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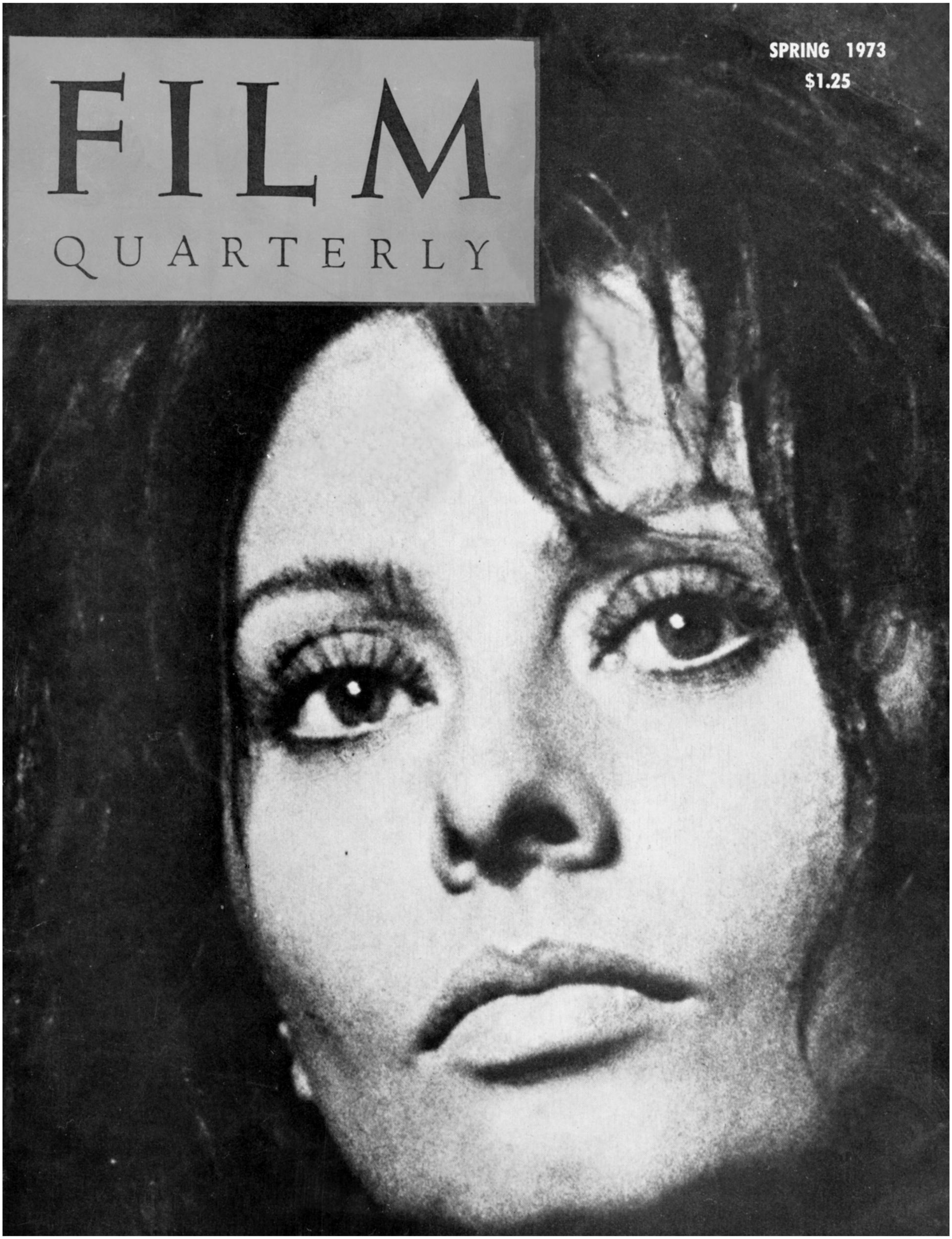

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CONTRIBUTORS

Brian Henderson was once a lawyer, and now teaches film at the University of California, Santa Cruz. James Roy MacBean has contributed many articles on film and politics to *FQ* and *Sight & Sound;* he teaches film at San Francisco State. Joan Mellen teaches at Temple and contributes frequently to *FQ* and other journals; she has just completed a short book on Marilyn Monroe. Boleslaw Michalek (non-Poles can approximate pronunciation by saying *Me-how-ik*) is editor of *Film* (Warsaw) and a leading Polish critic. Lyle Pearson is an American based in Paris; he travels extensively in North Africa and the Near East and is writing a follow-up article on films from those areas. G. M. Perry and Patrick McGilligan live in Madison, Wisconsin. Graham Petrie, who is English, now teaches film at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario; he contributes to many film journals. Paul Warshow studies film at Stanford; he has contributed to *FQ, Commentary,* and other publications.

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GIDEON BACHMANN

"Every Sexual Relationship Is Condemned"

AN INTERVIEW WITH BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI APROPOS "LAST TANGO IN PARIS"

"The Italian Communist Party, I feel, ever more faithfully expresses the reality of the proletariat, and thus of Italian culture. I feel it allows space for the intellectual and serves as a link between him and those aspects of existence which he has often avoided.

"But I no longer feel the same need for the political element in my films; not in the same way. Not like we all used to need it: like an element of clear conscience, of programmed engagement . . . "

Bernardo Bertolucci, 32, director of *The Conformist* and *Last Tango in Paris,* is talking in his Rome apartment. Clearly divided on the shelves that surround him are his main interests: Mayakovsky, Gramsci, Goethe, and Tolstoy along one wall; Hitchcock, Bogdanovich, a complete set of *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* and things that have been written about him a few steps up on a steel shelf. In between, abandoned, perhaps, in midscript, magazines on interior decoration, mostly French. The objects in the room are all 1900-

Bertolucci in Rome. (Photo: Gideon Bachmann)

1925; a Goodwin painting from the last auction at Christie's, solid, satisfying colors, Jugendstil without Mucha's flabby pastels. Like his political views, Bertolucci's taste seems decisive; he appears to take from literature, art, and society that which he can employ.

Cosmopolitan origins, a rarity for Italy. His poet father, Attilio from Parma, lover of Proust, Conrad, and Svevo, wrote film criticism and dragged the schoolteacher Zavattini to the cinema until the latter, enflamed, changed the texture of the art by authoring the classics of neorealism; his mother Ninetta, of Irish-Italian parents and born in Australia where her revolutionary father had sought refuge, wrote a thesis at the University of Bologna about Catullus. English, French, and ideas went flying about his head as far as he can think back; he received the Viareggio poetry prize for a slim volume at the age of 21. The same year he made his first feature film, *La Commare Secca,* scripted by a friend who lived in the same house in Via Giacinto Carini in Rome: Pier Paolo Pasolini, author of *The Ashes of Gramsci,* a book about the man who founded the Italian Communist Party. The circle closes.

Prima della Rivoluzione, his second feature, brought him his first acclaim: Talleyrand supplied the title, Italy's bourgeois revolutionaries, ten years after liberation, the subject. The sweetness of life in Emilia, where Bernardo was born; the poplars with their tops in the mist, the flow of enthusiasm and resignation, the useless parades and the incest of relationships and ideas; his pessimism even then founded in personal experience, mixture of intellect and earthiness, a deep sensuality of concept, sound, and vision. He seemed destined, even then, to become a cult hero.

His next film, *Partner,* form and failure à la Godard, and then psychoanalysis, some documentaries, and a protest film: in close-up, a typewriter, letter by letter, types a script they wouldn't let him shoot. After three years of stagnation and soulsearching, rescue by Jung and Italian TV, which commissioned two features: *The Spider's Stratagem* and *The Conformist.*

"Man is self-destructive, and destructive of his partner. In nature, it is usually the female that devours. Genetically, over the centuries, some males have understood her mechanisms, have understood the danger. Some spiders just approach the female, but stay within safe distance. Exciting themselves with her smell, they masturbate, collect their sperm in their mouth and wait to regain their strength after orgasm. Because that is how they get devoured, when they are weak after ejaculation. Later, they inseminate the female with a minimal approach, and thus she cannot attack them in the moment of their weakness."

The end sequence of *Last Tango in Paris* starts with a reversal of the roles from this Borges theme: Maria Schneider, the victorious snip, masturbates Marlon Brando under a table in the dark corner of a dance hall where his drunken prancing has convinced her of the end of their anonymous, sexual tango; weakened, he staggers after her as she escapes, through the streets of Paris with the wasted semen, breathless, up the stairs of her mother's home and into the study of her dead, military father; his strategy failed, he dies foetally from her bullet. The mantis, the while, recites what she will tell the police.

Ten years ago, when I first met Bernardo, his concerns were more directly cinematic, less literary. The camera itself as a subject of a film still seemed a possibility to him, the camera as an instrument of self-comprehension. And he didn't want to interfere with it too much; he was jokingly suggesting a law against montage. Films, he then thought, might well be divided into Pasolini's categories of poetic and prose works; he felt that because his work was primarily personal, it belonged in the first category.

The changes in the man are notable. The few years of inactivity and analysis seem to have left a mark: his eyes shift constantly and his tongue flicks from side to side in his mouth as he talks; his smile in secure moments is ironic, in others

—more frequent—questioning. He continually speaks of his latest film as if he had discovered its meaning now, after it has been shown, in discussing it with friends. *"Mi sono accorto . . . "* "I realized . . . that the couple in my film are not isolated from the world as I had planned for them to be. You cannot escape to an island: even your attempt to do so is part of our social reality. It turns out that my characters are profoundly symptomatic. You can't hide in a room; reality will come in through the window."

The discovery of what he was really doing in making *Last Tango in Paris* came to him, Bertolucci says, after he had started shooting:

Originally, I wanted to make a film about a couple, about a relationship between two people. As I began to work and felt the film taking shape, *mi sono accorto* . . . I realized I was making a film about solitude, I think. I believe that this is its most profound content: solitude. It's the opposite of what I had set out to describe.

I let reality take over, most of the time. I set up a situation, and then make a sort of *cinéma-vérité* about the characters, the real characters I find in front of my camera. In the case of *Tango,* I felt as if I was interviewing Brando and Maria, seen within the narrative context of the film. Thus what results on the screen always represents the fruit of the relationship I develop with the characters, and of the relationship I develop with the things and the spaces I find myself filming. It is through the camera that I begin to understand the things and the people. That is why I am constantly open to learning and absorbing into the film that which the filming itself reveals, even if that should be in contradiction with what I have written into the script.

With Brando and Maria my subconscious relationship was extremely intense, but I think I managed not only to drop most of my defenses, but that I helped them drop theirs as well. I felt, finally, that this first film I was making about the present was being made without any sort of defenses, without excuses, of either a historical, narrative, or even a political nature. It seems to me now, that in this sense it's quite a liberated film.

In what way, then, do you consider the two characters as profoundly symptomatic?

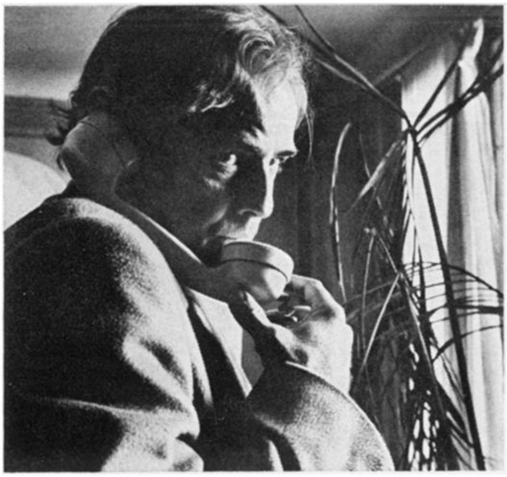
The encounter of these two ends up being an encounter of forces pulling in different directions; the kind of encounter of forces which exists at the base of all political clashes. Brando, initially rather mysterious, manages to upset the girl's bourgeois life-style, at least at the beginning, by force of his mystery and obvious search for authenticity. His way of making love to her is practically didactic. Didactic in the sense that he seeks the roots of human behavior in that moment, the moment after his wife's suicide, when he has reached a peak and a dead end at the same time. He believes that he must seek absolute authenticity in a relationship, and this, I feel, gives the encounter its political sense.

A political sense, then, that you hadn't planned?

Absolutely not. In fact, I had been somewhat preoccupied by what seemed to me an absence of political terms in the script. I was beginning to get worried that I was being faithless with myself and was, perhaps, making a mistake. Because in me, too, there existed a certain conventional mental structure that demanded the use of a direct, political statement in every work. I was saying to myself, watch out! You'll end up making another *Love Story!* But I quickly realized, shooting, that when you show the depths, when you drown yourself, as it were, in that feeling of solitude and death that attaches to a relationship in our Western, bourgeois society, and when you begin to identify the reasons for this feeling of death, you inevitably make a political statement.

Do you consider the search for "didactic," anonymous sex an antidote for this feeling of death in our society?

In the film, sex is simply a new kind of language that these two characters try to invent in order to communicate. They use the sexual language because the sexual language means liberation from the subconscious, means an opening



up. In no way, on the other hand, do I mean to identify sex with the feeling of death, either. I am not setting up any eros-thanatos theory. I am simply saying that when you describe a relationship thirsting for authenticity, you discover all that surrounds it, all that hampers its expression.

In any case, you link the concepts of sexual expression and personal liberation. Do you feel that self-liberation must be a conscious process?

Self-liberation in the sense I employ the term is a first step towards living better, towards the finding of an equilibrium with your subconscious, towards the finding of a peaceful relationship with your subconscious. These first steps can often be very dramatic, since we tend to suppress our own attempts at making them. We suppress our aggressions and frustrate our souls. Since that which is between Marlon and Maria is a sort of *amour fou* that continually devours itself, I had been afraid it would seem isolated. Instead it became a centrally symptomatic affair for our times.

You don't feel, then, that the individual must necessarily be rationally aware of his search in order to find that equilibrium?

No. One can also become conscious of the meaning of one's actions in a completely irrational manner. In fact, "becoming conscious" seems to me to be too limited a definition for what we are talking about. This does not mean that I reject psychoanalysis or other systems of reaching consciousness, but I feel the system must be different for each one of us. I, for example, walk this road towards self-liberation in a very unorthodox manner. I feel myself becoming conscious, but in an extremely emotional, instinctive fashion.

Does your intuition lead you to an understanding of the feeling of solitude and death in our society beyond our conventional answers found in Marx and Freud?

Both of these are still very important to me in my work. But I refuse to limit my reading of their meanings to the conventional interpretations. But certain references in this direction have been useful to me in understanding the characters of my film. For example, how an encounter turns into a clash. Or, to quote Maria, how the casual becomes destiny.

I cannot deny a certain educational structure and background, of which Marx and Freud form part, but I try and see them in a political, existential way. In making *Last Tango,* I found that what I had considered points of arrival were in reality points of departure; I mean to say that understanding my characters with the help of conventional psychology or politics gave me only a beginning glimpse of their complicated, personal structures, but it did help me in accepting them as living beings in front of the camera, and in accepting their contributions to the film.

I find that I must live through the relationships that a film creates in a direct way, without logical or rational references. You could say, of course, that the film is a form of dream, that the whole story is an oedipal projection on the part of the girl; after all, she is 19 and Brando 48. And his story could be another oedipal projection—he feels, in a way, that he is as much the son of his wife as he is the father of the girl—but I prefer not to define things in this way. After all, the film is meant to mean different things to different people; the final, personal significance of a work always depends on the viewer.

The viewer, then, for you becomes an essential component of the work?

Absolutely; as essential as the lights, as the sets, as the man who pushes the camera dolly. Even when an audience is not overwhelmed by a work, in its distance from the work it remains an essential component. But I cannot think about it when I am shooting. After all, every conversation one undertakes—and a film is a conversation—presupposes the presence of a partner. In the case of poetry, my interlocutor is the reader, in the case of the cinema it is the public. I do not like to talk alone, and I do not talk alone. I do not talk for myself, I mean. This, by the way, is how the cinema becomes a way of weighing reality, that is, it becomes an instrument for understanding the world. And I think this is true for both creator and viewer.

In a way, then, you are exploiting the public?

I exploit it by giving myself, but I am also exploited. It's a two-way relationship. By the way, I find more and more that there is no such thing in human congress as innocence and guilt. There is only supply and demand, something offered and something requested, indistinguishably intermingling. And you can't even say that he who offers is innocent and he who demands is guilty, or vice versa. And this applies to personal, sentimental relationships as well: there are never faults. And as far as the public is concerned, the only sure thing I know is that I seem to be seeking an ever larger one.

Have you changed your demands, then, since you were writing poetry?

No, perhaps the offer has changed. I also feel, by the way, that my films, deep down, are quite generous, that I make no excessive demands. Perhaps part of my process of liberation was the acceptance of the fact that I had always wanted to create a *spettacolo*. It took me a long time to accept this idea, although even my first 8mm films, made with my cousins when we were children, told stories, rather than just documenting the death of a pig or the vain search for an abandoned cable car in a forest. But I think that only with *The Conformist* I really accepted the role of author of story films. [*"Autore di film - spettacolo"* cannot really be translated; *"spettacolo"* essentially means a demonstration for a public, a notion situated somewhere between entertainment and spectacle.—GB]

Your difficulty is accepting this idea derived from the fact that you felt your political concerns could not be well expressed in the spectacular form, or because you found it difficult to give up the idea you expressed ten years ago, of the camera itself being the most important subject of your work?

I haven't really given it up. I had arrived at a point of rupture when I made *Partner,* the film in which I most violently went against my own nature of being a showman. Besides the fact that this film caused me a tremendous psychological trauma, because nobody, almost nobody, accepted it. Paradoxically I now find—now, after having finished and discussed it—that *Last Tango* is, of all my films, the one most closely related to *Partner.* Now that I have fully accepted my showman role I find I can return safely to a whole series of questions, obsessions, discussions over the meaning of the camera, of research and of experimentation which in the making of *The Spider's Stratagem* and *The Conformist* I had deftly avoided as if they were the devil. This means that now, with the security I derive from the show element, I can start afresh. That is why I find *Tango* very close to *Partner,* because in *Tango* there is a continual enquiry in filmic terms, a research on the use of the camera, an attempt to question the structures of cinema.

You don't mean in the spoofing sequences, where Jean-Pierre Léaud satirizes Godard?

Certainly not. Jean Pierre is not meant as a serious Godard character, rather as a character à la Jerry Lewis, perhaps. His part is superficial and strictly functional. He could also have been a carpenter. The reflections on the use of the camera are in all the rest. In that sense I don't think I have changed since we discussed all this ten years ago. I still feel I am looking for the very specific light that is typical and expressive of every feeling and of every epoch, and I still seek the very specific way of representing how time passes—that particular, psychological passage of time which gives a film its style. Perhaps it is a matter of *percorso,* of how a man moves through time, in the historical and in the practical, daily sense. That, in fact, is what holds *Tango* together, as I see it now: Brando's retreat from being a man of 48 back to being an adolescent and finally dying like a foetus. Jean-Pierre, filming his life with Maria, at one point, pushing the camera at her and forcing her to retreat, says: *"Avance en reculant!"* Advance by going backwards. That is exactly the *percorso* of the character of Brando in the film.

At the beginning of the film he is supervirile, desperate but determined in his despair. Look at how he fucks the girl the first time. But slowly he almost loses his virility. At a certain point he makes the girl sodomize him: going backwards, he has arrived at the anal stage. Let's say, the sadico-anal stage. Then he goes back even further and arrives in the womb of Paris, dying with mother Paris all around him, her rooftops, TV-aerials, her grey, grabbing anonymity. Much of this feeling was born during the shooting of the film, although I had planned for him to die like an embryo even when we wrote the script. But now I find that all this comes out very specifically; that there is a clear departure and a clear arrival in death. When we were planning the film, all this was only in my subconscious. My camera research clarified it for me. The irrational becomes lucid.

In your script, I found the words of the scene where he lectures to the girl on the restrictive structures of the bourgeois family, but he does not have anal intercourse with her while he is talking. Why did you add this in the filming?

It seemed clearer to me, if he accompanied the oral lecture with suffering caused to her in a direct way, performing for her, by using her, the double-faced violence he was describing. It is a violence that wants to teach, the violence of the teacher, and on the other hand there is the violence of the family, the destructiveness of the idea of the family. Her drive to be free, when she screams and repeats "Liberty, liberty!" is very real and also double-faced: she wants to be free of what he is talking about but also free of him. What he is doing to her, thus, is a sort of didactic savagery.

Do you mean to tell me that he uses perversion in the guise of anti-bourgeois teaching?

It's a moment of catharsis. He is conscious, but also divided, in that moment, between his consciousness and the pleasure of perversion. He immerses himself in perversion as personal catharsis, and also, partly, because perversion in that moment serves him as an escape.

Do you mean from impotence? Because he can never, obviously, live according to the principles he is talking about. Throughout the film you show him as a man who defends one principle and lives by another, or by none.

Partially yes, but also as an escape from the pain caused by his wife's suicide. There are many ways of getting over that kind of pain, perversion and sex are obvious ones. Sex is very close to death in feeling.

Certainly the metaphor you are suggesting seems to land the character of Brando in a duality of motivation. Your film, especially in America, where we tend to equate sexuality with liberation as you seem to do, has been hailed as an erotic masterpiece. To me it seems the opposite, and the sequence we are discussing, in its sadness and desperation, proves rather that you use sex as a symbol of the impossibility of relationships.

I didn't make an erotic film, only a film *about* eroticism. In any case, you can not separate "erotic" behavior from the rest of human action. It is almost always like this, that things are "erotic" only before relationships develop; the strongest erotic moments in a relationship are always at the beginning, since relationships are born from animal instincts. But every sexual relationship is condemned. It is condemned to lose its purity, its animal nature; sex becomes an instrument for saying other things. In the film, Marlon and Maria try to maintain this purity by avoiding psychological and romantic entanglement, by not telling each other who they are, etc., but it proves impossible, since dependencies of various types develop. Brando tries in vain to defend himself from his innate sentimentality, which is why he goes to such extremes in putting down both himself and her precisely at the moment he discovers that the man she claims to love is he. He already knows, deep down, that he will give up his strong-man act, that he will put on his pointed shoes and his red tie and will, over champagne, tell her who he is and accede to her bourgeois ideals, fearing that they are in reality more his than hers. It is the last dance of his chaotic solitude, his last defense. Asking her to cut her nails and insert her fingers in his anus is like saying: Fuck me, break my virility, destroy it!

Why do you feel every relationship is condemned?

Every relationship is condemned to change, anyway. Perhaps it can improve, but generally it deteriorates. It cannot remain just itself. Thus there is always a sense of loss. It is this sense of loss that makes me use the word "condemned" rather than saying "destined."

So you do not believe at all in the possibility of a romantic relationship?

Well, I am myself being a romantic when I say that first emotions cannot be repeated. But I do not believe that relationships can develop on a romantic level, because . . . well, because there isn't really a reason why they should: history, reality, are all but romantic. And a relationship must feed on reality in order to continue.

So what can develop between a man and a woman on a conscious level?

Not a very cinematographic question . . . What can develop is only possessiveness, which brings about the destruction of the loved object. That is the sadomasochism at the center of the relationship, a constant presence in all relationships. It is a component which in rare cases can be dominated and regulated and can find a channeling which instead of harming the relationship itself finds victims outside, a sort of centripetal instead of centrifugal sadomasochism. When we manage to channel and express our aggression outside of the relationship, the relationship can be saved. But most of the time it works against ourselves.

What about man's other, less personal relationships? You have changed your emphasis away from social and political themes, at the same time becoming more contemporary. And yet you defend a single political party.

In a way, I feel an even stronger political obligation now. But I think more clearly. I feel that my political engagement is more mature, less linked to personal neurosis. I feel my presence is a historical continuity, in a cultural involvement. A modest presence, of course, but I perceive it in a more liberated way, probably because I am also less frustrated. At one time I could not distinguish between that which was rational and profoundly necessary, and that which, on the other hand, was more of an alibi, that is, linked to neurotic structures and the search for a clean conscience. In a way, I think, all of us European intellectuals have lived in this distorted political dimension for the past few years.

Do you feel there has been a lack of political clarity? We do not seem to have been able to give the most recent generations any background by which to judge their current political moment. They seem more rootless than we were.

