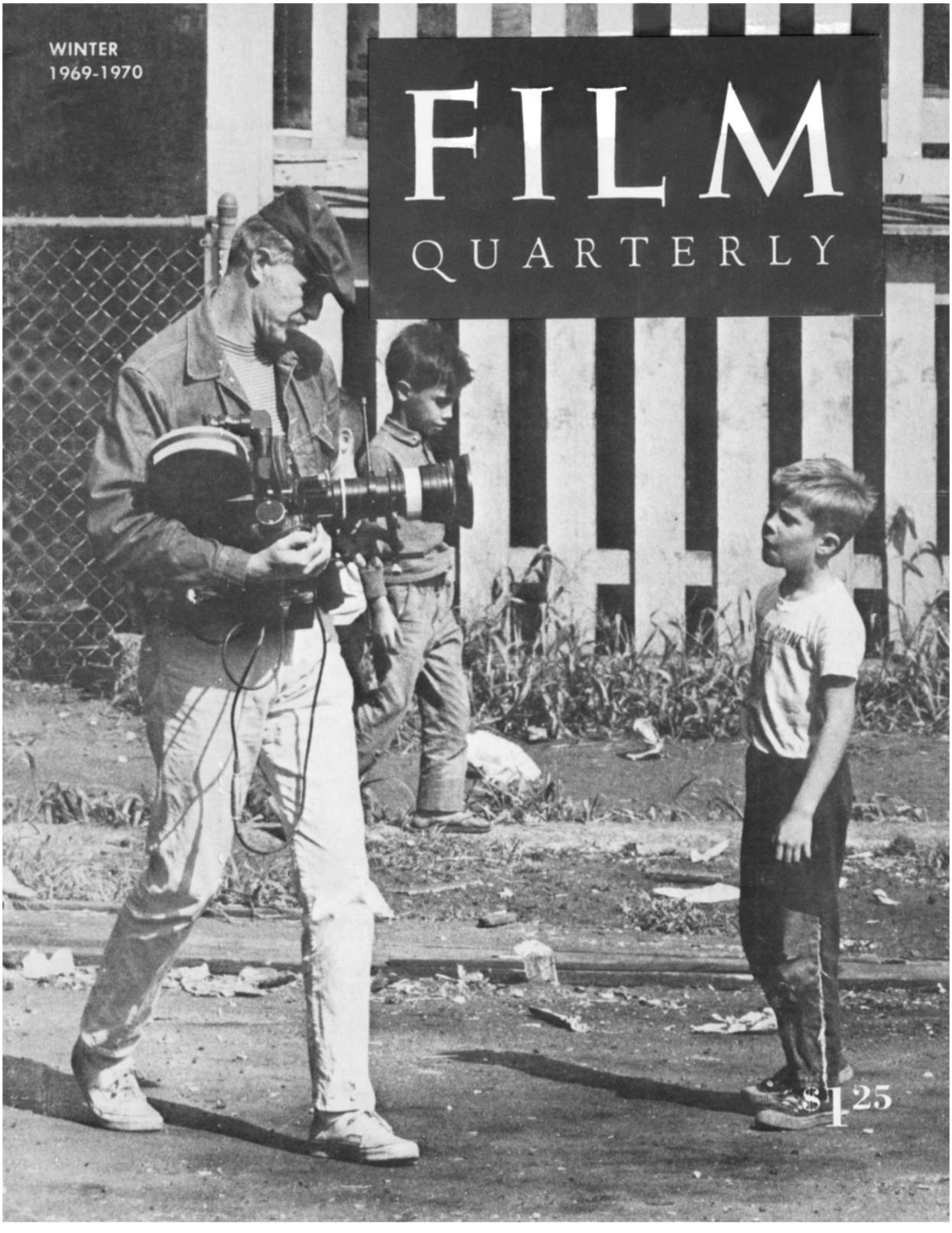
WINTER
1969-1970

# FILM
## QUARTERLY



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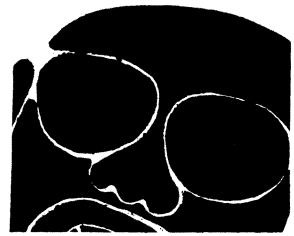

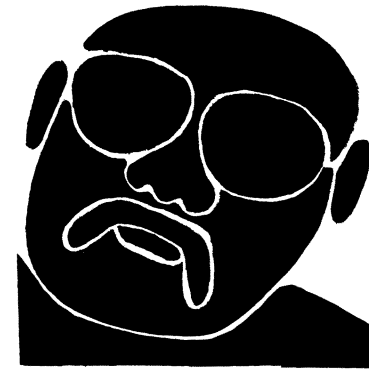

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VOL. XXIII, No. 2 Winter 1969-1970

## ARTICLES



## REVIEWS



**COVER:** Haskell Wexler shooting in the streets of Chicago on *Medium Cool.*

# Editor's Notebook

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through a turn toward very personal, often "subjective" cinema, very free and self-conscious in its camerawork and editing, American new directors are facing another set of problems: the relating of "real" footage (and more or less real people) with dramatic contexts, the difficult problems of attitude and thought that must be solved in confronting the realities of American life.

These realities have been touched upon in some 16mm films for years—as in the underground press, various media freak-outs, rock music, and so on. Their confrontation by the 35mm film, however welcome, is the overdue closing of a cultural lag. What the consequences will be, in even the short run, is hard to see. But in this issue, at the risk of a certain amount of overlap, we return to several films discussed in our last issue; and the articles and reviews in this issue themselves present conflicting and we hope mutually illuminating approaches to the new films.

## APOLOGIA PRO MACHINA SUA

As our regular subscribers have been informed by a separate notice, the University of California Press has installed a computer to handle subscriptions for *Film Quarterly* as well as book orders. Unfortunately, the change-over period has been arduous and protracted; not only have many individual subscriptions (and book orders) been delayed, but the printing of labels for individual subscriptions has been held up also—thus throwing us even farther off a regular schedule than is usual with scholarly journals. We believe that the computer has now been taught its repertoire of tricks; it should be caught up on its work by the end of 1969. Thus, unless the computer goes berserk like Kubrick's HAL, we expect to be able to issue our Spring number as soon as the printer has printed it.

The future may indeed belong to men sitting on tall stools, green eye-shades on their heads and quill pens in their hands—but for a while longer we will have to stick with the machine. For any reader contemplating an intimate relaitionship with a computer, several words of warning. Aside from their inherent and expected "stupidity," computers also suffer both mechanical and electronic breakdowns—some of which, despite their advertised image of infallibility, are difficult for their makers to fix. They require highly trained programmers to supervise their operations, and carefully programmed people to predigest information for them. The change-over period to a computer system takes some months; and it is folly to dismantle your old system until you have the new one operating smoothly, even though that means double costs for a sizable period. *Caveat emptor!*

## CONTRIBUTORS

DAN BATES now lives in Los Angeles. RICHARD CORLISS has been an intern at the Museum of Modern Art. ALLAN FRANCOVICH, an AFI Fellow, is now in Paris, where he is translating *Jean Vigo* for the University of California Press. FOSTER HIRSCH is a New Yorker. DENNIS HUNT is a graduate student at Berkeley. RICHARD KOSZARSKI is a graduate student at NYU. LARRY LOEWINGER teaches film at Wesleyan. DAVID MACDOUGALL is a graduate student in the ethnographic film program at UCLA. GRAHAM PETRIE teaches at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. MICHAEL SHEDLIN studies at Berkeley. K. T. TOEPLITZ is a well-known Warsaw critic.

STEPHEN FARBER

# End of the Road?

Summer 1969 may well turn out to be one of the crucial moments in American film history. For the last several years Hollywood has been steadily recovering from the box-office slump of the fifties; every year profits have been getting bigger, soundstages busier. But this past summer the trend has been sharply reversed. Almost all of the big, expensive, traditional-style commercial films *(The Chairman, The Great Bank Robbery, MacKenna's Gold, Castle Keep, Justine)* have failed miserably. Most of the movies released during the summer were dreadful, but that is hardly a new phenomenon; what *is* new is that the big bad movies are all losing money. Last year's Sidney Poitier vehicle, *For Love of Ivy,* was a smash; but this year *The Lost Man,* which is, if anything, a slightly *better* movie, has bombed. Almost all of the major studios have risked their futures on giant-budget films that once might have seemed good commercial bets —*Star, The Shoes of the Fisherman, Sweet Charity, MacKenna's Gold, Paint Your Wagon* —and that now will be lucky to recoup a quarter of their initial costs. Of course it's possible that a couple of the twenty million dollar blockbusters still unreleased—*Hello Dolly* or *Darling Lili* or *Tora Tora Tora* or *Catch 22*—will strike a gold mine and change the situation, but even the studios don't expect that any more. They know that they're on the verge of an unprecedented financial disaster. Many have stopped shooting altogether for a period of months. The Paramount lot is to be sold, and MGM and 20th Century-Fox (soon, with unwarranted optimism, to be renamed 21st Century-Fox) are talking of doing the same. Agencies are desperate—even many of their major stars cannot find work. The boom town is close to becoming a ghost town again.

The changing movie audience, talked about for a long time, has finally registered its preferences with unmistakable clarity. The two favorites of the youth audience last summer, *Midnight Cowboy* and *Easy Rider,* will probably be two of the highest-grossing films of all time. While *The April Fools* and *Sweet Charity* languish, there is an audience for offbeat movies that no studio would have dreamed of making even last year—for *Alice's Restaurant,* a crazy quilt of autobiography, farce blackout sketches, melancholy romantic ballad, melodrama; or for *Medium Cool,* an angry, passionate indictment of the forces of repression in contemporary America. Four major movies released this summer—*Easy Rider, Alice's Restaurant, Medium Cool, The Rain People*—were all made on low budgets, with virtually complete independence, away from the studios; all were written and directed by the same person, and all were conceived for the screen. *(Alice's Restaurant* moves off in such a different direction from Arlo Guthrie's record that it has to be considered a largely original piece of work.) None of these are Underground films—they are made for large audiences, with name actors, with very sophisticated Hollywood-level craftmanship. But all are truly personal films in the sense that works by Bergman or Antonioni are personal films. *Midnight Cowboy* is not quite comparable—it was adapted from a novel and has a separate writer, producer, director—but its success also represents a boost to personal film-making, for it was made outside the Hollywood cocoon, and in defiance of conventional assumptions about "acceptable" material for the screen.

The success of these movies and small movies like them—Frank Perry's *Last Summer,* Robert Downey's *Putney Swope* (the first major hit from the Underground)—has reached the front offices. This is not to say that the new studio executives are likely to be any more discriminating than moguls of the past. They are still

unable to see very far beyond the most recent hit. Right now they want every film to look like *Easy Rider*. What is more encouraging is that they would like every film to cost what *Easy Rider* cost—only $400,000. And any studio chief is more willing to gamble on difficult or volatile material when the cost is $400,000 than when it is $4 million. Similarly, when the budget is low, he is more inclined to give complete freedom to a film-maker whom he admires. In fact, the studios would really *prefer* a film to be made by one person instead of three or four—because that eliminates writers' and producers' fees; if the material is original, that cuts costs too—no expensive properties to buy. The chances for personal film-making have never been greater than they are at present.

Still, the only factors that will really change the quality of new movies are talent and a measure of good luck. It would be foolish to place too much confidence in the taste of the new audience. I don't really think this audience is any more enlightened than mass audiences of the past, though it does seem to be slightly more tolerant of movies it doesn't fully understand, like *If . . .* and *Alice's Restaurant*. The two most commercially successful of the new movies —*Midnight Cowboy* and *Easy Rider*—are the flashiest, least *artistically* successful of the group. These two movies express different audience fantasies from, say, *The Sound of Music* or *The Dirty Dozen*, but the nature of the youth response to these movies is *not* basically different from the response to a mass audience hit of the past—it is salivation, a conditioned-reflex response to very crude, surefire stimuli. When teens weep over the death of Ratso in *Midnight Cowboy*, or cheer at the facile putdowns of cops and army in *Alice's Restaurant*, when someone in the *Easy Rider* audience screams out "Fucking Southern pigs!" at the death of Peter Fonda, the responses have been very cheaply manipulated; they have nothing more to do with art than the lump that forms in nanny's throat when the Austrians sing "Edelweiss" in *The Sound of Music*. There is really no point in idealizing the young audience. If a movie happens to feed their fantasies, they will embrace it. (It may, almost by accident, do more than that—as *Alice's Restaurant* and *Medium Cool* do—but that is not the reason for those films' success.) And a modest, unfashionable picture like Coppola's *The Rain People*—a film made by a young man that deliberately avoids any gimmicks that will provide "youth appeal"—has no easier time finding an audience than it would have in the forties or fifties. There is something pathetic about Hollywood's present terror of making a movie without this youth appeal. I know a producer who has been trying to find backing for a very fresh and thoughtful film about middle-aged people, a film that would almost certainly have been made a year ago; now he has to keep hearing that the moneymen are not sure it has an "angle" for the nineteen-year-old. With luck we may get some interesting films out of this disorientation, but it's upsetting to think that the people in power still don't want to make movies for adults.

