and questions suppressed is always ideological.

turalism will therefore be partial, sketchy, and highly general.\*

The foundational defects of structuralism are interrelated. First of all, it is an empiricism. It takes for its object the text as given. This given, the textual object, is its horizon and absolute. Secondly, structuralism posits the object as other. It is based upon the separation of subject and object, that is, upon empiricist epistemology, which in turn is based upon traditional Western (dualist) metaphysics. This epistemology determines the practice of structuralism as a species of representation, itself locatable as concept and method within the historical ideologies of the West. (Michel Foucault identifies representation as the episteme of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>17</sup>) The structuralist work represents or reproduces the structure of the object; so that the two are related to each other as mirror-images. The structuralist text is a simulacrum of its object. (See Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity."<sup>18</sup>)

The critique of structuralism transforms this model in every respect. On the one hand, the text is no longer seen as an object, given and achieved (essentially a product), but as a process, as itself a production, specifically as a collocation of mechanisms for the production of meaning. Thus it is necessary to speak of the *work* of the text if one is to avoid reifying it à la the consumerist ideology of capitalism. This

collocation of mechanisms for producing meaning is itself not a given but is determined by material conditions which must be examined in analyzing the text. Thus the text cannot be understood by examination of the text alone. Similarly, indeed identically, the discourse which studies the text is productive. It does not represent the structure of the text, it does not study an object over a gap that divides subject from object, knower from known. It mixes with the text studied. The productivity of the text studied and that of the discourse which studies merge and interact to form a new text.

Related to the productivity of the text is the principle of intertextuality. This means, oversimply, that no text is isolated, discrete, unique, and that none is self-originating. Every text is a combination of other texts and discourses, which it "knots" in a certain way and from a certain ideological position. (Thus the notion of anthropology, of a universality of studies addressing culture as a whole, disappears. The latter denies its own signifying practice, which is always ideological.) Thus description of the structure of a text impoverishes and distorts it and, indeed, mistakes the nature of textuality itself.

Empiricism is overthrown not only because the productivity of the text replaces the static object, intertextuality replaces structure, and the conjoined productivity of critical practice replaces the subject-object split and representation, but also because inquiry is no longer limited to the object itself, the given, but addresses what is there in light of what is not there. This includes questioning the problematic of the text: not just the answers the text gives, but the questions it asks, and not just the questions it asks, but the questions which it does not ask. Why are certain discourses included in the text and others left out? Why does the text combine these and accent them in a certain way? By subordinating itself to the object and its problematic, empiricism is necessarily ideological in function. It reproduces the ideology of the object and above all its own ideology, by constituting itself as a discourse which does not ask fundamental and foundational questions, above

\*Of course, "structuralism" refers to a great number of discourses and to a great number of texts combining these discourses in various ways. It is perhaps too early to say that structuralism has been definitively replaced by a subsequent movement, let alone to differentiate the structuralist from the non-structuralist constituents of the new constellation. The critique of structuralism outlined here may even be read as structuralism's critique of itself. The critique is then a purge of the empiricist wing of structuralism and of the empiricist elements which have figured in it more generally. In such a critique-purge, "structuralism"—constituted as a sum of defects, as that which is critiqued—becomes the virtual object of structuralism, the theoretical activity, in the latter's clarification and transformation of itself. Such an object need not have hard edges, still less need it correspond to actual objects. What is important is the theoretical activity which it permits.

all of itself.

The relation of this theoretical work to film study may not be immediately apparent, except for the immense shadow it throws on the entire project of cine-structuralism, by which we mean here not only auteur-structuralism but other kinds as well. There exists in English, however, a film-critical text which seeks to build itself upon this theoretical foundation, the *Cahiers* collective text, "*Young Mr. Lincoln*." As mentioned above, the entirety of "*Young Mr. Lincoln*" may be read as a critique of structuralism and as a realization of the theoretical critique of structuralism in the area of film criticism.

#### NOTES

This text owes much to conversations and collaborations with Daniel Dayan over the past year.

1. *Film Comment*, 9, No. 3 (May/June, 1973), pp. 46-51; *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 1972); *Screen*, 13, No. 3, (Autumn, 1972), pp. 5-47.

2. *Theorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p. 75.

3. This text very nearly reverses Eckert's findings, concluding that (3) is not promising, at least as pursued so far. For reasons not fully developed here, we find (1)—perhaps more along the lines of Oudart than of Metz—and (2) of considerable promise. See Alan Williams's piece in this issue for a study of narrative mechanisms in *La Ronde*. Such study does not reduce the text to "underlying structures." It works on the traces of the film, it does not bypass the inscription in favor of systems which allegedly underlie it. It not only works on the signifiers, whereas auteur-structuralism bypasses the signifiers to get to the signifieds; it studies the *production* of signifiers, specifically those mechanisms which generate narrative. If this is not comprehensive study of inscription, as in the *Cahiers* "*Young Mr. Lincoln*," it is necessary preparation for such study.

4. *Luchino Visconti* (1967; New York, Doubleday and Co., 1968).

5. *Horizons West* (1969; Indiana University Press, 1970).

6. *Signs and Meaning*, pp. 93-94.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

8. Note the crucial repetition of the word "indispensable," before and after the Nowell-Smith quote, on p. 80. Two things equal to the same thing are equal to each other.

9. *Signs and Meaning*, p. 168. Wollen's ambiguous use of the word code confuses his text at several points. Many of these confusions are carried over into Eckert's

text where they generate new ones. One can argue that codes function at the level of meaning analyzed by Levi-Strauss, but these must be differentiated from the other codes referred to by Wollen. Levi-Strauss isolates what Hjelmslev would call the form of content. It is perhaps preferable to refer to structure at this level and to reserve "code" for the levels of expression. Thus structuralism, concerned with form of content, indeed—positing many layers of content—with a deep structure within the form of content, may be distinguished from semiology, which is concerned with moving from the level of expression to the level of content via codes. But, as noted in the text, structuralism is often used globally to refer to all work influenced by Levi-Strauss and structural linguistics.

Wollen consistently confuses codes of expression with form of content, according them an equal status, perhaps in an attempt to make his "structures" seem more legitimate. Asking whether particular codes are of value or not compounds the confusion. It is evident that all codes have value in the production of meaning in film. The question can only embody a preference for certain types of meaning and methods of analysis over others. The answer depends on the principle of pertinence chosen and the results desired by the analyst.

10. *On Racine* (1960; New York, Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 170.

11. "The English Cine-Structuralists," p. 49. Again, a confusion regarding codes. To the extent that a film produces meaning at all, one must assume the operation of codes at the level of expression. Codes are by definition logical in that they are constructed by a logical system of analysis.

12. *Signs and Meaning*, pp. 104-105. "Noise" for Wollen has quite a different meaning than for most semiologists. He seems to consider as noise anything deriving from the level of expression. If camera style and acting were the noise which Wollen suggests, that is, if they resisted codification, then no form of content could emerge from film at all. Hjelmslev would argue that one must posit a total parallel (not identity) between expression and form for the process of signification in cinema to be conceivable at all. Wollen revises his theory of noise in the 1972 edition, but, as argued in the text, with considerable ambiguity regarding the question of codes.

13. "The English Cine-Structuralists," p. 50.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

16. *Signs and Meaning*, pp. 167-168.

17. *The Order of Things* (1966; London, Tavistock, 1970), pp. 46-217.

18. *Collected Essays* (1964; Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 213-220.

ALAN WILLIAMS

# The Circles of Desire:

## Narration and Representation in *La Ronde*

Film analysis as a whole, and particularly work on narrativity in film, is still in an early stage of development, and no sort of relatively fixed methodology can be set up at this point. One promising point of departure, however, is the establishment, for particular films, of divisions into autonomous units of narrative by various principles of pertinence, and the study of the relations set up by these segments. One can be more or less detailed in this sort of analysis; the important consideration is always some sort of consistency in the process of division. Roland Barthes, for example, in studying a 32-page short story by Balzac, "Sarrazine" (in *S/Z*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1970) divides the narrative into 561 "units of reading" and studies the distribu-

tion of various "codes" which he identifies as operating in the text.

In studying feature films the process of segmentation and narrative analysis entails different criteria for different films. Max Ophuls's *La Ronde*, which will be studied here, invites such an approach by its clear separation into its various "stories." Ophuls's film begins entirely outside conventional narrative space and time, in one very long tracking shot following Anton Wolbrook from a misty background, to a stage, past movie equipment, into a set of Vienna in 1900. He dons the evening clothes which he will wear as *meneur du jeu* and announces his role as master of the "carousel of love." The carousel turns and the prostitute (Simone Signoret) appears on it; he helps her off and tells her of her part in the first episode of the film, the title of which he recites at the very end of this first segment (and shot, we might add) of *La Ronde*: "La Femme et le Soldat." This brilliant beginning sets up the principles which will govern the whole work, which is divided by the successive appearances of the various characters, beginning with the prostitute and ending with her reappearance, and by the different manifestations of Wolbrook as "leader."

The principal divisions of the film are marked, it would seem, by the appearance of new characters; Wolbrook generally (but not always) announces these divisions as episode titles. If we add to this principle the distinction between portions of the film in the "time" and settings of the various stories and portions not in these frames (generally signaled by Wolbrook's appearance in evening clothes) we may arrive at the following segmentation:



JANUS FILMS

| EPISODE                                   | PLACE   | CHARACTERS   | TIME                            |
|---|---|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. (Introduction)                         | Studio Sets & Carousel                                  | <i>Meneur du jeu</i> ,<br>Prostitute                 | —                               |
| 2. "The Woman and The Soldier"            | The street, under the bridge; barracks                  | Prostitute,<br>Soldier (Franz)                       | Evening (sunset)                |
| 3a. (The Soldier and The Maid)            | Ballroom, park, ballroom again                          | Franz, Marie   | Evening<br>(about 10 p.m.)      |
| 3b.                                       | Studio sets ("Walk through time")                       | Marie, <i>Meneur du jeu</i>                          | —                               |
| 4a. "The Maid and The Young Man"          | Alfred's home: kitchen, living room, hallway            | Alfred, Emma,<br><i>Meneur du jeu</i>                | Late Afternoon<br>(5 p.m.)      |
| 4b.                                       | Carousel intercut with shots of A.                      | <i>Meneur du jeu</i>                                 | —                               |
| 5a. "The Young Man and The Married Woman" | Alfred's apartment intercut with carousel               | Alfred, Emma,<br><i>Meneur du jeu</i>                | Late Afternoon<br>(5:30-8 p.m.) |
| 5b.                                       | Stylized carousel, simulating dance                     | Same   | —                               |
| 6. "The Married Woman and Her Husband"    | Bedroom   | Emma, Charles  | Night (11 p.m.)                 |
| 7. "The Husband and The Young . . ."      | Restaurant entrance dining room, entrance.              | Charles, Young Woman                                 | Night (ends at 11:30 p.m.)      |
| 8a. "The Young Woman And the Poet"        | Carousel intercut w/ outside K's apartment              | Kuhlenkampf,<br>Young Woman,<br><i>Meneur du jeu</i> | Night<br>(until 11:55)          |
| 8b.                                       | Apartment intercut w/ restaurant                        | Kuhlenkampf, young woman, husband                    |                                 |
| 9. "The Poet and the Actress"             | Dressing room intercut with outside theatre             | Kuhlenkampf and Actress                              | Night<br>(until 11:55)          |
| 10. "The Actress and the Count"           | Entrance hall, bedroom, hall again                      | Actress, Count                                       | Morning                         |
| 11. (The Count and the Prostitute)        | Bedroom, walk through studio sets (reverses segment #1) | Count, Prostitute,<br><i>Meneur du jeu</i>           | Morning                         |



All that we have done in this chart is to select and assemble certain types of information given in the film; it now remains to be seen if we can use this to establish patterns of exposition. One type of information is conspicuously absent from this schema. In dealing with most films we would have to include information for each segment on "elements of narrativity," plot in its basic aspects. This would be superfluous with *La Ronde*, for with minor variations each episode tells the same "story," the awakening of desire and its consummation by the successive pairings of characters. The film's narrative structure does not come from this repeated story as such but from the patterns in which it is told through the various episodes.

One curious feature is immediately evident in the film. Despite their apparent randomness, the episodes pair off in groups of two; this begins with segment two, the first "story" told in the film and continues to its end. The pairing is accomplished in two ways, first by information given about the time of the action and second by the degree of intervention in each episode of Wolbrook as *meneur du jeu*. The pairing principle in time is particularly evident between segments 8 and 9, where identical exchanges of dialogue occur:

"What time is it?"

"A little past eleven."

"I have five to midnight."

"So do I . . ."