This problem interests me greatly. The film I want to make next is, in fact, concerned with the rediscovery of roots. The film will be called *1900 (Novecento)* and tells the story of two children born in that year at a distance of a few hundred yards from each other, one in the house of the peasant and one in the house of the landowner, in Emilia. The film follows their lives through the century, living moments of Italian history with them. Friends at first, then enemies, with the rich one financing the first fascist clashes and the poor one in the Communist Party, navigating through the whole period of fascism in Italy. I want this to become a film about the agony of the culture of the land, of peasant culture, of a civilization that lasted thousands of years and has practically died in only 50-70 years of industrial "progress." It is a film I want to dedicate to the young generations; I want to carry them back to the rediscovery of their real roots which are those of the peasant world. I want to carry the camera into the cornfields, into the furrows of earth during irrigation, into the ground itself; and in a less physical sense bring them to rediscover certain popular values which we, for imperialistic reasons, have completely throttled. It's for those who today are 25 or younger—that means for all those who know this kind of world only from literature (and that, too, is a privilege, after all), for all those of the great mass who know nothing at all about these values, who are perfectly ignorant of their own roots, which must still be there somewhere—I just don't believe that a few decades can cancel out generations of genetic memory; in our nucleic acid there must be a memory of the values of the land. At least a sediment! Nobody has ever posed this problem.

Do you feel more clarity now, at least in being able to provide some guidance to this generation you are describing?

No, no. I have no clear lessons to impart. Personally, I do not see clearly, neither the problems nor the perspective. But I feel that within the party one is now given space to develop, perhaps, a clearer view.

JOAN MELLEN

Sexual Politics and *Last Tango in Paris*

Last Tango In Paris seems as if it is about sex, an inquiry into whether violent, "real" sex (the kind that makes Maria Schneider's hair curl by the middle of the film) is possible in a world of false values. The real significance of the film has been obscured and contained by the irrelevant furor over its purportedly explicit sex. What is particularly striking about the film, once we get over the sight of Marlon Brando performing anal sex, albeit with his clothes on, is that it is, in disguise, the most political of Bertolucci's films so far—his most ambitious attempt to integrate Marx and Freud. The means this time are not those of the superficia of external political behavior, as in *The Conformist,* but a startling visualization of the conflict between sexual freedom (conceived in *Last Tango* as license) and the psychological repression of which we are all victims.

The premise from which *Last Tango* begins, and which none of the American critics have

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The premise from which *Last Tango* begins, and which none of the American critics have perceived to date, is an indictment of the bourgeois family which dominates culture and society, suppresses feeling and "civilizes" the "savage" in us all by repressing bodily needs. Unexperienced and unacknowledged, these feelings emerge is a distorted form, either through the political savagery of the heroine's father (a colonel who died in Algiers) or in sexual relationships. With the heroine Jeanne (Maria Schneider) and her fiancé Tom (Jean-Pierre Léaud) deep feeling is shunned and feared. The wild sexual frenzy of Jeanne and Paul (Marlon Brando) is achieved through complete seclusion from society. Only then can they risk real and unbridled emotion. The impossible and hopelessly romantic goal of the figure portrayed by Marlon Brando is to unleash feeling outside of the framework of relations fixed by the external world, using a girl with whom all personal and past history will be denied and disallowed.

Bertolucci has said that "in our society even adultery becomes a bourgeois institution."* Bourgeois man, he perceives, represses his primal feelings, but winds up acting them out even as he imputes them to his victims—the poor whom the colonel's dog, Mustapha, would immediately recognize and attack when they entered his gates. The individual psyche and the social behavior of the bourgeois invariably converge and synthesize. During the most abusive sex act in the film, a rape involving anal intercourse, Paul forces Jeanne to intone a ritual of denunciation of "the holy family" and the "Church" which makes "civilized people of savages," renouncing "all that children are taught until their wills are broken."

Although *Last Tango* is set in no particular historical epoch, the film is preoccupied with the meaning of history during the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie. It denies our ability to move beyond the logic of what we have been or where we have come from. If it is not *about* politics, it is more political than either *The Spider's Stratagem* or *The Conformist* because it explores how people are afflicted by the dominant values of the time, seeking in sexual release a means of escape both from the social past and from the personal history of character. Brando-Paul experiences feeling as inseparable from rage and violence because this association occurs when deep needs are repressed from earliest years. And he can risk their expression solely in an insular, artificial environment isolated from bourgeois reality because the violence outside is not merely the concomitant of surfacing need, but brutalization and murder, as the colonel's boots and gun intimate. Jeanne submits, fascinated by the power of Paul's rage—but when, late in the film, it bursts inevitably into the outside world, it is thereby transmuted and assimilated to a sordid reality as oppressive as it is dreary.

The predominant camera movement deployed by Bertolucci is the tilt, usually beginning high up and moving down to earth, inexorably, fatally. Through its frequency, it runs by the end of the film in dialectical counterpoint to the plot, working in satire of Paul's attempt to escape from time and space in his idyll with Jeanne. In despair, experiencing a trauma of isolation and abandonment after his wife Rose's unexplained suicide, Paul pursues a 20-year-old, callow, waif-like half-child, Jeanne. He corners her in a run-down, rat-infested Paris apartment, virtually rapes her and then sets up a liaison.

The tilt expresses the presence of Bertolucci himself, warning Paul of the downward motion by which life returns us to what we have always been. Paul's inability to save his wife from suicide, and his absolute failure to know her, will be repeated in his failure to give himself without brutality and machismo to Jeanne (as well as in Jeanne's failure to accept him without this machismo). Only after his wife's death does Paul learn that her hotel had been a way-station

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*Many interviews have recently been published with Bertolucci, Brando, and Schneider. Quotations in this article are drawn from: *New York Times*, Feb. 11, 1973; *Newsweek*, Feb. 12, 1973; *The Village Voice*, Feb. 8, 1973; and from personal conversations with Bertolucci in Rome, May 1972. Pauline Kael's influential early review of the film was in *The New Yorker*, Oct. 28, 1972; Judith Crist's review was in *New York*, Feb. 5, 1973.

for street whores. She in her "purity" shared the aura of the aging prostitute whom she befriended. The tilt foreshadows Paul's return to the present by means of the past, as at the end of the film he offers Jeanne the gift of his real name, age, and history.

But at the beginning of the film, in trauma over the suicide he had been unable or unwilling to prevent, Paul rejects even the rudiments of furniture for his retreat with Jeanne. They suggest the appointments of his past and the suicide of Rose from which he is in flight. Paul demands that he and Jeanne tell each other nothing of their real lives, not even their names or the names of anyone they know.

Paul's method of escape from the pain and despair of unrequitable need (as revealed in the *cinéma vérité* account of his childhood) is, as Bertolucci has called it, "the present of fucking." The structure of the film, like the camera's return to the tilt, passes judgment and turns upon each of the character's futile attempts to transcend the conditioned responses of human connection. Jeanne, in a moment of gaiety, suggests to Paul that they try "to 'come' without touching." They sit, naked, staring at each other, their eyes tightly shut. The moment is early in the film, in the first flush of delight in discovering the joy of sexual play, through which they made contact with *themselves,* beyond the bonds conscious and social life have placed around them. It is also the beginning of the end of their idyll, as they make a failed attempt to deflect sexuality ever so slightly away from the abrupt penetration Paul demands as the sole mode of passionate relation.

Bertolucci works within Freudian conviction, centering the organization of Jeanne's psyche in the oedipal relation to her father. Nonetheless, Bertolucci has adapted Freudian perception to his own sociology, invoking Freud's dynamics of character more in spirit than in form. His people therefore behave as they do not because they are determined by Freud's model for all of human nature, but because they have been socialized by the repressive bourgeois family.

This is why in a film in which the hero hopes to carry out his relationship in absolute seclusion from the world, members of Paul's, Jeanne's, and even Rose's family appear unexpectedly in the *mise-en-scène.* Paul recollects his mother and father, Jeanne's mother recalls the colonel whose boots, gun (with which Paul will be murdered) and hat remain physically present and continue to arouse her. Rose's superstitious, meddling mother haunts Paul physically, presenting the source of Rose's devastation. They are there to establish that neither we nor Paul nor Jeanne have been inherently predetermined to behave as we do. The coercion of family, church, and state have been internalized—the very institutions Paul forces Jeanne to repudiate during acts of sexual brutality.

Because he handles his political radicalism so unobtrusively in *Last Tango,* critics have been misled into seeing crude Freudian mechanics in the characterizations—the result, perhaps, of their knowledge that Bertolucci began psychoanalytic therapy during production of *The Spider's Stratagem.* The Freudian motif infuses the earlier works as well. Athos Magnani and his son in *Spider's Stratagem* are played by the same man; the betrayal of resistance against Mussolini is conjoined to oedipal strife. In *The Conformist,* Clerici is shown in sexual play with his mother and in abuse of his psychotic father. Out of the oedipal drama flows a feared homosexuality, the root cause of Clerici's embrace of fascism. And Paul and Jeanne in *Last Tango* are also misshaped by the conjunction of instinctual need and the social repression of that need. Yet although he has denied particular interest in Wilhelm Reich, like Reich, Bertolucci pursues a concrete mediation between Freud and Marx, and there is little of the tenuousness of Freudian absolutism in *Last Tango In Paris.*

With *Last Tango* Bertolucci abandons an excess of historical detail, achieving with color alone most of the work of set design. This is because Paul searches for a pure moment in which past conditioning and external demand are cast off, however briefly. The emotional results, the process of failure, and the insidious intrusion of both the past and the society Paul would defy, grant the film its beauty and a daring which is unnerving.

Paul and Jeanne at fleeting moments believe they can exist outside of their own personal histories and past, but the very necessity to leave their hideaway and re-enter the time, space, and reality of the outer world foredooms them. Even their escape is marred by a constant awareness that they cannot live in the world and preserve what they have achieved only in flashes and instants. Bertolucci sees the tragedy and capitulation to the world as inexorable in this age, what Marx called the "pre-history of man"—a capitalist era incapable of humane relations. The disjunction between "savage" or intense feeling and civilization makes inevitably romantic the attempt of isolated individuals to remake themselves, while the world whose shape they would shed, remains. In fact, it is only Paul who is conscious of what is being attempted and who sees that it can work in the hideaway alone. Only when Paul gives in to his need to live in the world, and seeks to live with Jeanne on bourgeois terms, does she realize that it is over and can't work, indeed that it all becomes an enslavement.

A weakness of the film is that Jeanne is too young and unseasoned, too integrated within the relations of the pop present to understand Paul or his purpose. When he abandons his demonic quest and approaches her outside, he becomes a gum-chewing man of limited intelligence and achievement, as pathetic as the tango palace whose last dance he performs not only in derision, but in self-parody. When they speak to each other outside, all is sordid and unappealing: the flop-house hotel Paul inherited from Rose, the "cowshit" of the country where he would "take" Jeanne to live and his inability to have children because of "a prostate like an Idaho potato," caused by "a 'nail' I picked up in Cuba." Gone is the excitement of this abuse of her in the apartment, the lingering memory of the butter with which he stuffed her anus in a moment of sexual frenzy—to which she had submitted masochistically as a guilty upholder of the norms of her social class.

Jeanne is allowed to experience only the abuses of the sexual and we may ask why Bertolucci feels the tormented struggle should be that of the male alone. It is true that Jeanne herself, through her father and family, epitomizes the bourgeois, and she at the end is Paul's literal destroyer. But Paul had been unable to love his wife who killed herself in emptiness. He is no more valuable a human being, and is, in fact, far less capable of expressing love. Each time Jeanne shows him real feeling, he finds a new method of humiliating her sexually and bending her to his will; and it is he and not she who insists at the end upon the return to the bourgeois. It is, therefore, legitimate to challenge Bertolucci's conception of male and female roles.

Jeanne is passive, masochistic, and arousable only by brutality. She is singularly unmoved by the good-natured egotism of her fiancé, the *cinéma vérité* movie-maker played by Léaud. He is a callow, narrow-hipped unisex counterpart to Schneider herself. Bertolucci has found it necessary to tell interviewers that he is "absolutely for women's liberation. I like women better than men." It was in this context that he also has said that Jeanne is "not the woman of the future or the liberated woman, but the woman of the present," who can tell a man she would copulate with a pig for him and submit, if unwillingly, to anal sex.

It is precisely when Jeanne tells Paul he is the man she loves, the one who can save her from loneliness, that he humiliates her most completely. He forces her to stick two fingers up his ass while he indulges in reviling her as the embodiment of the society on which he would revenge himself: "I'm gonna get a pig and have it fuck you and vomit in your face and you have to swallow the vomit and then go behind it and smell the guts of the pig." But because Jeanne is made the bourgeoise and Paul the social rebel, she is violated by a rebel-hero *as* a bourgeoise and not as a victim of a bourgeois. Bertolucci thus sustains the culture's degradation of women in his film. Jeanne is never a participant in Paul's rebellion, but a foil and the vehicle of the culture and society, even when, ambiguously, she becomes the agency of his death.

Bertolucci constantly lights up Brando's face in gold (the set designer has called it "uterine"), and the quest for the absolute erotic present in sex is clearly his and Bertolucci's, with Jeanne playing the part of necessary tool. Brando, notoriously, posted his lines all over the set and even asked Bertolucci if he "could write lines on Maria's rear end"—no better example of her role as instrumentality. Schneider herself has insisted there was no real correspondence between herself and the passive Jeanne: "I have never been submissive like her. I am very free sexually, and it was still difficult to do Jeanne." And of his collaboration with Brando, who improvised continuously on the set, Bertolucci has said, "It was like a love affair," nowhere better minimizing Jeanne's significance as a human being to the project, let alone her equality as a presence in the film.

Judith Crist has thus expressed the chagrin of many in her revulsion for the image of woman conveyed in this film: "The film is all machismo filled with such detestation of and contempt for women that its universality is limited." Only Pauline Kael, whose rave review reads at a far lower level of consciousness than the film itself, seems to be at home with the film's treatment of Jeanne. But this may be because, applauding "hypnotic excitement . . . primitive force [and] thrusting, jabbing eroticism," she herself seems to have been seduced by the scenes in which Paul attempts to mold Jeanne like clay and bend her body to his will. Responding only to the surface of the film imposed largely by the star, Brando, Kael feels it necessary to assert that the girl Jeanne gets only what she deserves and, in any event, through her very callowness, triumphs over her aggressor: "It is the soft ones who defeat men and walk away, consciencelessly."

And indeed the imagery of the film is governed by the grand, machismo beauty of Paul and the inferiority of Jeanne. Even at the end, when Paul is no longer the bestial rebel, an inverted father come alive, Bertolucci's distaste for Jeanne emerges. She may be sexually vibrant and alluring, but she is without depth, real character, or the capacity to rise to the role of heroine or rebel. Her entire body, complete with pubic hair, is continuously revealed to us because it is irrelevant to the dynamic of the film—as Bertolucci has admitted in his explanation of why he cut the shot he filmed of Brando's genitals. "I cut it out simply for structural reasons, to shorten the film," Bertolucci dissembled. Too honest, however, to allow himself this pretense, especially for a film so replete with the presence of the director, Bertolucci added, "It is also possible that I had so identified myself with Brando that I cut it out of shame for myself. To show him naked would have been like showing myself naked." Bertolucci does not value Jeanne or feel her worthy of such concern because she is chosen to carry the persona and the quality of the bourgeois world itself, the worm in the wood of Paul's retreat. Jeanne is not the adult carrying the themes of the film, as she might have been had the part been played by a Simone Signoret to a Paul performed by a charming if unknown boy actor. The male is the real character and his sexual abuse of Jeanne expresses the moment of Bertolucci's consciousness. As Maria Schneider herself has said, she and Brando were "acting out Bernardo's sex problems . . . Bernardo was getting free of his sex problems. In effect we were trying to transfer them to the film."

Bertolucci's handling of the male and female thus brings us back to his dependence upon Freud, whom he has called "very important in my biological-physical life." As sexual violator, Paul was no threat to Jeanne's love for her father because only symbolically had he become the agent of the paternal, denouncing the father's world and values. But as a real man who would occupy the place reserved for her father, he cannot compare. He is dissolute, repellent, and lacks the actual power and authority in the world which her father fully and comfortably possessed. Jeanne shoots Paul with her father's gun, an obvious symbol of the penis, which Paul had playfully called her "happenis." (The shooting takes place with Paul curled up in a fetal posi-

tion: Bertolucci diminishes the film at the moments when he unnecessarily reduces it to formula.)

But Bertolucci largely succeeds in integrating his Freudian view of personality into the felt life of the film. One of its richest moments restores the inexorable realities of the present to Paul's fleeing psyche. It comes from Brando himself, in a monologue which both brings us close to the man and intimates why the world is unavoidably with him, and will claim him despite his mythic attempt to defy and transcend it alone. For Bertolucci as for Freud, childhood is always with us. During the shooting, the film dissolved into *cinéma vérité*. Brando the actor becomes Brando the screenwriter, his remembrance of his own past deployed as an emblem of the roots of Paul's character.

Brando recalls his father as "a drunk, tough . . . super-masculine," his mother as "very poetic—and also a drunk." He recounts how she was arrested nude and how he had to milk the cows every morning and evening. One evening when he was to take a girl to a basketball game, his father tyrannically demanded he first milk the cow. With cowshit on his shoes, Paul collected the girl and smelled in the car all the way to the game.

The "cowshit" for Paul, Brando, and Bertolucci represents all from which it is impossible to escape, the damage done us, the humiliation which confuses need and resentment, the pain of human connection and the enclosing history of one's existence. This dynamic animates a sexual politics which circumscribes Paul despite his desperate attempt to transcend himself. Bertolucci expressed it schematically: Paul begins as a man in battle to surmount but "goes back to adolescence and through a period of anal sadism," and is reduced in the final shot to a dead fetus. We progress from hopeful beginnings to failed but identical ends.

In defiance of Paul, who demanded that all history and identify should be ignored, Jeanne tells him when he lapses into describing his past, "You've been had. I don't want to know anything about your past, baby." Quoting him, Bertolucci allows her, playfully, to undermine the whole structure of his futile existential quest to live absolutely in the present. The scene was shot in one take, itself an expression of the resilience of the past in its drive to overtake us. Bertolucci brilliantly shows the hopelessness of instant salvation or existential "freedom" outside of history or social change.

Jeanne also seeks to deny the past, but in her case, as a model bourgeoise, by lying about its meaning and its hold upon her. Paul is honest about the way it was. Jeanne insists that childhood was "beautiful." And Paul with feeling rejoins, "Is it beautiful to be made into a tattletale . . . or to sell yourself for a piece of candy?" Jeanne, who was trained by family and class to live on the surface, thinks she is free of her past—even as does Maria Schneider, who was well chosen by Bertolucci for his conception of Jeanne. Schneider talks identically about herself as "free": "He's [Brando] not so free as I am. I'm more beautiful than he is." As a child Jeanne drew pictures of towers: a prisoner of the sexual and emotional world of the nuclear family, bound by envy and need for the penis denied her by nature and celebrated by her culture. Through Jeanne, if not through Paul, the shadow of Freud continuously dominates Bertolucci's image of female identity.

United Artists must have been delighted to print Pauline Kael's review in full in the advertisements for *Last Tango* because it focusses on the sex. In Kael's by now long familiar anti-intellectualism, her article ignores the true theme of the film, the whirling of the past which slowly advances, deadly and implacable, on both characters. What is interesting about *Last Tango* is not its simulation of forbidden sex (sodomy and masturbation), but its tracing of the boundaries of free choice in controlling one's relationships and forging one's separate identity. *Last Tango* is about the elusiveness of our hold on the present, which remains the only means by which we can live with the past. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Bertolucci's mentor with whom he worked on his first film, *Accatone,* has called *Last Tango* "a betrayal of culture," asking, "what's new about sadism?" But what is original about *Tango* cannot be its eroticism, which must bow in explicitness to pornos like *Deep Throat.* It is, rather, the use of sex as a catalyst to explore our mythological capacity to forever begin anew and live life in defiance of what we have been.

Always with Bertolucci at his best, style renews substance. The opening shot of the film is a dolly on a diagonal down to an agonized Brando crying out in a cathartic scream, "Fucking God!" while a Metro train on a viaduct goes by over his head. The walkway on which we first see both characters comes to represent the precarious bridge over which people travel in danger of falling into the abyss of their feelings. Jeanne enters the shot dressed outlandishly, swinging along with a carelessness that accentuates the tears of Paul whose anguish goes unanswered and unheard. The apartment at which they come together is on the Rue Jules Verne. Like the submarine of Captain Nemo, it will be an enclosed cocoon shut away from the harsh world, in which the soiled relations of the earth, the past, cannot enter. Like a womb, it is a place where Paul and Jeanne can express their rages and needs as infants.

Several surreal notes in the opening sequence provide cinematic equivalents for the emotions of Paul. A woman brushes false teeth in the toilet as Jeanne enters to make a phone call. In a flood of yellow light Paul passes her in the café. (The use of yellow in this film recalls Eisenstein's brilliant essay on "Color and Meaning" in *The Film Sense.*) The mad laughter of the black concierge creates a mood of the demonic, expressing Bertolucci's sense that inside, Paul and Jeanne are in the clutches of their obsessions and fantasies. The concierge grabs Jeanne's hand and won't relinquish it, like our compulsions which we are destined to act out.

Paul's entrance into the apartment itself is mysterious. He materializes out of nowhere, hunched in a corner like a demon or a ghost, like an unconscious urge which unexpectedly possesses us, playing itself out within its own closed logic. Brando sits as if rolled into a ball, clutching himself to provide the comfort he has been unable to obtain in the world.

Jeanne is both repelled and fascinated by the nihilism of the situation. The mirror in the apartment is cracked, another indication that the events which will take place here will be only a distorted reflection of the "real." Jeanne urinates with the bathroom door open; she is not wearing any pants. The apartment on the Rue Jules Verne is a place where inhibition must vanish, in which the *raison d'être* of their being together is to peel off what is external to their deepest selves. When Paul takes Jeanne for the first time, her response is almost immediate, wrapping her legs around him as he bends over her. The act has been prepared for by all these images suggesting a stripping away of facade, a return to the primal.

Leaving Paul, Jeanne hurries along a train platform to meet Léaud. The mad rush of the train on the Rue Jules Verne symbolized the emotion of Paul. It conveys the compulsion of Jeanne's attraction to him and his need. Its counterpart is the tame, static train from which Léaud exits. He walks through life filming his experiences rather than living them, as Jorge Luis Borges has called the tango a way of walking through life. Tom-Léaud is making a film about his relationship with Jeanne called "Portrait of a Girl," and she calls him the coward he is, hiding from life behind the parasitic role of the artist.

In the character played by Léaud, Bertolucci also seems to be satirizing Jean-Luc Godard and the bourgeois film-maker pretending to be a revolutionary. Léaud plans with Jeanne to name their children "Fidel" and "Rosa," recalling Godard's *Vladimir and Rosa;* he wishes to repeat the cycle of the destructive bourgeois family which drives its children to suicide. Léaud rushes around with his hand-held camera, is humorless and uses his pretty girlfriend in his movie, as Godard used his wives, Anna Karina and Anna Wiazemski. But even without these thinly veiled allusions he is ludicrous.

In an impressionistic series of intercuts Bertolucci draws us into the world of Paul which runs parallel to his affair with Jeanne. The first is the most shocking, that of the scene of his wife's suicide in which blood has been sprayed everywhere—on the walls, the door of the bathroom, and the shower curtain; the bathtub has thick red bloodstains, suggestive of violently primal acts, birth, ritual, violence, death. The girl who is cleaning has told the police. "One day he debarks in Tahiti," an explicit reference to Brando himself as a person incapable of giving enough love, escaping from himself into the exotic, the strange and the forbidden.

Paralleling Paul's disintegration in the decaying hotel where the final arrangements for the funeral proceed, are the scenes at the Rue Jules Verne in which he seeks to dominate Jeanne. He is in flight from the truth about his relationship with Rose, who took one of the hotel boarders as her lover. In one brilliant surreal scene, Brando and the lover, sitting in the identical red plaid bathrobes given them by Rose, drink the bourbon she had given her lover in emulation of her wished-for relationship with Paul. Impotently, trying to understand why Rose has killed herself, Paul tells the man, "I can't understand what she saw in you"; the irony is that in her entrapment what she saw in the man was Paul. She tried to make of her lover a replica of the Paul who could not give her the love she sought.