But while we ponder the mixed blessing of the new audience, it is impossible not to be impressed by the genuinely personal quality of the new films. Because these films are going to have a great deal of influence on the direction of the American film of the future, it is important to see what is truly original about them, and what merely modish or sensational. As a *group* of films they are interesting for what they have in common thematically. With the exception of *The Rain People*, all of them take account of the changes in American society of the last few years—the disgust with the war, the growing hatred of the police and other authorities, the disintegration of the contemporary American city, more permissive attitudes toward sex and drugs. Just a couple of years ago a movie that touched a contemporary nerve, like *Bonnie and Clyde*, had to do it indirectly—young people identified with the film's radical vision of alienation and despair in spite of the thirties setting and the gangster movie conventions. But these new films are set in the world of today's headlines; they refer specifically to Vietnam, the draft, the assassinations, Chicago in the summer of 1968. More important than their topicality, though, is an impulse all these films share—the urge to make some major revaluations of Amer-

ica. All of them deal with American myths, even with American history, as they try to come to terms with the desperation they feel about modern America.

Both *Midnight Cowboy* and *Easy Rider,* for example, concern journeys across America that are charged with portentous historical, cultural, mythic implications. The traditional frontier story is a westward journey; in these two films the characters travel eastward, but in all other respects their journeys are meant to counterpoint the archetypal journeys of American legend. The characters, innocent and hopeful at the beginning of their journeys, believe the nineteenth century myths about the mobility of American society; to them, as to the pioneers of our folklore, the land promises freedom. But these young men are at least a generation too late. The two films end tragically, the dreams unfulfilled, the promise of the land unkept; the great American odyssey now leads only toward death and disillusionment.

*Easy Rider* contains the more classical of the journeys—from civilization (Los Angeles) back to nature (the open spaces of the Southwest). In *Midnight Cowboy* it is the other way around —from a small town in Texas to New York City. But this film still means to comment on the American traveler's faith in the freedom and openness of his society (Nilsson sings, "I'm goin' where the sun keeps shinin' through the pourin' rain . . ."), and it connects with other popular American myths, Horatio Alger particularly; it is the story of a country boy out to strike it rich in the Big City. The director, John Schlesinger, seems to think we will be surprised to learn that Joe Buck finds the opposite of what he expects —poverty instead of wealth, degradation instead of gratification. But Schlesinger has a short memory. Dreiser and Frank Norris were sermonizing about the horrors of the city back around the turn of the century. By this point Joe Buck's disillusionment is really too predictable.

As social satire *Midnight Cowboy* carries few surprises for anyone who has been at the movies —or been alive—during the last ten years. Schlesinger is an Englishman; like many of his countrymen who come here to make films, he sees all America as one huge annex to Disneyland. But does *anyone* still believe that a pointed close-up of a deodorant advertisement reveals something fresh or interesting about contemporary America? And Schlesinger is no more penetrating in his characterizations than in his sociology. Joe Buck is such a hick, such a gaper, such a pathetic, put-upon schnook that he hardly seems worth all this attention. People who like the film will resent my impatience and will say that I have missed the whole point. For the triumph of *Midnight Cowboy,* I have heard, is that it musters compassion for someone we would have mocked and stereotyped before seeing the film. I don't deny that the film wins sympathy for Joe Buck, but I question how difficult an artistic feat that is. When a movie shows somebody completely alone in a heartless big city, starving to death in a filthy, freezing hovel, it's pretty hard for an audience *not* to pity him, no matter who he is. There's something unpleasantly condescending about the way *Midnight Cowboy* treats its characters. Much of this may derive from the script by Waldo Salt—an old Hollywood hand experienced with the telegraphed-punch school of film-making. Is it naive to expect more of Schlesinger, who seems to be an intelligent director? Some film-makers *can* deal with extremely simple characters, but almost invariably these are direct, almost primitive, instinctive artists who compose a kind of folk poetry for the screen. (John Ford is an example, or the de Sica of *The Bicycle Thief.)* But as soon as you introduce the kind of knowledgeable social commentary and the elaborate technical effects that Schlesinger throws into *Midnight Cowboy,* it becomes close to impossible to treat simple people on their own terms. One of the qualities we respect in a more self-aware artist is his willingness to explore himself, confront and dramatize the problems that concern him most profoundly. But Schlesinger deliberately avoids this kind of confrontation, instead simplifies his responses, searches for an object of compassion, and decides to do Joe Buck a favor by giving him a tender pat on the head. Schlesinger comes on like an intellectual slumming.

The only way to involve us in Joe Buck's pre-

dicament is to show that his mask of simple good cheer hides some of the same confusions, gropings for awareness, conflicts of need and desire that we recognize from our own experience. But Joe is too unchanging a character to interest us except as a rather infantile fantasy version of ourselves—a lonely, innocent dupe at the mercy of a cold, cold world. In spite of everything horrendous that happens to him, Joe never grows; whenever his situation begins to look promising—scoring with the young socialite, boarding the bus for Florida—he becomes just as naively optimistic as he was on arriving in New York. He's almost a Candide in Manhattan—and this approach might work if the film were more cool, brittle, and sardonic. But most of the time it plays for pathos, not irony, and so it just seems thin and facile and even maudlin. Who would dare ask us to *weep* over Candide?

The twist is the sexual dimension added to the Candide and Horatio Alger story; Joe Buck hopes to make his fortune hustling. The film treats all the sexual encounters—heterosexual or homosexual—with abhorrence. We can appreciate the reason for this—to render Joe's growing disgust at being used for his body alone, his more and more desperate search for sex personalized, *humanized*, for love. But Schlesinger becomes so absorbed in the morbid sensations that he ignores some vexing questions. Why *is* Joe so shocked and appalled by his sleazy relationships in New York? He was involved in sordid sex before, in Texas; what makes his experiences in New York different? He was even buggered by a gang of men in Texas, but what effect did that have on him, and does it have any relationship to his homosexual experience in a 42nd Street movie theater? Is this a study of a latent homosexual beginning to have to confront his true desires? The film is certainly filled with oblique hints of homosexuality that might be considered subtle if they were ever brought into the open and explored; as it is, they seem almost *accidental* implications of a film that keeps skirting its real subject.

At the beginning we see Joe infatuated with his own physique in the mirror and hanging a poster of Paul Newman on his wall; later he becomes very defensive when Ratso tells him that his much fussed-over cowboy gear is "strictly faggot stuff." The whole relationship with Ratso has very indirect, almost furtive suggestions of homosexuality that are quickly glossed over. All of Ratso's gratuitous remarks about "faggots" and how much he detests them are very suspicious, overemphatic denials. When Joe first tries to make love to the rich socialite—his first sexual experience in a few months—he is impotent, something that he says has never happened before. Then what is wrong? Is it that his affections are beginning to be focussed on Ratso? The girl even taunts him by insinuating that his problem is homosexuality, and it is his anger at the accusation that makes him potent at last. But the scene is left much too obscure; the impotence, which obviously has crucial psychological significance, is used only as a titillating gimmick, then quickly dropped. And the brutal scene with the masochistic homosexual salesman is equally confusing. Joe has beaten the man to get money, but after he has the money and the old man is lying helpless on the bed, why does Joe stuff a telephone into his mouth? We haven't seen anything in Joe before that would prepare us for this moment of unwarranted violence. Yet the reason for it is probably intuitively clear to anyone with even a primitive understanding of psychology—Joe is so disgusted by an external manifestation of the homosexual tendencies he does not want to acknowledge in himself that he cannot help responding with misdirected rage. But that implication, like most of the others, is covert; it seems to have slipped into the film *in spite of* the writer's and director's conscious intentions.

The scenes between Joe and Ratso have been highly praised, and they are undeniably the best scenes in the film—well written and well played, quite honest as far as they go; but unfortunately, like everything else in this film, they don't go nearly far enough. There is only one moment that even approaches physical intimacy between the two—when Joe tenderly wipes Ratso's face before they go into a party. By insisting on the platonic quality of the friendship, Schlesinger means to ennoble Joe's first relationship built on

mutual affection and respect instead of sexual exploitation. But that's really too sentimental. There are enough indications of homosexuality in both Joe and Ratso to make us expect to see the relationship explored with more candidness and penetration. This evasion is especially bothersome because the rest of the film pays so much attention to sexuality—even in Joe's relationship with his *grandmother,* Schlesinger emphasizes subtle sexual undercurrents. Why, then, does he become so innocent and idealistic in treating the relationship between Joe and Ratso? What happens to his cynical observation in these scenes? He becomes as naive and dreamy as his characters.

The relationship of Joe and Ratso is not much different from the innocent camaraderie, now-teasing, now-tender, of Western heroes—Burt Lancaster and Lee Marvin in *The Professionals,* John Wayne and Robert Mitchum in *El Dorado,* Paul Newman and Robert Redford in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.* The film is probably popular because, like Western and war movies, it expresses an adolescent homosexual fantasy, this time in a contemporary setting. Some reviewers have called the relationship of Joe and Ratso a "love" relationship, but love between two men would be more disturbing and painful to watch than this "pure," "clean," charming buddy relationship.

I think it is important to judge a film not only on how well it does what it sets out to do, but also whether what it sets out to do is large or complex or interesting enough. It isn't that *Midnight Cowboy* is ineffective or unmoving. Everyone is susceptible to the story of a man with a dream that's unfulfilled, of loneliness in the big city, of friendship broken short by death. The film unifies the audience by playing for gut responses that are difficult to resist, but I always thought that was the definition of successful kitsch.

*Midnight Cowboy* is not really very far from soap opera; it appeals to our crudest capacity for pity and self-pity, and never demands imagination or reflection of us. What makes it seem sophisticated is its convoluted technique—intricate intercutting of flashback and fantasy, with chic graphic effects by Pablo Ferro. None of these subliminal flashes or psychedelic nightmares means anything, but they certainly *look* impressive. Many of the most successful "prestige" movies of recent years, like *Sundays and Cybele, Georgy Girl,* Schlesinger's own *Darling, The Graduate,* have made use of this same formula—technical razzledazzle to dress up soap-opera plots. It's like cooking stew and giving it a French name. Audiences at *Darling* or *The Graduate* or *Midnight Cowboy* are delighted to find that the bellylaughs and heart-throbs they usually enjoy on TV or at the neighborhood theater this time belong to a Significant Cinema Experience. It's moving, and it's fancy too; it must be art. All of these movies have been critical triumphs. But there wasn't so much praise last year for *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter,* even though it dealt with many of the same themes as *Midnight Cowboy*—loneliness, unrealized dreams, the death of a friend—at a soap-opera level of intensity. *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter* pleased mass audiences and was a basically enjoyable movie (so is *Midnight Cowboy),* but it was too obvious a tearjerker to get very warm words from the critics. It didn't have the slick, tricky cutting and the kinky sex that make Schlesinger's film seem more mature. I wouldn't mind *Midnight Cowboy* so much—there are plenty of worse movies around—if only it didn't try so desperately and so deviously to conceal its marshmallow center.

*Easy Rider* is much more interestingly directed by Dennis Hopper, in a promising first effort, and it has the advantage of immediacy. *Midnight Cowboy* is the story of a country boy abused by the city and eventually finding love, then losing it—a story told in many films long before the sixties. Only the surface of the film is contemporary; its content is vintage schmaltz. *Easy Rider's* content *is* contemporary, but on the lowest level—the level of mass fantasy. Its importance is not as a work of art but as a cultural document that expresses—more by instinct than design—many of the feelings of today's youth. The film is so phenomenally popular because it is so completely in tune with its college and teenage audience—the movie-makers and

the movie-goers share identical fantasies and anxieties. Artists are always distinct from the herd, ahead of it, challenging it to catch up; but the people who made *Easy Rider* still *belong* to the herd.

Hopper and Peter Fonda, who between them wrote, directed, and produced (with some help from Terry Southern), are Americans, so it is not surprising that this film's attitudes toward America are more complex than in John Schlesinger's blatant, unrelieved hate letter. *Easy Rider* bitterly observes the death of frontier myths at the hands of gun-crazy, rabidly intolerant "forgotten Americans," but it shows an affectionate nostalgia for those myths and a love of the land itself never visible in *Midnight Cowboy*. This film is about freedom, a ballad of the open road, and it's difficult not to be moved by the exquisite lyrical shots of Southwestern rivers, mountains, deserts, and plains; these still-untouched landscapes represent to us everything that we have ever read and dreamed about the romance of the West. Near the beginning of the journey, Wyatt (also called Captain America) and Billy (who tries to look like a dimestore portrait of Buffalo Bill) stop at a ranch and are invited to have lunch with the rancher, his Mexican wife, and their children; Wyatt tells him admiringly, "You live off the land . . . You do your own thing in your own time. You should be proud." Later they stop at a commune in the desert, where the young people eat together, pray together, do rain dances as they plant their seeds, sing new lyrics to old American folk songs like "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain." These hippies, like the rancher, seem to be descendants of all the American heroes who left the city for the unpolluted air of the wilderness. But these people are anachronisms. The America of 1969 is the America Wyatt and Billy find in New Orleans, a nightmare city that breeds hate and fear and bigotry. And the new America guns down the two easy riders.