The mention of various times is a *leitmotif* of *La Ronde*, and the times mentioned so repeatedly always underline the pairings of episodes and the discontinuity between adjacent pairs. The interventions of the *meneur du jeu* also take different manifestations according to this organization. With the exception of the song and carousel segment (what we have labeled 4b) between segments 4 and 5, the paired episodes are joined with relatively greater continuity than the unpaired ones. Indeed, between the first and last pairs of episodes in the film not even a recited title interrupts the change of characters and story. (The Janus Films version of *La Ronde* titles segment 3, "The Soldier and the

Maid" with no justification from the sound track.)

What this grouping by twos seems to establish is a continuity based on the male characters (who are the common elements in the paired sections) rather than the females. We might add in this regard that the position of the prostitute (Simone Signoret) is unbalanced in the narrative, unlike that of any of the men; her two appearances are separated by almost the entire film. We could not say from this that the women in *La Ronde* cause discontinuity, however: rather it is their function to bridge and eliminate it.

We may also find two interesting sorts of progressions at work in the ordering of the film's episodes. The first concerns the social standing of the characters involved. From this point of view *La Ronde* exhibits a sort of spiral, rather than circular, structure. The social standing of the characters gradually rises until the end, when by an abrupt fall (which recalls the jump into the circus net which terminates *Lola Montès*) the prostitute is reintroduced into the circle. By their common pairing with the prostitute and by their status as *militaires* the soldier and the count are equated and the beginning and end of the film joined.

More interesting as a narrative development, however, is the curious balancing of the entire movie around what we have labeled segment 6, which takes place entirely in the bedroom of the married couple, Charles and Emma. In our segmentation and in the running time of *La Ronde* this sequence is precisely in the center of the film. This is in itself nothing abnormal, yet the structure and content of this segment show interesting divergences from the rest of the film. First we should note the extremely static quality of this part of the film. Ophüls's camera and his actors are normally in constant movement; here both are relatively still. The camera pans or tilts occasionally but never tracks. Furthermore, the segment is edited and composed with startling symmetry. It begins with a symmetrically composed shot from behind the couple's two beds; this shot is followed by one from a

complementary position in front, still perfectly equilibrated. These two camera positions, in reverse order, will also end the segment. Close-ups of Charles are followed by ones from similar angles of Emma. While not all shots balance perfectly (due to emphasis needed for the dialogue), the overwhelming impression given is of an almost perfect symmetry. But is this placement and peculiar construction gratuitous to the narration? In a purely formal sense this segment mirrors the movement of the whole film, which begins and ends with similar but reversed movements in space.

But Charles and Emma are differentiated from the film's other characters in one important detail—being married, their desire is totally licit. The film's one "legal" pairing is placed precisely in its center, whereas the instances of prostitution, most removed from the social order, are at its beginning and end. Also, the segment depicting Charles and Emma lacks the hesitant beginnings common to the others and, more importantly, lacks the essential movement in and out of closed spaces which characterizes the rest of the film.

Common to all the other episodes is a curious movement from one sort of space, which we might term the space of society—streets, hallways, ballrooms, etc.—to more closed spaces of desire—bedrooms, under the bridge, the grotto-like space around the park bench. Generally, episodes end by a more or less abrupt movement back out of the space of desire. Since Charles and Emma are already in a relationship of sanctioned desire, their segment lacks this movement, beginning and ending in the bedroom. The "movement" given to this segment is slight, caused by shifting camera positions and distances and a few small physical actions by the actors. And we should note that it is precisely at the point that Charles brings up the subject of love ("Do you remember Venice?") that the camera position shifts from the balanced compositions of the first two shots to a disequilibrated shot from one side of the beds. For desire in *La Ronde* is movement—movement of the characters towards and away from each other,

movement into and out of closed spaces, movement of the carousel which keeps everything "turning."

But we must leave for a moment such specific considerations to examine the effects of the repetitious structure set up in *La Ronde*. Rather than being one continuous narrative unity, Ophüls's film falls into ten narratives and a sort of meta-narrative, the efforts of the *meneur du jeu* to keep things "turning." Moreover each episode deals with more or less the same series of actions and themes. Narrativity seems to manifest itself, under normal circumstances, by posing a certain number of problems or conflicts and by delaying and elaborating their resolution and return to equilibrium. *La Ronde*, on the other hand, gives no importance to this type of development. A distinction made by the French semiologist T. Todorov may be useful in this regard:

The interest of the reader (and one reads the grail stories with a real interest) does not come, one can see, from the question which normally provokes such interest: WHAT HAPPENS AFTERWARDS? One knows very well, from the beginning, what will happen, who will obtain the grail, who will be punished and why. Interest is caused by a totally different question, which is: WHAT IS THE GRAIL? These are two different types of interest, and also two types of narrative. One unfolds along a horizontal line: one wants to know what each event will provoke, what happens. The other represents a series of variations which are ordered vertically: what one seeks in each event is what it is. The first type is a narrative of contiguity, the second a narrative of substitutions. (*Poétique de la prose*, p. 143)

Interest in *La Ronde* is focused not on the progress of its "stories" or even of its meta-narration, for one knows in advance the outcome of it all. Instead the terms of the narration, its signs, become valued as such. Todorov considers that narrations of contiguity characterize most fiction and that ones of substitution characterize, in a general way, poetry, though the two types may shade into each other. In

this respect it becomes meaningful to term Ophuls's film (and most of his work) "poetic." By freeing the film from normal constraints of storytelling, interest is directed to the central question: what is desire?

The richness, the poetry of Ophuls's work comes largely from the unending process of interpretation which they set in motion. For unlike the fixed nature of normal narrative "action" the emphasis on multivalent signs calls forth an endless chain of associations. We can never place a label on what "happens" in *La Ronde*, for its subject is finally as elusive as the grail. Nevertheless, certain patterns clearly emerge. We have already mentioned the film's insistence on motion, in a very broad sense of the word (for dialogue can often function as a type of motion). But the motions, the actions depicted, and the act of their depiction are of a particular kind. Few things are done only once; the notion of repetition becomes central to the film.

We can distinguish broadly three types of repetition operative in *La Ronde*. The first, and most evident, is the repeating of various details and structures from one episode to another, like the repeated question, "What time is it?" or the various ways in which characters remove their clothes. But there is also repetition within episodes, particularly of lines of dialogue. The poet Kuhlenkampf, particularly, seems incapable of saying anything only once. Another aspect of this type of repetition is the frequent spatial symmetry between beginnings and endings of various segments. Marie and Franz, for example (segment 2) leave and return to the ballroom, and the count is seen entering and leaving the hall outside the actress's bedroom (segment 10). A third type of repetition is present at the thematic level—characters refer to past experiences or experiences of others which are similar to their situations. The prostitute says of the soldier "He'll be like the others," and the young woman sleeps with the married man because he reminds her of a former lover, while Alfred refers to Stendhal's book *De L'Amour*, saying that it depicts the same sort of impotence which he experiences in segment 5. An inventory of all these references would cover several pages;

none of the characters seems to experience anything which has not been experienced before in various ways.

Desire, the "Carousel of Love," is movement, but it is *repeated* movement. It is motion in circles. The film's central metaphor, the carousel, is thus aptly chosen. The carousel turns and the same figures appear again and again; the characters in the various stories desire one another in succession and repeat not only the actions of others but their own actions. And the film itself has, formally, the characteristics of a circle. One important pun in this respect is, alas, lost in translation. The French expression for "to shoot a movie" is *tourner un film*, to *turn* the film. Thus when Wolbrook sings at the beginning, "Tournent, tournent, mes personnages," he refers both to their turning on the carousel (in their own "lives") and to their turning a film, which will itself proceed in large and small circles. At the end Wolbrook will say "La ronde est fermée" which can mean both "The carousel is shut down" or "The circle is closed (completed)."

The notion of repetition is inseparable from the idea of *time*. We have already noted the function of time in the movie's structure and the use of the repeated *leitmotif* "what time is it?" In insisting on the repetitive, entrapping nature of desire, the film must abolish one of the most celebrated characteristics of film as a medium: its existence in a sort of perpetual present. Filmed narrative has by its nature an attached message: This is happening "now," before your eyes. Thus we as spectators approach films waiting to see what will happen next, as if various possible outcomes were equally possible. Even films set in the past often overcome their frames to say "this is happening *now*." The implied position of the spectator is that of a viewer present *in the time of the narration*, and not in his own time. The notion that films can "take us back in time" is, in this respect, accurate. Phenomenologically, the spectator is in the place of the camera, viewing the representation without being immediately aware of his own frame of reference. But this state of affairs is incompatible with the orientation of

*La Ronde*. If everything depicted is repetition, if desire moves the characters in endless circles, then the spectator must not be allowed to fall into the immediacy characteristic of cinema as a medium. All is not happening "now," it has happened "before," or not at all. It is always too late. The *meneur du jeu* makes this clear at the very beginning of the film:

We are in Vienna, 1900. Vienna, 1900: We are in the past. I adore the past; it is so much more restful than the present, and so much more certain than the future.

Even this warning, and the changing of clothes which Wolbrook effects while speaking these lines cannot stop the work of film so easily. We noted before that the two principles which organize *La Ronde* are the successive appearances of the characters and the interventions of Wolbrook as "leader." These interventions, the meta-narration, have an important effect in the context of the film. It is necessary to pull the spectator out of the immediacy of the representation, to say, "This is a film, after all," from time to time. In general, this is done with the appearances of the female characters. (The exception to this, Alfred, is impotent in the sequence where this occurs, suggesting a difference at this point between him and the other men.)

This procedure has a tendency to identify the men with the level of narration and the women with that of the meta-narration. When Wolbrook speaks to the prostitute and to Marie, he is in his evening clothes as *meneur du jeu* and speaks to them from outside the narrations; when he speaks to the other (male) characters, it is in costumes and roles of the various narratives. The idea that Ophuls's filmic universe is somehow "feminine" is thus true for this aspect of *La Ronde*. Similarly, in *Lola Montès* framing devices are identified with women, whereas the men pertain to the level of narration.

We might add in this regard some other features of *La Ronde* which connote, within the prevailing mythology of our society, femininity. The chorus which sings the title song with the *meneur du jeu* is composed of female voices. On the merry-go-round itself there is a statuette

of a woman but none of a man. There is also a mirror, and mirrors occur constantly in the film as means of seeing the characters via the camera (thus phenomenologically the implied spectator is looking in the mirror also). The waltz itself is generally connoted as "feminine" as opposed to the 2/4 version of the same theme heard in the all-male barracks.

The question of narrativity in film is intimately involved with problems of representation. What is the connection established between the representation (the film itself) and the things represented in cinema? This is a problem central to thinking about cinema, and such diverse thinkers as André Bazin and Sergei Eisenstein have made it their central problematic. *La Ronde*, with its various levels of narrativity, offers a curious mixture of types of representation in cinema. The classification system of signs devised by the American Pragmatist C. S. Peirce may be of use to us here. Peirce divides all signs into three types, the iconic, the indexical, and the symbolic. The iconic sign is linked to its referent by a relationship of resemblance, as with a drawing or a diagram or with certain forms of ideographic writing. The indexical sign is linked to its referent by a "existential bond." For example if one sees dark clouds this is taken as a sign that rain is imminent. A human footprint indicates that a person has walked where the sign now is. Symbolic signs, finally, have a totally arbitrary relationship between sign and referent. There is no inherent connection between the word "chair" and the mental image which this sign calls forth. To extend this classification system to cinema we must extend it beyond the level of individual signs to coherent groups of signs, to discourse. Newsreel footage would seem to be largely indexical in its discourse, being taken as existentially related to the circumstances under which it was taken. The early films of Eisenstein, on the other hand, represent the most sustained effort to use cinematic discourse symbolically, in Peirce's sense. Iconic discourse in film would seem to involve the use of resemblances between sign and referent which do not on the other hand suggest the immediate presence before the cam-



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era of that referent, in which case the discourse would then become indexical. Animated cartoons and many German expressionist films fall largely into this sort of textuality.

By these criteria (for another exposition of Peirce's system see Wollen's *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema*), *La Ronde* shows a mixture of all three possible kinds of textuality. Within each episode the film works largely by the immediacy of cinema, the placing of the spectator in the perspective of the camera, to produce a largely indexical discourse, as do most "transparent" filmed narratives. (We should point out that the individual signs involved in this discourse are of varied natures; it is at the level of textuality, of coherent systems of signs, that the classic film narrative is indexical.)

But through the interventions of the meta-narration *La Ronde* produces another sort of meaning which can only be qualified as symbolic in Peirce's sense. In the episode "The Young Man and the Married Woman," for example, shots of Emma and Alfred in bed are followed

by a shot of the *meneur du jeu* at the carousel which is turning but then breaks down. By itself this shot would signify, indexically, nothing more than the presence before the camera of a carousel which will not turn; in the juxtaposition of shots, the symbolic meaning, Alfred's impotence, is produced. The relationship of the discourse to its object, the meaning of the sequence, is arbitrary and set up by the systematization of the film itself.