The hotel, lit with a sinister yellow, is no less enclosed than the apartment. Rose, like Jeanne, was condemned to the paltriest of emotional choices. In the apartment Bertolucci uses very shallow depth of field, paralleling Paul's struggle to keep everything in the one-dimensional present. He frequently cuts during a tilt from Paul and Jeanne to Paul in the hotel, indicating the inescapable motion from the willed and the fantastic to the real. The camera itself tells us of the futility of Paul's quest to escape to the present from what he has been.

With Paul, Jeanne becomes a child, as they gurgle and groan together. As Brando says, in fatigue over his own life matching Paul's, "Oh, God, I've been called by a million names all my life." The childish sounds the two make in lieu of names are cut into the barnyard of ducks recorded by Léaud's soundman. The priggish Léaud is always at one remove from feeling. He records the duck's quack instead of reaching for the sound from within himself.

He believes that to be adult one must be "serious, logical, cimcumspect, and hairy," facing all problems. He is a child, despite his possession of pubic hair, and not an adult like Paul, who knows that all feeling is childlike, that only a child is embarrassed by childishness. The filmmaker is both child and parasite, urging Jeanne to recall her past and her father so that he can "use" it and so deny its meaning. With Léaud, Jeanne can never communicate. "His eyes are closed," Léaud murmurs. "He played the piano very well," is her reply in non-sequitur.

Thus, however much distance Bertolucci creates between himself and Paul, the impulse in the film is constantly to diminish it. Léaud provides the film with a nonauthentic choice for Jeanne. The boy her own age, who wants to know everything about her past and is willing to marry her, is also superficial, unfeeling, and incapable of reaching her real self. The rough, dominating Paul-Brando who rages and is sadistic is the "real man," the "good stick man" despite his ruined prostate. The film shows no lovemaking between Jeanne and Léaud, suggesting that if Paul is forever returning to the fetal, Léaud has not even come as far as puberty. Still a boy, he can only talk about "being," and foolishly believe he can "change everything," encouraging Jeanne to "change chance to fate." Hiding behind his camera he has not yet the courage to make himself vulnerable, as Paul can.

Bertolucci ultimately shares with Sam Peckinpah, despite their political differences, the idea that the successful relationship between a man and a woman occurs when the woman is passive and the man as furiously domineering as a stud bull. However inadequate Paul is made to seem outside the apartment, the idyll inside forms a "set piece," a pure cinematic moment of authenticity beside which every other experience recorded in the film is derivative and as inauthentic as the life preserver stamped "L'Atalante," pace Jean Vigo, thrown into the Seine by Léaud. Paul lives *L'Atalante*. The apartment is his barge. Léaud is an outsider on life, his nose pressed up to the glass of being.

Even in the apartment, however, pure experience cannot be sustained, although its impermanence is suggested as a necessary hazard of existence rather than as a result of the neurosis or inadequacy of Paul. Jeanne finds that his "solitude weights on her" because "it isn't indulgent or generous." He talks about his past, yet he won't let her talk about hers. In defiance she lies down on the mattress and masturbates. He sits on the floor and cries in desperation, an effective cut from his life with Jeanne to that with Rose, indicating through the editing that the two relationships are essentially similar, and ultimately evoke similar emotions.

Like Rose, Jeanne discovers that at a deep level, he hates women: "Either they pretend to know who I am or they pretend that I don't know who they are." Jeanne is as unhappy with him as she is with Léaud, whom she attacks in terms that apply equally if not more to her relationship with Paul: "You take advantage of me. You make me do whatever you want. The film is over. I'm tired of having my mind raped." Bertolucci seems to anticipate the reaction to his portrayal of Jeanne, although he does not answer it.

The film thus progresses to a reductionism in which all relationships coalesce into one, even that between Jeanne and director Bertolucci, for whom Léaud in part stands as a satirized emblem. In response to Jeanne's tirade, all Léaud can do is make gestures with his hands across a Metro platform, framing a shot of her angry face. Her anger becomes that of Rose who tried to rip the wallpaper off the wall of her lover's apartment with her fingernails because she wanted the walls white, identical to those of her room with Paul. Rose was as powerless to control her life as Jeanne is to control hers.

The frequent tilts also convey the motion of one life merging into another. It is a closed notion of human existence, at moments determined in the most limited sense. As the central premise behind all the action it imposes the most diminishing element on Bertolucci's film. It underlines the reductionism of his characterizations, which increases as the film goes on. The cries of Jeanne after anal intercourse merge with the shrill sound of the train passing once again overhead, as she lies amidst the debris on the floor: bread, butter, and knife. It is like the humor and panache with which Brando swings the dead rat, a symbol of the decay of their relationship, in Jeanne's face. Despite the play, it is still a dead rat.

At the same time the film nowhere denies Paul's assertion that a love where you never have to be lonely does not exist; we are all "alone, all alone." We never learn the truth about each other, as Paul says to the flower-bedecked corpse of Rose before which he breaks down. Each wanted the other to take care of him/her. He calls their marriage a "foxhole" because they hid their real needs from each other. Like Léaud and Jeanne and, as Bertolucci implies, like all people in our age, they could not communicate. Paul's last gesture to Rose, wiping the obscene cosmetics from her face, is even interrupted by the knocking at the hotel door of a whore with her prey, to whom "the owner (Rose) has always been helpful." And Paul becomes her pimp, as Rose had been. For Bertolucci we are all "pimping," buying love when we cannot evoke it. With Paul in pursuit of the whore's client, Bertolucci cuts to the café sign: "La Bohème," satirizing the sentimental love story which still provides the romantic ideal for our society. "Love," says Bertolucci, is beating up a client for an ugly old whore, even as our love is tawdry, unreal, and self-seeking.

The ending confirms the characters in their destinies; Paul is as worn-out as the chewing gum he takes out of his mouth before he dies and deposits under the terrace railing of Jeanne's bourgeois apartment. He is as out of date as the tango dancers with their artificial heads locked in a distorted position, emphasizing again that he is of another era and that there is no "beginning again."

The mistress of ceremonies calls for "all best wishes for the last tango" and a long sweeping tilt takes us down beneath the tango couples to Paul and Jeanne whose destiny together is played out by the dance. When the MC interrupts their love-making, ("It's a contest, where does love fit in?") Paul, again in absurd futility, can only take his pants down to the woman, a parody of the exciting, violent passion he and Jeanne knew before. He becomes a real child rather than an adult accepting a child's needs. And Paul, like Léaud, has assumed an inauthentic facade, as we all do so often, despite ourselves. When he does an imitation of James Cagney, Jeanne in desperation grabs his penis, and the camera tracks past the empty tables in disappointment as she makes him come for the last time, his "last tango."

The final shot of the film belongs to the murderess Jeanne, in shallow focus so that the body of Paul on the terrace beyond is barely defined; in terror, she plans her story for the police: "I don't know his name, I don't know who he is, he tried to rape me, he's a madman, I don't know his name." He had, in fact, become a man she did not know, the husband of Rose, a 45-year-old adventurer. In his need Paul, all men, become devourers. Rose escaped him by killing herself; Jeanne escapes by killing *him*. Fearing the perversity and destruction of human relationships, as he had known them, Paul concealed his need of her as long as he could. As soon as she recognized that he was no longer the strong father figure, but a real man beset by the identity of a flawed, inadequate human being, like all of us, she no longer wanted him. Jeanne could be won only by brutality, by savagery.

But there is also a brilliant combination of the unconscious and the political at the end. In donning the colonel's hat in jest, Brando becomes a bourgeois like him, one of those who "civilize the savage" rather than allow primitive unconscious impulses to surface and express themselves. As a bourgeois in the apartment of Jeanne's bourgeois family, he becomes repressive, both politically (through the dialogue) and psychologically. "I ran through Africa, Asia, and Indonesia and now I found you," he tells Jeanne. He is no better than Rose's religious mother whom he accused of teaching the dead woman to repress her feelings and of being an indirect cause of her death. It is after he symbolically becomes the bourgeois colonel that Jeanne shoots him in revolutionary rebellion—although throughout the film she has been Bertolucci's vehicle for the bourgeois. At the very end the two exchange roles, revealing the duality in human nature which forces us to become the very thing we despise. (That we are what we claim to hate, that we are always ambivalent, was equally the theme of Bertolucci's *Partner,* based upon the idea of the double.)

Last Tango, visually complex, its imagery constantly revealing character and sensibility, both of people and of the age in which they live, offers too narrow a conception of what human beings can give to each other to be a great film. And Bertolucci is not consistently distant enough from his subject to offer us the exquisite ironies with which Buñuel invests *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie,* which Bertolucci encouraged the viewers of his film at the New York Film Festival to go out and see.

Yet as a paean to the damage inflicted on us all by bourgeois values, and on the inability of even pure sex to rescue us from bondage to the family and its lifelong hold on our sensibilities, *Last Tango* is a brilliant film. Where it lacks distance, it offers passion. Where it chronicles only failure, and where Jeanne and Paul, but especially Jeanne, seem too diminished to represent us, the attempt they make to come together (with or without touching) carries gaiety, courage, and a large conception, if not its complete realization.

BOLESLAW MICHALEK

The Cinema of Krzysztof Zanussi

Krzysztof Zanussi does not look like a film director: he is tall, rather thin, wears glasses, and although he appears to be a rather young scholar, he is very sure of himself. And indeed, he is scholarly. For four years he studied physics at the University of Warsaw and planned to become a solid-state physicist, but then transferred to Kraków where he directed his interests to philosophy: specifically theory of values, morality, psychology, and finally aesthetics. During these studies he made several amateur films, won quite a few amateur competitions, and so became the terror of the amateur film movement. Finally he enrolled at the national film school in Lodz, and immediately upon graduation produced one film after another: four feature films and a whole series of half-hour TV films. Within four years this young scholar became—to the amazement of the entire film world of Warsaw and Lodz—the leading figure in the Polish film industry.

Zanussi partly owed his rapid success to specific qualities of character: excellent organizational instinct, tactical skill, and precision. The pace at which he works is rarely encountered under Polish conditions. But his films convince us that he is also a great film talent.

As his thesis film at the film school Zanussi presented *"Smierc Prowincjala" (Death of the Provincial).* This half-hour film was not meant to be publicized, but it nevertheless received a lot of publicity. Up to this day I do not know whether this happened because of its unquestionable aesthetic and philosophical values, or because it was startingly different from anything thus far produced at the film school or in the Polish cinema. It is certain, however, that the "singularity" of Zanussi's films as compared with indirect cause of her death. It is after he symbolically becomes the bourgeois colonel that Jeanne shoots him in revolutionary rebellion—although throughout the film she has been Bertolucci's vehicle for the bourgeois. At the very end the two exchange roles, revealing the duality in human nature which forces us to become the very thing we despise. (That we are what we claim to hate, that we are always ambivalent, was equally the theme of Bertolucci's *Partner,* based upon the idea of the double.)

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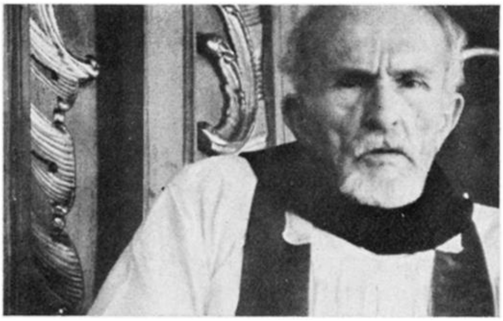


Death of the Provincial

the Polish cinema and the "cinema of the young" the world over, is of great importance. The plot of *Death of the Provincial* takes place in the secluded atmosphere of a monastery. It is the story of a young student restoring the frescoes of a chapel, and the Provincial of the monastery who is about to die. They don't exchange a word —only a few glances just before the Provincial dies. This suffices to bring out a subtle feeling of unease, and a certain number of questions (rather than answers) concerning youth and old age, faith and doubt, life, transience, and death.

Shortly afterwards Zanussi made *Zaliczenie (Summation)*, one of several films for Polish Television. It is a short, almost theatrical scene of a psychological duel between a professor and his student during an examination. Here Zanussi demonstrated not only his capability of creating a volatile atmosphere full of anxiety—as in *Death of the Provincial*—but also his dramatic sense, narrative discipline, and his knowledge of psychology.

STRUKTURA KRYSZTALU (THE STRUCTURE OF CRYSTALS)

The above-mentioned films were only overtures to Krzysztof Zanussi's later creativity. His real direction became clearer in his first feature film under the rather pretentious title *The Structure of Crystals*. Modest, gray, not very dramatic, this film reminds us of a chamber music composition for two instruments rather than a normal composition rich in motifs, instrumentation, and technique. Two friends meet again after many years. One of them, Marek, is a young scholar building himself a career, well organized, flexible, skillful, adaptable, and ambitious. The other, Jan, Marek's long time friend, abandoned all scholarly aspiration long ago. He lives in a remote village, and works at the small local meteorological station. He believes that in this solitude he is able to realize better his ideal of humanity, that life is richer when its rhythm is slower, and his experiences are deeper when there is time for reading and meditation. The film consists of disjointed conversations at teatime, interspaced with long moments of silence, walks in the snow-covered fields, an occasional lecture by a visitor to the local school, the village inn smelling of beer, a short trip to the nearby town, again conversations, small clashes, and Marek's departure to the capital. That is all.

But these are only surface appearances. Underneath lies a mass of questions. Did Marek really achieve success, or did he visit his isolated friend only to play the role of a successful man against the background of a forgotten village, to exalt himself and to humble the other? And what about his friend and rival Jan? Does his withdrawal from normal life, and his existence in seclusion signify a victory? Or rather a defeat which he is unwilling to admit even to himself? Is his desire for contemplation, his search for riches within himself, an authentic need or just a pose, a gesture of defense against defeat?

Has the dispute between the two friends some general social and psychological meaning, or is it only a confrontation between two different personalities? Zanussi has touched here something very real: the problem of what constitutes success under conditions within a socialist society. On the one hand, in Marek's attitude

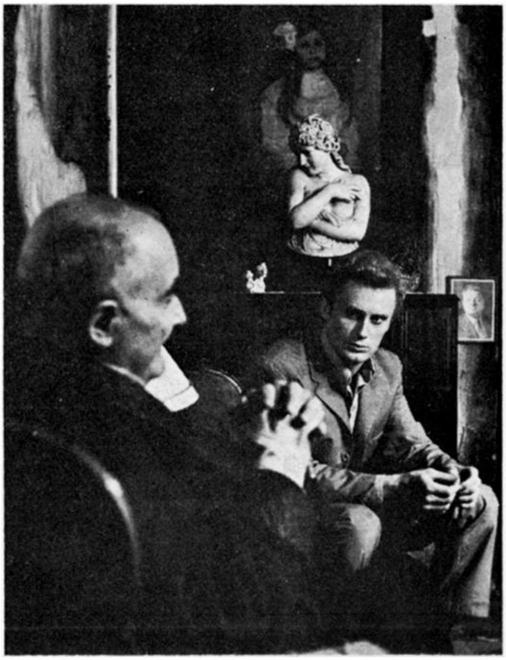
there exist the traditional elements of the battle for success: contempt for solutions which are unrealistic, impractical, ineffective — even if they have a moral justification. But do not such mechanisms of success imply a complete relativism of idealistic and moral principles? Does it not force a person to constant never-ending compromises and conformity? On the other hand, Jan rejects not only the negative and doubtful implications in the traditional philosophy of success, but even the very existence of success and advancement—he is virtually a misanthrope. It is necessary to note that these questions posed by Zanussi do not concern only the individual motivations and purely personal choices of Marek and Jan. These doubts apply to the entire society, as well as to the organization and the principles directing it.

All the above evolves from the disjointed conversations of the two friends. Zanussi cannot be accused of idealizing one hero more than the other. He criticizes and affirms both of them equally—in moral and social matters as well. This unresolved dispute is precisely what gives such a strange dramatic form to *The Structure of Crystals.* There are no exciting conflicts which create new situations or enliven the drama, nor are there mounting climaxes. The front—as in a positional battle—is always the same: there is no victor and no loser.

In thus departing from the classical forms of drama, Zanussi established the form of an essay, i.e., a free narration about people, their ideals, and the reality in which they live. These were the characteristics which made *The Structure of Crystals* a banner-film for all who see the future of the cinema in its intellectualization. The film received the annual award of the Polish film critics, but it did not get large audiences either in Poland or abroad.

ZYCIE RODZINNE (FAMILY LIFE)

After many years, a young man returns to his family home. Such would be a laconic description of *Family Life,* Zanussi's second feature. This homecoming is a great confrontation. On one side is the young engineer, very contemporary: he probably lives in a tiny, modern apartment. He shares the hopes and anxieties of all young men. On the other hand is his family home which he deserted long ago. It is strange, and falling apart. It houses his father, sister, and aunt—all embittered and angry at each other and the world. Is the return of the young man only a very outspoken dramatization of certain social conditions: a confrontation of healthy young people, the products of new times, with the old, neurotic, sick and crumbling world? Is it only the "old" and the "new" presented in the most traditional, but simultaneously a very simplified way? It was so understood by foreign critics when Zanussi's film was presented at the 1971 Cannes Film Festival: the deterioration of the middle class and its hierarchy of values, in an atmosphere of mutual cruelty practiced in a closed, small circle. It is something we know so well from the literature of the turn of the twentieth century: French à la Gide, Scandinavian à la Strindberg, Russian à la Gorki.



Zanussi's Family Life

This is a great mistake. Such a subject shown in Poland around 1970 has other sources and leads to other conclusions. The Polish middle class is by no means victorious and arrogant as in the literature mentioned. In *Family Life* it has no authentic existence—only a seeming existence based on a system of vestigial values. It is not a threat, nor does it rule anybody. It is a segment of society separated from the normal values and possessions, drowned in autocontemplation. Its only reality is memories. It is a shadow. Such a picture—contrasting sharply with the above-mentioned literature—does not evoke distaste or anger, but only contemplation on the transcience of life, and a certain nostalgia or some kind of tenderness.

This is the correct description of the hero—the young engineer—and of the drama's temperature in *Family Life*. Wit belongs to both worlds: the dead one of the past, and the world of the living. He feels aversion and hate because he knows this house and this "so-called life" much too well. Simultaneously he feels tenderness, because he cannot free himself from memories. *Family Life* is therefore a drama of a man who would like to free himself from his social, psychological, and class conditions, but is unable to do so. When he realizes it, he accepts—in a certain way—his moral and existential status as well as his personality.

ZA SCIANA (BEHIND THE WALL)

A similar existential theme appeared with great force in Zanussi's next film, *Behind the Wall*. His plans for the film were modest—a one-hour television film, like hundreds of others produced all the time. However, the theme, with Zanussi's perspectives and maturity, made *Behind the Wall* one of the most important films of the Polish cinema in recent years.

The apparent banality of the situation is incredible. It is the story of a meeting between a successful young scientist (note that all Zanussi's heroes are scientists, scholars, intellectuals), very stable and holding a secure position, and a frightened, frustrated, desperate, unsuccessful woman. We soon guess, moreover, that she has also had an unsuccessful erotic life. The film takes place in only a few interiors: at the elevator of their mutual staircase (accidentally they live next to each other in the same apartment house, which is impersonal and rather similar to an ant-hill), in his office where she comes seeking a job, and finally in her own tiny apartment. In these modest locations, and in the course of gray, trivial everyday life, the action unfolds into a beautiful parable of human destiny. The girl comes to understand that her neighbor from behind the wall is in reality very far removed from her: not only on the ladder of professional career, but also in the scale of human concord. He can not, or perhaps he does not want to, help her. His interest in her is conventionally courteous, and one senses in him a terribly cold egoism. The girl commits suicide . . . unsuccessfully—it is one more of her unsuccessful ventures. The scientist sees the ambulance in front of the house from the window of his apartment. On his neighbor's balcony he sees a hospital attendant. He goes to her apartment frightened, perhaps feeling vaguely guilty. But he hears the girl assuring him that it is not his fault, neither the fault of his egoism—just an accident.

This short film attains a degree of authenticity not otherwise found in Polish cinema. The film, besides having been made in authentic interiors, portrays both characters with painful realism. Also the psychological mechanism which evolved between them! In their movements, words, reactions, in the specific relation which develops between them, there is nothing stereotyped, no concession to cinematographic conventions. This achievement owes much to Zbigniew Zapasiewicz who plays the young scientist, but it is above all due to the magnificent Maja Komorowska-Tyszkiewicz. She was discovered by Zanussi one year earlier *(Family Life)*. Before that she was a little-known actress in a Wroclaw theater called *Teatr 13 Rzedow*—The 13-Row Theater—which was the cornerstone of the Grotowski Laboratory Theater. Her creation in *Family Life* was very mature and studied, with traces of hidden eccentricity. But it was in *Behind the Wall* that Maja Komorowska-Tyszkiewicz created a truly heart-rending image. She presented a picture of human despair, not in screams and tears, but in a bitter smile which covers up hopelessness, in sharp gestures which cover up wretchedness, in a voice which breaks because of fear that it will reveal the pain . . . but mainly in the eyes: the fright of a hunted animal is expressed in them. In a film with a banal theme, with the action taking place in mundane interiors and among undramatic and unprepossessing people, a certain sublimity and gravity of issues is apparent. *Behind the Wall,* which was broadcast by Polish Television, and later shown abroad, is a small masterpiece.

ILLUMINATION

Illumination (1972), Zanussi's fourth film, is closer to *The Structure of Crystals* than to the traditional drama of *Family Life*. It uses consecutive scenes marking the stages of life of a young scientist right after school, and up to the time when he becomes 30 years old. These scenes are interwoven with documentary material which illustrates the epoch, and with statements of contemporary scholars who comment on the problems raised in the story. The story of the hero is similar to the stories of thousands of other young people: he enters the university hungry for knowledge. He has the temperament of a scientist. Meets one girl, then another whom he marries. He is forced to interrupt his studies by military duty and the birth of his

child. Then again studies, assistantship, separation from his wife, and reconciliation. All this is not presented as rotating around one basic choice, as is customary in similar biographical films: a certain "either-or" which the hero has to decide. It is rather a biographic essay full of ellipses, narrated in a beautiful rhythm, about the life of a young Pole. It is full of small asides, lyrical notations, personal and other people's reflections. All this material is organized, however, into a few main themes.

Most prominent is the traditional theme describing the formation of a personality: the slow development, crystalization of morality and the hardships connected with it, resignations which can not be avoided, and determination. On this level, *Illumination* can be considered a pedagogical story for young people, but presented nobly and convincingly without insistence.

However, from the behavior of the young man, from his conversations, and the comments loosely woven into the action of the film, a second, very interesting theme appears: the process of discovery. The young man is ambitious and anxious to discover physics completely—and through it certain ultimate laws of the world. Simultaneously, he wants to study it deeply and broadly. Soon, however, he meets resistance in the form of an outdated method of teaching: specialization and automatization of scientific processes brought to absurdity. He finds that the ideal scientist-humanist—a man who studies only a segment of nature but is capable of conceiving it in entirety and understanding its deeply hidden structures—is today only a will o' the wisp. His professor enlightens him, in the end, that the contemporary scientist must always remember the relativity of his knowledge, of his limitations, its victories and defeats. He must sometimes treat his research as a game, and conduct it only for the sake of a game.

Finally, still another anxiety fills this film—one which we find in all Zanussi's films: the existential anxiety. When the hero at the end of the film enters the apogee of his life and success, it is already too late. Because at this point the slow but irrepressible decline begins—the second half of life, "over the hill," which puts one's entire existence under a question mark.

Repeated questions about the meaning of existence can bring impatient smiles to the face. But in this film—as in Zanussi's previous films—his serenity does not change into aridity, and his perseverance and inquisitiveness do not transform into boredom.

A THIRD POLISH CINEMA?

Four feature films and a few shorter films intended for television . . . is this all? None was a shock for the audience, none caused a revolution in the cinema world. On the contrary: all were chamber films and without great resonance in the world. At first glance their import was scarcely detectible. But something very significant for the Polish cinema and for the constant changes in Polish society is visible in these films. Let me try to put it in perspective.

Krzysztof Zanussi first came to notice with a group of graduates who appeared on the horizon of Polish cinematography between 1967 and 1969. They were called—perhaps too hastily—"The Third Polish Cinema," in comparison to the two earlier generations of postwar filmmakers. Their appearance was accompanied by too great a scepticism about one group, and too great enthusiasm for the other. The greatest satisfaction was manifested by the film critics, who were not so much convinced of the new group's success, as disgusted with the stagnation of Polish cinematography during the sixties. The new group consisted of the following: Witold Leszczynski *(Life of Matthew)*, Marek Piwowski *(Voyage)*, Wojciech Solarz *(Pier, Summons)*, Andrzej Kondriatuk *(Hole in the Earth, Scorpio, Virgo, and Sagittarius)*, Roman Zaluski *(Cardiogram, Plague, Anatomy of Love)*, Andrzej Zulawski *(Third Part of the Night, Devils)*. Krzysztof Zanussi was outstanding among them.