The trouble with this contemporary ballad is that it is much too thoughtless. For a film that congratulates itself on offering an angry retort to American optimism, *Easy Rider* is rather startlingly sentimental about America. "This used to be a hell of a good country. I don't know what happened to it," the Jack Nicholson character says at one point. But this nostalgic dichotomy of past and present ignores some of the most enduring and pernicious qualities of the American imagination. The film fails to perceive the relationship between the rain dance at the commune and the garish Mardi Gras float, the easygoing rancher and the redneck with a gun. *Easy Rider* has to make the Southerners into villains because it does not know how to examine the subtle influence of the land itself and the myths that it inspired on the forces of hate and violence in contemporary America; it does not see how we have all been *victimized* by fables of men born wild and living free. Even in frontier folklore the celebration of individual freedom often slipped indistinguishably into a glamorization of brutal self-reliance and self-righteousness. Because there was no absolute authority on the Western plains, the lone pioneer with the gun has always become that much more defensive and protective of the way of life that he has built, threatened by anyone who embodies something alien. *Easy Rider* needs to explore the myth of Western freedom much more ruthlessly; it really accepts too many fantasies about America at face value.

In the same way, the film is often warped by fantasies about its characters. When *Easy Rider* simply presents its motorcycle heroes and their friends without trying to sanctify them, it is valid and compelling. Dennis Hopper's Billy is *not* idealized, and he seems to me to be a genuine, impressive dramatic creation. He is boorish, suspicious, hysterical, hostile, lecherous, dependent, stupid, but he can be lively and rather waggish too; he isn't easy to sum up, because he seems to be an *individual*—contradictory, irritating as well as likable—and never merely a specimen of Freedom. Similarly, the hippie they pick up on the desert, who likes to imagine himself as Porky Pig, is seen with irony and perspective. In fact, the best thing about *Easy Rider* is its sensitivity to *distinctions* and even tensions among its young heroes.

Where the film goes soft is in the creation of

Peter Fonda's Wyatt, and this may be largely a result of Fonda's own influence on the making of the film; he seems to demand that every part he plays be a variation on Jesus Christ. Wyatt is intended as a foil to Hopper's Billy—cool and relaxed when Billy is uptight, understanding when Billy is dense, mild and gentle when Billy is aggressive. He is our sensitive hippie, our beautiful, angelic flower child. But Fonda can only look sensitive when he *is* played against someone so brutish as the Dennis Hopper character in this film; if he played by himself, his glassy-eyed seraphic look would seem only vacuous and dopey. The character is seen much too indulgently—his dumb, solemn pronouncements, "You do your own thing in your own time" to the rancher, or "They're going to make it" when he sees the kids on the commune planting seeds, are meant to be nuggets of wisdom and prophecy. His sensibility is supposed to be almost too fine and precious for other mortals to be able to comprehend. You'd have to go back to the most saccharine Victorian literature to find a character quite comparable to this innocent, beatific angel-on-earth. When he is killed, the film asks us to mourn because the brutalized rubes in our society are ravaging the beauty of soulful, sensitive youth; the last image, of Fonda's violent death, is intended to be apocalyptic. I'm more upset by the deaths of Jack Nicholson and Dennis Hopper, just because they don't represent anything transcendental. I value their irreducible quirks much more than I value Fonda's saintly posturing.

But of course it is precisely this idealization and self-indulgence in the characterization of Fonda's Wyatt that make the young audience respond so passionately to *Easy Rider*. There is really something morbid about the Fonda character and about the film as a whole—a fascination, almost a *wallowing* in death and suffering that probably represents one of the least appealing tendencies in the audience as well as the film-makers. The people who conceived this film and the people who applaud it take a certain masochistic satisfaction in casting themselves as martyrs, as poor innocents slaughtered by the barbarians. *Easy Rider* expresses a bizarre paranoid fantasy. One of the most disturbing things about many of today's radicalized youth is their fanatical belief in conspiracy, whether a conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy or one to put them all in detention camps. It was this belief in conspiracy that was one of the ugliest characteristics of McCarthy America in the fifties. So it seems depressing that the radical young, said to attest to an awakening from the complacency of the fifties, have inherited the paranoia of that generation.

The images of Establishment America in *Easy Rider* are hysterical to say the least; a European seeing the film would get the impression that "straight" Americans are waiting in the shadows for an opportunity to jump out and beat young longhairs to death, or that they spend idle moments driving along the highways shooting at any iconoclasts whom they happen to pass. These moments are certainly frightening, very effectively filmed, but I don't admire them; they only add fuel to our laziest paranoia by playing cheaply on wide-eyed, terrified stereotypes of the Southern redneck. It's true that respectable America tends to stereotype the outsiders—hippies, radicals, blacks—and see them in conspiratorial terms; so why should we praise a hip-youth-oriented film that stereotypes *its* enemies just as ruthlessly, and also casts them as conspirators? This film is as crude as the part of America it is attacking. What *Easy Rider* reveals *unconsciously* is a discouraging continuity in America and the image of the American hero. To judge by this film, the alienated young in America have the same sentimentality about American myths, the same unexamined belief in their own innocence, the same delirious, Know-Nothing paranoia that have always been the worst tendencies in the privileged segments of society. I don't deny a measure of validity to *Easy Rider*'s criticisms, but I object to its reduction of the tremendous complexity of American society in 1969 to a pulp fiction contest of good and evil, tremulous, angelic youth pitted against vicious, beer-bellied Southern bigots.

At the beginning of Arthur Penn's *Alice's Restaurant,* Arlo Guthrie, playing himself, also

starts traveling, to get away from his draft board in New York. He first hitch-hikes across the country to a college in Montana, then back east again to stay with some friends who have established a sort of commune in a deconsecrated church in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. The draft board in the first scene represents tyranny and repression; Arlo is searching for freedom, and like the motorcyclists in *Easy Rider,* he expects to find it on the road, away from the city. Alice and Ray's church in Stockbridge is their attempt, comparable to the desert commune in *Easy Rider,* to revitalize the frontier dream of freedom and make it relevant for today's youth. The dream ultimately fails, but for more complicated reasons than *Easy Rider* or *Midnight Cowboy* can imagine.

The scenes with the young people at the Stockbridge church have a surprising feeling of spontaneity and affection. There are moments in these sequences that make the hippie ideal seem more vital and meaningful than in any film yet made. Particularly in the two major festival scenes—the Thanksgiving dinner, and Alice and Ray's decorative wedding ceremony—the film gives us a sympathetic taste of the imaginative, joyous, almost ritualistic sense of community that the young people are striving to achieve. At Thanksgiving friends come by car, by train, on horseback, on motorcycle; it is a contemporary equivalent of a great family gathering of nineteenth-century American folklore. The Stockbridge community looks affectionately back to the Pilgrims at *their* Thanksgiving dinner, the pioneers moving across the country in wagon trains, the folk radical movement of the Depression. Alice and Ray are trying to find in American myths the inspiration for a still workable utopian community.

The film is focussed around Arlo, but Alice and Ray are really the most important and interesting characters. Their relationship with Shelly, a drug addict they take from Bellevue to rehabilitate at Stockbridge, provides the dramatic center of the film. Ray and Alice cast themselves as parents to Shelly and to all the young who come to stay with them, but like all parents, real or substitute, their relationship with their children is less "pure," more convoluted than they can see. Ray feels a need to compete with the young men to verify his own masculinity; so he is constantly pawing Alice in public, to show off the strength and healthiness of his sexual drive. He joins the young men in a motorcycle race, and he becomes jealous and angry when Shelly beats him. His insecurity happens to be justified, because Alice likes to satisfy her young men sexually; she is available to anyone who truly seems to need her. She gives herself to Shelly because she wants to believe that his dependence on her will be enough to keep him from going back on dope. And the scenes that show Ray's response to this infidelity are quite perceptive. He never admits what has happened, but when he is horsing around with Shelly at one moment, he exaggerates his playfulness almost sadistically, coming on too strong to overcompensate for his jealousy and also to let everyone know that he still has the spirit and mischievousness of youth. When Shelly does "shoot up" again, Ray is almost grateful for an opportunity to bring his hostility out into the open. He berates Shelly a little too harshly. Alice is angry and hurt for a different reason—she sees Shelly's weakness as a betrayal of her, a criticism of her maternal benevolence. She takes it too *personally.* In the crucial confrontation scene Alice returns to the church and finds Ray showing home movies of Shelly to search for clues to what went wrong; but Alice stands in front of the screen and blocks the image, then walks seductively straight toward the projector—a brilliant, psychologically cogent visual metaphor for her frantic attempt to use her body to overwhelm and deny pain.

The character of Shelly is very interestingly conceived, never conventionally motivated or explained. We see him from a distance, and for very short intervals, but the images of him are always disturbing—whether he is throwing things angrily around the church as he unpacks his mobiles, staring at Alice and Ray as they go to bed, or sitting, frightened, outside the courtroom where Arlo is being tried for littering. He seems to be tormented, but we are never allowed to understand why; in a way, he is meant to

stand for all of the problems that are too intense for a loving family to solve, pain too twisted and unmanageable to be absorbed into Alice and Ray's pastoral ideal. He will never be assimilated. He contains the violence that will bring the dream up short and destroy it from within. In other words, the film is brave enough to acknowledge that there are private wounds too deep to be healed by this gentle, tranquil community.

Intersecting the story of Ray, Alice, and Shelly is the more comic, episodic story of Arlo's search for identity, his run-ins with the police and the draft board, and the death of his father. Most of this is apparently autobiographical material, and that is the trouble with it. The other sections of the film have been dramatically shaped, but the scenes with Arlo never take on a dimension beyond merely reporting what happened. The decision to cast Arlo as himself was probably the crucial mistake; once that decision was made, the possibilities of characterization were automatically constricted. We get some idea of what the real Arlo Guthrie is probably like, and he's pleasant enough, but we are never allowed to get as close to him or see him in as rounded a way as we would a fictional character. Because Arlo is playing himself, Penn cannot examine him as sharply, as ruthlessly as he examines Alice and Ray; he can only let Arlo "do his thing"—which doesn't come off as particularly interesting here—and try not to interfere. Arlo is too passive a hero for most of the film, and his adventures are never dramatically integrated with the real theme of the film—the relationship of Ray, Alice, and Shelly at Stockbridge. He simply leads us into the commune and then finally away from it. We learn almost nothing about him, and we don't care much about his crisis of identity; but maybe it is enough to know that for him, as for other intelligent young people, the commune is not going to bring the meaning to his life that he is seeking.

The one part of Arlo's story that does have an oblique bearing on the study of the Stockbridge community is the death of his father. The scenes with the dying Woody Guthrie in the hospital are morbid, difficult to watch, and probably misconceived. An actor is playing Woody, but Arlo is playing himself, and somehow this fictional restaging of an actual, traumatic experience in Arlo's life, forcing him to relive an intensely personal grief for a dramatic effect, seems a genuinely unpleasant invasion of privacy. The death of Woody, which luckily happens offscreen, is designed to parallel the suicide of Shelly and the final failure of the commune. The relationship between these events is not quite dramatized; we have to know something about Woody Guthrie that the film doesn't tell us to be able to understand Penn's shorthand. But the moment when Pete Seeger sings "Pastures of Plenty" to Woody in his hospital room does suggest a link between the confident belief in the American land that still animated radicalism in the thirties, and the spirit of Alice and Ray's community. The death of Woody represents the death of a generation, and since it is juxtaposed with the funeral of Shelly, the boy who could not be reached in the hippie utopia, it also represents the death of a tenacious dream about America. The song that Joni Mitchell sings at Shelly's funeral is a requiem, a summing-up, a farewell to Woody and Ray's optimism about the endurance of a radical communal spirit in a free America. But at the very end Ray still clings desperately to the myth; he talks about buying land in Vermont so that his friends will have more space to live free. He even believes if they'd had the land earlier, Shelly could have been saved. Ray doesn't realize the insufficiency of the land to deal with suffering as profound as Shelly's; he doesn't understand that time has run out on his dream. The last shot, melancholy and haunting, is of a forlorn Alice standing alone on the church steps, looking after Arlo, and into the emptiness of her own future.