But perhaps the most subtle and satisfying aspect of the production of meaning in *La Ronde* is the perfect accord between the formal structure of the film, which we have characterized as circular, and its complex of referents—movement, repetition, time. In this respect the film is the icon of its meanings. The structure of the film is the structure of desire; the representation is also the object represented. As Wolbrook says at the beginning of the film, talking not only of himself but of the camera and the whole filmic process, "I am the incarnation of your desire."

## New Technologies for the Demystification of Cinema

For Edison and Dickson, in the earliest developmental stages of the movies, the motion pictures meant a device by which one person at a time, peering into a small hole, could behold the wonders of reconstituted motion: the Kinetoscope. The Lumières and various other eager entrepreneurs saw that, to become big business at that stage of technology, film had to be presented to many people in large halls: so they perfected mechanisms for projection, which ultimately climaxed in theaters that could seat more than 5,000 persons. But since the early thirties the trend has reversed: movie theaters have shrunk to a few hundred seats, and television has established a new paradigm of viewing as a family affair. We are nearing the closing of the circle, when movie viewing will once again be something that one individual does (or at least can do) by himself—though he need no longer peer into the Kinetoscope's recesses, and may soon be able to enjoy his own movie on a wall-sized electronic screen. For the social point of the technology of cassettes and cartridges (and pay-TV) is to enable the viewer to be liberated from the necessity of seeing films only in company with hundreds of other people—which means, of course, seeing only films that those hundreds (or millions) also happen to want to see. The promise of such systems is that, if the cost of buying a copy of a film can approach those of (say) an LP record or a paperback book, the entire market basis will be transformed, and with it the entire idea of "what a film is."

As long as the study of cinema depends upon the substance and systems of motion picture film, we are dependent upon the physicality and idiosyncracies as well as the wonder of what is basically a nineteenth-century technology, virtually unchanged since Lumière lit his first lamp.

Its intrinsic nature, however, imposes mechanical, geographical, temporal, economic, and therefore ultimately political barriers between us and the films we wish to see. The more times we wish to screen the work and the more intensive the level of our analysis, the more difficulties we presently face. Compared to the relative democracy of literature through the paperback, cinema study through film is a limited theocracy.

We are now on the brink of a totally new base of visual technology which has the potential of not only offering viable alternatives to these problems, but of changing, hopefully raising, our collective consciousness of cinema and our personal and public relationships to moving image art. The following is a review of the latest significant systems which are imminent or already open to public access, and the effects and changes we can expect from them. The emphasis here is not on the endorsement of any one patent or another, but as available representations of emerging systems. The point-of-view here will be that of the cineaste, and how these changes can hinder or further that which we now call cinema.

### THE CARTRIDGE RESOLUTION

We have become used to hearing enthusiastic predictions about the great impending Cartridge Revolution,\* which was supposed to make motion pictures widely available on a new basis, yet not seeing anything much happen. Rumors of further technological gambits may thus be greeted with even greater skepticism than before. Despite all the predictions, the development of cartridge and cassette systems has led

\*See "The Cartridge Revolution," *Cinema*, Vol. VI, No. 1.

only to an inconclusive civil war, rather than a revolution: each manufacturer has stuck doggedly to its own individual system, incompatible with the others.

There are several video cartridge systems: Sony U-Matic Color (video cassettes and unit), Avco's Cartrivision (video cartridges) and RCA's Selectavision (pre-recorded tapes) and others still in the hot twilight of research and development. Of these, Cartrivision has extended its commitment most fully to the consumer, with a recorder/player and a pilot selection of rental and sale pre-recorded 1/2" tape cartridges. Admiral and Sears dealers handle units with their own deluxe-model color TV in a large console unit integrated with the Cartrivision component. Together with the Instant Replay black and white camera, it goes as a complete videoelectronic home entertainment center for about \$1,800. Presumably, demonstration models of this system reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the cartridge approach. As the Cartrivision component is not sold separately, you must be willing to take the whole thing, Hispano-Norman Colonial cabinetry and all. I was told that about \$700 of the price covered the color TV, so a separate cartridge player unit could probably be offered for under \$800. The recording



and playback quality of the system using the camera with its 1:3 zoom lens was adequate, resembling that of compact low-cost surveillance cameras. It was certainly acceptable for most home recording situations. I eagerly watched as the demonstration cartridge for rental features was easily clicked into a cavity in the fascia. What followed was: the opening marching sequence from *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, the

landing scene from *Sands of Iwo Jima* wherein John Wayne admits that he, too, is scared, and some harrowing violence from *The Professionals* showing Lee Marvin vs. some Mexican banditos with very short lifespans. As *Cat Ballou* hove into view, I noticed a persistent vertical bounce in the picture. The salesman explained that "these two tension rollers here sometimes get out of adjustment, but can easily be fixed"; he tried, but it didn't seem to help much.

One of the cardinal advantages of these systems is supposed to be the clarity of the direct closed-circuit signal as opposed to the broadcast signal which is vulnerable to interference and scattering. But the tape image seemed actually coarser than and inferior to broadcast programming seen on the same set. And to make a comparison with the highest existing comparable standard, the image was barely one-fourth as good as a broadcast of *Johnny Guitar* I saw on West German TV, with its 1200-line scan (vs. our 525 domestic standard). The German broadcast retained an acceptable level of authenticity of a motion picture, while the Cartrivision did not. Despite the number of times a demo tape may have been run, if "years of trouble-free performance" are to be expected, this shouldn't bring a large drop in quality. Another big disappointment was that the unit cannot freeze-frame. This is a major drawback for the study and enjoyment of both home-generated and pre-recorded material.

Still, if the catalogue of Cartrivision's rental features is any measure of the personal choice we can look forward to having through the emerging systems, the future looks bright indeed. Despite the quota of low-interest chaff, there is excellent material to choose from. And choice is the whole point of any alternate distribution technology. *It Happened One Night* and *The Quiet Man* stand out of a crowd of also-rans; there are iconographic westerns such as *Stagecoach*, *High Noon*, *Rio Grande* and *Johnny Guitar*. It is the dramatic films that read almost too good to be true: *Gilda*, *Force of Evil*, *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, *Mildred Pierce*, and the essential Bogarts: *Casablanca*, *The Big Sleep*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Dark Passage*, *Key*

*Largo and High Sierra*. Also titles like *Little Caesar*, *White Heat*, *Captain Blood*, *Goldiggers of 1935*, *Macbeth*, and many other American classics. Foreign titles do not seem to present a problem: De Broca's *That Man from Rio*, Chukrai's *The Ballad of a Soldier*, Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria*, Truffaut's *Bed and Board*, Rohmer's *Claire's Knee* and Sjöman's *I Am Curious (Yellow)* promise more to come in world cinema.

But the hitch is that these titles are for rental only—and they cost from \$3.50 for a short feature to \$7.50 for a two-cartridge long feature. After one play and one play only, an interior cam locks into place, and you must return the cartridge. This and the inability to reverse or freeze-frame renders the system of very modest usefulness for cinema study. The argument goes that “You would pay six dollars for two of you to go to the theater to see a movie . . . this way you can see it at home.” Sure, but at that I would rather see the picture in its authentic format and scale. Even with the system's quality limitations, it would sometimes be worth \$6.00 for a cartridge you could *keep*. But otherwise we are still waiting for the right system.

None of the Cartrivision features are available for sale, even the one made up of classic Chaplin footage. There are however, prerecorded titles which you *can* buy, at \$16.00 and \$40.00—especially if you are keen on cooking, sewing and sports. One on Marcel Marceau caught my eye, as well as the intriguing work described as “*Color Music-Opus 4: A kaleidoscope of color vibrates in accompaniment to Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G Minor.*” Since you can't sample such fare, I think it is asking a bit much to have to take a forty-dollar chance on something which may not be for your eyes only.

The only way presently to get around the rental-only obstacle would seem to be the use of the Cartrivision feature of broadcast recording. Though blank tape cartridges cost about \$38.00 for 100 minutes of running time, you could tape and keep a movie that was shown on TV. There is also a timing relay device in the console whereby you can set the system to turn on,

record and switch off to capture events you don't want to miss (like maybe a President's resignation speech?).

But of course the value of the videotape cartridge systems' competent recording ability to copy broadcast (or cable) programming is in direct relationship to the worth of the material. As we know, (and find a certain righteous chauvinism in), a very significant amount of broadcast material is *Movies*. But unless you collect TV commercials the way some people collect stamps and coins, taping movies off the air seems an unrewarding prospect. (Can you imagine the proper crackling indignation aroused if an FM station interrupted Beethoven's 9th every few minutes for a word from our sponsor?) Occasionally a full-length feature is shown without cuts or commercials by one of the educational channels, but so far such showings would hardly justify Cartrivision's expense, even if we neglect tape costs.

However, if we really care about visual expression becoming more reciprocal and less passive, then such existing videotape cassette systems offer an interesting completeness. The addition of a simple vidicon camera with microphone enables “home viddies” to be taken in living sync-sound, with the forgiving grace of the tape being recyclable. Compact color cameras are dropping dramatically in cost, though it is still a pretty pricey drama: Akai's new 5¾ lb. CVC-150 lists for \$3,495 (vs. \$250.00 for the Sears 2½ lb. Instant Replay black-and-white camera). Certain disadvantages of this facility at its present stage, however, I find to be rather overpowering. These are *not* portable battery-powered units, and the range of the world viewed is thus limited by the short length of the power-cord umbilicus. Such systems will be useful for documentation of the familial core experience but we do, after all, have interests, experiences, and responsibilities which extend beyond our back yards.

An even more grievous limitation (which applies to all existing video systems) is the lack of editing capability. Not that most home movie-makers seem to be much interested in the magic of re-choreographing time and space anyway,



but even for those that are liberated in that direction, it's going to be a long, long time before a video editing console for the home will descend to the price of an electronic organ or basic Moog synthesizer. Even professional video-tape cannot be simply cut with a scissors like film (doing so upsets the picture); video editing is thus inherently a cumbersome process which involves several expensive playback and re-recording devices. While research is underway that may eventually result in simple and cheap video cutting, present trends are toward quicker but enormously expensive machines. Low-cost video technology in the immediate future will thus push strongly toward single-take, long-scene work. Perhaps I am underestimating the number of native Renoirs, Rohmers and Skolimowskis who can be poets of the long take or meaningful planned sequence shooting with the single-unit home video outfit but at this moment it is Super-8 with its full editing flexibility at low cost which offers the closest approach to Astruc's ideal of the *caméra-stylo*.

Cartrivision thus represented the *première vague* of the new visual technology. But in recent weeks bankruptcy claimed Avco Cartrivision, and hard times certainly face the other competing cartridge systems. There are two major reasons: the lack of international standards, such as were finally developed for film, so that a world market could develop; and cost, which has never been brought low enough to compete with pay television, much less going out to a movie theater.

### VIDEO DISCS

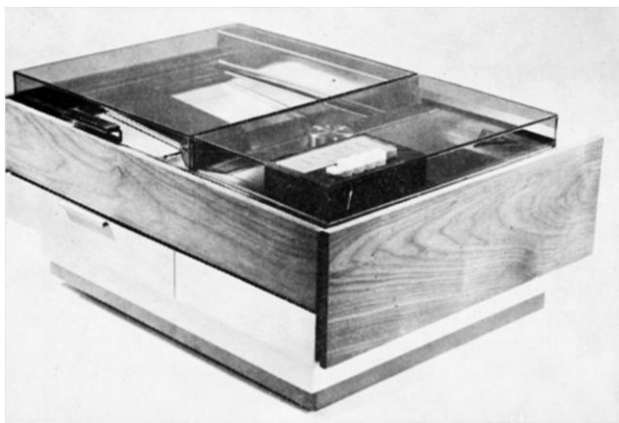
The next, and most ultimately promising stage (it will arrive within a year) is the video *disc*, in which the analogy to the LP record is taken literally. Its form also recalls the Vitaphone soundtrack disc used at the birth of the talkies. Basically a twelve-inch metal-vapor-coated vinyl disc with micro-grooves that carry visual as well as audio information, it has an appealing theoretical simplicity and a low-cost-of-manufacture potential which may prove crucial. Philips, Telefunken, Zenith, Matsushita, RCA and

others are all furiously researching and developing different discs. MCA (which owns Universal Pictures) is thus far the only firm that has come out with information, sufficient to give us here a close look at the great visual wave to come. Their process is called Disco-Vision, and it is very promising indeed.

At present, MCA seems single-mindedly concerned with establishing the potential sales (*not* rental) market for video copies of the vast amount of properties (over 11,000 films) they have title to. As Columbia and RCA did with the early microgroove systems, the Disco-Vision hardware may be marketed at a narrow margin. \$400 is now estimated as the cost of the player units, \$500 for the changers. (They attach to the antenna terminals of any standard TV set, and use its electronics and picture tube.) At that, they would be comparable in price to good hi-fi components and systems, and not beyond the reach of the vast acquisitive middle class, whereas the \$1,800 tag on Cartrivision has stopped almost everybody cold.