Why were these young film-makers so different? The whole Polish cinema—like all of Polish postwar culture—was dominated by a generation with war experiences, which became their source—directly and indirectly—for their art. However, war was for them not only destruction, suffering, the absurdity of death, etc. It was also the great transformation which took place in the country in those years: the change of government brought changes in social structure, human relations, and in the hierarchy of values. Everyone who even slightly observed the Polish cinema of the fifties and sixties, must have realized that the war and revolution had an overriding impact on Polish culture in the postwar 20 years.

The young generation, however, is not at all touched by the war. Zanussi: "I understand the earlier Polish cinema and its power in the works of Andrzej Wajda. But it is not problematical to me. I was born in 1939. During the Warsaw Uprising I was five years old. My memories from that time are not very clear. My friends two or three years older than I bear already the marks of this period—but not I." Such young people, free of the trauma which so decidedly influenced Polish postwar art, had been shaped in conditions of relative social stability. They try to record in their arts the aspirations and problems of their own generation. The "Third Cinema," therefore, was on the same thematical and historical level (although not on the same aesthetic level) as was the cinema of their slightly older colleagues such as Roman Polanski *(Knife in the Water)* and Jerzy Skolimowski *(Identification Marks—None, Walkover, Barrier, Hands Up)*. Both generations show in their films the dilemmas of young people entering life: the drama of the young who demand a place in a society which is already stabilized.

SUCCESS AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Zanussi expresses these dramas in all his films. He also touches upon social problems characteristic for a socialist society of the sixties and seventies. These were years in which a longing for a less severe life dominated our society: better and more available consumer goods, and a higher material and status level, especially for the younger generation. One could also sense a certain tiredness with the old stereotype model of a human and citizen: one who was the incarnation of social service, of self-sacrifice for the good of the entire society (and his self-satisfaction). A more contemporary model of a human appeared: less severe, and with less accentuated discrepancies between personal aspirations and social goals.

Such problems, which had appeared in Zanussi's *The Structure of Crystals,* trailed through all of his films and were presented again with new sharpness in his last film *Illumination.* Zanussi is one of the few people who approached the new problems with clarity, fully understanding all their social complications. It is a very complex process: professional success and prestige in a socialist society are not synonymous with material success. Therefore a degenerating influence of objects is smaller than in a typical consumer society. But similar dilemmas develop: when and in which situations does personal success transform into an egotistic personal gain? What are the moral goals to success? When and in what situations does one have to pay for success with conformity? Let's repeat: none of these questions had ever been touched upon by the Polish arts. They were still immersed in war traumatics, more and more removed from everything of importance to the new generation entering life in the sixties and seventies.

There is another point of great importance. Zanussi, together with his contemporaries from the "Third Cinema," looks at society from an entirely different perspective than their predecessors. It is the perspective of an individual who searches for a place of his own in society, who looks at the world and society with its mechanisms, changes and crises from the perspective of an individual.

It is a very important point, because with us it used to be just the other way around: the individual was looked upon from the perspective of the all-social processes. The fate of the individual was taken to be a straight consequence (sometimes even a simple exemplification) of general situations. He was determined historically, and identified with the aspirations of a group, a class, or the nation. We must remember that, in the tradition of socialist culture, art was always considered above all the instrument for knowledge of the laws ruling a society, rather than for knowledge of individuals within their inner, complicated world.

As a matter of fact, the established Polish artistic tradition—including the literature and poetry of the nineteenth century—had in reality a similar point of departure: always more important was the social and moral order of the world, rather than the individual. Therefore, traditional Polish art was not greatly enthused for the toilsome observation of realities: Poland's greatest literary works were rather a demonstration of general rules than truths of personal life. Such was the source of Polish cinema and literature of the fifties and sixties: they sought to transpose reality into a language of poetic metaphor, to mystify or caricaturize it rather than to present it in a factual light. Zanussi and his contemporaries propose a change: for them it is reality alone (not a transposed, mystified, or caricaturized version of it) that becomes the substance in which all the dramas, concerns, defeats, and triumphs of the individual and society takes place.

PARADOX OF THE YOUNG

As a sort of postscript, I would like to draw certain distinctions about Zanussi's (and his contemporaries') cinema, which has been a subject of many misunderstandings. Often I hear accusations that his films are not aggressive enough. That in an epoch of youthful movements, confrontations, and aggressive radicalism—when the conflicts of generations, races, classes, has become intensified—these young film-makers are excessively concerned with merely individual complications, as well as with ageless concerns about existence. Usually their contemporaries in Western Europe and the US are given them as bad examples. Such a way of thinking will not stand the test of any dialogue. In the capitalistic societies the individual is concerned with the fate of humanity at large because its uncertain fate hangs upon uncontrolled games of group, class, and national interests. This is why the young Western film-makers look in their art for simple diagnostics and uncover increasingly often now—perhaps unintentionally—the social and class dimensions of their world. The Polish film-maker—especially the young one with a great sense of responsibility and sensitivity—is concerned rather with the individual experience, with the ambiguity of human motivations, with the longings, the failures and triumphs of the individual. Much as his western contemporaries are discovering the social dimensions of the world, he wants to discover again the unique individual dilemma in the world that surrounds him.

It is, of course, a paradox: and one which Zanussi's films quietly illuminate.

[*Translated by Wanda Tomczykowska*]

GRAHAM PETRIE

Alternatives to Auteurs

First naturalized in the United States through the work of Andrew Sarris, the auteur "theory" has been violently attacked and ingeniously defended; critics considering themselves auteurists in some sense now occupy posts of academic and other power, with beachheads at such influential publications as the New York Times and with sometimes astonishingly solemn influence on neophyte critics. Lately, however, two new tendencies have appeared: some critics generally outside the fray are willing to admit comfortably that **"Nous sommes tous auteuristes"** ***(reducing the great debate to the triviality some say it always deserved) while others have begun, as in the article below, to attack auteurism at its heart: as a factual misunderstanding of the film-making process. Sarris, who can be a genial polemicist, is no doubt capable of following Marx's lead and announcing one day soon that he is not an auteurist.***

> *"No one ever really has final cut, even when you're the producer. Somebody else always owns the picture, and there's always always someone ready to take it away from you and screw it up."*
>
> JOHN HUSTON[1]
>
> GEIST: *I don't know if you have final cut . . .*
>
> SCHAFFNER: *I don't. I don't think anybody in the U.S. of A., who makes a film for a major distributor, has final cut.*[2]

The *auteur* theory was essentially an attempt to by-pass the issue of who, ultimately, has control over a film—an issue that Huston and Schaffner disclose with brutal frankness. By distilling something called "personal vision" from a film, and marketing this as the "essence" of its success, it was hoped to evade all the sordid and tedious details of power conflicts and financial interests that are an integral part of any major movie project. "Personal vision" made it unnecessary to pay much attention to such minor matters as: Who instigated the project, and for what motives? Who actually wrote the script, and how much of it survived? Who cast the film, and for what reasons? Who edited the final product, and under whose directives? All these could gratefully be swept aside, and attention concentrated on what was really of significance: the discovery of recurring themes, characters, and situations in film after film of one's chosen hero.

The contempt for fact displayed by *auteurists* at their peak sometimes achieved breathtaking proportions. Time and again they would confess ingenuously that they hadn't the faintest idea whether Hawks or Ford or Fuller or Aldrich had really *wanted* to make a particular film, had contributed anything to the script or casting, or had even directed several of the key sequences. All this, they confided was of little importance when set against their own intuition that the film *obviously* bore the director's personal stamp from beginning to end. This habit of arguing from preconceptions has so thoroughly permeated contemporary film criticism that a recent article on "Welles's Use of Sound" can use the railway station scene in *The Magnificent Ambersons* as one of its key illustrations without mentioning—or even showing awareness of—the fact that this scene was not directed by Welles himself.[3]

After this kind of thing it is something of a relief to read Garson Kanin's malicious comments on the Warner Brothers assembly line and to discover that Michael Curtiz (a recent candidate for hagiography) "sometimes started shooting a script without reading it" and that "frequently a director at Warner's wouldn't even see his assembled stuff."[4] To a hard-core *auteurist,* of course, this would merely provide further confirmation of his belief that a director's personal vision can somehow transcend otherwise insurmountable obstacles, but the recent massive accumulation of evidence of this kind must surely give the rest of us pause.

As books on cameramen and scriptwriters begin to pour off the presses, and interviews with them begin to fill the pages of the magazines,[5] it becomes evident that some radical rethinking will have to be done, and that most of the lazy and comfortable assumptions that have become habitual even to many who would indignantly deny that they were *auteurists* will have to be abandoned. It is no longer going to be enough to assume that the director's contribution is automatically of major significance; equally, it will be necessary to avoid the dangers of replacing one culture hero by another and launching into "The Cameraman as Superstar" and solemn studies of the personal vision of Sol Polito or James Wong Howe.

There are two directions that this reassessment might fruitfully take. One could be a thorough consideration of the cinema as a cooperative art and of the ways in which it thereby differs from fiction, poetry, painting, and even music and drama. (The two last require collaborators before they can fully exist and they can be performed badly or well, but *King Lear* is still a great play and Beethoven's Ninth a great symphony despite all the inadequate or horrendous incarnations they have achieved: one is dissatisfied with a particular interpretation and not with the original work itself. One has only one version of a film to judge, however, and it is *that* which becomes either bad or good.)[6] And a second might be a serious attempt to analyze the status of the director in Europe (and perhaps America in the silent period and the last five years) as opposed to the Hollywood of 1927–1967—the heyday of the big studios and producers.

It is ironic that, at the very moment when *auteur* critics have begun to get over their obsession with themes and are making daring forays into the territory of visual style, the whole question of the responsibility for the way a film "looks" should be thrown into doubt by cameramen who tell us that X "knew nothing about lighting" or Y "left all the lighting to me." But this in turn may produce unexpected benefits, for it forces critics, perhaps for the first time, to ask what it is that constitutes a "visual style." To what extent is it the arrangement of the lights and the choice of lenses, filters, and gauzes (almost invariably the prerogative of the director of photography), and to what extent is it framing and composition, the use of a static or moving camera, the type of location and setting, the establishment of a particular color scheme, the choice of costumes and make-up, and the creation of a basic editing rhythm (all of which *may* be the responsibility of the director)? The complexities of this type of approach are evident when one considers that it is perfectly possible that in a given film the balance of light and shadow, the visual effect of the close-ups, and the movement of the camera may be totally the work of the director of photography; the pattern, order, and type of shot may have been laid down in the script; the costumes and sets may have been chosen by the studio; and the editor and producer may create the final shape of the film between them without even consulting the director. In these circumstances what sense does it make to talk confidently of so-and-so's "visual style" and how can we ever be sure that we are attributing credit where it really belongs? Yet these are questions that have to be answered if we are ever to go beyond the bland assumption that "everything" (or at least "everything that matters") in a film can be credited to its director.

It is also worthy of note that, once the young French critics who had inaugurated and polemicized the *auteur* theory actually came to the stage of making films of their own, their enthusiasm for their earlier ideas began rapidly to fade. Truffaut has recently been expressing much more interest in the nature of a film's *script* than its direction, while Rohmer has abandoned the whole process of film criticism completely. It is possible that their own experience of the complexities of getting a film into production has led them to see how over-simplified their previous assumptions had been—at a time when, paradoxically, their own films have given the term "personal cinema" a coherent and justifiable meaning. The theory can then be seen as a kind of wish-fulfillment, a convincing of themselves that it was possible for *them* to make films, their own films and on their own terms; once they had succeeded in doing this, the theory had served its purpose and could be left behind. The staunchest defenders of *auteurism* now are probably to be found in America, where it serves to bolster the self-respect and boost the egos of American directors, as well as providing a convenient way of organizing a film course or getting a book into print. Its connections with the realities of film-making, however, remain as tenuous as they ever were.

The flaw in the *auteur* theory is not so much its assumption that the director's role is of primary importance as its naive and often arrogant corollary that it is *only* the director who matters and that even the most minor work by *auteur* X is automatically more interesting than the best film of non-*auteur* Y. What good does it do Kazan's reputation, for instance, to insist on including in a retrospective of his films the unwatchable *Sea of Grass,* a work that Kazan himself has disowned as a purely commissioned piece, and that the program notes to the showing at the BFI glumly admitted is worthless? And why continue to inflict on Fritz Lang "credit" for *Der Tiger von Eschnapur/Das Indische Grabmal* and bewail the "slaughter" performed on them by English and American distributors, when Lang spent most of his time on the set lamenting the depths to which he had sunk in being obliged to make these films, and concerned himself chiefly with adjusting the folds of Valery Inkijinoff's costume and saying that what he *really* wanted to do was to film Camus?[7] One of the *auteurist's* main defenses is that his methods allow him to rescue neglected films—but there are some films that probably deserve to remain neglected.

By focussing attention so exclusively on a limited number of figures the *auteurist* also runs the opposite risk of overlooking eminently worthwhile films that cannot conveniently be slotted into any of his favorable categories. Films like *Dark Victory* and *Now, Voyager* are left in limbo because Edmund Goulding and Irving Rapper are not considered worthy of *auteur* status; yet both films are still thoroughly watchable and transcend magnificently the stupidity of their plots. It is not, however, through the "personal vision" or "personal style" of the director that the films achieve this, and it would be impossible to take five minutes at random from either *Dark Victory* or *Now, Voyager* and attribute them with any confidence to either Goulding or Rapper on the basis of visual style or thematic material alone. In most respects the two films are interchangeable: they are the product of a particular *genre* and a particular studio, and in theme, structure, moral tone, sets, costumes, lighting, and camera style they meet the requirements laid down by these rather than expressing anything deeply felt on the part of director or cameraman.

The films, however, are not totally anonymous: they are studio products, put together by craftsmen who were also minor artists, but what gives them their lasting quality is the artistry of Bette Davis, who wielded much more power at Warner's at that time than most directors (and even read her scripts right through before committing herself to filming them). She is not in any sense the "author" or "creator" of these films, she did not write or photograph or direct them, but in a very real sense they were conceived for and around her, and she probably had as decisive an effect on their shaping as any of her collaborators. They are *her* films, and when people go to see them today it is Bette Davis they go to see them for.

The situation becomes more complex if we try to apply a similar approach to a film that is almost universally considered to "belong" to its director: *Ninotchka*. Certainly this film is full of Lubitsch "touches": it displays the elegance, the wit, the cynicism, the total lack of respect for conventional moral susceptibilities that we associate with his work (and which even pre-*auteurist* critics of the thirties had managed to isolate and identify). In moral tone and social milieu, in characters and situations, it forms part of a world that Lubitsch had been creating as recognizably his own for the previous 15 years. And yet, from today's standpoint, the film belongs as much to Garbo as it does to Lubitsch. It forms an integral stage of her own career—a career that displays a degree of continuity and artistic coherence comparable to that of most Hollywood directors. It was a film that Garbo wanted, and needed, to make at least as much as Lubitsch did: it gave her a chance to display a neglected facet of her talent and to show her potential as a comedienne. She had more say in the choice of technicians than Lubitsch and insisted, as usual, that William Daniels act as director of photography. The film was made by Garbo's MGM rather than Lubitsch's Paramount, and though the differences between Paramount glamor (in terms of sets, costumes, and lighting)and MGM glamor may be slight, there is no doubt that they exist. And although Lubitsch supervised and contributed to the script, it is certainly possible to see Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett's writing as having as much connection with Wilder's later *One, Two, Three* and *Some Like it Hot* as with Lubitsch's earlier films.

An understanding of the basic intersecting forces that went together to make up films like *Ninotchka* and *Now, Voyager* can only help to enrich our appreciation of the films, and is surely preferable to distorting *Ninotchka* by trying to see it as "all" Lubitsch, or neglecting *Now, Voyager* because there is no convenient category in which to slot Irving Rapper. Indeed we might begin to develop a degree of sophistication that allows us to enjoy a film for something more than the "personal vision" of its director—for its photography, its costumes, its music and even (like the humble and much-despised fans of Hollywood's past) for its stars.

There is no need, of course, to neglect or degrade the director and it is worth remembering that many European and even American directors had been identified (and written about) as artists with something personal to convey many decades before the *auteur* theory appeared. A partial list of these figures would include: Eisenstein, Griffith, Hitchcock, Murnau, Pudovkin, Chaplin, Von Stroheim, Ford, Lubitsch, Capra, Mamoulian, and Preston Sturges. The *auteur* theory had the effect of shaking up and often reversing conventional evaluations, and its most lasting contribution has probably been the discovery and rehabilitation of the neglected figures of the formerly despised "action" genres, together with the American films of Lang and Renoir; yet here too it should be pointed out that Manny Farber has been praising the "masculine" values of Walsh, Fuller, and Siegel for many years and for reasons that have little to do with *auteurism*. What we can usefully do now, is to start sorting out and re-examining some of the *auteurist* preconceptions that have become petrified into meaningless dogma.

Granted that the cinema *can* be a "personal art," how do we set about defining this? It is certainly possible to identify recurring themes, characters, and situations that reappear throughout the work of many directors, but to rely on these alone, as *auteurists* tend to do, is to court disaster. The continuity may be the result of working within a certain genre, or for a particular studio, or in habitual collaboration with a favorite scriptwriter or actor, just as much as it may spring from a deeply felt need of the director's temperament (and even here the recurrence of a particular theme may indicate a shallow or obsessive vision rather than a fruitful one). To try to isolate a "personal style" based on visual qualities is even more dangerous: there are not more than a handful of American directors to whom one can safely attribute a distinctive visual (or aural, or editing) style that persists no matter with whom they are collaborating or for whom they are making the film. My own list would include Griffith, Welles, Keaton, Chaplin, Von Sternberg (in the films with Dietrich), Ford (in the Westerns at least), Nicholas Ray (for the consistently bizarre quality of his images), and Kubrick.

Even if these difficulties have been overcome, and we have succeeded in agreeing on something —in theme, characters, visual composition, editing, settings, use of music, or what have you— that sets one director apart from his fellows and can reliably be traced as persisting in at least a significant number of his films, there are other problems to be taken into account. Do we insist on pursuing this personal factor into the deepest recesses of the hack and commissioned work that the director may have been forced to churn out, or do we settle on some kind of dividing line that marks off work that is worth considering from that which is not? How do we cope with actors, cameramen, composers, set designers, and scriptwriters who may also have evolved a "personal style" over a series of films (bearing in mind that here too we have diffculties in establishing degrees of freedom and of choice, many cameramen having confessed that they changed their lighting style according to the studio they worked for; while the precarious and often humiliating status of the writer in Hollywood needs little further documentation)?

All these questions lead ultimately back to the issue of control raised in the quotes from Huston and Schaffner. One can take the *auteurist* position that "personality" is some kind of mystic quality that exists in a vacuum, and can be examined in total isolation from such mundane factors as whether the director had anything very much to do with initiating, writing, casting, photographing, scoring, designing, producing, or editing the film for which we are giving him sole credit. It is at least consistent with this standpoint that those few Hollywood figures of the thirties and forties who *did* manage to secure something of this kind of control, being able to choose, write or produce their own projects— men like Stevens, Wyler, Huston, Capra, Sturges, and Mamoulian—have been steadfastly belittled by *auteurists* and insulted for displaying no "personality." Or one can try to work towards a viewpoint based on some kind of knowledge of who actually did what in a particular film, and why; and only then begin to apply criteria of artistic evaluation. As far as the status of the director as an artist is concerned, a useful starting point (though it would have to be used with modesty and flexibility) might be this quotation from Eisenstein:

> Unity makes any form of creative cooperation possible—not only between a director and an actor, but between a director and a composer and, particularly between a cameraman and a director. This applies primarily to the cinema, where all these problems acquire particular significance and acuteness. Cooperation exists in every collective where there is unity of style.
>
> When, then, is a "conflict" justified? When can the director behave like a "tyrant"? First, when a member of the collective does not fully perceive the importance of stylistic requirements. Useless to cry dictatorship; it is the director who is responsible for the organic unity of style of the film. That is his function, and in this sense he is a unifier.[8]

It may very well be true, as Andrew Sarris has argued, that English-language critics and audiences have over-estimated the freedom of the European director and that he has often had to put up with restrictions at least as confining as those of his American counterpart. The fact remains, however, that Hollywood between the coming of sound and the end of the fifties had no exact equivalent anywhere else in the world. Films were shaped to suit the talents and the tastes of the producers and the stars, or to fit the requirements of an established film *genre,* or to exploit a mood or a theme that was fashionable (or thought to be fashionable) at that time; they were rarely made because a director desperately wanted to make them. Once filming began, the director had to adapt himself to the whims of his producer, the accepted "look" and moral tone of his studio, the requirements of a script that, in most cases, someone else had written, the limitations imposed by the talents or the screen image of his actors, a tightly organized budget and production schedule, and the knowledge that, once he was finished, the film would be taken away and edited by someone else, often in accordance with imperatives that had nothing whatever to do with what he may have been trying to express. All this is familiar enough, but it bears repeating in the light of some of the more starry-eyed versions of the Hollywood director that we have been given in the past few years. The European director encountered some or all of the same limitations, but rarely in so massive and uncompromising a form, and there has always been a greater opportunity in Europe for the director to *inaugurate* his own film and not merely do the best he can with material allotted to him.

In the groupings which follow, therefore, I have placed together figures from the American, European, and Oriental film-making traditions, *not* on the basis of some elusive and idiosyncratically applied "personality," but according to the degree of creative freedom they can reasonably be assumed to have enjoyed during the most important periods of their careers. A reformulation of this kind might provide a valuable antidote to the almost maniacal "Pantheon-building" that has dominated much of the discussion of film during the last decade (in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Movie* as much as by Andrew Sarris). My aim is to restore some sense of practicality to an activity that has become increasingly divorced from reality, and my groupings are not intended to imply value judgments as between one category and its fellow. The fact that one man had more creative freedom than another does not automatically make him a better artist (and many film-makers have wasted or abused the freedom granted to them); but a knowledge of the degree and type of freedom enjoyed will allow us to replace fantasy by common sense when talking about their work.

The listings also make no pretense at being exhaustive and are intended simply to suggest the considerations that should be taken into account and to offer a few representative names of each type.

CREATORS

Those who, in all or most of their completed films, were able to do all or most of the following: write, choose, or collaborate closely on the script; have a decisive voice in the choice of actors and technicians; direct; produce, or work closely with a sympathetic producer; edit or supervise the editing of the version that was released for public viewing.

Strictly speaking, only *Chaplin* truly belongs in this category: he is the only figure in the history of the cinema to have been able to make *all* his feature-length works exactly as he wanted to make them and to release them without interference or alteration to the finished product.

However, some others come close to this level:

Eisenstein: if we leave aside films like *Que Viva Mexico!* and *Bezhin Meadow*, that were never completed, Eisenstein was given total artistic freedom in the preparing and shooting of all his films. Only *October* was altered after completion, and even *Ivan the Terrible, Part II* was finally released exactly as he had made it.

Griffith: from about 1914–1925 had complete artistic and usually financial control of his work, writing his own scripts and editing the films himself. Any assessment of his work, however, should take into account his collaboration with Billy Bitzer, Lillian Gish, and others, and should note the decline of his career after 1925.

Keaton: enjoyed a freedom similar to that of Chaplin between 1920 and 1928. *The Cameraman* and *Spite Marriage* after that period are still recognizably, and beautifully, Keaton, despite the pressures that were to destroy his career soon afterwards.

Von Sternberg: seems to have possessed a good deal of freedom even before the collaboration with Dietrich. For her, he wrote, designed, and often photographed the films, and was left in peace by Paramount to do so, as long as box-office receipts held up.

Lubitsch: was his own producer at Paramount for most of his career in sound films and was able to control scripts and casting to a very large extent.

Capra: enjoyed almost total freedom at Columbia during the thirties, his work being both financially and artistically profitable.