What I admire about the film is its refusal to provide a glib explanation for the failure of the commune. It does not blame the failure on outside forces like the urbanization and commercialization and brutality of modern America, as *Midnight Cowboy* and *Easy Rider* do. I think the film does indirectly imply a dichotomy between past and present, country and city in its contrast of the pastoral scenes of life in Stock-

bridge and the comic episodes of some post-Johnson phenomena—the police investigating Arlo's littering offense with elaborate scientific equipment, Arlo's horrific draft board physical. But although these scenes have some funny moments, they work on such a crude, farcical level that they can't provide much material for an indictment of contemporary American bureaucracy. These scenes are not especially well-filmed (Penn has little talent for this kind of farce), and they are too familiar by now to be biting, but Penn fortunately doesn't try to drive home a terribly significant point about the way we live now; he seems to enjoy these sophomoric burlesques for their own sake. The failure of the commune ultimately has very little to do with the dehumanized ritual of the contemporary draft board. Perhaps all we can say is that the community is broken apart because no dream can ever take full account of the richness, the strangeness of life. Penn is sympathetic to the young people's community, but he sees that egotism, jealousy, rivalry, impatience, frustration hold as much sway here as in any community on the outside. Once you begin to question the motives of the people pursuing the dream—once you admit, for instance, that Ray is trying to deny his age or that Alice feels a neurotic compulsion to salvage and mold other lives—the dream itself is irrevocably undercut. Penn's shrewd, lively interest in psychology (an interest visible in all of his films) prevents him from casting the heartless Big City or the Southern bigot as his villains; he makes no cheap attacks on targets that are too easy to hit. There are no heroes or villains in his film, only imperfect, three-dimensional people whose confused desires subtly tear away at and eventually destroy their own finest ideals. Like *Midnight Cowboy* and *Easy Rider, Alice's Restaurant* tells us that our great frontier dream is dead; the crucial difference is that Penn does this without reducing the problem, without ever losing a respect for human complexity. There are some sections of his film that please the young audience as much as *Midnight Cowboy* and *Easy Rider,* but this film does more than merely reflect and satisfy mass audience fantasies; it is a disturbing, challenging, explorative experience. *Alice's Restaurant* is deeply flawed, wildly uneven, but it is art, not pablum.

Perhaps because Haskell Wexler has had more experience with documentaries than Arthur Penn, *Medium Cool* is unstrained when it confronts material that is contemporary and volatile; in fact, of all these new movies *Medium Cool* contains the fullest and most precise record of the way in which present-day America oppresses us all. Wexler's TV-cameraman hero, at first completely apathetic to the social unrest that he chronicles, begins to come alive when he learns that his station has been turning over all of his film to the police and the FBI. He has been living under the delusion of professional freedom only to realize that he has always been a willing victim of subtle police state surveillance. At the end of his film Wexler uses footage from the 1968 Chicago police riots in a non-documentary, intensely subjective way, to enlist a passionate response of terror and outrage. The images of blood on the streets or of the heroine passing Kafka-like cordons of army tanks and jeeps in the middle of the city transforms realistic data into a strangely surrealistic vision, a nightmare at high noon. And the scene that follows, the death of the photographer and the West Virginia woman in an automobile accident, is meant to have a subliminal, nonrational connection to the scene of the Chicago riot; Wexler wants this violent ending to seal his vision of the death of freedom in contemporary America, to underscore the way in which we are all implicated and eventually destroyed by the injustice and repression in our society. The ending really doesn't work as Wexler intended—it remains stubbornly unsymbolic, simply a fortuitous accident—but the film is unified by the rage and despair with which it contemplates the growing violence in America.

An irony about the film is that although Wexler feels obliged to refer to all of the social cataclysms of 1968—the police brutality, the Negro revolution, the King and Kennedy assassinations, the war, the violence of white backlash—his most memorable scenes are not the docu-

mentary records or the scenes of social protest, but the tender, affectionate scenes with the Appalachian woman and her child, and particularly the lyrical flashbacks of their life in West Virginia. Like *Easy Rider* and *Alice's Restaurant, Medium Cool* is nostalgically drawn back to the countryside. But what makes the West Virginia scenes remarkable is that they are never sentimentally falsified. Even as Wexler sympathetically captures the utter simplicity and genuine communal regard of these people in Appalachia, he acknowledges the way in which they contribute to the brutality and intolerance in the more complex society across the mountains.

At one moment a social worker in Chicago asks young Harold where his father is, and the boy answers, "At Vietnam"; there is a sudden sound of rifle fire that leads us to expect some footage from Vietnam, but Wexler cuts to Harold's memory of his father shooting beer cans off an overturned car and trying to teach him to shoot too. The associations of the rural man's sanctification of hunting as a test of masculinity, his reliance on the gun, and the American involvement in Vietnam, are undogmatically implied with the sparest, most economical of cinematic means. There is another charming, lovingly photographed flashback of Harold's father walking with him through the fields giving him a lecture about the subservient role of women in his society: "A woman belongs to a man, but a man doesn't belong to a woman." In other words, Wexler refuses to soften his portrait of the poor even though he responds to their closeness to the land and the freedom that it promises. *Easy Rider* idealizes the American past and the American rural experience; *Midnight Cowboy* coarsens it, sees only its monstrosities; it is only one indication of Wexler's greater intelligence that he is able to portray the rural poor with *both* affection and skepticism. His film tries to do too much, but his sensitivity at least qualifies him for the task. In spite of inevitable miscalculations, there is a persistent alertness in Wexler's response to America past and present.

THE RAIN PEOPLE

Francis Ford Coppola's *The Rain People* is unlike these other films because it focusses on a private emotional crisis, and never explicitly relates the characters to their society. Still, it cannot be quite coincidental that *The Rain People* too concerns a journey across America: a New York woman, married and pregnant, picks up and leaves her husband one morning, and starts driving, convinced that she must have time to herself, to discover who *she* is, before she decides whether she wants to devote herself to a family. She keeps driving west, and in a small town in Nebraska her journey comes to an unexpectedly violent end. This film, like *Midnight Cowboy* and *Easy Rider,* certainly depends for part of its meaning on American myths of freedom on the open road, our traditional belief in the journey away from civilization as a source of refreshment and renewal. The very first traveling shot of the countryside has an exhilarating sweep and romanticism; the land itself tempts us to believe that Natalie will find on her journey the

insight into herself that will redeem her future. But *The Rain People* sees the general and the mythical *through* the individual. Although it contains a genuine responsiveness to some of the beauties and horrors of today's Midwest, it never claims to present a major statement about contemporary America.

Interestingly enough, one of the movie's failures is that it is *not* specific enough about contemporary society. Because it never ties its heroine to her period, the film loses its grip on her. We never learn enough about Natalie's background, the New York milieu that oppresses her. It is important to know, for example, whether she's an educated, intellectual woman or simply an average American housewife. The fact that she makes such an extreme, if only half-articulate gesture of protest against the suburban family suggests that she has been exposed to contemporary questioning of traditional assumptions and prejudices about women. But those questions are never specifically raised; we have no way of filling in the details of Natalie's world. What is she running from exactly? What is she running *towards?* We don't expect her to have well-defined answers, but we do expect to get some idea of what qualities in her are frustrated by marriage, family, suburbia, what she hopes to find on her own. She tells her husband over the phone, "Before we were married, when I woke up in the morning, the day was my day; now it's your day." But what did she do with her days before she was married? What would she like to do with them now? By cutting her free from her time and her specialized milieu and making her a "universal" character, Coppola loses the intensity of her dilemma, fails to dramatize the tension between her maternal, domestic instincts and her more personal needs.

But Coppola's own ambivalence toward this woman cuts very deep and is probably ultimately responsible for his omission of the requisite background material. The film begins from Natalie's point of view; we see *her* vision of the subtle ways in which marriage cramps her (just a brief image of her struggling out from beneath her husband's arm in bed is a fine subjective rendering of her anxiety), *her* memory of being trapped inside a circle of dancers at her wedding. Thanks partly to Shirley Knight's extraordinarily passionate performance, we sympathize with Natalie's frustration, hope to be drawn even closer to her internal struggle. But without warning Coppola changes his point of view, pushes us *outside* the character with a bizarre jolt. Natalie has picked up a hitchhiker—a college football player who, it turns out, has a plate in his head from injuries suffered during a game—because she wants to "make it with somebody new." As she puts on her make-up to prepare for her evening with him, Coppola gives us gross, ugly close-ups of her spreading garish lipstick over her mouth. From a troubled, sympathetic natural woman Natalie is transformed into her Hyde-like second self, a monstrous, painted harpie. And the scene in which she plays cruelly with the football player, finally demanding that he bow down before her, is startlingly out of keeping with anything we have seen of Natalie before.

Now it's possible that a disturbed, neurotic woman like Natalie would have more facets than we could guess on first impression; it's even possible that she would have a coldly lustful, vicious side, though Coppola never convincingly relates her moments of gentleness and anguish to her moments of bitchiness. The real confusion in the film is not in Natalie, but in Coppola's *attitude* toward Natalie; his vision of her wavers between passionate sympathy and terrified hostility and revulsion—an oscillation that is apparent simply in the *visual* treatment of the character. Shirley Knight is brilliant in every shifting moment, but even she is unable to persuade us that we are always watching the same character. Coppola's feelings are out of control. He is frightened of Natalie's excesses, of her potential destructiveness, and as the film goes on, he judges her more and more harshly for abandoning her marital responsibilities. He seems to want to say that a woman's natural role is her domestic role, and that if she tries to deny her "nature," she will hurt herself and other people. So it becomes understandable why he never explores Natalie's background or the

alternative to domestic life that she is seeking; if he got too close to her, it might complicate and undermine his moral position. Fortunately, the schizophrenia of the film—Coppola's irrepressible responsiveness to Natalie—keeps it from turning pat or unpleasantly moralistic.

And even the condemnations of Natalie are often provocative. In his portrait of the slimy, mercenary reptile ranchkeeper who swindles Killer out of his savings, or of the Nebraska cop who lives in desperate antagonism with his teenage daughter in a squalid trailer, Coppola offers the kind of qualification to the frontier myth that *Easy Rider* and *Midnight Cowboy* dwell on—the land itself is no longer pure, it is blighted by poverty, greed, desperation, hate. But his most searching criticism of the myth is his questioning of the *value* of freedom. To some extent one has to respect Coppola's skepticism about Natalie's unexamined faith in the westward journey as elixir. The grotesque scenes of Natalie putting on her make-up can perhaps be understood as Coppola's bitter parody of sexual and emotional freedom. "Freedom" can really be callous, cruel, destructive. And the lyrical shots of the countryside thus take on an especially ironic meaning in this film: we have to test our thrilled response to these romantic images against our growing realization that the dream of freedom—even if contemporary America would allow its fulfilment—is itself inadequate, for it denies other, richer possibilities and responsibilities in human relationships. Coppola has not quite successfully dramatized the full complexity of that theme, but his attempt is a fundamental criticism of American myths less topical and more far-reaching than in any of these other films.

*The Rain People* is not the best of these recent movies, but I think it is the most encouraging one, the one that holds the most interesting promise for personal film-making in America. For there is nothing about this film that is fashionable, nothing that makes it easy to sell to teens—no Arlo Guthrie record, no rock music backgrounds, no exaltation of youth against the Establishment, no documentary scenes of demonstrators in Chicago, no psychedelic parties. The film is an intimate exploration of Coppola's own interests and obsessions; it cannot possibly appeal to a mass audience. I have said that the film is confused, but I am not really too concerned about that. The only way for an artist to grow is to have the opportunity to blunder, muddle through a problem that he has not yet quite resolved. We do expect great art to resolve confusions, but Coppola is still very young, this is only his third film, his first completely independent one, and I am glad that he has been able to test himself so profoundly, even if the results are not yet fully satisfying. In *You're A Big Boy Now*, there were traces of intensely personal material in the handling of the man-hating bitch Barbara Darling, and in the recurring images of sex as an engulfing experience and women as devourers—images charged with highly ambivalent feelings. But that personal material was almost lost in a superficial, tricky, and familiar film about an adolescent breaking free. In *The Rain People* Coppola's ambivalence toward women has taken the center of the screen, and he has explored his conflicting feelings in much greater depth, until finally the exploration becomes too painful, and Coppola drops his heroine for a series of safer, more manageable, still moderately interesting subordinate character sketches. (There may be another, but possibly related reason for this shift of focus, as George Lucas's documentary about the making of *The Rain People* suggests—Coppola's own stormy working relationship with Shirley Knight.) The film falls into episodes toward the end, but this is still a major step ahead of Coppola's past work, and I expect that if he has the same kind of freedom on his next film, he will be able to see that much more clearly, probe that much more unsparingly. Just his handling of actors in this film suggests his greater involvement, concern, and maturity. One of the most difficult things for young filmmakers is working through actors. In *You're A Big Boy Now* and the best-forgotten *Finian's Rainbow*, Coppola's attention was on his visual effects, and most of the performances were shrill and one-dimensional. The more modest canvas of *The Rain People* has drawn Coppola much

closer to his people; I think this is the finest *group* of performances in any American film released this year.

And so the dissatisfactions one feels about *The Rain People* are not overwhelming. The chance to fail with material too complex and urgent to sort out all at once is a luxury that film-makers in Hollywood have never been able to afford. And if the fragmentation of the industry leads to more low-budget, independently made films, film-makers may have that luxury again; without it they can never hope to realize their artistic potential. But it is too soon to make any optimistic predictions. It may be that the failure of *The Rain People* will force Coppola to go back to a more "commercial" project next time. And if a few more of these low-budget, personal films fail, the situation could change drastically once again. But for the moment anyway, these new films, with their strong, though sometimes naive commitment, and their passion to shatter irrelevant myths about America, are abrasive, and they leave us with a sense of impatience and anticipation.