The disc system offers features and operational modes which strike immediately at the heart of cinema study needs. Each disc is recorded on one side, with up to forty minutes of playing time: a feature film can thus be contained in a three- to five-disc album. With a changeover time of four seconds, over six hours of unattended playing time can be provided with a full stack of ten discs. Instead of a physical-contact pick-up stylus, Disco-Vision uses an *optical* system; the scanning is done by replaceable helium-neon laser, with a life-expectancy of about 9,000 hours. The disc itself has a transparent optical coating above the focus level, so that dust and scratches do not interfere with the reading of the signal. As if that weren't enough, the discs come in plastic trays, from which the changer automatically extracts the disc, plays it, and returns it to the tray. This means that the disc surface is never touched; and, while it doubtless can't last forever, it is hard to see exactly what could cause it to wear out.

Given this basic structure, the system easily and organically allows for speed-up, slow-down,



*The Disco-Vision multiple-disc player-changer. It weighs less than 50 lbs., is 23" x 18" x 11". Total playing time 6 2/3 hours. A single-disc player will also be available.*

reverse, frame-by-frame replay, and freeze-frames that can be held indefinitely, as there isn't the rapid image-degradation that occurs on video-tape units. Programming for replaying of selected tracks and digital readout are also possible. One of the more intriguing operational features is the access capability of *radial traversing* of the disc. This means that you can leap forward and backward within the continuity of a movie in searching for that pivotal scene, just as you can manually search for an aria on an opera record, but without the danger of scratching the disc. Paradoxical as it seems, the disc system will give us ways of studying cinema that are literally impossible with motion picture film (or videotape).

MCA bravely promises prices of \$1.99 for a single disc to \$9.95 for a five-disc album: the same range as LP records. Even poor people find the means to own television sets and record players and a good number of records. This means that the disc, unlike the cartridge technology will be essentially non-elitist and reasonably accessible to everyone. With features being sold at those prices, we will face a new and basically political reality: the non-restrictive private ownership of the motion picture as aesthetic artifact. The proposed video-disc system, however it is ultimately formed and implemented, and whomever the piece of the action is secured by, appears to offer the first real means for constructive demystification of the cinema. This demystification will inevitably range from the contempt of familiarity to the

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knowledge of love, as we find these many-fold paths opening up to personal choice in the manipulation of the moving image.

### THE MOLECULAR FRAME

Believe it or not, there are many gifted film critics and theorists who have rarely if ever seen a film other than in projection. It does not follow that every film can be ultimately understood only by a frame-by-bloody-frame microscopy; but with total ease at doing so, many people are going to start playing with movies in this fashion even if critics don't. A gradual rise to a new level of concrete popular understanding of cinema seems inevitable, even aside from the broadening effects of repeated complete viewings of a wide range of outstanding works now seldom seen at all. We will be able to savor the symbolic dissolves of *Dark Passage*, and the woodcut-like compositions of *Gate of Hell*. What's more, we can do so with friends, and go over that dissolve as many times as needed to reveal its metaphysical marrow, or keep a frame on for an hour while admiring Kinugasa's artistry.

The MCA disc has over 35,000 "frames" per side, each one of which can be presented as a clear and steady image, (when the prototype demonstration in Chicago is made commercially operable). Thus Gutenberg as well as Méliès will find a place in video disc. At a page a frame, on one disc you could have all the back issues of *Cahiers*; an essential album for the cinéaste would be highlights from MOMA's Film Stills Archive, and the *L'Avant-Scène du Cinéma* slide sets. In publications, we will be putting our movies where our mouths are, and including discs with film books. Indeed the entire book and clips of the films it discusses could be contained in a couple of discs, programmed to go frame-by-frame for the text, and automatically gear into motion for the moving sequences. We could look forward to booklecturefilms like Arlene Croce on the American Musical, Jay Leyda on Soviet Revolutionary Cinema, Christian Metz on Semiology. As the MCA discs are flexible enough to roll into a tube for mailing, film journalism itself might eventually launch into disc

format, as today many good magazines cost around two dollars anyway. And we film freaks won't be the only ones interested in such material; there will be an inevitable raising of the public consciousness of the forms, range and depth of cinema as the people claim films for their own. Film criticism will have an additional level of practical meaning for the disc-purchasing public.

### FILM EDUCATION

At the low cost of discs it will be possible for schools to have large libraries of cinema study material. Students will probably buy their own textdiscs the way they buy textbooks today. But what should not be forgotten is that here, especially, it will continue to be necessary to also project films in their original formats, in the sizes at which they were intended to be seen. For the student to then be able to intensively study a disc of the same title as well as research through the other works of the director, etc., will be an immense advance for cinema studies.

### RENAISSANCE OF THE CLASSIC FILM

In the mastering sequence for Disco-Vision, the original material (film, slides, graphics) is fed directly into the mastering machine or through an intermediary video tape. The release discs (manufacturing cost: less than 40¢ each) are replicated from the nickel-plated stamper much the way the LPs are. Most importantly, the mastering is done on a real-time basis. This should mean that films of the silent era can be transferred at their original frame-rate speed (which varied greatly) without most of the problems of film transfers today. There should be no excuse for not securing, as master material for disc release, the best and most authentic print of a title with its original tints and tones, and musical score. According to an MCA news release describing the excerpts contained in the demonstration disc: "...they span the entire historical spectrum of changing film technology, from the old black-and-white nitrate negatives of the 30's to Technicolor's three-strip nitrate negatives . . . culminating in Kodak's acetate color negative of the 70's."

Classic films have suffered greatly in the 16mm release market, often having no more than the kinetic skeleton of their essence remaining in a faded, jerky *Tötentanz*. To avoid similar degradation in disc releasing, I would like to put forth two strong recommendations: (1) that the first frame on the disc be a color-correction pattern enabling you to adjust the color balance of your TV set (what good would the authentic delicate tints of a hand-stenciled 1895 French magic film be, if it were distorted on your tube?) and (2) that MCA, RCA *et al.* take counsel with an advisory group like The Committee on Film and Television Resources and Services, who are dedicated to the furtherance of film art, to develop priority lists of films that are most urgently needed in disc form, and to ensure that the best standards are maintained as to authenticity, completeness, and technical quality of the master materials. There are enough crummy 16mm prints around; we have no need to see them (further degraded) in video-disc form.

### MODERN FILM: THE GREAT CORNUCOPIA

Most of MCA's films are American from the 30's on, including the works of W. C. Fields and the Marx Brothers, and titles like: *Double Indemnity*, *The Big Clock*, *Frankenstein*, *Psycho* (with, I hope, the shower scene), *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and "Prize-Winning Student Films." At this point perhaps we can take a hard look at which genres of cinema will be particularly well served by the disc process, and which will not. *Film Noir*, for instance, will be dynamite. These films are among the least expensive and most plentiful titles to acquire, so we should in time have the entire genre for access. Their imagery is probably least hurt by the small screen; I look forward to being able to appreciate at leisure the Goya-esque chiaroscuro of *Raw Deal*, for instance. The American musical, on the other hand, might suffer. Busby Berkeley's compositions were really meant for the big screen, in the biggest houses film has known. Still, they will be better appreciated in another sense because of the slow-speed analytical possibilities of Disco-Vision, where we can see the dynamics of movement which I believe

reveal Berkeley to be an outstanding experimental film-maker.

The television screen basically has a 4:5 ratio with fallen corners. When we start getting into films that use the wide screen, we're really in trouble. As with Cartrivision, and broadcast television, MCA unfortunately intends to fill up that vertical dimension at any aesthetic cost . . . so if we want to see Ray, Sirk, Godard and Lean, it will have to be with their wings clipped. *2001* would be impossible, and even Fuller would be cramped. Unless they can be convinced to retain the horizontal dimension and never mind the black tubing above and below, we are going to have to wait for the legendary wall screen to rescue contemporary features. Solid-state circuits, fiber optics, liquid crystals and all, it's going to be a long wait. There are some projection units operating, but not really practical for widespread home use.

The Cartrivision foreign releases are apparently all dubbed. Hopefully there can be alternate sub-titled and dubbed releases of discs. Failing that, perhaps MCA would consider having all their foreign releases sub-titled; with the two audio tracks available on the discs, one could contain the original language, the other carrying the dubbed track so we could switch to our choice. If the MCA sample album of *Airport* is indicative of the liner notes we can expect, I would like to add another suggestion; there is more than enough room to print the complete credits and production information, plus some basic critical comment which would help the purchaser gain perspective on the film's place in history and the point it represents in the careers of the director, writer, actors and actresses and technicians. Nor should they be any more shy in prominently displaying the release date than is a good vintner.

### NEW CINEMA: PRIVATE CINEMA

The entrance cost to the videodisc technology appears to compare favorably with that in the recording industry: under a thousand dollars to have a master cut and enough copies to promote your material. Happily, MCA's posture at present is one of looking forward to extensive li-

ensing of mastering facilities rather than maintaining a tight monopoly. This is encouraging. At \$100 to \$200 an hour for a mastering studio, it compares well with videotape mastering. The break-even point for pressings is thought to be from 50 to 100 release discs, after which copies cost pennies. This means that an independent film-maker, for instance, need go no further than his or her original or internegative, and can end up with far more release copies on disc than is possible on film for the same money. It means that the door is open for virtually any material to go out on disc, one way or another.

Of more far-ranging importance is the way that discs can reach the great segmented market in ways film has not. Independent cinema is in far worse shape than it deserves; some of the most interesting and beautiful moving image art is getting very little distribution. It is difficult to assemble audiences sufficient to support it, and television rarely screens it in this country, even in San Francisco. Given the low cost of discs, it should be assured of reaching its present audience through stores, clubs, and even direct-mail, and to reach new but isolated would-be viewers in considerable numbers. More personal and intimate visual expression will be appreciated, and then needed. Many cine-poems like the work of Brakhage and Belson are probably at their best on the small home screen, not in more theatrical projection circumstances. The abstract film has usually been at a disadvantage in an audience, and may well find its rightful home as an object of personal meditation and wonder.

The disc economics would appear such that if you can sell a couple of thousand copies of an independent work, you can at least break even. I would think that it should parallel the classical record industry where many an arcane and obscure work is carried and supported by the big sellers (usually of popular music), with the result that we can look forward to discs of every imaginable visual expression (surely there must be at least a thousand people in North America who would be interested in the structuralist work of Hollis Frampton for two bucks?). Independent film-makers are among the hardest pressed

artists in the world, lucky if the erratic rentals of their works cover even their film stock costs, so they can be *permitted* to continue making films. The kind of distribution promised by the disc—the film as visual paperback—is the first real hope of such film artists.

### DISC RECORDING?

There is no intrinsic technological obstacle to the development of home recording sets using discs. There are already units used in scientific and instrumentation fields, usually employing a contact system recording on a re-usable metallic disc, but with relatively short playing times. Panasonic and Hitachi have developed "Freeze-Frame" televisions, using a one-time ten-image capacity magnetic recording disc. When there is a strong enough need, reflected in a demonstrated market potential (which seems to be the name of the game) we'll probably see home units with one-time and re-usable discs, the blank discs costing under two dollars a piece (vs. \$20.00 or so for comparable time in a tape cartridge), something like six years from now. If so, the cartridge systems will lose the recording-ability edge they enjoy at this moment. If not, we will probably see a bilateral visual technology like that in the audio field today: discs for playback release, tape for recording and some playback release.

### TOWARDS AN AUDIO-VISUAL HEGEMONY

The MCA disc already has two audio tracks which gives it stereophonic capability, and quadraphonic sound is additionally possible. The recording industry is quite interested in the laser-scan system, because of the durability factor and greater possible quality and range of audio information. We can look forward, therefore, to a unification of TV, hi-fi, and video-disc components in a single system. The audio quality of TV would (or at least *could*) finally be raised to stereophonic high-fidelity, improving the level and range of broadcast material. If the same unit could play back music and video, and also display printed pages, it is hard to see how there would be many homes without the system. Kodak is already marketing a Super-8 film-chain

unit, the Supermatic VP-1, for \$1,195. Like the Disco-Vision player, it displays on a standard TV set. When its price approaches that of a home movie projector, this system will be complete.

There is already talk about the adding of a vision track to future record releases. The first form these visuals take will no doubt resemble concert film footage and what we have seen on the Scopitone Super-8 cartridge juke boxes. If you decide to buy a record of Sonny and Cher's songs, you will jolly well *see* the pair doing their thing, much as on the TV show.

But more exciting and profound possibilities are opened up by this additional audio-visual flood gate. The innovative rock groups will no doubt take the lead (Mick Jagger would know exactly what to do) with dazzling optical trins. The widened opportunity for creative filmmakers for work will find a legion of compatible collaborations, just as many independent films have long used existing music tracks.

The art of abstract vision will be furthered by the work of light-show artists, videographic experimenters, and computer graphics.