Hitchcock: both in Britain in the thirties and in Hollywood after that obtained a position of respect and authority. Some of his early Hollywood work is largely routine, but over his career as a whole he has generally made only the films he wanted to make, and on his own terms. He is far from being a one-man show, however, and his writers, cameramen (especially Robert Burks), composers (Bernard Herrmann), and actors (James Stewart, Grace Kelly, etc.) deserve a good deal of credit for the success of his films.

Bergman: since 1950 has exerted total control over all his films. But he works with collaborators of genius: Gunnar Fischer, Sven Nykvist, Max von Sydow, Eva Dahlbeck, Bibi Andersson, Liv Ullman, etc.

Fellini: since *The White Shiek* has made films on his own terms, to the extent that his name is now routinely attached to their titles.

Truffaut: all his films have been his own projects, scripted or co-scripted by himself. Only *The Mississippi Mermaid* has suffered from external interference, and there only in the version shown in North America.

Kubrick: the most totally independent of major contemporary American film-makers. But he "voluntarily" cut *2001* and has just done the same on *A Clockwork Orange*. The scale of his projects requires a good deal of assistance on the level of special effects, but, on the other hand, script and photography are often handled by Kubrick himself, uncredited.

MISFITS, REBELS, UNFORTUNATES, AND PROFESSIONALS

Those who had this kind of control often enough for it to make sense to talk about *some at least* of their films as displaying artistic coherence and continuity. At significant stages of their career, however, they did work that was purely routine and to which it is probably unnecessary to devote much attention (whereas with the first group almost every film is one which the director *chose* to make and all should therefore be taken into account when evaluating his achievement). Or, in some cases, several key films have been so mutilated before release that critics spend more time lamenting the "lost" film than studying what remains.

Von Stroheim: the archetypal representative of this group.

Welles: had complete control over *Citizen Kane*. But to what extent in *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Touch of Evil* are we seeing the film that Welles intended us to see?

Ford: the thorough professional, who makes three films he has little interest in, in order to make the fourth that he really cares about. Some 25% of his work, then, was made with a large degree of creative freedom. But which is that 25%? Ford, for one, won't tell us, and his British admirers think that it was *Seven Women*.

Buñuel: since *Viridiana* (1961) has obtained the freedom that he possessed only sporadically in Mexico in the fifties.

Lang: the German films were made by a man with a pretty free hand (though he was heavily indebted to the scripts of Thea von Harbou). The American films were mostly assignments, though he did a good job on many of them.

Renoir: a few beautiful, uniquely personal films, and many that suffered from the demands and compromises effected by studios. *Madame Bovary, Toni, Elena et les Hommes* and *La Règle du Jeu* (until its restoration in 1965) were among those that suffered from cuts by producers and distributors. Most of the films of the twenties and some in the thirties were done purely on commission.

Losey: his career has been a running battle with producers and distributors. Only the films with Pinter perhaps emerge as "pure."

Pudovkin: had something of the freedom of Eisenstein in the twenties and up to *Deserter* (1933). His work after that serves the Russian state more than himself.

Kurosawa: The Seven Samurai and *The Idiot* were butchered by his studio. Others were only lightly masacred. A few have survived intact.

Chabrol: a period of total self-indulgence in the late fifties and early sixties (originally financed from his own funds) was followed by the routine thrillers of the mid-sixties. The films since *Les Biches* have been very much a team effort, with Stéphane Audran, Michel Bouquet, Paul Gégauff, and Jean Rabier contributing perhaps as much as Chabrol himself.

Mann: the Westerns of the fifties (and *El Cid*) form a coherent group of films on which Mann suffered little outside interference or pressure and worked with sympathetic producers and scriptwriters.

SCENE-STEALERS AND HARMONIZERS

This is not limited solely to directors and includes any major collaborator on a film whose influence seems to have been decisive in creating its quality or lasting impact. It could be the star round whom the script was written and for whom the technicians were chosen; the scriptwriter whose work was so powerfully visualized that it needed little alteration in the filming; the director of photography who created images that transcended a banal script and poor acting; a creative or domineering producer in whose hands the director was little more than a puppet; or an erratic or routine director who rose to the challenge of particularly congenial material or circumstances.

This category includes several figures mentioned already as collaborators in the first category. It also overlaps with the second, to the extent that these people rarely had *total* artistic control over their films and that their influence is evident only in a *proportion* of the films on which they worked. There is value, however, in studying aspects of their careers as a whole and in trying to establish patterns of continuity.

Among film stars, for example, *Greta Garbo* and *Bette Davis* were, at the peak of their careers, almost invariably the factor around which discussion of a film would start. Director, cameraman, and supporting actors were chosen to suit *them,* and they possessed powers of veto or noncooperation which ensured that any debate was usually settled to their satisfaction. Each developed a consistent artistic personality on the screen, around which the script, sets, and lighting were shaped: there is a fine line to be drawn between this and mere type-casting, of which Garbo was more nearly the victim than Davis. James Stewart might come into this category too, so many films of quality—from *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington,* through *Vertigo* and *The Man from Laramie* to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*—having centered round his varied *personae* as the slow-burning, passive, almost victimized spectator who finally rouses himself to action.

Val Lewton is perhaps the classic example of a producer whose films display a homogeneity of theme and atmosphere, no matter who happened to direct them.

Boris Kaufman, Gregg Toland, and *Raoul Coutard* are cameramen whose work is recognizable no matter which director they are filming for. Normally they have worked with men of great distinction, but we will have to learn to talk of the visual style of Godard *and* Coutard, of Vigo *and* Kaufman, of Wyler *and* Toland.

Scriptwriters would include *Dudley Nichols* (taking into account his collaboration with Ford in particular), *Jacques Prévert* (who imposes his own patterns on Renoir as well as on Carné) and *Thea von Harbou* and *Carl Mayer,* whose impact on German Expressionist film is all-pervasive.

There are many directors who were identified with a particular kind of film and could be trusted to carry that through efficiently, but have displayed little noticeable talent outside their chosen area. Some of these would be: *James Whale* (horror films), *Vittorio de Sica* (neorealism), *Raoul Walsh* (gangster and war), *Michael Curtiz* (melodrama and costume dramas), *Roger Corman* (horror), and *Budd Boetticher* (Western). All these enjoyed a considerable degree of freedom in making films of this type (partly because so many of them were low-budget) and all are quite heavily dependent on the quality of their collaborators.[9]

It would be possible to continue, inventing other categories and drawing more and more refined and tenuous distinctions, but I prefer to stop here. I am concerned simply with suggesting that there are other ways of thinking about the personal factor in film-making that those propagated by *auteurism* and the common assumption that one must start with the director when trying to determine the quality or value of any particular film. In many cases, of course, the director *is* the decisive influence—in one or two or a group of films, or, more rarely, over his entire career—but this is far from being always, or even normally the case, at least as far as Hollywood is concerned; and too much injustice and distortion has been performed in recent film criticism for the sake of providing a neat and tidy solution to the extremely complex question of artistic freedom and creativity in the movies. Good and even great films have been produced in circumstances where directional control has been negligible, or where other contributors have played an equally significant role; a major concern of film criticism should now be to discover how and why this should be so.

NOTES

1. *New York Times* (Sunday, December 10, 1972).
2. *Film Comment,* Vol. 8, No. 3 (September- October 1972), p. 36.
3. Phyllis Goldfarb. "Orson Welles's Use of Sound," *Take One,* Vol. 3, No. 6 (1972), p. 11.
4. *Sight and Sound,* Vol. 41, No. 3 (Summer 1972), p. 136. Kanin also claims that, to the best of his knowledge, *no* Hollywood director of this period (the late thirties and early forties) had the right to final cut.
5. Spreading, in an interesting reversal of the usual trend, West-East across the Atlantic: see *Cinéma 72,* No. 168 for one of the rare French articles on cinematographers.
6. This is true even of a remake, which—unless it was originally taken from a stage play—is never *exactly* the same material merely performed in a different manner. Which also accounts for the fact that a script that was never made into a film—even one by Eisenstein—has a curiosity rather than an artistic value.
7. "Souvenirs de Valery Inkijinoff (II)," *Cinéma 72,* No. 168, pp. 82-83.
8. *Notes of a Film Director* (Dover, New York, 1970), p. 113.
9. I am not intending to slight these men by calling attention to their limitations. Bergman would probably make a mess of directing a Western. The point is that he has not tried—or been forced—to do so.

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Photo: James Korger

G. M. PERRY AND PATRICK McGILLIGAN

Ousmane Sembene: An Interview

Ousmane Sembene is a slight but sturdy Senegalese, a charming and provocative conversationalist, a committed revolutionary. He is also a Third World film-maker of major force and accomplishment, whose international reputation as Africa's most important director is based remarkably on a total output of only five films, though he was previously well known as a novelist.

As a leading spokesman of sub-Sahara's black artistry, Sembene has travelled the world personally, projecting his films and spreading his basic message of pride and confidence in the heritage and culture of Africa's native peoples. On such occasions in America and on the Continent, the films of Sembene have been heralded. In Africa, however, these volatile works usually are banned, typically through pressure brought by the French government, which maintains a vigilant watch over its former colonies. Only Sembene's first full-length feature, *Mandabi,* has been widely distributed outside of Senegal.

The 49-year-old Sembene was born at Ziguinchor in the rural southern region of Senegal, where the action of *Emitai,* his latest film, takes place. Unlike other European-educated African film-makers and writers, Sembene had little formal schooling—only three years of vocational training beyond the primary grades.

Sembene's life paralleled the story of French recruitment of unwilling African natives told in *Emitai:* he fought in the French army during World War II as a forced enlistee. He remained afterward for a time in France, employed as a dockworker and union organizer in Marseilles while training himself to be a writer.

Sembene has published five novels and a collection of short stories, a body of work so impressive as to place him at the forefront of African writers. His most famous novel, *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* (translated in America as *God's*

Bits of Wood) documents in semifictional form the historic Dakar-Niger railroad strike of October 1947, a major step toward Senegalese independence from the French. His last novel, *Le Mandat* (1966), was the basis for his celebrated film, *Mandabi.*

Sembene trained briefly in the Soviet Union before turning his talents to film in the early sixties. But to try to detect Russian influence on his work, or indeed any influences, is mostly futile, for Sembene is very much his own creator. He is one of those rare talents who make film production seem an absolutely natural act.

Nevertheless, one might view *Mandabi* as no less than an African *Bicycle Thief,* with the same universal power and appeal. It relates a similar story of a simple, uneducated man in the city (a non-actor, as in the DeSica film) who is reduced to hopelessness in his circular confrontation with the bureaucracy, and brought to despair when stolen from by a younger generation made corrupt by a society which has lost its human values.

Emitai, Sembene's latest work, trades the slightly abstract social consciousness of *Mandabi* for a direct, historically oriented attack on French colonial practices in the African rural areas. In its use of a provincial setting, in its almost surreal treatment of tribal rites, in its absurdly comical caricatures of the fascistic oppressors, and in its utilization of a mass hero, *Emitai* also offers a parallel to Rocha's *Antonio das Mortes,* a film from another neocolonialized country, Brazil.

Sembene toured the United States late in the fall of 1972, in order to raise funds for his next film project. He stopped in Madison, Wisconsin, for a day, exhibited *Emitai,* and spoke at length to student groups at the University. Visibly exhausted from his tour, he nevertheless answered a continuous stream of questions with seemingly endless patience, a task made doubly difficult by the fact that he speaks only halting English. Luckily, the questions were skillfully translated into French for Sembene's benefit, then the answers back again into English by his superb American interpreter, Carrie Moore.

The following interview is an edited version of Ousmane Sembene's day at Madison.

Originally you were a highly successful acclaimed novelist. Why did you make the switch to film-making?

I've just finished another book but I think it is of limited importance. First, 80% of Africans are illiterate. Only 20% of the populace possibly can read it. But further, my books indispose the bourgeoisie, so I am hardly read at home.

My movies have more followers than the political parties and the Catholic and Moslem religions combined. Every night I can fill up a movie theater. The people will come whether they share my ideas or not. I tell you, in Africa, especially in Senegal, even a blind person will go to the cinema and pay for an extra seat for a young person to sit and explain the film to him. He will feel what's going on.

Personally, I prefer to read because I learned from reading. But I think that cinema is culturally much more important, and for us in Africa it is an absolute necessity. There is one thing you can't take away from the African masses and that is having *seen* something.

But are the films by native black Africans being seen at home?

In West Africa, distribution remains in the hands of two French companies that have been there since colonial times. Because of the active push of our native film-makers, such as our group in Senegal, they are forced to distribute our films, though they do so very slowly. Of the twenty films we have made in Senegal, five have been distributed. It is a continuous fight, for we don't think we can resolve the problems of cinema independent of the other problems of African society.

Neocolonialism is passed on culturally, through the cinema. And that's why African cinema is being controlled from Paris, London, Lisbon, Rome, and even America. And that's why we see almost exclusively the worst French, American, and Italian films. Cinema from the beginning has worked to destroy the native African culture and the myths of our heroes. A lot of films have been made about Africa, but they are stories of European and American invaders with Africa serving as a decor. Instead of being taught our ancestry, the only thing we know is Tarzan. And when we do look on our past, there are many among us who are not flattered, who perceive Africa with a certain alienation learned from the cinema. Movies have infused a European style of walking, a European style of doing. Even African gangsters are inspired by the cinema.

African society is in a state of degeneracy, reflected also in our imitative art. But fortunately, unknown even to many Africans themselves, African art has continued, even as the black bourgeoisie had aped European and American models. In African cities is produced what we call "airport art," whittled wood that has been blackened; true art remains in the villages and rural communities, preserved in the ceremony and religion. It is from believing in this communal art that we can be saved from the internal destruction.

What are the particular circumstances in making films in Senegal?

We produce films in a country where there is only one political party, that of Senghor. If you are not within the party, you are against it. Thus we have lots of problems, and they will continue while Senghor is in control. For instance, his government has just vetoed distribution of the film of a young director, the story of a black American who discovers Senegal. The film began with *cinéma vérité* style, but soon became oriented and plotted out to focus on our problems, as it should be. When the government saw the change, it vetoed the film.

We are approximately twenty film-makers in Senegal. Last year we made four long films. They were of unequal value, but we produced them through our own means.

Financing is our most complex problem. We go all over the world giving talks, carrying our machines and tape recorders, projecting our movies, trying to find distribution. When we secure a little bit of money and have paid our debts, we can begin a new film. The sources of the money vary. You can find a very small group of people who have money which they might lend you in exchange for participating in the filming. Perhaps you can locate a friend who has credit at the bank. But most of us make only one film every two years.

The editing of *Emitai* was financed with laboratory credit. But the laboratories that know us are in France, where we have to go for our montage and technical work. That's very expensive. We're not against France, but we'd prefer to stay at home. *Emitai* was shot on money I received on a commission from an American church for making a film called *Tauw*. We do not refuse any money, even from a church.

Our films are shot in 35mm for the city theaters, then presented in 16mm in the rural areas where there is no 35mm. It is difficult to find 16mm projectors in the cities, a problem created intentionally by those in charge of distribution. We began by making our films in 16mm—much more economical. But the distributors would refuse to project the films in the cities because of the 16mm, so we had to adapt ourselves to their game.

On paper, we could have our own distribution company. But we think that isn't the solution. Why create a parallel market, spend a lot of money, then be beaten down? What exists already should be nationalized.

Are your films distributed throughout Africa?

The only film I've made that has been shown all through Africa is *Mandabi*, because every other country claims that what happens in the movie occurs only in Senegal. And I say it isn't true. *Emitai* has been banned everywhere in Africa except in Senegal, where it was allowed only after a year of protests.

We tried to show *Emitai* in Guadeloupe, but the ambassador from France interceded. The film had one night of exhibition in Upper Volta but never again. When I was invited by the government and students of the Ivory Coast to show it, *Emitai* was first screened the night before by a censor board of eight Africans and two

Frenchmen. The eight were in agreement but the two Frenchmen went to the French ambassador who went to see the head of the government. I was told that it wasn't an "opportune time" to show this film. They were all very polite, so I didn't say anything. I took my film and left.

Has Emitai *been seen in France?*

Every time I want to show this film, the date falls on "a day of mourning for de Gaulle." De Gaulle dies every day for my film.

Who were the actors in Mandabi?

They weren't professionals. The old man who plays the main role, we found working near the airport. He had never acted before. I had a team of colleagues and together we looked around the city and country for actors. We didn't pay a lot, but we did pay, so it was very painful to choose. There was always the influence of my parents, my friends, and even the mistresses of my friends, and we had to struggle against all of that. You laugh, but I assure you it was very difficult.

Once the police telephoned me and soon this fellow arrived who was their representative. I was a little disturbed. But he had just come to tell us that he had a friend who wanted us to put his mistress in the film. I was forced to accept or else it would have cost me. It is concessions like this one which makes work difficult.

How did you rehearse Mandabi?

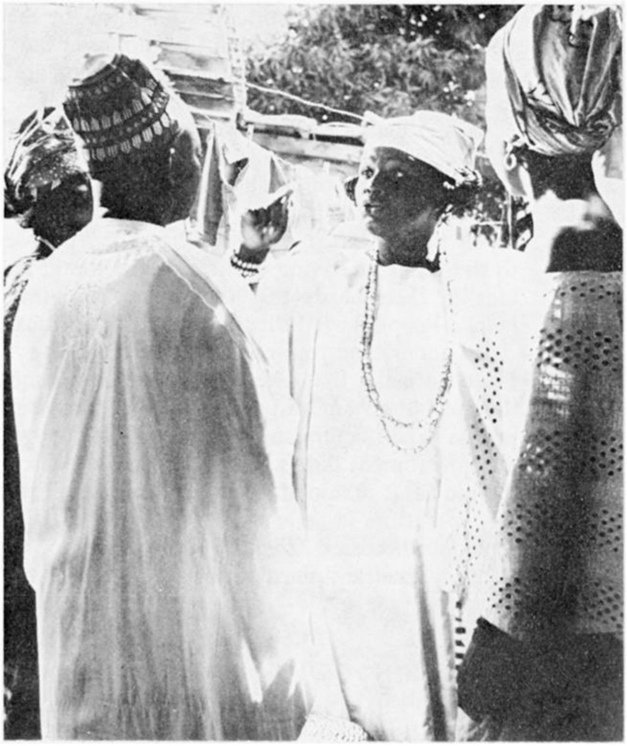
We rehearsed for one month in a room very much like this lecture hall. *Mandabi* was the first film completely in the Senegalese language and I wanted the actors to speak the language accurately. There was no text, so the actors had to know what they were going to say, and say it at the right moment. Cinema is very arbitrary, yet there is a limited time and during it the actors must state what needs to be stated. People often reproach Senegalese film-makers for slowness, so we must be aware that cinema is not only the image but it is a question of punctuation.

Could you talk about the role of music in Mandabi?

Contrary to what many people around the world think, that Africa only spends its time dancing, our music sometimes has served a significantly more important political purpose. During the colonial period, all of the information that was diffused among the people was passed on by music at the large central gathering places, such as the water fountains or wells in the city. The musical refrain was dispersed like a serpent that bites its tail.

I composed the music for *Mandabi,* and tried to make it of maximum importance. After the film was presented in Dakar, people sang the theme song for a while. But the song was "vetoed" from the radio, which belongs to the government and is sacred. (Since the *coup d'etat,* the radio station is guarded even more than the government.) So things changed. All you needed was a new sound and it chased away the old one.

Another factor: we who make films in Senegal are looking for music that is particularly suitable for our type of film. I think it is here where African cinema still suffers certain difficulties. We are undergoing Afro-American music and Cuban music. I'm not saying that's bad, but I would prefer that we would be able to create an African music.



MANDABI ▶

Are you satisfied with your conclusion to Mandabi?

I don't think I really have to like the ending. It's only up to me to give the situation. The ending is linked to the evolution of the Senegalese society, thus it is as ambiguous. As the postman says, either we will have to bring about certain changes or we will remain corrupt. I don't know. Do you like the ending?

What we wonder is this: do you believe it is the duty of the political artist to go beyond presenting a picture of corruption—to offer a vision of the future, of what could be?

The role of the artist is not to say what is good, but to be able to denounce. He must feel the heartbeat of society and be able to create the image society gives to him. He can orient society, he can say it is exaggerating, going overboard, but the power to decide escapes every artist.

I live in a capitalist society and I can't go any further than the people. Those for change are only a handful, a minority, and we don't have that Don Quixote attitude that we can transform society. One work cannot instigate change. I don't think that in history there has been a single revolutionary work that has brought the people to create a revolution. It's not after having read Marx or Lenin that you go out and make a revolution. It's not after reading Marcuse in America. All the works are just a point of reference in history. And that's all. Before the end of an act of creation, society usually has already surpassed it.

All that an artist can do is bring the people to the point of having an idea of the thing, an idea in their heads that they share, and that helps. People have killed and died for an idea.

If I understand your criticism, then I'm happy. I had no belief that after people saw *Mandabi,* they would go out and make a revolution. But people liked the film and talked about it, though my government didn't. They wanted to censor the movie at the point where it said that "Honesty is a crime in Senegal."

People discussed *Mandabi* in the post office or in the market and decided they were not going to pay out their money like the person in my movie. They reported those trying to victimize them, which led to many arrests. But when they denounced the crooks, they would say it was not the person but the government which was corrupt. And they would say they were going to change the country.

I know my own limits. But through nothing more than just supplying these people with ideas, I am participating in their awareness.

Do you find that people in America find similar associations with Mandabi?

Initially, the film was not destined for other people than Africans, but we can see that certain films, whether made in Africa or in America, can give us something and teach us, and that a contact is possible from people to people. There is an old film that I like a lot, *The Grapes of Wrath,* which dates from a moment of crisis in America. But the present-day peasants in Africa are at that level. So, you see there are works that create communication.

Do you find similar communication and inspiration in the cinéma vérité of the Frenchman, Jean Rouch?

Inspired by Rouch? He applied his methods a few years ago to the French problem, but didn't go far and didn't bring a revolution to the French cinema. I think the New Wave of Godard and Truffaut has contributed something. But *cinéma vérité* in the fashion of Rouch is not really *cinéma vérité* nor is it his invention. The methods date from the Russian socialist films of Dziga-Vertov.

Would you comment on your own experiences as a student of film-making in Russia?

I don't talk about my Russian experiences in America just as I didn't talk of my American experiences in Russia. Every country has its methods and every system of education tries to perpetuate what it represents. Their teaching is socialist or communist just as teaching in America is linked to the establishment. You can take it or leave it. And since I was ignorant, I was forced to take what was given to me, and afterwards I used it as I thought I should.

Why did you make Emitai, "God of Thunder," *a political film addressed particularly to the peasantry?*

In African countries, the peasants are even more exploited than the workers. They see that the workers are favored and earn their pittance each month. Therefore, the element of discontent is much more advanced among the peasants than with the workers. This fact doesn't give the peasantry the conscience of revolutionaries, but it can lead to movements of revolt which bear positive results.

There are many peasants who live fragmented in a closed economy, producing enough to eat without commercial relationship to the government. But there are other peasants involved in commercial activities who are beginning to understand economic exchange. Last year there were rumors of discontent among the peasants. To tear apart this discontent, Senghor distributed three billion francs to the peasants. You see, you can have hope in the peasant, but you can't base your revolutionary movement around them. But we're not discouraged. The peasantry is a force on which we can depend.

What is the historical background of Emitai?

I came myself from this rural region and these true events of the Diolla people inspired me to present an image of French conduct in my home territory during my early manhood. During the last World War, those of my age, 18, were forced to join the French army. Without knowing why, we were hired for the liberation of Europe. Then when we returned home, the colonialists began to kill us, whether we were in Senegal, the Ivory Coast, Algeria, or Madagascar. Those of us who had returned from the French war involvement in Vietnam in 1946 came back to struggle against the French. We were not the same as the black soldiers at home from French-speaking Africa who participated in colonialism instead of demonstrating against it. Now, 10 years after independence, it is these same ex-soldiers who are bringing about *coups d'etat.*

Aren't the women the true heroes of Emitai, *as they also were in your revolutionary novel, called in America* God's Bits of Wood?

As *Emitai* shows, when the French wanted our rice, the women refused but the men accepted the orders. Women have played a very important part in our history. They have been guardians of our traditions and culture even when certain of the men were alienated during the colonial period. The little that we do know of our history we owe to our women, our grandmothers.

The African women are more liberated than elsewhere. In certain African countries, it is the women who control the market economy. There are villages where all authority rests with the women. And whether African men like it or not, they can't do anything without the women's consent, whether it be marriage, divorce, or baptism.