DAVID MacDOUGALL

# Prospects of the Ethnographic Film

*In spite of the great advances in formal method in social science, much of the understanding of persisting and general relationships depends upon a grasp that is intuitive and that is independent of or not fully dependent on some formal method. In advancing social science, we invent and practice technique, and we also cultivate a humanistic art.* —ROBERT REDFIELD

Ethnographic film-making occupies a curious place between the art of film and the social sciences. It has long lacked the full support of either, yet it has the capacity to achieve a truly humanistic kind of perception embracing them both. Recent interest in the ethnographic film, spurred by the accelerating disappearance of traditional cultures, may now enable it to fulfill its promise.

I

An ethnographic film may be regarded as any film which seeks to reveal one society to another. It may be concerned with the physical life of a people or with the nature of their social experience. Since these are also the subjects of anthropology, we tend to associate ethnographic film-making with anthropologists, but the two are not invariably linked. One of the earliest and most important ethnographic films, Flaherty's *Nanook of the North,* was the work of an explorer and geologist.

The most easily identifiable ethnographic films are those which deal with primitive societies. Two such films made by Americans are John Marshall's *The Hunters* and Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds.* Certain other films dealing with industrialized, transitional, or created societies may also be included—such as Chris Marker's *Le joli mai* or *La Mystère Koumiko,* Michel Brault's *Pour la suite du monde,* or Wiseman and Marshall's *Titicut Follies.* Ultimately, all films are in some measure ethnographic, for none can entirely evade the culture which produced it. Future historians may study *Pillow Talk* or *Easy Rider* as eagerly as those of today study Egyptian didactic tales or laundry lists in Linear B.

The intercultural aspect of the ethnographic film is nevertheless essential in regarding it as

closer to his people; I think this is the finest *group* of performances in any American film released this year.

And so the dissatisfactions one feels about *The Rain People* are not overwhelming. The chance to fail with material too complex and urgent to sort out all at once is a luxury that film-makers in Hollywood have never been able to afford. And if the fragmentation of the industry leads to more low-budget, independently made films, film-makers may have that luxury again; without it they can never hope to realize their artistic potential. But it is too soon to make any optimistic predictions. It may be that the failure of *The Rain People* will force Coppola to go back to a more "commercial" project next time. And if a few more of these low-budget, personal films fail, the situation could change drastically once again. But for the moment anyway, these new films, with their strong, though sometimes naive commitment, and their passion to shatter irrelevant myths about America, are abrasive, and they leave us with a sense of impatience and anticipation.

DAVID MacDOUGALL

# Prospects of the Ethnographic Film

*In spite of the great advances in formal method in social science, much of the understanding of persisting and general relationships depends upon a grasp that is intuitive and that is independent of or not fully dependent on some formal method. In advancing social science, we invent and practice technique, and we also cultivate a humanistic art.* —ROBERT REDFIELD

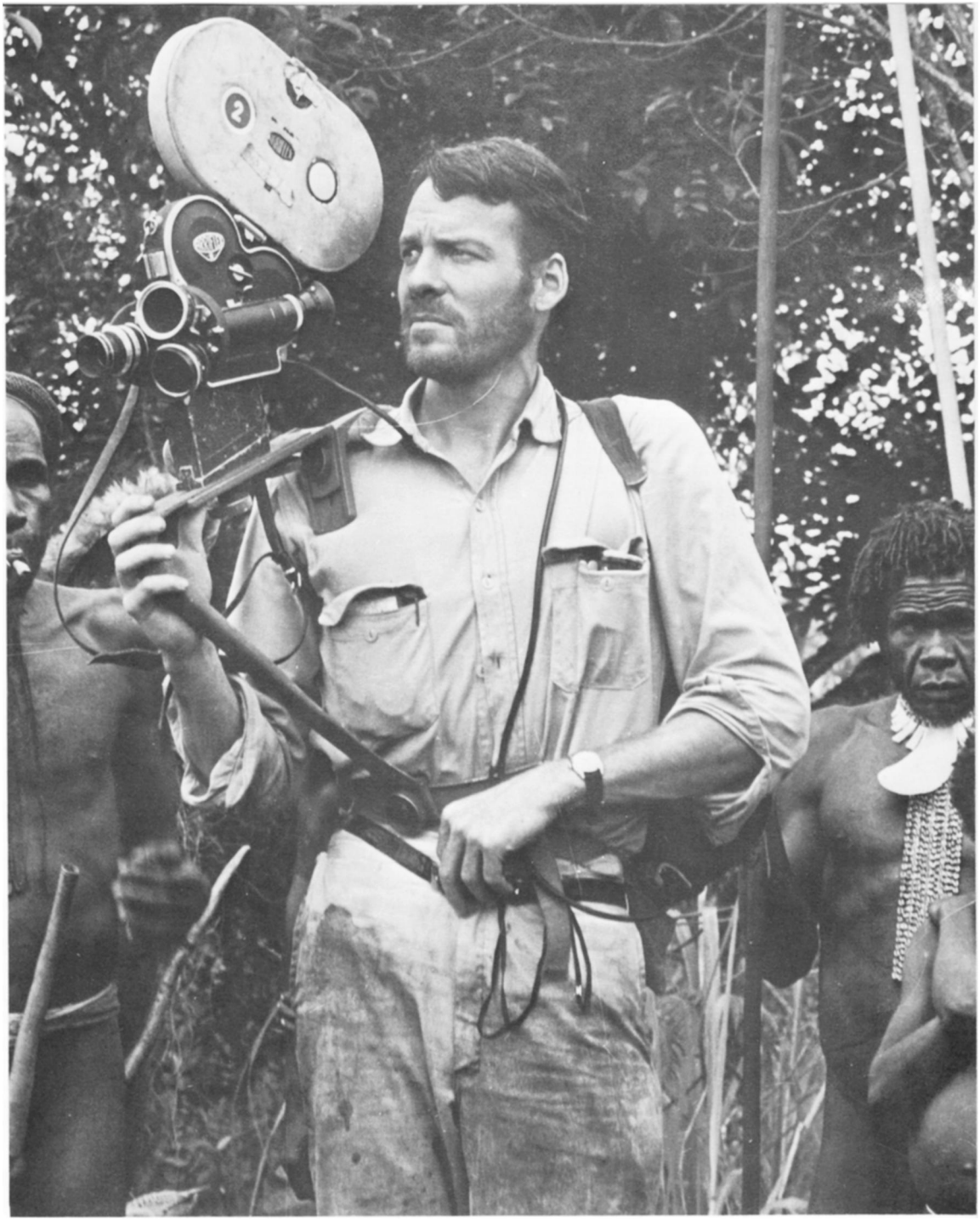
Ethnographic film-making occupies a curious place between the art of film and the social sciences. It has long lacked the full support of either, yet it has the capacity to achieve a truly humanistic kind of perception embracing them both. Recent interest in the ethnographic film, spurred by the accelerating disappearance of traditional cultures, may now enable it to fulfill its promise.

I

An ethnographic film may be regarded as any film which seeks to reveal one society to another. It may be concerned with the physical life of a people or with the nature of their social experience. Since these are also the subjects of anthropology, we tend to associate ethnographic film-making with anthropologists, but the two are not invariably linked. One of the earliest and most important ethnographic films, Flaherty's *Nanook of the North,* was the work of an explorer and geologist.

The most easily identifiable ethnographic films are those which deal with primitive societies. Two such films made by Americans are John Marshall's *The Hunters* and Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds.* Certain other films dealing with industrialized, transitional, or created societies may also be included—such as Chris Marker's *Le joli mai* or *La Mystère Koumiko,* Michel Brault's *Pour la suite du monde,* or Wiseman and Marshall's *Titicut Follies.* Ultimately, all films are in some measure ethnographic, for none can entirely evade the culture which produced it. Future historians may study *Pillow Talk* or *Easy Rider* as eagerly as those of today study Egyptian didactic tales or laundry lists in Linear B.

The intercultural aspect of the ethnographic film is nevertheless essential in regarding it as



DEAD BIRDS: *Robert Gardner during a lull in the battle.*

something distinct. The aim of interpreting one society to another is what underlies its kinship with anthropology. Without this aim, a film like Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens,* so revealing of Nazi psychology and values, could properly be called an ethnographic film.

Strictly speaking, many documentary films are not ethnographic in this sense. Yet the means by which documentary film-makers examine aspects of their own societies often parallel those used in ethnographic films. If anything, ethnographic film-makers have got their methods second-hand. The approaches pioneered by Leacock and the Maysles, and by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin in *Chronique d'un été,* are now at last beginning to be applied to the exploration of other cultures.

Dramatic films often verge, or seem to verge, on the ethnographic, either because of their subject matter or the circumstances of their production and viewing. The films of the Italian Neorealist movement strike many as a more honest representation of a culture than the domestic melodramas which preceded them. Part of this effect may be illusory, however—the result of the use of non-actors and of the odd tendency to find poverty more "real" than riches.

The "foreignness" of a film may also have a bearing on the ethnographic qualities which we attribute to it. To Western eyes *Pather Panchali* has the force of a cultural document, yet because it was not made by a Westerner, its ethnographic content is implicit. For Bengali audiences it would not possess the same quintessential quality as for Europeans and Americans. No doubt many American films strike foreigners in a similar manner. There may, for example, be something which the French learn about America from the films of Jerry Lewis that is less accessible (or less bearable) to Americans themselves.

Films like Susumu Hani's *Bwana Toshi* and *Bride of the Andes,* and James Ivory's *Shakespeare Wallah,* fall into a more difficult category, for they deal with encounters between members of the film-maker's own society and members of another. Like all fiction films, however, they are less likely to be taken seriously as ethnographic statements than most documentaries, even though these often contain interpretations of reality which are far more suspect. Only Jean Rouch, in films like *Moi un noir* and *Jaguar* seems to have had much success in defying the automatic association of fictional techniques with falsehood, and this is probably largely due to his having introduced fiction into the documentary rather than the reverse.

A final group of films to be considered are those concerned with the exotic and sensational, or with travel and adventure. A film like *Mondo Cane* seeks sensation at the expense of understanding. *The Sky Above and the Mud Below* is only saved from being one more adventurer's self-glorification by its sometimes beautiful pictures and a certain measure of respect for its secondary human subjects. *Grass,* released in 1925, was intended in a similar vein, yet rather by chance it achieved something more valuable. Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack filmed a Bakhtiari migration in Iran, yet they felt they had only succeeded in getting the background for a film. To this day, Cooper regrets that they were unable to add a semifictionalized story. As a result, *Grass* is a remarkably detailed account of an extraordinary human endeavor. Cooper and Schoedsack later made *Chang* (1927) in a Lao village in Thailand, but ethnographically it is an inferior effort, blending contrived sensations with a naive portrayal of Lao culture. *Grass,* we must conclude, was an ethnographic film in spite of itself.

Most travel films, or films of the exotic school, fail to approach other cultures with enough genuine interest to become truly ethnographic. Too often they simply indulge and reinforce the characteristic cultural responses of their makers when confronted by the unfamiliar. Flaherty's *Moana,* if we may include it in this category, is one of the very few exceptions, for it was a commercially backed film which largely subordinated the culture of its makers to that of its subjects.

## II

The first uses of film for ethnographic purposes coincided with other early efforts in the history of the cinema. While the Lumière

brothers were recording simple scenes of daily life like *La Sortie des usines* and *L'Arrivée d'un train*, F. Regnault was filming the pottery-making techniques of Berbers who had come to Paris for the Colonial Exposition of 1895. In 1901, Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer took a camera into central Australia and successfully filmed rituals and dances among the Aranda Aborigines.

This record-making use of film continues to the present day, but it amounts essentially to a scientific application of film technology rather than true film-making. This latter we must consider to be film used not only as a recording tool but also as a visual language, with a syntax allowing information to be revealed by the interrelation of shots as well as by their contents. It is this use of film language which gives anthropological films the possibility of being more than works of science and becoming works of art. It is also possible, of course, that films made for nonscientific purposes—like *Nanook* and *Grass*—will have a scientific relevance not anticipated by their makers.

The chances to test either of these possibilities have been disappointingly few. The social sciences have provided few films which can be considered more than record-footage or illustrated lectures, and documentary film-makers have provided few which are not filled with serious ethnocentric distortions. In the first case this is attributable to lack of funds and a too narrow view of film; in the second, to indifference and an ignorance of the ideas of anthropology.

*Nanook of the North* was probably the first true ethnographic film, for it was both a film and inherently ethnographic. Although Flaherty was not an anthropologist, the procedure which he followed still commends itself to anyone attempting to make anthropological films. He knew his subjects intimately, knew their language and customs, spent several years filming among them, and sought out their reactions to their own representation on film. Not only was Flaherty the first to see in film the means for a new kind of exploration and documentation of reality, but he pursued his insight with a thoroughness which would be rare even today.

NANOOK

GRASS

As a film *Nanook* has lost none of its immediacy after fifty years, and despite certain fabrications which ethnographic film-makers would now probably avoid, it remains one of the most valid and effective summations of another culture yet attempted on film.*

*Nanook* also reveals Flaherty's personal concerns, though to a lesser extent than his later

*A shortened, speeded-up version with a puerile sound track is unfortunately in widespread distribution; it is a serious distortion of Flaherty's work.

films. Yet in 1920, film-makers, unlike anthropologists, were under no professional obligation to keep their attitudes at a distance. If anything, their tendency was to the contrary. It is therefore noteworthy that Flaherty restrained himself as much as he did, for it attests to his fundamental commitment to revealing the essential reality of what he found. The case of *Nanook* also suggests the extent to which an artist may parallel the disciplines of the social sciences if he is motivated by similar ends.