A more limited, but no less interesting probability, is the availability of optical-effects generator components to be added to your color TV. With random sequencing, chroma-keving and phasing, etc., it would translate audio signals (such as FM broadcasts) into visual patterns, much as a cybernetic color organ. The more you and I can shape and form our own developing imagery on the screen, the more valuable the new technology will be. At the least, it can remain but mindless electric wallpaper.

### EFFECTS ON BROADCASTING AND EXHIBITION

This is an area in which it is perhaps the most difficult to prophesy, save that neither will be the same again. Obviously if the TV set is being used for disc replay, there is no room for broadcast material. This kind of competition is perhaps the best thing that could happen to a medium of promise which has failed to live up to the possibilities sketched boldly by Ernie Kovacs and the G.E. Theater early in television's infancy. There has been some speculation that



MCA's vision of the future home-entertainment center. (The picture is "simulated," i.e. fake)

TV will veer more towards the line now taken by radio: more news and current events, special interest and interview shows. Music has become radio's major material, and movies have been the music of the visi-waves; perhaps some mystic circle will complete itself, and we will see TV programming in the form of previews and samplings of video-disc software for sale, with a new breed of disc-jockey of the silver tube.

It may very well be that cinemas as we know them will phase out. Whether or not the first-run show can keep enough of a lead on the disc release is problematical. Hopefully the art houses will remain, supported by the loyal, discerning audience that loves good film, and would want to see cinema in its authentic form even if they own the disc. There will always be musicals and similar theatrical forms, and the great wide-screen epic which cannot be duplicated on the home set; but just as the circular economics of film production today dictate that most pictures conform to restrictions which will allow them to reap the revenue of broadcasting, so most future features will be tailored for the disc. The exception is the film as environmental work and spectacle. *2001* could be trimmed to 00, and shoe-horned into the tube (over Kubrick's cooling body); but even with a wall screen, it is doubtful that works like *Woodstock* and *Let the Good Times Roll* can be presented adequately anywhere but in a properly prepared

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theater. In the past few months I have seen some landmarks of cinema's further logical expansion: the Pacific Film Archive's reconstruction of Abel Gance's triptych *Napoleon*, Arthuy's *Polyvision* in Paris, *Laterna Magica* in Prague, and Swoboda's *Noricama* in Nuremberg. These point the way to a completely open-ended redefinition of cinema as collective theatrical experience which will get added impetus by these other developments.

### EROTICA

Cartrivision's catalog lists, under "Adult," titles like *Mona*, *The Nurses*, and *Hollywood Blue*. An inevitable course that discs will furrow will be the erotic and even pornographic work that will help keep us off the streets; it will be the boob-tube in more ways than one. Aside from the wan hope eternal that someone, somewhere, will make the artistically redeeming erotic film, the blue disc should serve as a political litmus test of censorship. When that goes down, you can expect more political interference at other more precious levels.

### POLITICS

Within the limits of politically thematic narrative cinema it is immediately encouraging to see titles like *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion*, *Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove* included in the initial offerings of Cartrivision. But radical visual expression will have as great a potential for dissemination as more establishment-oriented forms through discs—especially if it evolves into a visual rhetoric that more people will want to look at. As long as radical groups and film-makers are not denied access to disc mastering (which is of course not inconceivable), the only barrier would be the minimal costs towards producing release discs . . . and then the problems of distribution. Of course, in Marxist terms, that financial threshold is in itself a political barrier.

### VISUAL SHARING

One of the more quickly overlooked characteristics of the video-disc technology is perhaps one of the most ultimately meaningful. If the

discs indeed are almost impossible to damage or wear out in normal use, their interchange between people and institutions can gradually exert positive influences in structured and unstructured ways, to the benefit of the visual material itself, and our attitude towards it. There should be a great eventual withdrawal of the risk-fear of wear and damage which is a concomitant interface between ourselves and the aesthetic object, when they are films, tapes or records. Many friendships have been strained over indelibly scratched records and chewed-up footage of works borrowed and lent. The discs should impose little of this riding-bicycle-with-glass-sculpture feeling in any degree, but should be an added encouragement to greater visual exchange and the aesthetic dialogue that goes with it. Cinema will become even more a shared art. Institutions, hopefully, will be less uptight about their disc circulation than with the other audio-visual media.

Children. Think upon the ten-year-old named Ingmar Bergman: having been given a toy cinematograph, he wore out the first little film that came with it, saved pocket money to buy what few other titles were available, and even drew

his own cartoons. A deep and lasting fascination and understanding of cinema began there. Too many of us inflict a hands-off policy on our very young to protect our prize LP's, but children should be able to play (yes, *play*) freely with the video-disc unit. They should be able to do so as freely with our album of *Strike*, or *Vertigo*, as with their own favorites of *Big Business* or *Wizard of Oz*; they will probably learn more from that than you and I. The generation that grows up on the crest of this second wave of technology will have a visual consciousness that might well see ours as passive, repressed, and underdeveloped. Their sons and daughters will in turn be part of the inexorably approaching *third* visual wave: three-dimensional holographic imagery viewed at any and every scale. Hopefully, they will still screen the old "flatties" with the love and respect they deserve.

A 17" x 23" chart summarizing the various systems (EVR, Super-8, video-disc, cassette, etc., etc.) is available for \$5.00 from Video-Player Wallchart, Box 1988, Studio City, Calif. 91604.

## Reviews

### STATE OF SIEGE

Director: Costa-Gavras. Script: Franco Solinas. Photography: Pierre-William Glenn. Music: Mikos Theodorakis.

The new film by Costa-Gavras, which attained pre-release notoriety by virtue of having been hastily withdrawn from the American Film Institute festivities at the JFK Center, does in some measure warrant the panicky response of the cultural custodians in Washington. The film not only presents the execution of an American AID official in a sympathetic light, but goes on first to describe a variety of unsavory American activities in Latin America, including the training of local police forces in methods of torture, and second to indict the United States for its imperialist policies of direct (Santo Domingo) and

indirect (Brazil/Uruguay) intervention in the internal affairs of Latin American nations. Moreover, it exposes the hypocrisy which surrounds the exercise of these policies: the cloak of humanitarian philanthropy provided by American or so-called "international" organizations like AID, IMF, the World Bank, and others; the state ceremonies which customarily embalm the "innocent" victims of "terrorist activity" in a jelly of fulsome praise.

Despite the fact that *State of Siege* is based on an actual incident (the execution of Dan A. Mitrione by the Tupamaros), and evidently adheres in every detail to the events surrounding it, the film is sure to be denounced by American critics as "propaganda," defined for this purpose

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as any work of art which contains unpleasant truths.

Unhappily, there is some justification for this response. By adopting a fictive, rather than a documentary approach to his subject, Costa-Gavras invites the suspicion that his film is only fiction. Despite the fact that his fiction literally conforms to the actual course of events (and, judging by the fascinating documentary *Tupamaros*, conforms to many minute details as well), this "actual course of events" is fact only outside the world of fiction. Once it enters the world of fiction, it is no longer fact in any literal sense. This remains true despite the film's prologue which asserts that the film is based on an actual incident (this assertion itself is a convention of realistic fiction), despite the publication of a book containing the supporting documentation behind the fiction, and despite Costa-Gavras's repeated assertions that the facts in the film are true. The realist aesthetic embodied by the film (if the film is based on a real event, the fiction is "real"), seems particularly naive because we have become so accustomed to directors who achieve a higher realism by insisting on the fictiveness of their art. This is as true of documentary directors like Ophuls (note the prominence of the camera in *Sense of Loss*) as it is of Godard.

*State of Siege* presents no compelling reason for a viewer not already sympathetic to its point of view to become so. In order for the fiction to be perceived as true, in the sense that a docu-

mentary is "true," it must either contain documented facts, or else create fictional truth. *State of Siege* attempts the former in at least one episode, the one in which Santore (the fictionalized Mitrione) is rebutted, during the course of his interrogation, by an article from the *New York Times*. Costa-Gavras could have gone much farther in this direction by, for example, having Santore's interrogators show him actual documentary film footage (which exists, say, in the NET production *Who Invited Us*) of the US Army training Latin American police and military officers, or else documentary interviews with the victims of Brazil's DOPS which appears in *Brazil, No Time for Tears* or the Wexler-Landau film on the same subject. Presumably, Costa-Gavras did not go further in this direction because it would have violated the factual authenticity of his film: the Tupamaros did not, in reality, show documentary footage to Mitrione. In an interview several years ago, Costa-Gavras rejected the suggestion that he could have used documentary footage on the Lambrakis funeral in *Z* to give the film an added dimension. His position at that time was that newsreel footage would have "cheapened" *Z*. Yet his refusal to deviate from, or embellish his sources, his scrupulous adherence to the actual event, not only prevents him from reaping the benefits of the mixed documentary/fiction form, like Wexler's *Medium Cool* or Landau's *Que Hacer?*, but prevents him from utilizing the freedom of fiction and therefore the sense of veracity that great art provides. Compared with *Battle of Algiers* which, for all its faults, remains the yardstick by which all other theatrical political films must be judged, *State of Siege* is flat and thin. Costa-Gavras refuses to create full characters. This is undoubtedly a self-imposed limitation. Motivation and inner psychological states cannot be easily "proved" or documented. This restriction, however, creates a kind of cinematic behaviorism or naturalism consisting of an inventory of externals, a serial repetition evident in a number of scenes: the hijacking of cars for the kidnapping, the play with the loudspeakers at the university, the poll of Tupamaros on the bus, in which the same event is repeated

Yves Montand in STATE OF SIEGE.



again and again. Despite the fact that the film, like *Z*, concerns an investigation, i.e., an exploration of the reality behind the appearance of Santore's seemingly innocuous status as a traffic and communications expert, the point of view remains essentially an external one.

The rejection of complex characterization is most critical in the case of Yves Montand who, at the core of the film, is fatally miscast as Santore. After *La Guerre Est Finie* and similar roles we expect from Montand a fine-spun cynical rationale of imperial policy, along the lines of that given by the French paratroop colonel in *Battle of Algiers*. Rather, in response to the accusations of his Tupamaro interrogators, we get only a series of denials culminating in a burst of Cold War rhetoric. By remaining faithful to the tapes of the real interrogation, Costa-Gavras throws away a golden opportunity to give depth and power, not to mention political complexity, to this confrontation between revolution and reaction. Instead, we get cardboard characters, chess pieces in a war between two armies of professionals. We are thrown back on our reflex reactions: admiration of the courage and skill of the Tupamaros; hatred of the American imperialists. But these responses are not extended or complicated by the film.

Hesitating between the world of fiction and documentary, Costa-Gavras has given us neither. We have a documentary intent without internal documentation, which robs the film of conviction, no matter how true we know it to be, and a fiction straightjacketed by fact, which deprives it of the imaginative depth we expect from art. Moreover, *State of Siege* raises a question often posed by Godard and others: are the traditional forms of the Hollywood film adequate to a revolutionary content? It would seem, in the case of *State of Siege*, that they are not. The conventions of the big-budget Hollywood spectacle, no matter how political or "correct" the content they express, subvert this content. The omniscient point of view, the grand sweeping helicopter and crane shots that drip with production value, the overly emphatic Theodorakis sound track (one expects shortly to hear the "kidnapping theme" from *State of Siege* played

by Lawrence Welk on the top ten), cause us to sink down in our seats, put our feet up, and enjoy the "movie."

Part of the problem lies in the fact that Costa-Gavras's sensibility is not particularly political. Despite his attraction to eminently political subjects—the Lambrakis Affair in *Z*, the Slansky trials in *The Confession*, and now the Tupamaros in *State of Siege*, his best film remains his first and least political, *The Sleeping-Car Murders*. *State of Siege* tends at its best, but least politically interesting moments, towards pure cops-and-robbers melodrama, the mechanics of the contest between two rival groups. The fact that one group happens to be a repressive Latin American police force trained by Americans, and the other a dedicated band of revolutionaries, makes the film political only in a superficial way. This is not to say that Costa-Gavras does not distinguish between the two. The film creates a distinction between revolutionary violence and official violence. The former is controlled and selective, the latter uncontrolled and indiscriminate. The victims of the MLN (National Liberation Movement/Tupamaros) are clearly identifiable as enemies of the people. When the Tupamaros kidnap a genuine US agronomist, they discover their mistake and let him go. Santore is given expert medical care at a major hospital by his captors. Although the Tupamaros are obviously prepared to execute Santore if the necessity arose, they do not wish to do so if it can be avoided, and regard the eventual execution as a political defeat. The members of the ruling oligarchy, on the other hand, are indicted by the film as the real terrorists. Not only do they employ US-trained extra-legal death squads to summarily execute suspected members of the political opposition, but they readily dispense with the facade of liberal democracy to impose a state of siege on the entire population of Montevideo.

The sins of *State of Siege* are sins of omission, of what has been excluded. The narrow muck-raking focus on American complicity in torture leaves the more subtle but significant manifestations of American power in Latin America unrevealed, despite Costa-Gavras's occasional ef-

forts to suggest the extent of this power. We get very little sense of either the politics of American imperialism, or the politics of the urban guerrillas. We have no sense of their strengths and weaknesses, or of the function of kidnapping and assassination in a larger political strategy.