What were the circumstances in filming Emitai?

The Diollas are a small minority with a native language about to disappear. For two years, I learned and practiced it. Then I set out to make contact with the Chief of the Sacred Forest. In order to be able to speak to him, I needed to bring a gift offering. He preferred alcohol but I myself drank it up along the way. When I arrived and was hungry, the chief ate without inviting me. That hurt me. Afterwards he said, "You know well that to speak to the king you have to bring something. Since you didn't bring anything, I couldn't invite you."

The people in the movie are not actors, but people from the village. I had a limited time to tell my story, so I couldn't permit them to do only what they wanted. We would rehearse beginning fifteen minutes before the filming, but all the movements were free. I brought red bonnets for the young people to wear who played soldiers. They refused at first because such bonnets are reserved for the chief.

The chief is not chief by birth, incidentally, but initiated after receiving an education and training. No elected person holds advantage over another. There have been moments when the Diollas elected leaders who then left during the night. That's the reality.

Were you aware of evolving in your choice of a hero from the individual in Mandabi *to the collective hero of* Emitai?

I'm not the one who's evolving. It's the subject which imposes the movement. This story happened to be a collective story. I wanted to show action of a well-disciplined ethnic group in which everyone saw himself only as an integral part of the whole.

Have the Diolla people seen the film?

Before premiering the film for the Senegalese government, I went back to the village to project it. I remained three nights. All of the villagers from the whole area came and, because they have no cinema, their reaction was that of children looking at themselves in a mirror for the first time. After the first showing, the old men withdrew into the sacred forest to discuss the film. When I wanted to leave, they said, "Wait until tomorrow." They came back the second evening, then returned to the rain forest.

The third evening there was a debate. The old men were happy to hear that there was a beautiful language for them, but they weren't happy with the presentation of the gods. Though these forces obviously did not manifest themselves when the French arrived, the gods still were sacred and helped the old men maintain authority.

The young people accused the old of cowardice for not resisting at the end of the war. The women, of course, agreed, but were very proud of their own role.

And the reaction in the cities?

Many asked me why I wanted to make a film about the Diollas. You have to know that the majority of maids in Senegal are Diollas to give you an idea of the superiority felt by others in relation to them. (The African bourgeois have two or three maids. It's not very expensive.) To see *Emitai,* the maids left the children. They invited each other from neighborhood to neighborhood to see the film. Finally, the majority Ouloofs went to see the film and realized that the history of Senegal and of the resistance was not just the history of the majority of Ouloofs. The Diollas are a part of Senegal. And so are the other ethnic groups. And when the Senegalese government finally decreed that they were going to teach Ouloof, they were in a hurry to add Diolla. I don't know if that is because of the film, but that's what happened.

Your films obviously are influential political instruments in Senegal. Could films made in the United States have the same effect?

Alone, no. With the people, yes. There are those who stay secluded and say that artists are creating important works and everything is going to change. Nothing will change. You can put all the revolutionary works on the television, but if you don't go down into the streets, nothing will change. That is my opinion.

LYLE PEARSON

Four Years of African Film

> *I have seen in Persia a film which doesn't exist and which was called The Life of Charlie.*
> *—André Malraux, Esquisse d'une Psychologie du Cinéma, 1946*

I haven't been to Persia, which doesn't exist anymore. But there is an annual festival of films in Iran—there are in fact festivals now sprinkled over the Near East and the northern half of Africa, in Damascus, in Ouagadougou, and sometimes in Rabat. The Dinar, France, francophone film festival has just cut itself loose and from now on will take place every other year in a Third World country—and the Federation

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There is also the Cinematic Days of Carthage, the biennial festival which gave birth to the FEPAC. It is the oldest of such festivals and, being in Tunisia, ties Africa and Asia together for at least ten days every two years. Actually I have attended only this Carthage affair, in 1970 and 1972, and the 1969 festival in Rabat. But, as the director of the Carthage Festival, Tahar Cheriaa, has said, the 1970 festival included "practically all the African production since 1968," (with a hefty amount of films from the East) and African cinema outside of Egypt has been born only in the last decade.[1] While there were at least five American observers at the 1972 festival—there has never been a black American representative there, to my knowledge —I was (outside of Frederick Gronich of the MPAA and someone from the Tunisian division of the USIA) the only US observer at the 1970 festival. In addition, I've been seeing African films in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Paris for three years; and I thus modestly suggest that I probably know more about African film from a recent historical point of view than anybody else.

In 1972 African feature film production crept down to the equator (that is, if one is to ignore Lionel Rogosin's *Come Back, Africa* and the features made by the white South African community for its own consumption). This distinction can be shared by two equatorial African countries, Gabon and the Congo Brazzaville; the film from Gabon takes place in Gabon, while that from the Congo Brazzaville is supposed to take place further south, in the Portuguese colony of Angola.

It should be noted that the film from the Congo, Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (the title is the name of a quarter), is not the first feature to be shot in the Congo by a Third World director, Glauber Rocha's rather miserable *The Lion Has Seven Heads* having been shot there three years ago. It should also be noted that Miss Maldoror, who is married to an Angolan writer and who has made a well-known short film on Angola, *Monangambée (The Cry),* in Algeria and an earlier but as yet unseen feature on Portuguese Guinea, is not African—she is from Martinique. She lives in France, and is no more African that Franz Fanon. Her films show it; the photography is by Claude Agostini, and all of the technical aspects of the film are handled by Frenchmen.

The first film from Gabon, Phillippe Mory's *Les Tam-Tams Se Sont Tus (The Tom-Toms Are Silent)*, points up the problems with making a film in the way *Sambizanga* is made—both films are slick and made with a French crew but Mory, who has appeared in French films, is Gabonese and he takes for his subject prostitution (as well as polygamy).* I asked Mory if the central character of *Les Tam-Tams,* which he plays himself, was aware of his own acts of prostitution and Mory said Yes; prostitution in Mory's film equals collaboration.

Is a well-made color feature in French that takes for its subject prostitution any better than a well-made color feature in Portuguese that takes colonization for its subject, but that tries to pass itself off as happening in another country? About all Miss Maldoror does to convince us that we're not in the Congo is to slap up a sign that reads "Angola" in front of what is supposedly a police station. The six-member all-Third World jury at Carthage thought that was all right and *Sambizanga* shared top honors with a Syrian film, and *Les Tam-Tams* won nothing. This is rather a pity I think for *Les Tam-Tams* has the look of an honest B-movie, of Samuel Fuller without the violence, and Mory consciously raises the question of ethics in film-making. *Sambizanga* looks like the least repellent work of Bo Widerberg, and Maldoror un-

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*These are also central themes in Oumarou Ganda's *Le Wazzo Polygame (The Polygamous Holy Man),* a medium-length film, which doesn't look French at all. With Sembene's *Mandabi,* polygamy has appeared in at least three African films; prostitution, however, appears more rife south of Senegal.

consciously raises the same question. If *Sambizanga* is a hit in France and not in Africa the French bourgeoisie will have won out again; that is, Africa will have been forgotten in the wake of French aesthetics and profits. Mory complained, "You can't win here if you don't make a political film," but *Sambizanga* brings up this other problem, which seemed to irritate a larger part of the Carthage public—the idea of collaboration with the French.

It is unfortunate that in tracing African-by-Africans feature film production it is necessary after these two African-French co-productions to jump half way up the coast to Senegal, but it is also indicative of the African film scene. Film-making is even more sparse in the interior than on the coast, and more so in former British territories than in the French. A 16mm feature from Gabon, *Il Etait Une Fois Libreville* by Simon Auge, was withdrawn from competition at Carthage because Auge views it as merely "research" preliminary to a real feature. The only possible stop between Gabon and Senegal is Ghana, which had a 35mm feature at Carthage in 1970, Sam Aryeety's *No Tears for Ananse*—the only African feature I know which is based on national folklore. King Ampew, a Ghanian who has studied film in Munich, had his final thesis film, *They Call It Love,* in competition at Carthage this year but it was filmed in Munich in eleven days on a very reduced budget and is hardly a movie; its subject, like that of Denis Sanders's *Soul to Soul,* is Ampew's view of American blacks, living in Munich, and their music. (*Soul to Soul,* while being shot and shown in Ghana, remains a sort of inverted travelogue in which black American performers rather self-consciously search for their own "soul"—Wilson Pickett is the worst offender. We did not get *Soul to Soul* at Carthage, nor Ossie Davis's Nigerian-American-Swedish coproduction shot in Nigeria in 1970.)

Since 1969 Senegal has made at least one feature every six months. We got, as far as I know, every one of them at Carthage although only one was in competition, Mahama Traore's *Lambaaye* (the title is the name of a town), a 16mm adaptation of Gogol's *The Inspector General* to Senegalese reality. Like his *Diegue-bi (The Wife)* which I saw in 1970, Traore's new film is awkward in its beginning scenes; unlike *Diegue-bi* it is not a satire on other African films. In the former, the hero has financial difficulties caused by his *femme,* as in Oumarou Ganda's *Cabascabo;* she in turn lies to the local grocer, telling him that a *mandabi* will soon arrive to take care of their bills; also, a young rake is named Ousmane. Where Sembene uses a small economy car for an effect in *Mandabi,* Traore uses a Corvette. *Diegue-bi* pulls a final switch on *Mandabi* in that the husband is arrested and his wife is left alone with the bills. In both *Diegue-bi* and *Lambaaye* a priest or marabout appears; in the former almost everybody asks him for advice and he demands a fee, which everybody pays a part of; in *Lambaaye* he simply poses a benediction, "This *must* be the inspector," and then is seen no more. Much of the humor here is in the dialogue and the satire of Islamic custom; the fake inspector speaks Ouloof like the rest of the cast but dresses up his speech with both Arabic and French expressions. At the local hospital, the patients of which are for the sake of the fake inspector *en congé,* he asks the staff how they pass their time, "Playing cards?" (Gambling is forbidden by the Koran.) Satirically presenting another Islamic custom as well as the desire to climb the social ladder, a young girl is prepared for a forced marriage with the "inspector." The big switch from Gogol's plot comes when the non-inspector starts borrowing money from everybody; this is a theme common to most Senegalese films.*

The technique is often crude in a Traore film

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*It occurs not only in *Diegue-bi, Lambaaye,* and *Mandabi* but in Momar Thiam's 1971 *Karim (The Generous One).* The theme of man seduced from his money by a woman is also common in African film; it exists in *Diegue-bi, Karim,* probably in Thiam's *Mon Beau Pays, L'Option (My Beautiful Country, the Option),* and in Ganda's film from Niger *Cabascabo (The Old Warrior).* Ganda, being from a more heavily Islamized country than these other film-makers, provides a reference from the Koran to Samson and Delilah.

—bad lighting, unbalanced compositions, awkward angles. But, perhaps because this year he lacked the competition of Djibril Diop (whose *Badou Boy* tied for second place at Carthage in 1970) *Lambaaye* came in on a three-way tie for third place; only African and Arabic films at Carthage are in competition. And there is in spite of this occasional awkwardness an element of spectacle here that *Diegue-bi* does not have. Near the end of the film we see an outdoor entertainment session, with some remarkably sexy dancing and a sort-of-blues singer in a blue satin dress, battery-operated microphone in hand. The scene is handled as if it were in a documentary—pans moving across the audience in which you have to search pretty hard to locate the protagonist (the entertainment is being presented for his benefit) and hand-held close-ups of the singer—there is an air of hand-held spontaneity here, as there is in a more subtle way in most of the film. It is as if Paul Morrissey had headed for the veldt and cut out his dirtiest jokes.

Traore and Morrissey—the events and people they tend to show us are often more important than the stories they tell. Do we like, or dislike Holly Woodlawn because of a predicament he/she may find him/herself in, or because of him/herself? The same for the singer in *Lambaaye,* who is probably totally unaware of the plot into which she has been tossed; in fact *we* can't really relate her to that plot, she is interesting only as a singer, we are curious to see her manner of presentation, to know how she sings a song. And there is a similarity in the way Morrissey and Traore make films—while the credits of *Lambaaye* list more technicians than an Andy Warhol film ever does, both make 16mm story features in color with improvised dialogue and direct sound and often take their jokes from other movies. Traore even looks like Warhol—dark glasses, an American Army jacket, a small under-the-chin beard, and a slinky movement that would make you sure, if he was from the United States, that he was a pusher. It's nice to know there's someone making anti-establishment films in Africa; it somehow assures me that Warhol isn't such a freak after all (and that there may be more weight to the ontological theory of film than was formerly thought).

On the other hand, Babacar Samb, who remains a friend of Jean Rouch since their work on a short film together ten years ago,* has made *Codou* in non-handheld 35mm black and white, the story of a young girl who loses her mind after failing a ceremony in which her lips are to be pierced. Modern psychiatric practices fail to bring the girl, Codou, back to sanity although traditional methods of cure do. The question remains: will she remain sane for long? According to Samb—

> Each time someone has tried to graft a culture on our own, it has been a failure. We have our feet in the middle ages and our head in the modern world. To want access to the modern world without taking account of this middle age is a serious fault. . . . to want at any price to return to the middle ages is no more viable.
>
> In my film, I affirm that it is necessary to assume one's own culture to gain access to the modern world.[2]

This really is the same concern that we find in *Les Tam-Tams,* the same question that *Sambizanga* raises unconsciously, and both the subject and the major problem with the new film by Ousmane Sembene, *Emitai.*

Ousmane Sembene in *Emitai (The Angry God)* definitely tells us that collaboration with the French is a bad thing. *Emitai* is a complicated film, much more so than any of these others, and I'm going to deal with it from this one point of view. The point is that *Emitai,* like *Les Tam-Tams,* describes but also suffers from this collaboration, albeit on another level. It does not suffer from it in a preconceived or self-

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*Few African directors have. Sembene, for instance, is fond of saying that Rouch, outside of *Moi, Un Noir (Me, a Black),* treats Africans like "insects." Ganda, who is featured in *Moi, Un Noir,* has to my knowledge expressed no opinion on Rouch, but the Carthage festival refused Rouch's *Petit à Petit (Little by Little)* in 1970. The problem, again, may be one of reluctance to collaborate with the French.

justifying way; it would be unfair for Sembene to make such a film, for his very point is that collaboration with France is a bad idea. But this collaboration exists in Sembene's films by virtue of their historical situation—they are made with French government money, through the advance-on-receipts law used by many French directors; and *Emitai,* unlike *Mandabi,* has been censored.

In *Emitai,* which takes place near the end of the Second World War, when Sembene was a boy, the French army tries to enlist Senegalese citizens against the Germans, but the Senegalese have little interest in this "white man's war"; their apathy is entirely reasonable and very funny. The film takes place in the south of Senegal among the Diolla, an animist and not an Islamic people (*Emitai* is a Diolla and not a Ouloof word). From the French comes the command that the rice in the village is to be confiscated for the troops; the women of the village hide the rice and the local priests, acting under the advice of their animist gods, which are presented as masks in pink-tinted close-ups, attack the French officers. The attack fails, the priests begin to doubt their own gods, and the Senegalese already enlisted into the French army are forced to fire on the village women—and it is here that the censorship enters. Originally one was to see the soldiers fire followed by the bloody bodies of the Senegalese women; now this is "left to your imagination," as the Senegalese consul to Tunisia told me: we see the soldiers fire, the screen goes black—and that's the end of the movie.

Sembene's new film has been marred by censorship but what we can see of it is a masterpiece—a new style of film, unlike the *Musée de l'Homme* documentary quality that hinders *Mandabi* stylistically, and totally different from all western manners of story-telling on film. Few films cannot be related to other films in their story or in their style; Sembene's *Emitai* can be related to Sophocles's *Antigone* in its story, but not to any film in its style. This is true in its manner of photography—almost entirely long shots, never extracting its characters from the environment, but making the environment an integral part of the story—and in its pace. There are no flash or quick shots, the editing is never manipulated to gain speed on events, everything is made ultra-clear, as if the length of the action

Sembene's EMITAI

and the objectivity of the photography were enough to clarify not only the story but Sembene's thought processes behind the story.

Jean Narboni claims that in *La Noire de . . . (The Black Girl from . . .)* Sembene treats "the two employers . . . as blacks are treated by Griffith, but Sembene is not so cinematically inventive" (*Cahiers du Cinéma,* May 1967). So be it; but here he breaks away from all the Griffith-inspired devices — subjective angles, cross-cutting, the speeding up of reality by progressively shorter shots, the devices of emotional story-telling—that have plagued filmmakers ever since Griffith. Who has bothered to get away from the bourgeois syndrome besides Godard (and possibly Rainer Winder Fassbinder) previously in commercial storytelling film?

I don't mean that the *story* remains clear at all moments in *Emitai*—with this new ultra-clear presentation of action, in which every action is presented in one shot, a consequent breakdown in continuity appears. If one is not aware of the story in advance or if one loses just one shot —as, unfortunately, happened at the second and last showing of the film at Carthage, when we were not shown the soldier firing on the village women—one is aware only of clearly presented action but not at all of how those actions relate to one another. This may be intentional, as far as the desire to stimulate thought goes—Sembene likes Brecht. Sembene has not made a film for everyone—not the French, nor the Frenchified Senegalese bourgeoisie. *Mandabi,* in spite of its success in the US and the USSR plus a showing on French television, still has had only limited showing in Dakar, and I'm sure this has somewhat isolated Sembene from other Senegalese film directors. Here he has created a film for serious-minded people who are willing to think and to decide. Sembene, having trained in the USSR under Marc Donskoi, and having previously been active in dockers' unions in France, considers film a political tool but he remains a victim of the trap that both French and Senegalese bureaucracy have set for him. *Emitai* is not a film for *tout le monde* politically or aesthetically and even in its reduced form is probably not going to be seen very much outside of the festival circuit. Even at Carthage a group of young Tunisians after laughing through several reels walked out on it.

It is a pity that we, partly through bureaucracy and partly through taste are not free to see and to accept this beautiful, path-finding work from a major artist—be he black, white, or like the photography surrounding the gods which he so objectively presents—pink.

There were also seventeen African short films at Carthage in 1972, from ten different countries. The jury couldn't decide which was the best and gave equal prizes to five short films. Four of these films were in 16mm, and Moise Le Lecourt's *Le Mvet,* about the making of a musical instrument, shot in the Cameroun and edited through various ethnographic services in Paris, is the most technically advanced short film that I have yet seen by an African. As well it should be—it took him eight years to make.

The many features from North Africa and the Near East which were also shown at Carthage must be the subject of a later article.

NOTES

1. An interview by "H. G.," "Il faut faire éclore dans toute l'Afrique des cinémas nationaux," *Algérie-Actualité,* April 2, 1972, p. 18.
2. Interview by D. Bouzid, *Contact* [Tunisian cultural magazine], n.d., p. 7.

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GIDEON BACHMANN

In Search of Self-Definition

ARAB AND AFRICAN FILMS AT THE CARTHAGE FILM FESTIVAL (TUNIS)

It is useless to approach the cinemas of struggling countries with aesthetic criteria. A burning subject matter doesn't always allow for refined packaging. But the colonial traditions of the cinema have formed an audience here, over the generations, that responds to a film language composed of melodrama, music, and dramatic buildups resolved at the end and in happy compromise. It may be possible to change film-making, but it is much more difficult to change film viewing.

There are film-makers in the developing countries today who are able to present works of immediate concern in a style that corresponds to this immediacy, and to forego aesthetics. But often these remain films made for their peers, appreciated only by intellectuals and critics, which do not reach their target audiences because there is no tradition of veracity in popular film viewing in the countries for which these films could be of major importance. Audiences are not used to films that make them think.

Two roads are open to film-makers: choose an antiquated form to carry a new idea, or risk losing their audience by refusing to make this compromise. Both alternatives were represented in the large group of films from African and Arab countries that were seen at the 4th International Film Festival of Carthage (which doesn't take place in Carthage at all, but in a few terrible cinemas in the center of the new city of Tunis). The majority chose the first solution, with the result that a variety of important contemporary subjects (Palestinian refugees, agrarian reform, guerrilla warfare, unemployment, lingering bourgeois tendencies in the new democracies, the reactionary influence of Islam, etc.) were wrapped in B-movies complete with chases, dramatic low lighting, electronic music, ham acting, and stories that resolved themselves at film's end. The few that took the other road, like the excellent *El Fahhaam (The Charcoal Maker)* from Algeria, will undoubtedly be seen by audiences and be appreciated for their honesty—but whether they will succeed in making an inroad on the mind of rural Algerian villagers must be doubted.

Since this dilemma cannot really be resolved except by slow education, one could almost reach the conclusion that the cinema, as we are familiar with it today (the few talking to the many) may not be a useful form for the transfer of political ideas. Drawing the balance after having exposed oneself for a week to the reactions of Tunisian audiences (Carthage is a popular participation festival, unlike Venice or Cannes) on the one hand, and the refined comments of Third World intellectuals, present here in large numbers, on the other, one begins to fear that the political cinema of direct utility has not yet been born. As a microcosm of the communication problem that besets the Third World, Carthage, while not offering solutions, at least clearly delineated the contradictions.

These are many, and similar in most Third World countries. The liberation from colonial rule, which took place mostly in the fifties, has created republican autonomies which are still, in effect, cultural dependencies. Tunisia, for example, independent since 1955 (but under Bourguiba since 1956), is intellectually a French country. Tunisian intellectuals study in France and often end up living there. The children of the French do not mix with the Arab ones, and the French here do not speak Arabic. The publications offered by the Arab vendors that make the rounds of the three cafés of central Tunis, are *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Afrique Asie;*

only tourists buy English-language publications, and the Arab papers, the French will tell you from third-hand knowledge, are not worth reading. In fact, the French-language local papers are poor copies of *France Soir,* headlining daily the exploits of the head of state. The police are everywhere, watching against leftist turmoil, and after the 1970 film festival here, it appears that its head spent six months in jail. This year, all films shown were censored first.

This was the setting for seeing films from more than 20 countries, where the situation is similar. Even in Algeria, the country on this continent most often looked to for revolutionary leadership, a girl can end up in jail for hosting black friends after a certain hour. And any Algerian in an advanced state of friendship will avow that intellectuals there consider the revolution initiated but not achieved. The African countries of the West Coast, each with between five and 60 languages spoken internally, with economies dependent on autonomously controlled resources but externally controlled means for their exploitation, even in the best cases steer a meandering course of political indecision. No two countries have similar problems, or speak similar languages, except French. And each is convinced that its problems are central, unique and burning, and their solutions applicable universally. The result, in both films and the discussions that followed them, is total disunity.

And yet each representative, either film-maker or cultural worker, that one meets, is full of self-consuming zeal. There can be no doubt about their honesty. Caught in a political dilemma but fighting on a cultural front, film-makers find themselves thwarted not only in their difficult relationship to their audience, but equally, and often more so, in their relationship to the authorities of their countries in trying to obtain means to make the films and freedom to attack certain themes. What was seen in Tunis, therefore, were films either made independently abroad (or in countries where the action did not take place), or films made under considerable technical and/or ideological difficulties. These often very young men, who vehemently and often didactically polemicised at the public discussions, blindly maintaining patently unmaintainable positions of political extremism, in many ways were more interesting than the films they had made. All their frustration and conviction was pumped into this essentially sterile public of their peers, to no practical avail, since their contradicting vehemencies cannot, by definition, convince, and since none of what was aired in that room ever went beyond its walls.

Of the films seen, few risk exposure in Europe. To make sense in London or New York, for example, very few of them could do without an introduction. Both in style and content they are very local films, and paradoxically only the worst (such as the major prize winners *Sambizanga* and *The Duped Ones,* both made away from their locale by accomplished film-makers) may end up with any kind of a run in Paris, where they have a small guaranteed audience of well-wishers and where the Tunisian prize may carry some small weight in the Left Bank. Only two of the films seen are definitely worth bringing to Western audiences, and only one of these comes from the African continent.

El Fahhaam was made by Mohammed Bouamari, who was assistant to Costa-Gavras on Z, to Bertucelli on *Ramparts of Clay* and has worked with Lakhdar Hamina and William Klein. Since 1966 he has made three short films, and this is his first long one. It was financed by the Centre National du Cinéma, but had not passed the strict Algerian censorship by the time it was shown in Tunisia (the print came straight from the lab), and it is hoped that the critics' prize and the second major prize it obtained at the festival, will help it take that hurdle when it gets home, since the material it touches has often been subject to restrictions in Algeria before. It has no great revolutionary idea, but it attacks certain prejudices which the new Algerian society has not eradicated: the position of women in rural areas, the flight from the soil, the remaining social class structures, the retarding influence of the Moslem religion, and the new bureaucracy. All this is done without undue dramatization, in a calm, poetic, documentary style, following the daily life of a charcoal-maker in the brushy woods somewhere in the Algerian mountains.