*Nanook* was released in 1922. Cooper and Schoedsack filmed *Grass* in 1924. There follows a long period during which valuable record footage was collected by Stocker and Tindale in Australia (1932 and 1935) and by Bateson and

## FILM AND ANTHROPOLOGY: A NOTE

Film-makers are very worried about their virginity—they always have been, whether it was threatened by exploitive producers (studios, distributors) or sponsors (government agencies, advertisers, special-interest groups). When asked to collaborate with scientists or "subject experts" they act as if they'd been asked to join the Vichy government. Thus a common reaction to such a special field as ethnographic film has been to assume that it is something on which failed anthropologists and failed film-makers collaborate to conceal each other's weaknesses. This leads to devious explanations that Jean Rouch is not really a film-maker and Robert Flaherty was not really an anthropologist, with any interest their work has for film or anthropology being merely coincidental to their own mad genius.

It is fair to say that Rouch and John Marshall probably *are* geniuses and their achievements cannot be imitated.

However, there is a great pressure to try. A colloquium at UCLA in the spring of 1968 turned up practically all the great names in ethnographic film, and established quite clearly that a new kind of collaboration between film-maker and ethnographer was developing, in the wake of pioneers such as Rouch and Marshall. Now there is a new breed, of which the author of the accompanying article is a leading example. Trained in the UCLA film school, and then in UCLA's ethnographic film program, he has worked in the United States and in Africa, and has become one of the field's best cameramen, with an extraordinary eye for people and their interrelationships.

When Pat Jaffe was editing Leacock's *Petey and Johnny*, she reported the frustration she felt at not coming up with a structural order for the footage that would result in a coherent movie without denigrating the subjects. This is a major aesthetic problem still being faced in ethnographic film; MacDougall reports that Marshall would no longer want to give a film the shape of *The Hunters*, since that bears so little relation to the shape of the people's lives. Thus the film which the MacDougalls and Richard Hawkins have shot in Uganda among the Gesu will have to respect the intimacy which was recorded on film *and* avoid the temptations of melodramatic structure obvious in the preparation of two young men for circumcision rites.

It is clear that we are still at a very preliminary stage in the art of collaboration. If the realist cinema is to advance it will have to depend either on the happy accident of rare talents (Fred Wiseman?) or hope that people can be trained with the right eye and ear for what is happening, and the minds to make sense of it.

—COLIN YOUNG

Mead in Bali (1936-37) but during which few notable ethnographic films were made. Then in the late forties Jean Rouch began making films in West Africa. The Marshall family began to collect footage which would later result in *The Hunters* (1958) and other films. Robert Gardner, who edited *The Hunters* with John Marshall, shot *Dead Birds* in 1961.

Marshall's film, *The Hunters,* tells the story of a hunt for food by a small band of !Kung Bushmen in the Kalahari Desert. It was skillfully compiled from material concerning a number of different hunts in over 250,000 feet of record footage. (The total body of Bushman footage is now over half a million feet.) The film is therefore not a strict record of an actual event, but an attempt to reveal one aspect of Bushman life, and through it an understanding of the Bushman world view. It is a case of synthesis put to the service of a truth which no single event by itself might adequately express. Through its emphasis upon the pursuit of a wounded giraffe, the film makes us share something of the attitudes of a people whose marginal existence depends upon the killing of game. No single "slice of life" could communicate quite the same sense of the Bushman's world of scrub, thorn, and pan, nor his experience of living always on the edge of privation. *The Hunters* is a rare and special film, reflecting the kind of understanding of a culture which permits a meaningful interpretive rendering. It is one of the few true ethnographic films that we have, and it is also a pioneer work in the field.

Rouch's work began with documentary records (*Chasse à l'hippopotame au harpon, Danses de possession, Circoncision chez les Songhaï*) but developed into a comprehensive exploration of the uses of film in revealing other cultures. Films like *Moi un noir, Les Maitres-fous,* and *Jaguar* combine documentary elements with elements of fiction and psychodrama to penetrate the aspirations and frustrations of individuals in a changing society.

Rouch's approach has sometimes paralleled Marshall's, as in *Chasse au lion,* but it has generally been characterized by a different spirit and by a willingness to invite the participation of

THE HUNTERS

his subjects in the interpretive process. His objective in doing this is two-fold. It does, of course, permit the self-expression of people as they know and understand themselves, but on another level it reveals them to us as they would like to be, and it enables us to approach aspects of their culture of which they are unconscious. We sometimes see, too, a process taking place in which the characters come to view themselves and their culture with new eyes. Over the past few years, Rouch has become concerned about the dangers of certain kinds of participation in film-making (one of the "gangsters" of *Moi un noir* ended up in jail; students in *La Pyramide humaine* failed their examinations), and temporarily at least he has given up psychodrama.

As a whole, Rouch's film-making is impressive for its resourcefulness in finding new modes of expression. Many of his films were made under difficult conditions, and with inadequate equipment and financing. Rouch seems to have stepped over these obstacles almost effortlessly, and one often feels that they have brought out the best in him. His films may be technically flawed, but they proceed with such insight and energy that this scarcely matters, and the technical crudity itself sometimes adds a certain note of brute veracity not unlike that noted by André Bazin in Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon Tiki* film.

Rouch's resourcefulness is readily apparent in *Jaguar,* one of his best films. Made over a ten-year period, and at odd moments on odd scraps

of film, it concerns itself with the subject of migration from the rural areas to the cities of West Africa. It is the story of a group of young men who leave their life of cattle herding in the arid savannaland bordering the Sahara and begin a journey of thousands of miles, taking them to the coast of Ghana (then the Gold Coast) and back again.

Rouch used non-actors who improvised their parts. He did not have synchronous sound but managed to achieve an extraordinary, multi-leveled sound track by having his characters improvise a running commentary while watching themselves on film. It is a fascinating mixture of dialogue, comments on the action, exclamations, reminiscences, laughter, and jokes at one another's expense. It tells us far more about the men and their half-played, half-lived experience than would have been possible by almost any other means. As he has done many times, Rouch has turned a potential limitation to his advantage, and *Jaguar* is a brilliant example of the role which creative interpretation can play in ethnographic film-making.

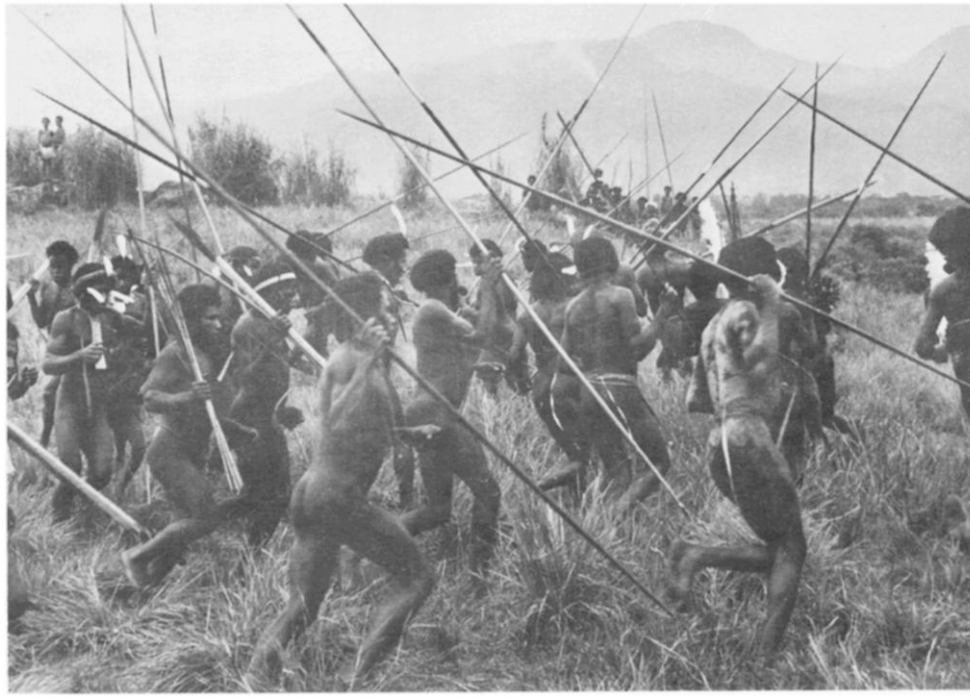
*Jaguar* and other films by Rouch have been criticized for mixing fact and fiction, and for presenting Rouch's feelings about Africa rather than Africa itself. There is no doubt some truth in this, as there is in Flaherty's case, yet it is also true that Rouch has done more than any other ethnographic film-maker to try new methods and infuse his films with the spirit of their subjects. *Jaguar* was not made about a homogeneous society but about a condition and state of mind that existed in West Africa in the fifties —a time when it was possible to travel freely and when there was an exhilarating sense of opportunity in the air. Today Rouch considers that period closed. *Jaguar* is one of its few surviving expressions.

The controversy over Rouch's approach underscores the scarcity of films which can be considered even remotely ethnographic. If more films were being made, no one would begrudge him his unique kind of experimentation. It is perhaps a measure of the poverty of the field that any film which deviates from the most conventional modes of inquiry is accused of betraying anthropological principles.

Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds* was but one result of a joint expedition of social scientists, naturalists, and photographers to study the relatively untouched culture of the Dani, a people of the Baliem Valley in the Central Highlands of New Guinea. The expedition also produced two anthropological monographs, Peter Matthiessen's intimate portrait of the Dani, *Under the Mountain Wall,* a book of still photographs called *Gardens of War,* and several shorter films by Karl Heider.

*Dead Birds* attempts to view the culture from the perspective of ritual warfare, the dominant preoccupation of the people, which Gardner feels colors every other aspect of their lives. Gardner says he chose to go among the Dani because of his interest in ritual warfare, and he claims that the film is a personal response to what he found. Such a position tends to disarm criticism, but the film is clearly meant as a more

DEAD BIRDS: *(Distributor: Image Resources, 12 Arrow Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02138)*



DEAD BIRDS *The battle.*

definitive statement than this would imply. It is an attempt to find within a culture a central core of meaning which defines its entire outlook. Among the Dani, Gardner finds this expressed in a fable of mortality and immortality where men share the fate of birds, which in their inability to shed their skins like snakes are denied eternal life. As in the myth of the fall of man, freedom is intimately associated with vulnerability. Man must pay for his brief glory with his life.

The film conveys this sense of the Dani world in a convincing and often brilliant fashion, yet one sometimes wonders afterwards whether the fatalism and independence expressed by the fable is in fact an adequate explanation for everything one sees. There remain many mysteries about the warfare, and Dani attitudes toward it, which the film does not reveal. One is left with the impression that the interpretation is too simple, or excludes too much, and that in spite of itself there is a touch of condescension in the film.

Whatever its omissions, *Dead Birds* remains a remarkable achievement, for it goes far beyond the surface quality of record-footage and shows a specific time and place inhabited by individuals rather than mere components of a social mechanism. Like *The Hunters*, from which it is descended, it exposes us to the motivations of another society with sufficient force to enable us, briefly, to share some of its values. Unlike *The Hunters*, however, it was planned this way from the start. It is one of the few attempts since Flaherty to place faith in the film as a total means of exploring the nature of another society. It is true, however, that Gardner's colleagues were conducting other kinds of studies, and perhaps this is an ideal arrangement, freeing film for what it can do best.

Recently, Asen Balikci, an anthropologist at the University of Montreal, and Quentin Brown, of the Education Development Center, have produced an important if costly body of filmed materials on the Netsilik Eskimos. It represents a mixed approach, some of it tending toward responsive film-making (especially in the camera work of Robert Young), the rest more in the nature of film records. This project is significant for the beauty and sensitivity of its documentation, its success in achieving an historical reconstruction, and the fact that the fin-

*Netsilik Eskimos. (Distributor: Educational Development Center, 15 Mifflin Place, Cambridge, Mass. 02138)*

ished films are intended to be used in elementary school teaching.

In the past few years a number of anthropologists and film-makers have become increasingly involved with ethnographic film. Among these are Timothy Asch among the Yanomamö of Venezuela, Ian Dunlop and Roger Sandall among the Australian Aborigines; James Marshall in the Amazon; Mark McCarty in Ireland; Jorge Preloran in Argentina and Venezuela; Richard Hawkins in Chile and among the Gisu of Uganda; David Peri and John Collier among American Indians; and the writer among the Jie of Uganda.

John Marshall has recently declared that he would not wish to make another film like *The Hunters*. Today its approach strikes him as overambitious and dominated by Western structural conventions. In editing other films from the !Kung Bushman footage he has turned his attention to finding new methods of organization, both for individual films and for groups of short films designed to be seen serially.