The political strategy of the Tupamaros has been based on an analysis of the particular historical, social, and geographic conditions peculiar to Uruguay. It was adopted after lengthy debate over the question of whether Uruguay which, after all, was almost unique in Latin America in being a relatively stable liberal democracy with a highly developed welfare system and a bloated middle class, was ripe for armed struggle. The traditional left parties, members of the "loyal opposition," with the usual united-front perspective, said "No." The MLN decision to undertake armed struggle was at least partly based on a negative assessment of the shaky economic foundation upon which Uruguay's prosperity was based. The combination of a runaway inflation (136% in 1967), a banking crisis due to speculation, and a huge foreign debt\* led the regime to adopt a deflationary policy which in turn led to widespread discontent. The objective economic situation, the notion that armed struggle can itself create a pre-revolutionary situation ("Revolutionary action in itself, the fact of being armed, prepared, equipped, the process of violating bourgeois legality, generates revolutionary awareness, organization, and conditions") and the belief that the Uruguayan police and military were relatively weak (some 12,000 poorly equipped troops in the middle sixties) plus other factors like the strong tradition of militant trade unionism in Uruguay, all contributed to the MLN's decision to constitute itself as an armed vanguard.

This analysis raises several problems of the utmost importance, all of which Costa-Gavras ignores. Among them is the principle that selective acts of revolutionary violence directed at the ruling class strip the regime of its facade of

legal legitimacy and in fact raise the consciousness of the people, thereby creating the subjective and objective conditions necessary for revolution. The kidnapping of Santore brings down a heavy repression on the people of Montevideo, as the title of the film suggests, but there is no indication of how they react to this. Is the middle class radicalized by these events or do they blame the Tupamaros for their discomfort? The police who invade the university are mocked in the episode with the loudspeakers, but there is some reason to suspect that the regime used the kidnapping as an excuse to destroy pockets of traditional opposition, like the university, in order to consolidate its power. The fact that the repression in Uruguay, as elsewhere, has recently become so great as to seriously threaten the guerrilla forces, suggests doubt as to the adequacy of their analysis. As in *Z*, events which are subsequent to those which the film depicts, retrospectively call into question the politics of the film; yet there is no indication within the film, no internal examination of the film's politics, which might prepare us for this.

If questions like these are not raised, it is probably because they do not interest Costa-Gavras. He seems most interested in the forms these struggles take: assassination, investigation, confession. Indeed, in the interview referred to earlier, Costa-Gavras said that what interested him in *Z* was the "mechanics of political crime." The same might be said of *State of Siege*.

Nevertheless, *State of Siege* is an important film. For all its flaws, it will reach a large audience with a vital message. It performs a service to the people of Brazil, in particular, by calling attention to the barbarous practices of the present Brazilian regime, and to the people of Latin America in general by exposing direct American responsibility for the repressive and inhumane regimes which inflict American interests upon them.

—PETER BISKIND

*Ed. Notebook, Cont'd.*

sity of Massachusetts (Amherst) Media Center. FRED SWEET teaches at Berkeley and has written a study of Alain Resnais. ALAN WILLIAMS is in Paris, investigating current developments in French film thought.

\*Carlos Nunez, *The Tupamaros*. New York: Times Change Press, 1972.

**ESSENE**

A film by Fred Wiseman. Zipporah Films, 54 Lewis Wharf, Boston, Mass. 02110.

Viewers of Wiseman's previous documentaries (*Titicut Follies*, *High School*, *Law and Order*, *Hospital* and *Basic Training*)\* may be quietly astonished at the nature and the impact of *Essene*, which does not take place in the gritty, ominous corridors of a prison or in an oppressive high school, nor in the congested interiors of an urban hospital, nor in the all too representative streets of a large American city. The film pays its attention to an Anglican religious community which on the surface has little or no connection to the urgent social and economic problems of the previous films. A monastery in a rural setting—what could constitute a more radical departure from the concerns of those earlier visions of institutional inhumanity? In *Essene* we watch instead the rituals, routines, exchanges among a group of men committed to a life which secludes them from the deterioration of cities, the profanities of schooling, the anxieties and paralysis of so many institutional roles. Instead of routine cruelty to a prisoner or student we have a benevolent laying on of hands in a monastery's Pentacostal prayer service; instead of tough white talk to a tough black juvenile we have a soft-toned discourse from the abbot regarding pharisaical and Christian definitions of law; instead of tears of shame, rage, and frustration in the other films we have the fears of a long-haired postulant as he bemoans his difficulty in becoming a part of the community.

With *Essene* Wiseman focuses our attention on the quite specific collisions between a quite limited number of individuals. The examination of social issues in this film is not accumulated through quick-cut series of collage sequences of particulars so much as it is achieved through the close-quartered, representative drama of reconciling self-discovery and contentment with social responsibility and cooperativeness. The film as a whole is paced with several

short scenes conveying the daily realities and routines of life in a monastery: farming, meals, drives to town; but Wiseman creates this film's special energy, complexity, and dramatic unity through five or six fairly lengthy sequences (*Essene* has fewer sequences than any of the other films). As *Essene* disengages us from the visual immediacy of a more familiar world, we come into the presence of a more freshly dramatic situation than any of the other films provided.

The film opens with shots of individual monks sitting in a group—strong but tight faces, unimpressive and familiar in a tense sort of dignity. It is a prayer meeting of sorts, each person calling the rest to join him in remembering a worthy person or occasion. There is a sustained evocation of a woman in New York whose group therapy became "an experience in community" and whose memory seems to judge in some way the present group. There is mention of Buber, and Hiroshima. There is strong emotion, but muted and ritualized by both the place and the persons. The group is a collection, the film makes us feel, of individuals struggling quietly to create community. The spoken word appears an awkward and weak vehicle.

Cut to a conversation between the abbot and a stern, disagreeable monk who disapproves of being called by his first name and who eyes the abbot throughout the exchange with crochety suspicion and fear. The abbot seems to be appealing for means of drawing this man into the fold, of discovering some basis in mutually shared values to overcome the other's resistance, his rigidity. But when the abbot invokes the shared belief in Christ as a means of community, his opponent declines the offer of such kinship. Though these men live together, they are temperamentally and spiritually worlds apart.

This mean yet comic antagonist to the abbot's soft-spoken and benign hopefulness we see later as he drives into town for a potato peeler and other odds and ends. In the hardware store he repeatedly fails to flinch at being called by a wrong first name, and his smile and easy manner are in remarkable contrast to what he "gave" the abbot. He partly enjoys the stereotypes of

\*Wiseman has just completed a new film on a Juvenile Court.

the monastery the store worker promotes. This monk, we realize, is reaching for nothing beyond his own self-protection and secure status as an individual in an atomized, not communal, society. His stubborn, undramatic resistance to the community's growing emphasis on the shared life represents one decided strain on the monastery's attempts to manage the message of its faith.

The viewer can locate the many problems of this world through this man. The ritual of the Mass service is now group-oriented and in English, and the monastery holds prayer vigils heavily emotionalized. Clearly this monk stands opposed to these tides of change. He may be only one, but he continually captures the attention of the community in its analysis of its faulty movement and recurring disabilities. The world of the town and the monastery may be bridged by this man, but only here does he act as any sort of connection or mediator. No bridge over troubled water is he meant or likely to be. Loneliness masked as self-righteous isolation and fear hiding behind sterile personal dogmatism: as others reach out for joy and sing "Heal him, sweet Jesus," the implacable loner heads for town.

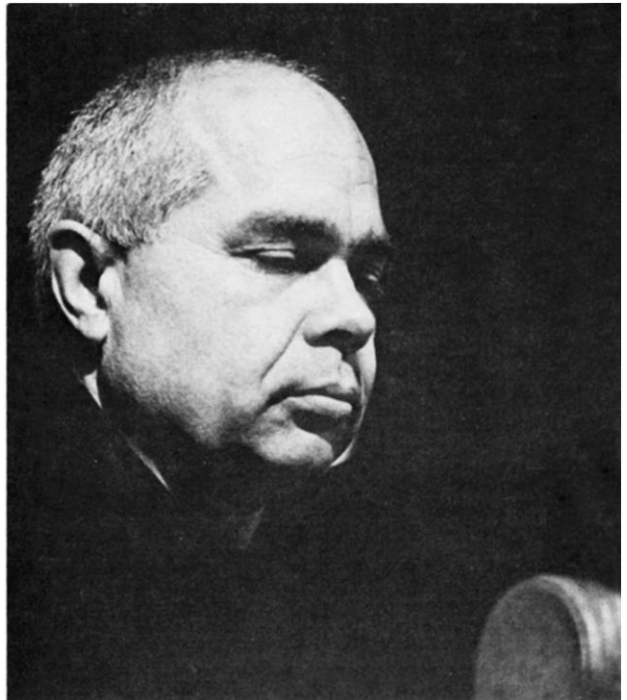
If this monastery is in actuality anything but ideal, here is clearly one reason. In a setting where everyone counts, those who discount others take a stiff toll on the group. In a setting where each is living a life *immediately* symbolic, revelatory of one's ultimate values, the reactionary is influential, seen, pronounced in his individual authority (this monk plays the anti-abbot, in fact). By his presence he then strains community for others by denying it for himself, diminishes a sense of collective authority and leadership by refusing to recognize as valid the private level of need, trust, and hope which motivate such values in the first place.

Such a refusal, symptomatic of bigotry and paranoia themselves symptomatic of a stunted emotional growth, is not the only sort of behavior which threatens this small group of men. More visible and volatile, the catalyst for *Essene's* evolving drama, is the presence of a highly emotional and assertive postulant who in-

ternates not rigid retreat but anarchic reformation. His arch-opponent is law made legalistic and petty by a small mind and a man fearful of compassion. But the hungry postulant's other enemy is—in an important way—community itself, an entity whose sustenance demands either a merging of individual selves or a transcendence of those selves as merely individual. This postulant, however, is seeking a salvation in and through this community, and he wants that community "now!" He might pronounce sentimentally the platitude that "people understand in the long run," but his full self is cinematically captured as he sits expansively alone at a piano moaning a song of self ("Deep River") which drifts in currents of personal preoccupation all but impossible to deliver over to the shared experiences of a community.

Two sorts of individualism threatening a never yet and always to be realized community: *Essene* gradually focuses on this basic drama, and more intently on the principal arbiter and cypher for the entire group, the abbot himself. He must attempt to mute or erode the mean-minded reactionary spirit of the one monk while

ESSENE: *The abbot.*



at the same time giving some direction and criticism to the wild intensity and desperate theatricality of the other. Through the centuries-old monastic theology he must attempt to articulate a therapy for the lives of men often dangerously far from "authentic contemplative peace," the ideal of a monastery according to one scholarly treatment. So the abbot speaks in this film always in a context of disputes and personal animosities. Visually he remains benign and sympathetic, his voice calm and cautious, a blend of quiet judgment and pious hopefulness. He speaks of the necessity of the "Spirit infusing the letter of the law," and how in Biblical times the Pharisees irresponsibly tamed the dialectic by siding with law over against Spirit. That spirit infusing law the abbot is clearly reaching for in his community, one which he notes is filled with tension because it rejects the pharisaical approach to life.

That rejection involves in this case a perplexing and perplexed affirmation from this monastic group of the "Pentacostal movement" in the Anglican Church: a new emotionalism and group-consciousness in liturgy and prayer. Such a movement feeds the troubled spirit of the postulant toward angry and chaotic outbursts of passion as it feeds the no-first-namer with greater disgust for change and accommodation to such trends in the brotherhood. *Essene* then portrays a small society at work redefining itself both in the light of its particular members but also in light of larger cultural forces it both moves toward and with. The abbot is trying to steer a middle course between firm rejection and over-eager acceptance of the new spirit (he is clearly troubled by many of its psychological and social consequences).

Looked at as a whole, the film sympathetically directs our attention first to the absence of shared experiences and directions in the community and then gives us several opportunities to witness modes of defining and arbitrating the conflicts. As the film builds to its complex conclusion, the question of leadership burns incandescently. The abbot has led in the past through a mild but skilled consensus-building, carefully avoiding outright exclusions of anyone

and therefore vulnerable to the consequences of an uneasy truce. As the film develops, that uneasy truce shows clear signs of no longer serving its limited purpose. One monk, the senior mentor figure, and others at one point insist that the dissidents must stop fighting and "start loving the brothers." The abbot alone is faced with the task of finding a politics fitted to that simple commandment. He comes to examine the style of his own leadership near the end, and appears to emerge renewed for the possibly larger confrontations to come as the "center" ceases to hold and the community's very survival is at stake.