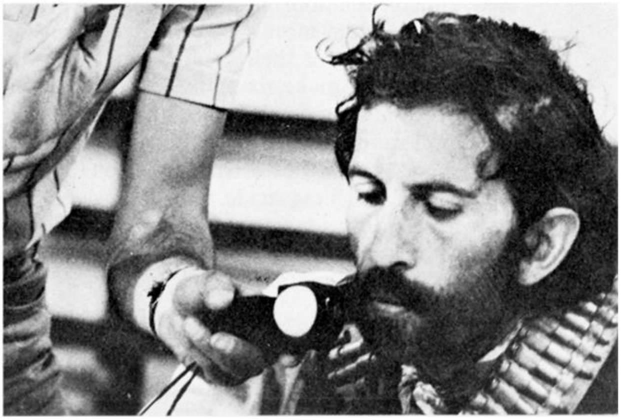
Not much happens. We watch the making of charcoal: the cutting down of a tree that has become state property as a consequence of land reform (but the local policeman closes an eye), the tedious labor unaided by appropriate tools, the burning smoke that attacks the lungs (instead of using precious charcoal herself, which burns clean, the charcoal-maker's wife uses wood, which is bad for her health, as a form of mute sacrifice at her home hearth). But "progress" and the nationalization of the oil industry have brought natural gas to the villages—so the hard-earned charcoal goes unsold, the family suffers hunger in the deserted village, where they are the sole inhabitants left after the emigration to the cities. The man goes off to Algiers, to seek a friend with whom he had been during the fighting for independence. The friend has become a functionary, with a pretty secretary and an immobile face, who affably disposes of the embarrassing guest with the excuse of an important phone call. To work in town, in industry, seems the only way out, and at film's end an obstinate gesture is indicated: in the presence of the district's notables, the woman removes her veil, and the family seem to be parting for a new life. We are not told whether this is a dream sequence, nor does the director make a clear statement concerning his own attitude towards the gesture. In a way, he seems to say, all solutions are partial, and the real problem lies in the hardheadedness of men and the impossible situations that they have created.

What distinguishes this film from most others seen here, is that it does not impose a strict viewpoint on the material. Remaining open in this way, it allows for more identification on the part of the viewer, and does not preclude his own search for answers. As such, it pleases both cinephile and progressive, but it remains to be seen if its utility in the field, when shown to people whose consciousness and self-awareness it might help to increase, can surmount the obstacle of an essentially elitist filmic style. It might work when shown with a portable projector in remote villages; in popular Algerian cinemas it risks boos. It is not entertainment, but a sort of documentary of a state of soul.

John Dos Passos, his friend, said of John Reed that it was Pancho Villa who taught him to write, in 1913. Paul Leduc's film *Reed: Mexico Insurgente,* traces Reed's trip to Mexico as an American reporter and his growing conviction that one cannot watch revolutions, but must take sides—a conviction that took him to Russia four years later, where he wrote *Ten Days That Shook the World.* I do not know by what fortunate fluke this film ended up in an African and Arab film festival, except that its theme, more perhaps than those of films from the area itself, touches the core of the colonial problem: that which happens in a man's heart when he lives a period of social and political change. More than those from the countries contemporarily involved, this film managed to convey the textures, feelings, concerns, and contradictions of a revolution in progress with sensitivity and immediacy.

Leduc undertook a dangerous experiment: he attempted to make a historical documentary by recreation. Photographed by Greek cameraman Alexis Grivas in a muted, brownish tint, on 16mm, without sets or cinematic splendor of any sort, everything we see seems to be material from the period. Reed himself is played—almost entirely in longshot—by Claude Obregon, a performance which in its underplaying achieves the greater sensibility. Based on Reed's own book, the story carries through from his arrival at the Mexican border until the battle of Gomez Palacio—roughly a year of campfires, encounters, losses of friends in battle, inter-

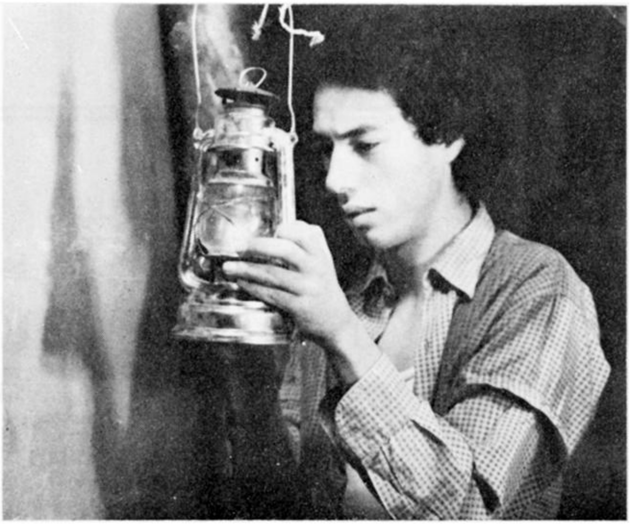
REED: MEXICO INSURGENTE ▶



views, hardships shared, and convictions growing. Never is there an attempt to editorialize or to present an "objective" view of the events—everything is seen through the eyes of Reed, but with a fine camera distance, a razor's edge balance which for once has totally succeeded, creating a surface of truth without doctrine.

The use of a documentary technique in a fiction film, which is characteristic of the films of both Bouamari and Leduc, also showed its validity as an instrument of idea promulgation in another film not shot on the African continent, but represented here as a Ghana entry because of the nationality of its director, King Ampew. Made as a thesis film at the film school in Munich, this feature follows the routine of a black singer in a club there, which seems to consist mainly of accepting, without emotion, the advances made to him by a series of white women. In absolutely deadpan style we are introduced to a grey town and a grey existence, a joyless and emotionless continuity of faces and environments, which in their total impact create a harsh attack on contemporary German society. Few have treated the racial problem in sexual terms (Lionel Rogosin's cumbersome *Black Fantasy,* also seen here, is an exception), and few have treated the sexual problem in a society of surface wellbeing without melodrama. Ampew has done both, seemingly without effort, and has created a valid document of a state of mind. It is not the whole problem, many will say, and he shows neither cause nor solution. But in the German context he certainly makes one see clearly that which perhaps one has always seen, but not paid attention to. Especially as a stimulant to discussion, in the milieu where it was shot, this film could represent a valid recipe for a style that begins to bridge the gap of making political films in an atmosphere of unprepared audiences.

The same can be said for the short Tunisian film *The Forbidden Step* by Behi Ridha. Censored after selection for the festival, it was shown privately. It concerns the sexual frustrations of a seller of postcards in the holy town of Kairouan, who finally attempts to rape (or rapes) a German tourist in a mosque. Tunisian audiences are extremely sensitive and often childish when it comes to even the slightest sexuality in a film, obviously bearing witness to deepset conflicts in what remains to this day a restrictive society. But despite the fact that Ridha's film shows masturbation and some nudity, the audience (mostly young people) took the film in a serious fashion, without the customary outbreaks—a testimony to Ridha's sensitivity and sense of balance. This may not be much of a film in another context, and to Western eyes seems banal and perhaps dated, but it is revolutionary for Tunisia. Bourguiba's picture next to Sophia Loren's on the wall of the boy's dirty hovel (he spits his toothbrush water on it) and Bourguiba's words repeated to him by the judge at the trial, exemplify the conflicts inherent in his daily existence. And the hushed attention of the public to the film bears witness to its topicality for them.



THE FORBIDDEN STEP

Perhaps saying, again and again, "for them," gives the measure of this festival—precariously perched between an essentially colonial, liberal progressivism, and the exigencies of newly independent cultures steering in stormy seas between growing economics and uncertain cultural heritage. The fact is, that all the goodwill cannot eliminate the differences, and that revolution, in each area, must be achieved by the people of that area, each individual for himself. Festivals that attempt to pretend that there is more in common than there is, risk showing up only the difference.

JAMES ROY MacBEAN

The Working Class Goes Directly to Heaven, Without Passing Go:

OR, THE NAME OF THE GAME IS STILL MONOPOLY

"The factory is a prison," says a militant on the picketline in Elio Petri's *La Classe Operaia Va in Paradiso (The Working Class Goes to Heaven),* a film whose jarringly abrasive depiction of life in a factory reminds me a bit of Jonas Mekas's harrowing presentation of life in another sort of prison, a military one—*The Brig.* While full of humor—and therefore not nearly as unrelenting in its assault on the spectator as *The Brig*—*The Working Class Goes to Heaven,* like the Mekas film, effectively employs a dissonant orchestration of jerky hand-held camera movements, aggressive close-ups, a constant barrage of noise, and a histrionic acting style (full of violent hand gestures, sudden head jerks, and abrasive voices whose habitual mode of speech is the shouted expletive) in order to give the spectator a gut-level feel of the brutalizing system—in this case, industrial capitalism—which, in a very real sense, imprisons the film's protagonists.

And, in fact, Petri's factory-prison and Mekas's military-prison have much in common, for both impose their ironclad regimentation on human beings in the name of machine-like efficiency. And neither in the military nor in the factory are you allowed to question just where that machine-like efficiency leads. A machine, after all, doesn't ask questions. And if in the process of becoming as "efficient" as a machine, you become a little less human, well, as drill sergeants and shop foremen would say, tough shit!

What is human nature anyway? Massa, the factory-worker (colorfully portrayed by veteran actor Gian-Maria Volonte) who is the chief protagonist of *The Working Class Goes to Heaven,* gives a bitter discourse on human nature in the film's first sequence. For him, man is thought of in crudely mechanical terms: "You put in a little raw material called food; various machines in the body go to work on it; and the final product that comes out the other end is . . . shit! Man is a perfect little shit-factory. Pity there's no market for the stuff; we could all be capitalists."

That's a cynical, dehumanizing attitude, to be sure; but, as the film brings home to us constantly, working conditions in a factory *are* overwhelmingly dehumanizing. And, as Petri emphasizes, the machine-patterns of factory life not only impose themselves on the worker physically—buffeting him relentlessly in the factory's frenetic rhythms and cadences of movement and noise—but also may impose themselves on him conceptually — channelling the worker's consciousness into very linear, mechanical models of thought which limit his ability to understand and transform his situation.

In many ways, *The Working Class Goes to Heaven* is an extended analysis and dramatization of a situation which was only sketched, however pointedly and insightfully, by Godard in the assembly-line sequence of the Dziga Vertov Group's *British Sounds.* Exploring, like Godard, the effect of factory working conditions (particularly the constant barrage of machine-noise) on the consciousness of the worker, Petri has found a way to demonstrate dramatically—from the standpoint of the individual worker—what Godard suggested intellectually—through a provocative juxtaposition of various elements on the sound track. Already assailed by more than enough noise on the factory floor, the worker may simply tune out or even resent any attempt to raise his political consciousness—particularly when, as in *The Working Class Goes to Heaven,* the militants' agitation (with bullhorns in front of the factory gates) may very well sound to the beleaguered worker like just more abrasive noise. In short, the alienation of the worker on the job is so pervasive that it effectively impedes the development of the Marxian political consciousness that would enable him to understand and to start changing his situation.

Bombarded with noise on all sides, the worker's resentment may even be exacerbated by the bitter recognition that the militants are right in pointing out the unnatural bleakness of a workday routine which begins before sunrise, ends after sunset, and, day after day (at least in the Northern Italian winter), imprisons the worker in a sunless world where, as Petri emphasizes, the rhythms of nature are overwhelmed by the rhythms of the machine. Moreover, as Petri subtly points out, management—adding their paternalist verbiage to the barrage of noise—actively encourages the worker's identification with his machine. As Petri's workers enter the shop each day, a taped public-address message wishes them *buon giorno,* and, in a little peptalk, encourages them to treat their machines with "tender loving care," reminding them that the key to "a good productive workday"—and to the piece-work bonuses that go with increased output—lies in each worker's intimate relation to his machine.

Massa may be bitter about his workday routine, but he has taken on some of the qualities of a machine and is a super-productive worker. He boasts that his name heads the factory list each month for total output; he gloats over the extra money he earns on the piece-work system. Contemptuous of the other workers who cannot keep up with his productivity, Massa even lets himself be used by the shop supervisors to set extremely high, frenetic rates of output which are then imposed on everyone as "shop standards." Although he is slightly ill at ease about doing this, Massa obviously can't resist the opportunity to show off and lord it over his fellow workers—especially since, as a reward, he extracts from the overseers tacit approval to smoke a cigarette in spite of the strict "No Smoking" rules.

Asked to break in a couple of new workers, Massa explains that the secret of his productivity is concentration. "You gotta pick out something that'll hold your concentration. Me, I concentrate on Adalgisa's ass over there," he says, pointing to a factory errand girl. Thinking of that ass and what he'd like to do with it, he explains, enables him to work up just the right rhythm with his machine, so that once this basic rhythm is established—"a piece . . . an ass . . . a piece . . . an ass"—he can gradually increase the pace to turn out the maximum number of pieces.

It is through this crude male-chauvinist sexual imagery that Petri introduces the film's underlying theme—that sexuality is the characterological ground that will tell us the most significant information about how and to what extent the machine-patterns of the factory workday permeate every aspect of the worker's life. Using this scene's obviously sexual associations of the thrusting motions of the machine, Petri develops throughout the film the way even the worker's *ideas* of sex are geared to the productivity paradigm of his relation to his machine.

Sex, like everything else for the worker, is thought of in terms of output. Quantity is emphasized. Massa is always bragging emptily about how many times a night he can do it, with no concern for the quality of experience shared by two persons. (After subjecting a young virgin from the factory to a joyless quickie in the front seat of his car, Massa insensitively boasts how she ought to be grateful to be "broken in" by someone as good as he is; and he likens his "performance" to that of his car—a remark which Petri has made ironically appropriate by staging the scene in the cramped quarters of the front seat of Massa's car so that the girl's initiation into sex seems to be accomplished as much by the gearshift lever as by anything else.)

At first glance Petri's emphasis on sexuality in *The Working Class Goes to Heaven* might seem a direct extension of his treatment of sexuality in his preceding film, *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion;* but a closer look reveals, I think, some striking differences. As I have argued elsewhere ("Sex and Politics," *FQ,* Spring 1972), Petri's *Investigation* seems to me to share with several other recent films an oversimplified view in which homosexuality—or latent, unacknowledged homosexual tendencies—are suggested as the root cause of fascism. In any case, the methodology of Petri's *Investigation* is the familiar one of examining an individual's behavior in search of clues that will suggest the underlying psychological causes (invariably childhood traumas) of that behavior.

Surprisingly, however, in *The Working Class Goes to Heaven* Petri boldly changes direction: for once the "present factors" of neurosis are not glossed over as merely superficial symptoms of an older, "deeper," unresolved oedipal complex. For once the methodology is not infinitely retroactive; and instead of invoking a rather crude psychosexual determination, Petri in this film explores the way in which even the supposedly deep-seated character-structures of sexuality are not necessarily "fixed," once and for all, in earliest childhood, as most Freudians would maintain, but may on the contrary be constantly in process of formation even well into maturity and perhaps all through one's life. And, significantly, what Petri concentrates on in *The Working Class Goes to Heaven* are the relations between sexuality and the machine-patterns imposed on the life of the mature adult factory worker in industrial capitalism.

This approach to the relations between sex and politics is long overdue;* and what is especially thought-provoking in Petri's film is his thorough examination of the concrete, tangible effects of the factory work-experience on the character-structure of the individual worker. If the worker seems a little neurotic, Petri is clearly saying, no need to go back to his childhood relations with mama and papa; just go take a good look at your nearest factory. For a factory worker in his middle or late thirties like Massa, that work experience, day after day, year after year, all his adult life, is bound to leave its mark on his character.

And, sure enough, Massa has quite a few problems. His home life is unstable and obviously less than wholly satisfying. Separated from his wife (who has custody of their young son, and who is now living with one of Massa's co-workers), Massa is currently carrying on a listless affair with Lidia, a divorced hairdresser with a young son (about the same age as Massa's own son); they live with Massa in his apartment.

This particular family arrangement serves to point out the way industrial capitalism tends to reduce people, even in their most intimate relations to one another—such as marriage and parenthood—to interchangeable parts in the big social machine. Moreover, this family arrangement has certain financial ramifications. While contributing to the financial support of his own son (and Massa seems just a little resentful about handing over money to his wife's new lover), Massa also finds himself having to support Lidia's son. When asked why Lidia's ex-husband doesn't pay to support his own kid, Massa can only reply—with a mixture of scorn and resignation—that the guy is a clerk and therefore doesn't make enough to support a kid. Thus Massa's productivity is a vicious circle: as a particularly fast and efficient worker, Massa earns more money than most men; but precisely because he makes so much and the wages of so many others are barely above subsistence level, he finds himself having to assume more financial responsibilities than would normally be his.

Finally, Massa's productivity causes him trouble in still another way. His fellow workers, envious of his high output and resentful of his

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*The call for a revolutionary, materialist psychoanalysis has recently been issued with great insight by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose book *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie: L'Anti-Oedipe* (Editions de Minuit, Paris) denounces and demystifies the idealist notion of the unconscious which reigns in psychoanalysis today. [Incidentally, it was Godard and Gorin who first called this book to my attention during a conversation in which they also expressed their admiration for Petri's examination of the worker's psyche in *The Working Class Goes to Heaven.*]

collusion with the overseers in the speed-up, begin to heckle and harass Massa in the factory. When this happens, Massa's temper really boils over, and contemptuously shouting that he'll show them what "a real Stakhanovite" can do, he furiously pushes himself to work faster than ever. Sputtering with rage, Massa quickens his already frenetic work pace — grabbing each piece with his fingers well before it has stopped turning in order to move on to the next piece a few seconds faster. Suddenly, however, in his anger, Massa loses concentration for an instant, loses the rhythm, and, missing his timing by a split-second . . . loses a finger in the moving parts of the machine.

With this accident Massa's life undergoes a profound change. The loss of most of one finger, itself, is not disabling: he'll be able to go back to work after a brief layoff for the hand to heal. But during this enforced respite, Massa has time to think. Suddenly removed from the relentless rhythms and exhausting pace of the factory work-day, Massa can pass his time in a more relaxed but also disoriented way—paying a visit to his son to show off the now four-fingered hand, and also visiting a grizzled old ex-worker, Militina, who is living out his old age in a mental institution.

This latter experience, however, proves most disquieting to Massa. For one thing, he recognizes in himself some of the same behavior patterns—a compulsive ordering of the silverware whenever he sits down to table—which Militina, probably echoing some psychologist's report on his own case, offers as the first hint he had that he was going crazy. (Militina also makes the excellent point, however, when asked just when he actually went crazy, that "It's others who decide that.")

Equally disturbing to Massa, however, is the disorienting ambiance of the mental institution (which Petri has accentuated by staging this scene in a fenced-in compound which even seems to have a wire-mesh roof). In fact, so disorienting is this encounter with Militina that in the course of their conversation their roles somehow get reversed, with the result that Massa, who came in blustering with self-confidence to cheer up old Militina by bringing him a book he had requested *(Quotations of Chairman Mao)* and to give him news of the rising sentiment for a strike at the factory, ends up listening with awe to the supposedly crazy Militina give a very forceful and articulate critique of the workers' petty, opportunistic strike plans and point out vividly the need to overthrow the entire capitalist system. Militina's spirited monologue includes his recounting that what ultimately got him fired from the factory and put in a mental institution was stepping out of the assembly line one day, grabbing a passing boss by the neck, and shouting "For God's sake tell me what product I'm working on or I'll strangle you!" Massa is so confused that he almost forgets that it's he, and not Militina, who is supposed to leave the mental institution when the visit is over. (And to add to his surprise and confusion, Militina's parting request to him is simply "Next time, bring guns!")

In one way or another, the visit to Militina gets to Massa, for when he returns to the factory to resume work (and is greeted by an unctuous supervisor who welcomes back "such a productive worker") Massa inexplicably takes his own sweet time, singing while he works, apparently not giving a damn anymore about productivity. When asked by one of the time-study overseers if he can't work fast anymore because of the missing finger, Massa contemptuously demonstrates that he *can* work as fast as ever, but bursting into anger he declares that he no longer sees any sense in busting his gut to fill the pockets of the bosses. This outburst—along with his new snail's pace—quickly gets Massa in trouble; and he is ordered to report for an interview with the factory psychologist, who asks him what a certain obviously phallic-shaped figure suggests to him.

With a vague awareness of what he's getting into, Massa acknowledges that it reminds him of a "cock," but then to cover his tracks he warns the psychologist not to think he's having any troubles with his sex life. "Any rumors you might have heard about me are false," he declares, not realizing he is giving himself away as he goes on to explain that if he can't make it with Lidia it's simply because she's such a bitch, and that, in any case, he can do it as many times a night as ever with other women.

This brief interview with the plant psychologist is a nice touch—revealing as it does both the facile application of psychoanalytic dogma (the rote ferreting out of Freudian symbolism) and the fact that a worker's psychological problems only get attention when they begin to interfere with his output on the job and thereby endanger the boss's profit-margin. Moreover, it's interesting that Massa, who is now starting to see the absurdity of his old compulsive productivity as a worker, is unable to see that his attitude towards sex shares that same obsessive concern for output—and this insight into Massa's problems is not likely to be recognized by the plant psychologist, whose job is to reintegrate the problem worker back into the productivity pattern and who therefore will simply not even consider the possibility that this obsession with productivity is a large part of the problem itself.

Meanwhile, the workers have called a general meeting to hear various proposals for a strike. The large Communist union, attempting to take advantage of—and at the same time head off—the rising momentum stirred up by the Maoists who are agitating each morning at the factory gates, has formed a united front with the two small noncommunist unions who are calling for an increase in the incentive pay-rate on piecework. A more militant stand is taken by the small group of workers aligned with the Maoist students: this faction calls for an end to the piece-work system. Massa, arriving a few minutes late at the meeting, impulsively speaks out in favor of the more militant position, calling for abolition of piece-work in spite of the bonuses he himself reaps by his extraordinary productivity. Dramatically waving his now four-fingered hand in the air, he shouts that it isn't worth it, that the system makes everybody a victim!

Despite the impressiveness of Massa's sudden turnabout, the vote is overwhelmingly in favor of the reformist proposal of the union leaders; and the workers again opt for the more moderate, union-sponsored proposal of a limited strike (two hours per day) instead of the total shutdown called for by the Maoists. Massa's disgust and disappointment at the outcome of the meeting, however, are then somewhat compensated for by his taking quick advantage of his newfound popularity—by seducing the factory virgin in the car-seat encounter referred to earlier.

As the strike begins, Massa plays a leading role in physically preventing the white-collar workers from entering the factory. First he hauls a frightened time-study overseer out of the employees' bus and extracts from him a hasty pledge to honor the picket-line. Then Massa leaps on the hood of the shop supervisor's car to prevent him from entering the parking lot—an act which touches off a mêlée as the riot cops, who have obviously been on hand all along though hidden from view, charge the striking workers with clubs flailing. The strikers are forced to flee; Massa offers his apartment as a refuge for the Maoists. This gets him in trouble, however, with Lidia, who resents finding the apartment filled with bearded longhairs, fears that they'll steal her trinkets, and generally disapproves of their politics. Shouting "I'll never be a communist," she indignantly exclaims "I want nice things and I'm willing to work for them. I want a fur and I'll get one because I deserve one." Taking the TV-set and her son with her, she storms out, while Massa, trying to cajole her into staying, promises "I'll get you a fur." The Maoists, fearing that Lidia's wrath might prompt her to denounce their whereabouts to the police, quickly leave—sententiously citing "revolutionary caution."

Back at the picket line the next day, the strikers are told that management wants to negotiate. However, when Massa tries to pass through the factory gates with his fellow workers to attend the negotiating session, he is prevented from entering and handed a notice of dismissal for his rôle in the previous day's riot. Confused and frustrated, Massa runs along the fence which surrounds the factory, trying to find an unguarded spot where he might climb over to join his comrades. Petri expressively emphasizes Massa's sense of panic at this sudden disorienting of his life by having the camera track giddily apace with Massa as he runs along the fence. Massa gets small consolation from a comrade who yells to him from inside the fence that his immediate reinstatement has been added to the workers' demands—adding, however, that "the negotiations are likely to be long and complicated: you'll just have to be patient."