Other ethnographic film-makers have shown a similar interest in film form, and therefore ultimately in film content, indicating their desire to break free of ethnocentric formulas and allow their films to reflect more accurately the structures of the societies which they portray. In *The Village*, for example, Mark McCarty refuses to approach Irish society through the lattice-work of conventional expectations. This may prove unsettling to those who recognize in it something substantial but find themselves unable to reduce it to the usual categories. The film's success lies in answering, or at least illuminating, some of the new questions it raises.

Film-makers are also conscious of the need to provide a context for films which show events that would otherwise remain inexplicable. Timothy Asch has chosen to cover the same material twice in *The Feast*, his excellent film on the Yanamamö. The film begins with a shortened summary which clarifies what follows, a pattern also used in some of Marshall's recent !Kung films.

The question of structure in ethnographic films will probably become increasingly important to anthropologists and film-makers. It is more and more apparent that ethnographic footages does not always contain what we think it contains, nor does it reveal information to us in the same conceptual patterns that have traditionally organized anthropological thought and writing. Indeed, film could alter the study of primitive societies in much the same way that modern linguistics has altered the study of languages, by revealing the inadequacy of the conventional grammar which has long controlled our habits of perception.

Developments in this direction may soon make films like *Dead Birds* and *The Hunters* seem false and old-fashioned. The ethnographic film, so long a step-child of the cinema, may well develop innovations in form which will also help free dramatic and documentary films from structures to which they have long been bound.

## III

It is clear that the social scientist who contemplates using film should consider carefully its full range of possibilities. He will then be better prepared to decide whether or not to adopt it in its totality—that is, as a kind of language. If so, he becomes, for better or worse, a film-maker, working not only with images but also with the structures which relate one image to another and which allow them to reveal in concert what they could not in isolation. If he rejects a structural use for film, he effectively rejects everything but its technology.

There are uses in research for limited applications of film, but they are analogous to using

only the lexical aspect of written language—as if one were to employ words but not sentences in anthropological writing. Like writing, film becomes singularly crude and inarticulate without its syntax, and is reduced to a kind of note-taking. Films exist which amount to sets of visual notes, like Carroll Williams's *Ixil Setting Film,* but they are no more representative of the full possibilities of ethnographic film-making than note-taking is representative of the full extent of written anthropology.

Misunderstandings of these possibilities often strain relations between film-makers and anthropologists. A common oversimplification is the division of all film work into record-making, on the one hand, and "aesthetic" or "artistic" film on the other. Structural uses of film become too easily branded as scientifically suspect, the implication being that all but the simplest recording uses belong to the province of art; and on the rather dubious assumption that art is concerned with form rather than content, these uses are held to be antagonistic to anthropological objectives. "Aesthetic" and "artistic" become perjorative terms applied to any efforts which are not the most rudimentary kinds of recording, even when these are patently inartistic. Ethnographic films are thus lumped together with "art films" and the crudest travelogues. That film can be used for analytical purposes of a more complex sort is not enteretained, nor is the possibility that an anthropologist might conceivably choose to use film expression rather than writing for all of his work.

The serious ethnographic film-maker is hampered by this characterization, for he does not set out to make "art," but rather to apply film at its most sensitive to the examination of other societies. He does not use film language for its own sake, but for what it can reveal of external reality. In effect, he lets art take care of itself. It is therefore not the relationship of art and anthropology which is at issue, for art is a by-product rather than a goal of this kind of film-making. What is at issue is the acceptance of film as a medium capable of intellectual articulation.

For anyone attempting to assess the promise of film for anthropology, an understanding of its limitations is probably more beneficial than a feeling for its more obvious resources. All too often, unbounded enthusiasm for one aspect of a new discovery obscures elements which ultimately prove more valuable. There is a tendency among those who have never worked with film, and among some who have, to regard it as a kind of magic, capable by itself of capturing the most precise and informative images. Among anthropologists this view often takes the form of rejecting any role for the film-maker beyond that of turning the camera on and off. The camera becomes an object of veneration and is thought capable of a kind of omniscience in viewing other societies. The film-maker becomes a potential threat to the culturally unbiased vision of the camera, likely to impose distortions on the film-making process.

This point of view is based upon a fallacy, yet fortunately it is a fallacy of faith rather than indifference. Its only danger is that once revealed (like a magician's sleight-of-hand) it may lead to such disenchantment that any role for film is rejected.

Belief in the omniscience of film as a research tool arises first from experiencing its effects without understanding how they are produced, and second, from overgeneralizing from the particular film experience. Film-viewers in Louis Lumière's day were entranced at the sight of leaves shimmering on trees. It seemed incredible that the precise motions of each leaf had been captured, and audiences responded by investing the camera with superhuman attributes.

Today the ability of a camera to record the shimmering of leaves is still awe-inspiring, and the assumption is easily made that if it can do this, an extra-human cinema is possible. Under the stimulus of such accurate representation, the viewer conjures up its accompanying context of sensations—the smell of earth and foliage, the feeling of sunshine and breeze, even the sounds of birds. It is not surprising that the would-be ethnographic film-maker or anthropologist, eager for a way of capturing experience which avoids the terrible difficulty of words, seizes upon the cinema as a technological wonder. The

precise images of men moving in their environment may be sufficient to convince him that it is but a small step to filming everything about them.

Anyone who has handled a motion picture camera, however, knows how difficult it is to use, even for simple recording purposes, and how often there is a disparity between the images on the film and the reality. Certain magical qualities remain, but it becomes clear that to capture any sense of the totality of an event, far more than technical competence is required. The camera is disappointingly tunnel-visioned, and the subjects of its images are devoid of the meanings which they achieve naturally in a larger context.

To document a scene in any depth, the selectivity of the camera cannot be left to chance, nor can it be excessively broadened. The ethnographic film-maker must choose his images with as much care as an ethnographer with a notebook chooses words. This is true for all the tasks which he may set himself. The difficulty is perhaps greatest when he attempts to convey aspects of culture which are not visible but which have visual signs or correlatives. Beyond a certain point, this may even be foolhardy. Anyone attempting to put on film a complex kinship system might be better advised to take up pencil and paper.

It is possible, however, to examine with film the nonvisual aspects of a culture—its attitudes, values, and beliefs. Yet the film-maker should not assume that he can proceed as an anthropological writer might, for film has a different kind of sensitivity and yields its information in a different form. It is not essentially a symbolic system, but a system of concrete representations. The film-maker must proceed on the hints of thought and feeling that come from direct observation of human behavior. His analysis will not be a series of abstractions, but a kind of exploration. It will be intimate and specific, and it will have the force of immediate experience. If it generalizes for an entire society, the process will not depend upon summary statements but upon the connotations of single witnessed events, or the accumulated evidence of related events.

If this kind of inquiry is difficult and requires both skill and knowledge, it does not necessarily follow that the recording of simple visual data is much easier. One may think that to show how a basket is woven or a tool is made it is enough to set the camera on a tripod and turn it on. This either reflects a belief in the magical fallacy or a tolerance for records of poor quality. If the camera is far enough away to show the craftsman and his surroundings, it will be too far away to show his most delicate manipulations. If it remains close enough to record these, much

*Still from an unfinished film by David MacDougall on the Jie, a seminomadic, pastoral people of northeastern Uganda.*

may occur outside the picture area. If it faces him, part of his work or equipment may be hidden behind him. If it is low, it will not see the top of his work; if it is high, it will miss the underside. If the social context of the work is important, even more complex considerations arise.

Clearly, even the recording of a technological process requires more than the presence of the camera itself. Such scenes are easily filmed badly, but they may also be filmed so that we see in great detail what is occurring. The difference lies in the degree to which the camera is responsive to what is taking place before it. Some zealous investigators erroneously assume that to use different camera angles and focal length lenses in such a case is merely to obscure the "objective" recording of an event with artistic pretensions. No doubt their suspicions can be justified by many bad films, yet this should not blind them to the resources of film-making. Used to serve the subject, they increase the chances for objective observation.

Eisenstein used to set his film students the problem of how to shoot a specific scene if one were confined to a single fixed camera position. The inevitable question that arose was what was most important to show in the scene, and what would have to be sacrificed. Such problems are good training for a film-maker. They make him more conscious of the means at his disposal and more careful in their use. But to impose such restrictions upon film-making in the name of greater objectivity is analogous to saying that one can see better with one eye than with two.

All this is perhaps self-evident to those who regularly use film as language, or who understand it as such. But in the social sciences, words (and in some cases diagrams and numbers) are the primary means of dealing with information. Film therefore remains for many a perplexing and unmanageable intrusion. Record-footage, minimally articulated, has managed to find a place as a partial substitute for first-hand observation, but today, when film offers a means of exploring societies in much greater depth, it would be unfortunate if it were turned entirely in this direction.

This is not an idle possibility. The present tendency of the social sciences in the direction of cross-cultural and structural analysis requires specialized and suitably unambiguous data. Film can provide some of this, and it has already proven useful in fields ranging from child development and primate sociology to kinesics and sociolinguistics. But it is to be hoped that a natural tendency to balance such an emphasis with other approaches to human societies will soon find in film-making an appropriate and indispensable method.

Much about the quality of life in traditional societies escapes the sifting and sorting processes of social science, and in any case is irrelevant to its present goals. As these societies vanish, and as the peoples of the world come more and more to resemble one another, the variety that once characterized the social life of man may be fully grasped only in the works of skillful writers and film-makers. There is an aesthetic value in the diversity of cultures; and to the humanist there is a wisdom to be derived from viewing one's own way of life and values in the light of others.

Anthropology is, of course, a response to these perceptions. The value of film is that it can help them to be more complete: by adding the sensory experience to analytical data and by exploring various levels of human experience with a simultaneity which is impossible in written studies. In a single shot or scene, for example, it may be possible to convey not only the physical details of a ritual ceremony, but also its psychological meaning for those involved, and perhaps even its symbolic significance.

Preserving the imprint of diverse cultures therefore becomes an important and urgent goal, for which all the accompanying dangers of individual interpretation must be risked. Films do not achieve complex perceptions easily. This therefore presents the ethnographic film-maker with his greatest obligation: to increase through his skill the number of meanings conveyed in his material. While filming, and later in the editing process, he must be prepared to observe and reveal the texture of human life on a variety

of levels: the appearance of a people and their surroundings; their technology and physical way of life; their ritual activities, and what beliefs these signify; the quality of their interpersonal communication, and what it tells of their relationships; the psychology and personalities of individuals in the society; the relation of people to their environment—their knowledge of it, use of it, and movement within it; the means by which the culture is passed on from one generation to another; the rhythms of the society, and its sense of geography and time; the values of the people; their political and social organization; their contacts with other cultures; and the overall quality of their world view.

The difficulty and expense of film-making are great (though the expense can perhaps be less than is generally supposed), but neither expense nor difficulty should be permitted to create a paralyzing inertia in the field at a time when the need for its flowering is so great. If few good ethnographic films have yet been made, it is not because they are impossible to make, but because ethnographic film-making has undergone a protracted infancy. It is now time that it matured. As film becomes increasingly familiar in our lives, some of its magical attributes fall away. It becomes more approachable and as a consequence more likely to be tried, mastered, and ultimately applied to the most difficult tasks of all.

IV

The work of Rouch, Marshall, and Gardner reveals that skillful use of the film idiom can achieve a sense of the wholeness of other cultures. The need for this is also apparent to anthropologists who do not make films, for at times some turn to a kind of writing which differs from their usual approach. This is why we have Colin Turnbull's *The Forest People* as well as his *Wayward Servants*, and Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* as well as *Structural Anthropology*. Other books of similar intent are Oscar Lewis's *Children of Sanchez* and *La Vida* and Elizabeth Marshall Thomas's *The Harmless People*.

The film-maker's task is no easier than the writer's, but at least he has the advantage of speaking directly to the senses of his audience, without the coding and decoding inevitable with written language. His problems lie elsewhere: not in finding stimuli to evoke a given reality, but in choosing from a profusion of stimuli those which most meaningfully represent the totality of an experience.

The makers of record-footage often seek the opposite of this: to isolate single aspects of culture so that they may be studied more clearly and also cross-culturally. This is the reason for the "thematic unit" approach of the *Encyclopaedia Cinematographica* at Göttingen. It also characterizes the reconstructive films of Sam Barrett, such as *Pine Nuts*, in which we see men and women going through their motions of food-gathering like automatons. Such documentation is valuable, though one may wonder whether it always requires the exclusion of the surrounding social context. The precision of observation achieved in some of the Netsilik Eskimo films would suggest that it does not.

A more problematical kind of record-footage is that which attempts to apply methods derived from statistics to visual information. The taking of random and therefore presumably "representative" views of culture with the camera has been suggested by some investigators, but false conclusions may be drawn from such material unless so much has been shot as to constitute a statistically large sampling. Valuable information may be discovered lying latent in film—as Sorenson and Gajdusek have ably demonstrated in their studies of child development and disease—but there may be some doubt whether filming conducted by individuals completely unfamiliar with a society, and therefore without anthropological preconceptions, produces enough rewards to justify its great expense. Unconscious preconceptions are inevitable, and they can be as limiting as conscious ones and harder to eliminate.