He works for rapprochement, reconciliation, the fusion of opposites: Martha—Mary, law—spirit, passion—discipline, his own hortatory teaching and the "laying on of hands" group spirituality. His leadership is actually and potentially only so effective, however, as the larger questions and authority become apparent. Can the group generate a collective strength insuring cooperativeness and tolerance? Can the past traditions accommodate themselves to a consciousness so group-oriented that the contemplative ideals are not hopelessly compromised? Can an ages-old theological symbol-system fulfill the demands for personal therapy placed on it by these new group dynamics?

Such questions emerge organically from *Essene*, and they are scarcely so private to the world of an Anglican monastery somewhere in the midwest that they don't deserve our secular and even "anti-denominational" attention. Wiseman has shown in his accustomed documentary style—heavy on representative situations and encounters, a patient watching and listening for accumulated meanings—that any group which has accepted the necessity of reconstitution in today's culture is battling with basic problems of social philosophy and practice. The abbot remains affirmative that Martha and Mary can occupy the same household and serve the same master. Others may wonder if they are even any longer sisters in anything but name. *Essene* is a film with a special resonance which may make it Wiseman's most important to date.

—PATRICK SULLIVAN

## AMERICAN GRAFFITI

Directed by George Lucas. Produced by Francis Ford Coppola and Gary Kurtz. Script by Gloria Katz, Willard Huyck, and Lucas. Photography by Haskell Wexler and friends. Universal.

*American Graffiti* is stuffed to its customized tailpipes with little deuce coupes, rollerskating carhops, cherry cokes, copped feels, cooties, Clearasil—plus lots of vintage pop songs. But George Lucas's fantastic comedy, an account of one summer night in 1962, has more on its mind than nostalgia, even though it does play for the cheers and laughs that ring out when a girl in the first scene parks an Edsel at Mel's Drive-in. Lucas and his fellow writers, Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck, manage to be serious without portentous symbolism or heavy underlining. They slip on an end title which they should have let the audience write for itself but, otherwise, their poise is flawless; the car crash at the end, to take the most obvious example, has not been inflated into an apocalypse. Despite its crowded sound track and its mesmerizing flow of images, *American Graffiti* is a low-keyed, unpretentious movie. Yet it cuts to the heart of something serious and entangling in American life.

Four relatively simple storylines crisscross during the night. Curt and Steve (played by Richard Dreyfuss and Ronnie Howard) are set to fly east to college in the morning; Curt is having second thoughts about leaving the town that means more to him than he has realized before, even though class president Steve presses him to agree that staying behind would be a drastic mistake. While mulling it over, Curt hunts for a Mystery Woman who mouths an allurements to him from her passing T-Bird and becomes his emblem of tantalizing possibilities just out of reach; at the same time, a ducktailed gang, the Pharaohs, is putting him through a wringer. Elsewhere, two others get into funnier predicaments: John, the ruler of the local drag strip, who tries to impress a carload of girls and ends up tricked into chaperoning 12-year-old Carol (Mackenzie Philips); Terry the Toad (Charlie Martin Smith), who entices an empty-headed bouffant blonde named Debbie into Steve's car and then has to sweat to hang onto her. Except for Steve and Curt, nobody in the

film, especially the girls, has the option to go away to college, yet Curt's indecision conceals a more basic question that they must all answer: to leave or not to leave their lovely, fragile world of intoxicating childhood dreams. The question turns out to be truly ambiguous; this is one source of the movie's power.

Lucas has been amazingly thorough and technically dazzling in conjuring up this "last year of the fifties." Except for the final two sequences, the whole movie takes place after dark. Aided by his creative cast and camera crews supervised by Haskell Wexler, Lucas has spliced bits of San Francisco, San Rafael, and Petaluma into a ghost-dancing, iridescent nightgown, a galaxy of pranks, games, thrills, and lights through which the gaudy cars weave and cruise like phantoms. Maybe, after *THX 1138*, locking us into enclosed worlds is turning out to be a Lucas specialty, but *American Graffiti* has no trace of the earlier film's tired ideas and visual clichés out of tritely doom-laden student epics. It captures the humor and verve of youth that can, at least briefly, transform pop-schlock trash into an amusing, stylish constellation of codes and rituals. At the same time, it also finds some surprising emotions lurking behind them; each characterization catches us off guard with unexpected quirks and depths. For instance, Terry's blonde prize, who goes to incredible lengths to mimic Sandra Dee only to be taken for Connie Stevens, seems at first like a moron pure and simple. Yet as the evening wears on, Candy Clark subtly changes her into a good-natured, sweetly funny Dream Girl, and this witty turnabout goes hand in hand with the way that she eventually rejects a hunk of local beefcake in favor of her clumsy suitor. *American Graffiti* is not just a checklist of fifties memorabilia; it uses them to recapture the attitudes of the period, particularly the innocence that Vietnam, Oswald, hard drugs, birth-control pills, Nixon—the whole spectrum of sixties shake-ups—would alter, perhaps destroy, forever.

The magic of this spectacle becomes more poignant when Curt leaves the next morning and Steve, who has decided to stay behind with his girlfriend Laurie (Cindy Williams), sees him

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off. The glamor and freshness of their nocturnal fantasyland has now vanished; the pinched faces of his prospective in-laws and the bleak emptiness of the tiny airport seem to foretell sterile tomorrows for the young lovers, while they remind Curt of the joys that he is abandoning. Naturally, this world seems more pristine now than it did then; its innocence was at least partially an illusion because of its media-hype and insidious adolescent conformism. Even so (and the film acknowledges all this), next to the dismal future that awaits Steve and Laurie and the chastening one that Curt is approaching, their night seems all the more an enchanted playground in which life is always a whirling carousel of delights. Its self-consciousness is still airy and effervescent, not yet tainted with the rancid condescension of camp, its music still lyrically frivolous. The Top 40, for good or ill, weren't straining after more self-serious artistic ambitions, and nobody was shilling any mystiques about the Fabulous Fifties.

Yet the surprising resonance of *American Graffiti* stems from its understated but trenchant criticism of nostalgia as well. Lucas captures the sheer disposability of pop culture and its trappings. It's a jolt for anyone of his generation to see how quaint everything—clothes, cars, slang—now looks and sounds, nearly as archaic as the flivvers, phaetons, spats, and idle rich of the twenties and thirties. Then you think, "But this was only eleven years ago." Those who thoughtlessly call this a "period picture," though it is one, unknowingly highlight its weird, unnerving distillation of future shock. Even those utterly inured to rapid change may feel a chill or two while they belly-laugh, when they experience firsthand how swiftly only yesterday has turned into long ago.

The movie is firmly plugged into the nostalgia boom that plays upon our desires for a sense of roots, for a more comprehensible world, for a half-fearful look back at our own innocence. The same media that bring disorienting change to our living rooms and thereby stimulate our urges to recapture the past usually reduce that past to safe, sentimental placebos; nostalgia peddlers chew up ever more recent chunks of



AMERICAN GRAFFITI

yesterday and spit them out as flavorless, denatured pulp. But in *American Graffiti*, superman John—played by Paul Le Mat as a wistful blend of machismo and charm, braggadocio and uneasiness—rebukes these merchandisers and those in thrall to them. He is living what they sell; he has managed to reduce his whole life to little more than shutting down anybody who challenges his dragster. In high school, this was clearly his claim to fame, his antidote to numbing anonymity; he cannot say farewell to it now, the way Curt can, because the outside world in its complexity terrifies him. The irony cuts several ways. John prefers the simple, clear-cut competition of drag racing to the scarier, more nebulous contests of the larger world. And with good reason—he dimly senses that they are murderous, that those unable to cope with them soon end up on the scrap heap, like the graveyard of used-up jalopies that he shows to Carol. Yet his avoidance of them locks him into a childish, soul-shriveling level of mere existence.

John is part of an American syndrome whose victims litter our imaginative writing: the "big rods" in Dan Wakefield's novel of the fifties, *Going All the Way*, rudderless jocks fixated on the sham accomplishments of their youths; F. Scott Fitzgerald's Tom Buchanan, the aging polo player who will never outgrow his cheap emotions; the paunchy, tired American gargoyles of Jason Miller's play, *That Championship Season*, compulsively reenacting the Big Game because it has turned out to be the high point of their miserable lives. In some ways, John is a more complex character than any of these; he is younger, softer, more sympathetic. Like Debbie,



he braves the ridicule of regimented friends; he stops viewing Carol as a nuisance and starts relating to her as a person. But, touching as this is, it is also a bit pathetic to see how hard it is for him to risk even this simple a human relationship. Despite the basically kind, easy-going personality behind his tough-guy's mask, he is too deep into his toothless James Dean rebellion to save himself, even though nagging frustration has begun to erode it. From his comparatively unsophisticated nostalgia, it is only a few steps to the colder, more elaborate cultural corpse-eating of the nostalgia industry and its customers.

The others share John's immaturity, not so much in their naive ignorance of how the world works (which the movie gently implies through Curt's disillusionment when he learns that Wolfman Jack's frantic spiels on the radio are taped instead of live) as in their utter lack of perspective on their own media-nurtured dreams and feelings, the bottomside of the pop kaleidoscope. Now that Steve is slated to depart, Laurie fears being left alone or losing him to another, a fear parodied in some of the wailing songs. Saturated in pop, they cannot quite conceive of surviving the death of their romance. The movie never mocks their feelings for one another; in moments like their half-acrimonious solo dance at a sock hop, caught in a brilliantly romantic pan shot whose very sweep seems to drain off the surliness of their running argument, their intensity, their pain, their humanity are honored. Yet, as this same shot also suggests, they are trapped in shallow reveries of eternal love that will diminish the control that they can have over their destinies.

The shooting, editing, and staging of the crash scene—a marvel of skillful timing—sum this up. To punish Steve, Laurie has let herself be picked up by one of John's challengers, whose car crashes and burns during their duel. Steve rushes to the wreck to find her miraculously unhurt. When she throws herself into his arms and pleads with him once more not to go away, the rush of emotion overwhelms him. We see the trap closing; an extremely fateful decision takes only an overwrought instant to make for people

with only fantasies to guide their exploited, corrupted desires. They seem headed for the suburban malaise defined so masterfully in another novel of the fifties, Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road*. Only the vividness of the characters permits us to hope that somehow they will find ways to preserve their souls. Which is why the end title violates the premise of the film. By telling us what becomes of the boys a few years later, it slams the door on this hope, as if, despite the richness and beauty of the characters, their futures were inevitable. Not that the title is unbelievable; it just inappropriately closes off an open film.

*American Graffiti* finally comes to suggest a variation on Bo Widerberg's *Raven's End*. In that marvelous film, an aspiring writer painfully wrenches himself away from a provincial Swedish town, difficulties with his family, and a loved girl whom he has gotten pregnant, only to be haunted by memories which transfigure the very drabness of what he flees. Only now does he begin to understand what a hold that backwater village, those disorderly relationships, his moral dilemma in leaving the girl will always have on him, how they will fire his imagination. In *American Graffiti*, none of the young people but Curt can abandon a hometown almost equally provincial that is incandescent by night but deadening in the glare of the following day. The movie is a poetic lament for the passing of their wondrous night and all that it seemed to promise. This and the sensitivity of Lucas, Katz, and Huyck to the blighting influence of social conditioning on life's most crucial steps lends to *American Graffiti*, for all its real exuberance, a strong undertone of heartbreaking pathos.

—MICHAEL DEMPSEY

## NATIVE LAND

Directed by Leo Hurwitz and Paul Strand. Photography: Paul Strand. Written by David Wolff (Ben Maddow). Songs and narration: Paul Robeson. Editing: Sidney Meyers. Music: Marc Blitzstein. Frontier Films, 1940.

*Native Land* has the heroic accents we remember from *The River* and *The Plow That Broke the*

he braves the ridicule of regimented friends; he stops viewing Carol as a nuisance and starts relating to her as a person. But, touching as this is, it is also a bit pathetic to see how hard it is for him to risk even this simple a human relationship. Despite the basically kind, easy-going personality behind his tough-guy's mask, he is too deep into his toothless James Dean rebellion to save himself, even though nagging frustration has begun to erode it. From his comparatively unsophisticated nostalgia, it is only a few steps to the colder, more elaborate cultural corpse-eating of the nostalgia industry and its customers.

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*Plains* — a somewhat self-consciously Poetic phrasing that now easily seems pompous or naive. “This way we came—we, the people—we crossed the ocean toward an unknown land,” begins the narration (spoken in Paul Robeson’s sonorous tones) which opens *Native Land* and knits it together throughout. Like the New Deal documentaries, *Native Land* is fundamentally a tract illustrated with newsreel footage, stills, and reconstructed dramatized incidents.

And like the Lorentz films, it takes a historical-political position which is hard for us, at 33 years’ distance, to accept. The first difficulty is that it assumes (as virtually all white Americans then did) that the continent was empty—or populated only by savages, which came to the same thing—when the settlers came, and that their occupation of it was thus a glorious chapter in the march of civilization, and not at all the bloody and unscrupulous genocide we now know it to have been. A second difficulty is the assumption that industrialization is per se a fine thing—so that shots of factory chimneys belching pollution bring joy to the narrator but only hoots from present-day audiences. The third is that, like many political films made since, it assumes a prior Golden Age—apparently the heroic pioneer period—when men were men, invented liberty and equality, and lived happily without oppression. A recurring argument is founded on this third point: the film’s basic rhetorical posture is that it ain’t any longer so, and we have to fight to restore it.