Disconsolate at being cut off from "his" world, Massa passes seemingly endless days in this limbo state. The negotiations drag on. Earlier, when laid up with the hand-injury, Massa hadn't minded having time to reflect on his situation as a worker; but his lay-off then was only temporary. He knew he would soon go back to work, even if less dedicated to productivity. Now, however, faced with the prospect of *never* being able to return to his familiar place, Massa experiences tremendous anxiety. After all, it's the only job he knows. Moreover, separated from his wife and son—and now deserted by his mistress (and her son)—Massa fears that his whole world is falling apart. And to top it off, there's his nagging awareness that his sex life wasn't really that good—and now he's even got to put up with the psychologist's transparent attempts to read a castration complex into his loss of the finger.

Desperately seeking reassurance and help, Massa even finds himself rebuffed by the Maoist students. Carrying on their struggle on several fronts simultaneously, in the local high schools as well as in the factories, the Maoists bluntly tell Massa that his case doesn't interest them "at a personal level, only at a class level"—pointing out that their own personal careers and health are being sacrificed to the cause.

Thoroughly confused and demoralized, Massa visits Militina once again at the mental institution. Now fearing for his own sanity, Massa listens numbly as Militina recounts a dream of knocking down the wall to Paradise. "Wherever there's a wall," shouts Militina, "knock it down!" Still in a funk, Massa leaves, but not before handing to Militina a big red package looking suspiciously like guns.

Back in Massa's apartment, we come to the real crisis, the central moment of the film—the individual worker, isolated and powerless, reduced to stasis and despair. The unshaven, abject Massa morosely takes stock of what little remains of the threads of his life: innumerable knick-knacks, four alarm clocks, "magic" candles by Ronson (never used), a "loving couple" vase, a few worthless stock shares tucked away in a basement closet, and a huge inflatable Donald Duck belonging to Lidia's son. Suddenly overwhelmed by the absurdity of this existence geared to mindless accumulation, Massa grabs Donald Duck and tries to wring his neck—only causing the duck to emit a screeching sound. Finally, in a fit of fury, Massa presses his burning cigarette into Donald Duck's body, causing Donald slowly to deflate. (At which point the San Francisco Festival audience broke into loud applause.)

His frustration now spent, Massa wearily slumps down on the couch, and, without bothering to undress, pulls a blanket over himself and falls into a fitful sleep, only to be awakened shortly thereafter by Lidia's unexpected return. Petri moves the narrative swiftly at this point, signaling the couple's reconciliation simply by cutting from Lidia's unexpected arrival (with the abject Massa asleep on the couch) to a shot of the two of them being awakened in their double bed, an indeterminable amount of time later, by the buzzing of the doorbell.

This time it's the jubilant union delegates, who tell the dazed Masa that the strike is settled, that he's been reinstated, and that the workers have won "a great victory." "It's the first time in our region that a worker fired for political activities has been reinstated." The irony of this is beautiful. All through the film, we, along with Massa, have gradually achieved a gut-level awareness of just how dehumanizing life in a factory really is; and now the "great victory" of the reformist unions merely allows a worker who was fired for rebelling against the intolerable system to go back to work under that same intolerable system . . . and be thankful for the chance. "And what's more," the union men add, "we won the pay increases on piece-work."

So the next day, life at the factory returns to normal. Once again the workers, Massa among them, file through the factory gates while Maoist militants with bullhorns try to stir them up: "The sun isn't even up yet and you're going into the factory. When you come out it will be night. You won't see the sun today."

But the film doesn't quite end yet. In a brief concluding sequence we see Massa back at work. Only now, instead of turning out pieces on his own machine, he's at work on the assembly line. As always, there's a lot of machine-noise, but Massa manages to shout loud enough to communicate with the man next to him, telling him about a dream he had the previous night. As Massa recounts the dream, the man next to him repeats the story, in turn, to the next man down the line, and so on. Massa's dream, very similar to the one Militina recounted to Massa earlier, is about breaking down the wall to Paradise.

When they hear it was a dream about Paradise, the workers each ask "How about me, was I there too?" And the word gets passed on that all of them were there together in Paradise. Another question gets passed back up the line to Massa: "What were we doing?" But before we get a chance to hear the answer the camera suddenly picks up a worker pushing a cart and, in a panning movement, follows him as he goes down the assembly line. At the end of the line he swings the cart into place, adjusting it to pick up the finished product as it rolls off the assembly line.

But just as he gets ready for the pick-up, the film ends: the shot freezes. We never see the finished product. It remains a mystery, although a huge finger painted on the wall points down ominously and insistently to the spot where the end-product of the worker's labor should be.

Having some of the qualities of a dream itself, this conclusion seems to suggest that even workers' dreams are likely to be linear, mechanical models wherein all it would take to achieve a workers' paradise would be—as Militina, in his younger days, had demanded—knowledge of what product they were working on. Unfortunately, as old Militina now realizes—in his madness?—the task of achieving a workers' paradise requires, among other things, guns . . . and the willingness to knock down walls.

But the walls that present the biggest obstacles, as Petri's film provocatively emphasizes, may be the walls imposed on the workers' minds —barriers erected by an industrial capitalist system which insidiously perpetuates the vulnerability of the exploited worker by imprinting its machine-patterns on even the deepest level of his character.

Correspondence & Controversy

ON INTERPRETING BAZIN

There is a complexity about Brian Henderson's analysis of the structure of Bazin's thought that, I cannot but feel, would have surprised Bazin as much as it puzzles me. This is not to say that Mr. Henderson must therefore be mistaken, only that I find it hard to accept on the basis of his analysis that what I have so long felt to be so much of a piece, so whole and, while full of

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No one, it has always seemed to me, has held more consistently that the ontology and the philosophy of film are inseparably and casually connected. Nor, may I add, although this is not the main point at issue, do I know of any critic (except his friend Amédée Ayfre) whose ontology has such historically respectable roots in the schools of the west.

Surely nothing more succinctly and neatly summarizes Bazin's historic - ontological approach to cinema than the analogy of the *asymptote*. Nor could he have put it more clearly than in his expression of a belief that the year 2000 will salute the advent of a cinema free of the artificialities of montage, renouncing the role of an "art of reality" so that it may climb to its final level on which it will become, once and for all "reality made art"—a possibility that he sees foreshadowed in the films of de Sica-Zavattini. One might even say that here ontology and history are fused!

Introductions are notoriously unread and the only reference publicly made to my attempts to deal (in the introduction to Vol. II) with the ontology of Bazin's history and the history of his ontology dismissed me as a would-be erudite showoff. May I ask Mr. Henderson to ignore that warning and to glance at those pages and to reread, especially, the essays on neorealism. He will then see how it could be that I might be puzzled along with others who are reading his interesting study of Bazin's thought.

Perhaps he would also be so kind as to indicate who the writers are in France, England and America who are engaged in the "healthy and necessary process of going beyond Bazin"? What and where is this "beyond" for which these scurrying critics are headed? Perhaps in his third installment Mr. Henderson—whose intelligence and integrity I deeply respect—will clear up these points for some of us.

—HUGH GRAY
[Translator of *What Is Cinema?*]

REPLY

Gray proposes a simple Bazin, whom I have made complex. He does not, unfortunately, address my arguments specifically. Gray still finds Bazin consistent and unified; my arguments to the contrary must be faulty, but how are they so? Gray perhaps suggests that a thinker is presumed consistent until proven inconsistent, as though: innocent until proven guilty. Since I have failed to make out the opposite case (or at least failed to convince Gray), the consistency of Bazin's system stands. Gray may therefore ask me in effect to begin all over again and to tell the court, on new grounds, why Bazin is inconsistent. But in thought, unlike law, consistency is no more a presumption than its opposite. In order to make out a case for the unity of Bazin's system, Gray (or someone else) would first have to construct it—identifying the principal premises, showing their interrelations, etc. This has not been done.

Under the terms of Gray's criticism, I am to reread his introduction to Volume II, reread Bazin's essays on neorealism, and then, it seems, to recant of my own free will. I've done my rereading and I do not recant. The historical background which Gray's introduction provides is quite interesting; it does not, however, settle the question of the meaning of the texts written by Bazin. It is this question which my article addresses. I will not reproduce my arguments here; I will only recall certain of the more important areas of inconsistency (or problem areas) discovered in the Bazin texts. At the theoretical level, Bazin uses the concepts of reality and relation to reality in at least three ways: physical and social reality as recorded by the camera; in the case of adaptations from the theater, the reality of the play's text, its theatricality; and the reality of film history. Fidelity to each of these realities is different. Fidelity to physical reality is apparently inherent in photographic reproduction but is achieved well or badly by different shooting and cutting styles. Directors of adaptations must be faithful to the theatricality of the text; here the introduction of physical and social reality may be ruinous to the film. The film critic must be faithful to the reality of film history, which includes all film styles and all modes of adaptation known. Bazin uses the concept of film history or himself writes about film history in at least three ways also. "Theater and Cinema" and "In Defense of Mixed Cinema" concern large-scale developments in the international film industry, 1940-1952, principally its turning to plays and novels for film subjects. In the majority of Bazin's essays, individual films and directors are chosen and discussed by Bazin as aesthetic highpoints within film history, conceived on an art-historical model of formal innovation and excellence. (My original article argues that reality means something different in each of these essays. Visconti's "aesthetic realism," Fellini's "poetic realism," etc.) "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" propounds a version of film history wherein film production as a whole has become more realistic at each of several technological stages: sound, panchromatic stock, composition in depth, etc. These are some of the opposing directions in which Bazin's work goes; I leave it to the reader to work out the strictly logical consistencies and inconsistencies involved, if interested. It is true that Bazin sometimes uses the analogy of the asymptote, but he speaks of reality and history in the other ways I have indicated also.

Despite my protests, I will do some self-criticism anyway. Though I adhere to its principal analyses and conclusions, certain aspects of my article were unclear and perhaps misleading. I over-simplified in suggesting (at times) a clear-cut, overall conflict between ontology and history, when these are more accurately tendencies or motifs which overlap and interweave in many different ways in Bazin's work. (If anything, then, my analysis of Bazin's thought is insufficiently complex.) This over-schematizing is accentuated by the rhetorical form of the article, which proposes a division in Bazin's work, marshals arguments in support of this thesis, then returns to it and restates it in conclusion. This conclusion—that Bazin is inconsistent—is not very interesting in itself and it leads nowhere. I should have assumed Bazin's inconsistencies at the outset and proceeded to explore them in an open-minded way. I should have dropped the propositional-conclusory form, which suggests that I have the answers in advance, and adopted an investigatory form. As it is, the piece begins several explorations which are somewhat curtailed by its rigidified form. There is another point about the inconsistency theme. This was not meant as a criticism of Bazin: inconsistent therefore deficient. Since Hegel we know that contradictions are the constituent elements of thought systems and their link with later work also. We analyze the contradictions in a body of work in order to see how it is put together (dismantling = demystification) and to determine what it cannot explain. The premises we differentiate can then be put together differently or combined with others to produce new theoretical structures overcoming previous contradictions. Thus contradictions in Bazin are both a key to his work as it stands and a key to post-Bazinian developments as well. In short, film theoretical work, like other kinds, will often be this plodding activity of deriving and reworking premises through the method of consistency.

That there is a great deal more to discover in Bazin, especially in Volume II, I am sure Gray and I agree. But film people seem to be bored with Bazin now, few have read Volume II carefully. And they are certainly bored with neorealism. Nevertheless (I assert) Bazin's neorealist essays contain the key to Rossellini, the key to Fellini, even perhaps the key to Visconti. Bazin's essays on these directors remain the best written on them, often illuminating films made by them after his death. And through these figures, other figures are illuminated. Any key to Rossellini is at least half a key to Godard. Any key to Rossellini and Godard is at least two thirds a key to Bertolucci. Of course I exaggerate. There are in any case no ultimate keys. One must agree with Barthes that every critic is "utterly subjective, utterly historical." Still, due partly to the paradox that all of his favorite directors are still making films, Bazin remains not only better than contemporary critics but even more contemporary than they are. And while we are on the subject, it becomes necessary to urge Hugh Gray and the University of California Press to carry through their Bazin project to its end, by translating the rest of *Qu'est-ce que le Cinéma?* There are essential things remaining, the essays on *Senso, La Strada, Il Bidone, Europa 51, L'Oro di Napoli, Los Olvidalos,* and many others. We must have these.

—BRIAN HENDERSON

Film Reviews

SOUNDER

Director: Martin Ritt. Producer: Robert Radnitz. Script: Lonne Elder III. Photography: John A. Alonzo. Twentieth Century-Fox.

SOUNDER

Sounder is a celebration of black American life. It shows us a family of sharecroppers in the Depression who, despite the continual, inescapable social, political, and economic injustice waged against them—as against all black Americans—survive not just physically but spiritually as well: each member whole in himself and the family itself intact, despite the year-long separation of the father. In showing us this family, the film tells us, or shows us, that black Americans have as rich a tradition as white Americans or any other group; that their lives have been full of strength, joy, family feeling, and heroism; that even while excluded from, or oppressed within, the mainstream of American society they have been as much part of the land, as *American,* as any other Americans. The film does this with a full sense of the weight of the injustice, of the continual suffering it causes, and of the need to eliminate it.

Thus the film escapes the old benign racist stereotype of blacks as content in their deprivation because their needs and potential as human beings are so much less than those of white people. At the same time, it escapes the countervailing modern white liberal or radical view which sees blacks as *only* a social problem or sees them as people *only* negatively: as maimed, deprived, suffering, destroyed. Answering a white critic who seemed to feel "that unrelieved suffering is the only 'real' Negro experience," who seemed to look at a black man and see "not a human being but an abstract embodiment of living hell," Ralph Ellison wrote:

> But there is also an American Negro tradition which teaches one to deflect racial provocation and to master and contain pain. It is a tradition which abhors as obscene any trading on one's anguish for gain or sympathy; which springs not from a desire to deny the harshness of existence but from a will to deal with it as men at their best have always done. It

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> takes fortitude to be a man . . . ["The World and the Jug," in *Shadow and Act*].

There is nothing commendable, let alone heroic, in acquiescence in an avoidable injustice. But insofar as the injustice is intractable, insofar as the choice is between living *with* injustice and not living at all—and this has been the principal choice for black Americans throughout their history—then survival with injustice can be heroic. This is the heroism the film is about—a heroism of an altogether different and more meaningful order than the fantasy heroism of the recent black James Bond-type super-heros.

The screenplay by Lonne Elder III was adapted from William H. Armstrong's book *Sounder,* which won the Newberry Medal, a children's book award. The story is simple, and I'm simplifying it more, leaving out a number of incidents, including almost everything concerning the hunting dog, Sounder. The Morgans—Nathan, Rebecca, their son David, and his younger brother and sister—are a family of sharecroppers in Louisiana in 1933. Unable to get enough food to feed his family, Nathan steals some meat from a white man's home. He is apprehended, tried, and sent to prison camp for one year's hard labor. There is some question whether the rest of the family can plant and gather the crops in his absence; if not, they may lose the farm. David, who is around 11, walks for days with Sounder to the prison camp to see his father but cannot find him. On this journey he meets Camille, a young teacher, educated and enlightened as well as kind, who is mistress of a school with only black children. He stays with her for a day or so, then returns home. The family succeeds in finishing the crop on time. Nathan comes home, and the family is reunited. But Camille has invited David to stay with her and join her school, and the story ends with Nathan driving him there.

The simplicity of the story frees the filmmakers to concentrate on the real matter of the film: the texture and nuances of the life they are depicting. This is what gives the film its force and meaning and gives substance to the grander implications of its story and dialogue, which would be hollow without it. When Rebecca, setting out on the long trek to town to see Nathan in prison, says goodbye to her children, preparing them for her absence, we are shown in the most unemphatic way, through small nuances, both her anxiety and the way she is concealing it to protect them. And we get a sense of the deep, complex, unmeditated structure of this woman's love for her children—its combination of strength, tenderness, intuition, and courage—and of the structure of feeling uniting the whole family. And there is the same kind of resonance in scenes of more ordinary moments, which convey the everyday rhythm or rising and going to sleep, work and play, and the minute interchanges between characters and between the characters and their environment.

In all this the film's visual style is fundamental. Martin Ritt, the director, has chosen a style built largely on long shots and long takes, and the result is a naturalism characterized by a respect for wholeness, proportion, and continuity—for natural spatial and temporal relations. In the long shots which take in the house, the land around it, and the members of the family fulfilling their various functions, together even when they are not in each other's field of vision; or in tracking shots, such as the one which moves from Rebecca outside to the children waking up, follows them through the kitchen and then outside to their parents, or the ones which follow the family and friends on their way from church, the meaning is inseparable from the style itself: the unity of these people with each other and with the land; the way each of these lives is a whole in which joy and suffering, work, play, and rest, inner life and the external world in which the person moves are finally unified and continuous.

Ritt eschews the use of cutting especially when it would falsify or distort a situation. He never uses it for surprise and seldom to emphasize a point, preferring to let the effect derive from the situation itself. Thus he almost never uses a cut to introduce a character new to a sequence. As the family nears home and the sheriff and his deputy are waiting there to arrest Nathan, we know something is wrong first from Sounder's barking. We initially see the men quite small, in long shot, in the right side of the frame. Whereas most directors would cut to a close-up or medium shot long before, Ritt does not allow us to see them even in medium shot until Nathan has reached them. This restraint, proportion, and lack of emphasis, this refusal to draw more from the situation than is inherently there, makes the scene more, not less, forceful, because we believe it more and do not feel manipulated.

I wish Ritt had gone even further in his avoidance of conventional montage. I have the feeling that, from fear of monotony or some other lack of conviction, he failed to follow his stylistic inclination to the limit. But when, after Nathan's sentence is declared, Ritt cuts to a reaction shot of David's face falling—or in other places where he gives in to conventional montage—the weakness, the hackneyed quality, the slight sentimentality come precisely from the way of cutting.

A major aspect of the film's wholeness, evenhandedness, and sense of proportion—and it is of course the combined product of Elder's screenplay, Ritt's handling of his camera, his handling of his actors, and their performances—is a refusal to caricature. In a film with black heroes the temptation to caricature the whites who are the agents of their oppression is very great. In fact this is so much what we expect that the thwarting of these expectations is a considerable source of power. The "villains" we see here—the sheriff, the deputies, the judge, the landlord, David's regular schoolteacher—mere toadies of a larger structure, are seen as mediocre, pathetic, petty, prejudiced. But they are not made into raving sadists, and their being granted their small share of humanity makes us all the more able to appreciate the superior humanity of the Morgan family. I would guess that the constant humiliation and oppression that the Morgans are seen to suffer at their hands, generally not dramatic or even too overt precisely because it is a stable symptom of a stable racism, is much closer to the actual day-to-day experience of sharecroppers during this period than beatings and lynchings.

Nevertheless *Sounder* strikes us with some of the quality of a fairy tale or a fable—and is open to the charge of sentimentality. This charge is valid in only a very limited way. The film is sentimental, I find, in the absence of almost any harshness in the soft, lyrical tones of its colors and its composition or any harshness in the way the members of the family impinge on each other. The kind of restraint, the suppression or perhaps the sublimation of rage that characterizes the parents' behavior toward their children—they virtually never let out the force of their anger or frustration against them—seems to me much more characteristic of a middle-class family, white or black, than of a poor, unlettered laboring family. In even the most loving such family I would expect a much freer and more open expression of minor, momentary hostility.

But another part of the fairy-tale quality comes from a kind of modulation, a refusal to go to the extremes of violence, suffering or confrontation. For example, when Mrs. Boatwright, the "good" white woman, peeks at the files and finds out what camp Nathan is in, the deputy threatens to ruin her reputation in the town if she discloses the information. But she tells the Morgans, and nothing comes of the threat. This may seem like an evasion. Yet the deputy would have almost no way to find out she told them. Or when Nathan, slightly lame after his return, stumbles and gets hit by the draw-bar of the cane press, we think he is going to die or have a concussion or at least be knocked unconscious. But no, he is just stunned and humiliated at the diminishment of his powers.

If we rush in to call such modulations or omissions dishonest or sentimental, I think we are measuring the movie not against life but rather against other movies, or against plays and novels, which—taking their cue originally from Greek tragedy—have almost always been founded on a radical deformation of the shape of existence: on coincidence, extreme situations, dénouements. In real life, head-on unmodulated confrontations and violent deaths are the exception. For most people, death is a gradual process of weariness and loss of one's powers—such as we see beginning in Nathan—of which the actual death is merely the ultimate step. What may first seem sentimentality is really the opposite: a respect for the real form and proportions of life, including the real forms and proportions of its suffering.

When David is at Camille's house the first time, she reads him a beautiful passage from W. E. B. DuBois about how the unique wisdom blacks have gained from their experience could contribute to the culture at large. The passage comes from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) from (although one would not guess this from the passage alone) a chapter called "On the Training of Black Men," a strong statement about the need for education for black people. And by education, DuBois—unlike Booker T. Washington—means not just technical training, preparation for particular trades, but, as he insists, education in the widest sense: culture, knowledge of the world outside and of "the rich experience of the past." For DuBois this is an absolutely necessary and inseparable part of the movement toward the complete political, social, and economic equality of blacks, which he, also in contrast to Washington, insists on.

This kind of education, which David is about to embark on, is something that Rebecca and Nathan, for all their humanity, lack—and which offers something further: knowledge of the world outside, of one's place in it, of how one's position needs to be changed, and of some of the means to do so. The film doesn't say, or even explicitly ask, what political conclusions or political results this education will lead to. Will it show that assimilation is the answer and perhaps help bring it about? Or separatism? Or revolution? Or is there a solution? Has anyone, in the 40 years since the film takes place, found the answers to these questions? We cannot blame the film for not answering them, and even posing them explicitly would have misshaped it and made it a worse, not a better film. It ends by pointing to the first step in the journey, but it never says the journey will be short or easy.

—Paul Warshow

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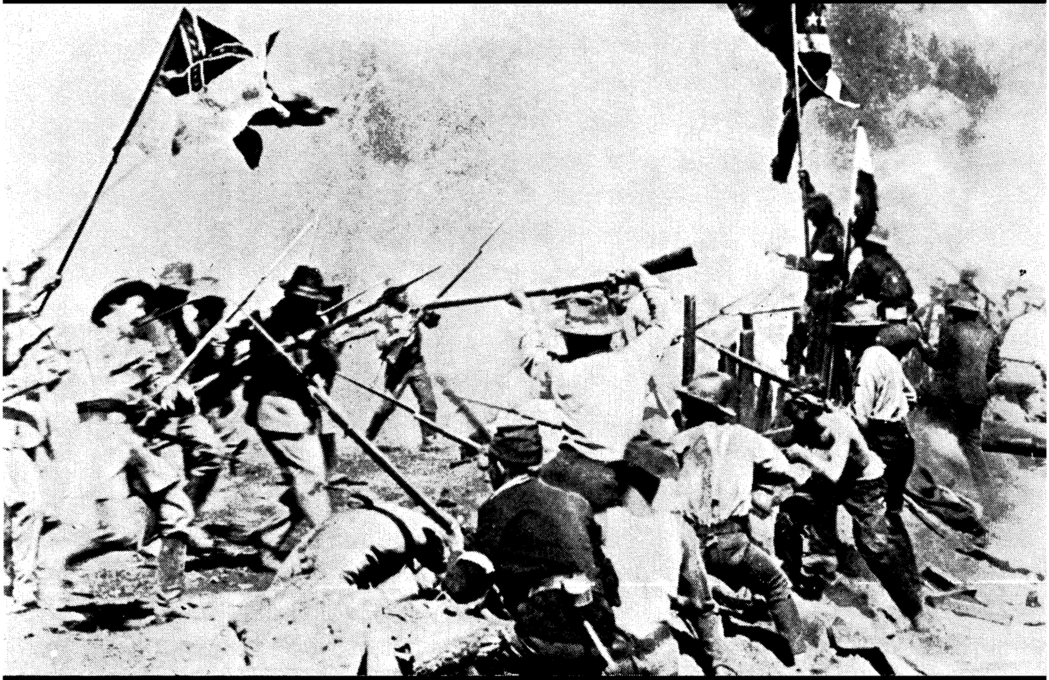

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