These assumptions add up to a patriotic posture which now sounds suspicious to many radicals. But, odd as it may seem to young people, most of the radicals of the thirties felt possessive about the country. They felt they owned it by the grace of God—and they had no place left to go. They put lots of American flags in their work, and if you had pointed out that George Washington was a slaveholder they might have punched you in the mouth. They were alienated because of their politics—which tended to be CP-frontish and thus, to some degree, *not* home-grown—but not because of their cultural tastes and style, which can now seem to us deplorably ethnocentric and petty - bourgeois. However,



NATIVE LAND: *The unwilling labor spy gets his orders.*

such first reactions are, I think, bad ones. It is better to sing “This Land Is Your Land, This Land Is My Land,” and mean it, than to relapse into highly sophisticated (and anomistic) apathy. As John Schaar argues persuasively in “The Case for Patriotism,” (*American Review* #17), it indeed seems likely that a mass radical movement is only conceivable if it is patriotic, and that the term patriot must be salvaged from the scoundrels so the republic can be saved; Schaar adduces Ho, Debs, and Fidel as examples of radicals who properly loved their countries. In this sense we have something very troublesome to learn from *Native Land* and other works from the thirties.

The episodes which make up the body of the film are acted reconstructions, with scripted dialogue, and careful if simple camerawork. Their subjects were reportedly drawn from accounts in the press of the day: a farmer who has been active in a farmers’ union is murdered by thugs; black and white sharecroppers are tracked down

by redneck deputies; most complex, a story of a spy planted in a labor union who steals the membership book (after a dramatic crisis of conscience) and thus gets his supposed comrades fired and blacklisted. (Those were the days when employers did *not* want to deal with unions, and union leaders did *not* know how to play golf—and got shot by employer goons.)

The answer to these criminal tactics—which were, be it noted, a little rougher than Watergate bugging—was: organize. The film documents mass meetings, and tells of the massive pressure from millions of new union members—pressure on Washington, pressure on the corporations directly, but above all pressure on Washington, where the New Deal labor laws were enacted, where the Senate held years of hearings on industrial violations of civil liberties. In that pre-electronic and pre-shredder era, the Senate investigating committee was forced to seize, and painstakingly tape back together, thousands of incriminating documents which had been torn up in wastebaskets. Something like 41,000 labor spies were said to be on industry payrolls—evidently even outnumbering the FBI informers of our day! It was, says the narration, “an immense conspiracy, directed by a handful of fascist-minded corporations”—but it was defeated by the victories of collective bargaining, unemployment insurance, and the strength of organization.

The climax of the film is more documentary than dramatized. It begins with a rather bathetic introduction setting the scene (in which Memorial Day is called “a moment in the history of the Bill of Rights,” when it was actually a Civil War mourning day that originated in Boalsburg, Pennsylvania—I know because I grew up there.) But the treatment of the 1937 Republic Steel massacre is abrupt, sober, and moving, and the narration ends by calling for Americans, as before, to “stand up as free men and fight for their rights.”

It is excellent that we are now getting the chance to see and appraise some of the lost film work of the thirties; the American documentary movement, which has hitherto been known

mainly through the rather goody-goody films of Lorentz, begins to look far less the anemic cousin of British documentary than we have believed it. *Native Land* is no masterpiece, and its preachy style would not be attempted today; but it, together with *China Strikes Back* and doubtless other works of the period, shows that American film-makers were making strong and original attempts to deal with the realities of their time. They worked, as Biberman did later in *Salt of the Earth*, within the stylistic shadow of the Hollywood film, and they never found a form that would give them access to the mass audiences they sought. But they were struggling seriously with problems that are, to say the least, still with us. —ERNEST CALLENBACH

#### LETTER TO JANE

*Tout Va Bien* concludes by raising new questions about the possibility of viable commitment by an intellectual to revolutionary struggles. *Letter to Jane* also deals with this question but in a more direct way, for all vestiges of narration have been stripped away. Instead we are presented with a sustained film-essay or lecture plus images that illustrate Godard and Gorin's stated belief that “aesthetics is a category of politics.” The films, which sparked fierce debate in the question sessions at the New York Festival, have apparently been designed as part of a cultural attack on the part of Godard and Gorin, to stimulate discussion on important questions in order to bring about greater clarity as a precondition to what they see as the need for the formation of a new Marxist-Leninist party in France.

*Letter to Jane* consists of a series of photographs, primarily a photo of Fonda in Vietnam that is recycled numerous times, and perhaps two dozen additional images (from *Tout Va Bien*, Vietnam, faces of film stars, etc.). The sound track is a political-stylistic analysis of the image of Fonda in Vietnam, delivered by Godard and Gorin. The film, made in 16mm for \$300, lasts an hour, and rivets the spectator's attention.



NATIVE LAND. (See also review p. 60.)

Los Angeles, Seattle; there never was a complete inventory of those from the local Film/Photo Leagues or individual correspondents.

Rosow: Every time people see these films they walk out with an awakened look in their eyes. Part of the important need is not only coverage in magazines, the real film education is in getting these films shown. Do you have plans for distributing them?

BRANDON: For the silent period, and certain of the silent films, we're trying to get clearance from the estates and families and enough of the participants to be able to do it, to develop a program. The program, I am sure, will be non-profit and based not on general circulation but on some format to enable regional use for study both for the content in context with studies in labor history, politics, American history and American problems and also for film students and scholars. But we're not now thinking of

re-cutting them as shorts or re-cutting them into a feature-length compilation film. Features are going to be made on the subject of the thirties, but this material I think should retain its own tone, with credits, with tracks, or tape provided for background and explanation. A couple of the later films are in circulation now: *People of the Cumberland*, through Macmillan-Audio-Brandon; *Pie in the Sky*, Museum of Modern Art; the others, there are different studies about how to clear them and how to make them available on behalf of the different people involved. *Native Land* plans will soon be announced on behalf of Frontier Films. I will do everything I can to search for the others and make them available eventually with full documentation. Any fees that I might get for my lecture-showings will go to a non-profit fund for finding more, preservation, making negatives and printing utilization materials.

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In visual terms it is a montage sequence of photographs, at times shifting to a series of primitive wipes (one photograph lifted and pulled across the screen to reveal another image). I only recall the camera zooming (slowly) into a photo once in the film. The space of the film is thus flat and planimetric, as it is in *Tout Va Bien* with the exception of the supermarket scene. The lack of spatial depth and the priority given to the sound track heighten the film's illustrative lecture-like quality; the rhythm of the montage works as rhetoric making us focus our attention as we would at a lecture.

Perhaps Godard feels he has taken this approach to its extreme—he often expressed a desire to get greater depth in his films, to pay attention to the “angle of a shot” as he put it, remarking that this was the greatest lesson that one could learn from Eisenstein (not montage, which in spite of Eisenstein's writings was a process that only Vertov really understood.) However it should be stressed that *Letter to Jane* is, in spite of or because of its cognitive structure, one of the most exciting films Godard and Gorin have made.

The film opens with the key photograph of Fonda in Vietnam which was reproduced in *L'Express*. Godard and Gorin begin to speak to us: “The film asks the question what part should intellectuals play in the revolution, and many others . . . the film is a kind of detour that leads us back to ourselves . . . the spectator must be able to really think and to ask questions.”

After this detour the voices come into congruence with the Fonda-in-Vietnam image: “How can cinema help the Vietnamese people win their independence?”

Then for about 20 minutes Godard and Gorin move away from their central subject (which however remains the major visual image) saying that “we are going to analyze” but not doing so. In part this functions as rhetoric: we become impatient for the analysis, attempt to analyse the photo ourselves, and finally welcome Godard and Gorin's solution, in part simply to order the

film. But in this long detour Godard and Gorin also touch on related questions for revolutionaries.

For example the image of Mao and Lin Piao appears on the screen for a brief second or two—the image shocks in its directness for an X has been roughly drawn over the figure of Lin Piao. On the sound track we hear: “Where do correct ideas come from . . .” The quotation from Mao stating that correct ideas do not come from heaven (implicitly one's best wishes) is brought into relation with the visual equivalent (the brevity of the shot, the roughness of the X on Lin Piao's face) of Lin's fall. Thus Godard and Gorin compress into a few seconds a year's analysis of Lin Piao's fall, infusing criticism of his “idealism” with the emotions raised by the visceral quality of the image. The audience that will respond to this may be limited, but for them Godard has succeeded in the realm of “intellectual montage” (sound and image) that Eisenstein often wrote about but executed in a heavy mechanical way.

After creating this visual-analytic image Godard and Gorin return to analyze the photograph of Fonda in Vietnam. The photograph shows Jane Fonda (left, facing us) listening to (the caption says talking to) a Vietnamese in Hanoi (he faces her, thus his back is to us), and in the background center, slightly out of focus, the face of another Vietnamese man listening.

The film makes the following criticisms:

(1) Although the photo was distributed by the Vietnamese the caption was written by the bourgeois media. The text extends a weakness in the photograph in that it puts Jane Fonda in the foreground and the Vietnamese people in the background, distorting further to say that Fonda is questioning when she is clearly listening.

(2) The photo focusses upon the militant as superstar. It is taken from a low angle, like Welles. The frame's relation to the actress who is looking is not in relation to what in Vietnam she is looking at.

(3) In the photo the image of the Vietnamese cadre in the background is blurred even though

in reality the Vietnamese left is clear, and the image of the American militant is clear although in reality the American left is blurred.

(4) The expression on Fonda's face is tragic. This is incorrect for two reasons: the tragedy is in the US not in Vietnam; the expression implies passivity and resignation which are not qualities of the Vietnamese people in struggle.

Godard and Gorin expound upon the implication of her expression. We see photographs of a similar expression on Fonda's face in *Tout Va Bien* when she is expressing pity for the workers (deemed insufficient for it denies them the dignity of their struggle), and also in *Klute* when she asks the detective to have sympathy for her and stay the night. Godard and Gorin then show photographs of a very similar expression on Henry Fonda's face in *Grapes of Wrath* and *Young Mr. Lincoln*. (The four images are strikingly alike!)

The Fonda-senior photograph serves in *Letter to Jane* to raise questions about the adequacy of bourgeois tragedy and the narrative realistic mode in leftwing films. Godard and Gorin link this expression to the New Deal and Popular Front in the thirties. They regard it as an expression "that says I know a lot about things but doesn't say what," for "there is too much information" (feeling?) "in too short a space." This is "the swindle of capitalist art," an expression of pity that can be used mindlessly for any situation, undifferentiated idealist feeling.

(5) Godard and Gorin criticize the tragic expression on Fonda's face as lacking content, in comparison to that on the Vietnamese cadre's face, for he suffers daily tragedies yet continues to respond with strength.

(6) Finally, the key political criticism, stated near the end of the film. Fonda's expression (and the text) is pacifist, saying only "peace in Vietnam" and by implication "peace in America," instead of affirming the heroic Vietnamese people's struggle for independence and unification, and by implication, that of American working and oppressed people against exploitation and oppression.

All this may seem to some (as it did to many

at Livingston College and at the New York Film Festival, where the critics were hostile) to be making too much of a photograph. Yet Godard and Gorin do no more than an accepted stylistic art critic such as Panofsky or stylistically oriented literary critics (Spitzer, Auerbach) do. It is true however that at times they substitute a "logic" of wit and metaphor for the materialist analysis they advocate, a poetic mode that can as easily be subjective as it can enlighten about history.

However the film does take account of the limits of its analysis—a desire to raise new questions for the future for revolutionaries as well as the present. Thus the film concedes that the North Vietnamese have their reasons for circulating the picture: it is of value in appealing to a certain kind of audience as it is also detrimental for the reasons the film gives. In conversation and in public Godard stressed that had he been invited by the Vietnamese he realized he would have likely served in the same way as Fonda.

The film is thus more than topical; the photo of Fonda raises questions not only of her visit to Vietnam but of the nature of revolutionary art, film, and reportage as well as the role of the intellectual and artist in the revolutionary movement.

This is obviously a question that troubles Godard and Gorin. In spite of the achievements of his latest films Godard said he was anxious in his next work to move on to explore questions of depth, angle, lyricism, and music in film. This and *Tout Va Bien* indicate that perhaps Godard will again tap the emotional resources that infused his earlier, more narrative films. (Although Gorin shrugs off inquiries about aesthetic questions that were raised in the thirties, that period may be a key one from which to evaluate their future work.)

Godard and Gorin's most recent films have spoken to Mao's observation that "not having a correct political point of view is like having no soul." And while exploring new aesthetic and political questions they have produced some extraordinary films.

—MICHAEL KLEIN



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