It is also erroneous to assume that in a "slice of life" one has captured an accurate image of an event taking place before the camera. The most significant aspect of it may be hidden or exist on a non-visual level. Members of a society may, for example, appear to take for granted

things which are highly important to them. If the film-maker captures only the outward emphasis placed upon these things, he may deduce a false impression of their real significance. This is avoided if he is prepared to look beneath the surface of events and be guided in his filming by the structures which he finds there.

The recent introduction of portable synchronous sound equipment has been of immeasurable importance in expanding the possibilities open to ethnographic film-makers, even though surprisingly few have taken advantage of them. It has made accessible the entire range of human experience involving speech. This includes not only the subjects of conversation, which can be one of the richest sources of information about a people, but also the social behavior which surrounds conversation and the nature of the interpersonal relationships which it reveals.

Scenes filmed with synchronous sound take on a new immediacy and psychological depth, yet this should not tempt us into believing that it is now easier to make meaningful films than it used to be. If anything, it calls for even greater discipline, for one must now be attuned to the meaning of a much subtler range of behavior taking place before the camera. Synchronous sound, like any other means of documentation, remains a mere technical capability until made to serve a larger conceptual approach. There is a danger that synchronous sound may give new force to the magical fallacy in ethnographic film-making, and in documentary films we have already witnessed this in the misapplications of *cinéma-vérité* techniques.

V

Any anthropologist with fieldwork behind him knows that what gives to a culture its uniqueness and dignity can never be encompassed in a description of its values, social organization, and economy. Instead, it lies in the awareness of individuals waking each day into a world embracing certain possibilities and no others. These constitute the conceptual and physical horizons of the communal experience and give it its meaning and special character. By approximating the cumulative effect of extended experience, a good film or book can create an awareness which illuminates other kinds of knowledge.

*A Netsilik Eskimo child playing.*

In the best ethnographic films there is an attempt to involve the viewer's senses and feelings as well as his mind. Flaherty always makes us aware of physical environment as an influence upon cultural attitudes. In *The Hunters* Marshall stresses the constant disappointments which accompany the search for game, perhaps throwing some light on the patience and solidarity in Bushman social relationships. Such films do not attempt to duplicate the information available in a written anthropological study. Instead, they expose the viewer to the setting and practice of life of a people.

In some of the Australian record-footage shot by Stocker and Tindale in the 1930's there is a suggestion of what film can do, even inadvertently, to put an audience into a life experience different from its own. While the implied purpose of the various scenes is to show specific activities of a band of Aborigines, other unemphasized aspects of their life recur sufficiently often to provide a significant thematic substructure. An example of this is the role of dogs. They are never singled out for attention, yet they are always present; and one gradually begins to realize that these people do not "have" dogs, but that dogs live among them. When men sit around a fire, dogs are between them, sharing the warmth. When they sleep, the dogs are there sleeping among them. It is perhaps a small

point, and there is no doubt much more to be learned about dogs in this society, yet it seems important in understanding the quality of life in a small nomadic band.

Among the Netsilik Eskimo films of Asen Balikci there is a scene in which a small child snares a seagull, slowly and inexpertly stones it to death, and then brings it triumphantly to his mother, who cuts off the feet for him to play with. For a long time he makes the feet run over the ground, holding one in each hand. The cameraman has the good sense to follow this sequence of events, and in its totality it reveals something of another way of life with extraordinary conciseness. It tells more than about the socialization of children, or their attitudes toward life or suffering, or their relationships with their mothers. By some intuitive means it better prepares us to understand other aspects of the culture—its mobility, its ecology, its beliefs.

One could mention other isolated details of this kind, but what seems important is the unexpected manner in which a film can suddenly penetrate the emotional life of a people. The film-maker runs risks when he pursues such insights, for he must guard against endowing aspects of another culture with a false significance. Yet at the same time he stands between his own society and another, and as the mediator between the two he must find ways of extending his understanding to those who have only his film as a source. His choice of material must be partly influenced by his judgement of how it is likely to be received. He can thus never be totally independent of his own culture, never a total cultural relativist.

The ethnographic film-maker has the means today to select from many levels of social behavior and combine them to produce a human document which is valuable both anthropologically and aesthetically. What he may concern himself with is partly the subject of conventional ethnology; but much else reflects the interests of documentary film-makers in any society: the desire to achieve an immediacy of time, place, and human experience.

Like anthropologists, ethnographic film makers must beware of a certain arrogance which amounts to a more intellectualized form of the "white man's burden." Film is a product of industrial civilization, but this does not mean that it cannot be employed effectively by people in transitional societies. One sometimes feels that Jean Rouch has tried to make the kinds of films about West Africa that West Africans might have made had they had the means. Some, like Senegal's Ousmane Sembène, have now found the means and are skillful film-makers.

The training of film-makers in developing countries should perhaps be undertaken as a concomitant of ethnographic film-making, a program which could be made practical if regional ethnographic film centers are ever established. The objective would not be "naive" film-making of the kind fostered in John Adair's and Sol Worth's experiment among the Navajo, but rather the creation of experienced and committed film makers. This is important because it is difficult enough to make film say anything, much less reveal the subtleties of one's own culture. Home movies tend to look similar in all societies. The most "Navajo" film to come out of Adair's and Worth's project was in fact made by the least naive film-maker, whose training and experience had prepared him to master the camera more quickly than the others.

It is not necessarily true that an indigenous film-maker will understand all aspects of his society better than an outsider. Indeed, there are many reasons why he may not. But the value of non-Western schools of film-making, such as the Japanese and Indian, should convince us of the poverty of a one-sided approach to any culture. Films made by non-Westerners about their own societies may be less anthropologically oriented than those made by ethnographic film-makers, but this does not mean they will be less relevant anthropologically.

In encouraging film-making in other societies we may also be the beneficiaries in a way which we may not at first anticipate. In the long run it is probable that some of these film-makers, having made films in their own countries, will reverse the ethnographic process and turn their cameras upon us.

RICHARD KOSZARSKI

# Lost Films from the National Film Collection

Among the least heralded events at the Seventh New York Film Festival was a retrospective showing modestly listed as "Special Events: I, The National Film Collection." Yet however modest their arrival, the impact of the 23 recently acquired treasures far exceeded the piddling fizzle of the main festival, which launched itself under the dubious banner of *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice.*

What the retrospective really proved is that our knowledge of film history has been so filtered through the personal tastes of Rotha, Jacobs, Barry, Lejeune, and the other pioneer film historians, that the discovery of a lot of films which they (and their more recent successors) hardly mentioned is about to upset a lot of our long-accepted notions about the evolution of the film art. Now that the Library of Congress has the funds (a $1.2 million grant from the American Film Institute) it can afford to be comprehensive, and a lot of forgotten material that few really considered of any great value is coming to light. The sense of marvelous discovery afforded by viewing *The Canadian* or *The Patsy* is enhanced by the thought that they were never on anybody's list of great classics, and that their restoration to public view is very nearly a happy accident—for how many other obscure films of similar caliber have completely vanished, unknown masterpieces which have disappeared without anybody knowing or caring? Although the uncut *Greed* has been the holy grail of film archivists it's now conceivable that the greatest discovery might even be something that didn't quite make *Film Till Now.*

Just as the restoration of the paper positive collection at the Library of Congress has caused a sharp reevaluation of the pre-1912 period, and of the relative contributions of Porter, Bitzer, Griffith, and others, so the slow filling of the 1912-1942 "gap," during which only 30 films were deposited for copyright, will cause another radical shake-up in our theory of film history. Even this first cursory exhibition has made it obvious that film comedy of the twenties extended far beyond Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd, Langdon, Sennett, and Roach—something which film students brought up under the "great comedians" thesis might find difficult to comprehend. King Vidor's *The Patsy* (1928, and not even listed in the Vidor filmography published in Andrew Sarris's *The American Cinema)* proves to be one of Vidor's most successful films, a brilliantly witty comedy with multiple gag variations, effortless and unobtrusive camera movements and editing, and fine performances from the entire cast, headed by Marie Dressler and Marion Davies (who proves herself a fine comedienne as a hapless flapper who tries to pry a man away from her overbearing sister).

This type of comic structure contrasted strongly with Keaton's *The Cameraman* (1928), the first MGM feature Keaton made under another director; it has some good Keaton material, but the supporting players remain largely cardboard figures for Buster to play against.

The loss of nearly all W. C. Fields's silent films must now be considered a disaster even by non-Fieldsians if Gregory LaCava's *So's Your Old Man* (1926) is typical. Fields plays Sam Bisbee, a tippling small-town braggart who happens to invent unbreakable windshield glass. When a mix-up at an automotive convention has him tossing bricks through a series of windshields he thinks are his (and the flavor of the Fields episode in *If I Had a Million* is already here full blown) he goes home in disgrace, only to be rescued by a princess he meets on the train. It seems that the characterization and the plot derive mainly from a book by Julian Street, but the resemblance to Fields's later films—mostly written by himself—is considerable, and

Buster Keaton in THE CAMERAMAN.

bears further study. (He remade it in 1934 as *You're Telling Me.*) There is even a Fields set piece, the golf act later filmed (much more effectively, in sound) as *The Golf Specialist.* The ending prefigures *It's a Gift,* for just as Fields thinks the final humiliation is upon him, an auto manufacturer who has found out the truth gives him a contract for a million dollars, and we cut to Fields in a fabulous mansion, surrounded by footmen—and his old drinking companions. But the film is also valuable as an early LaCava, as full of comic touches as the later *My Man Godfrey,* and it shares that film's concern with the gulf between the rich and the poor in a country which prides itself on its egalitarianism.

The retrospective was prepared by the AFI for the Film Society of Lincoln Center out of prints either already in the National Collection, or on their way there. There were two or three rather dramatic examples of the problems of restoration as distinct from preservation, for although the films shown have been "preserved" (acetate copies of all existing material having been made) not all have been restored to viewable condition. Paul Fejos's *Broadway* (1929) one of the famous all-talking-singing-dancing musicals, had two sequences obviously misplaced, and the final reel, the one with the Technicolor footage and the big musical finale, seems to have hypoed out of existence. The print had not yet been restored by the Library's staff, as it was on its way to Washington through New York at the time of the Festival. A similar trouble occurred with John Ford's *Men Without Women* (1930), his first film with Dudley Nichols. The print shown was to have been assembled from three partial negatives and a fragmentary sound track, but the sound and picture were still on separate reels. Thus the film was shown unrestored, and silent. Rex Ingram's *The Conquering Power* (1921), with Valentino and Alice Terry, was shown in the form of a print made from the original negative which has been deeply scratched and bears only flash titles.



The AFI would like to have this program travel to at least two other cities, and hopefully all of this restoration work will be completed by then. The exhibition of the Library's prints off its premises is difficult to arrange because of deposition requirements which limit the Library's function to preservation and restoration. The Chief of the Library's Film Department, John Kuiper, maintains that this should be the Library's prime function, with exhibition to scholars and researchers on the premises only. This makes it easier to obtain prints from the producing companies, since they can be assured that the Library is not in the exhibition field. Depositing their material also solves their tricky nitrate problem, as well as lending a certain prestige to the company itself. During the time the films are on deposit the producers still have all rights of exhibition; the Library secures only the right to make preservation copies to show scholars and researchers on its own grounds. After copyright expiration, however, all the deposited print and preprint material falls into public domain. At present, copyrights have been frozen since 1962, and no new material has entered into public domain while the new law has been under revision, but it seems likely that a corporate copyright of 75 years will then apply. It should be noted that the touchy situation of cajoling prints from producing companies covers only the period from 1912-1942; since 1942 copyright prints have had to be deposited on demand. Although other archives, notably George Eastman House and the Museum of Modern Art, may collect selectively along solely artistic guidelines, the Library's collection, being national, must be comprehensive. So each year (in addition to whatever films from

THE VANISHING AMERICAN

"the gap" are acquired) approximately a thousand new titles are added, including all the registered news and documentary films, all registered foreign films (although these usually include only the big commercial successes), all American features of any critical or popular acclaim, and about 70-80% of the rest, including skin flicks, motorcycle movies, and TV films. The Library has been collecting TV films since 1946, with an especially strong collection from the mid-fifties on. A major preservation problem of the seventies will be the transfer of the Library collection of videotapes, which are rapidly becoming as fragile as old nitrate prints.

Once an acetate preservation copy is made the Library has no qualms about screening its original nitrate prints until they wear out. This was the case with *The Vanishing American* (1926), a western in the epic tradition of *The Covered Wagon;* its fabulous location photography was rendered even more effective by being exhibited in an original amber print, with blue night sequences. *The Vanishing American* is truly a remarkable piece of filmmaking; its photography ranks with *Shane* and the best of John Ford. The camera moves effortlessly and effectively, and the cutting is amazingly good; a final sequence of the Indians riding down from their ancient hills to rout their white oppressors predates the conclusion of *Storm Over Asia* in a startling manner. The ten-reel film is split into two sections: a documentary-like study of the settlers of the American plains from ancient times, and a modern story about the continued oppression of the Indians. Although the film weakens in its over-delicate handling of the love of an Indian (Richard Dix) for the white schoolmistress, and the presentation of a stock villain (Noah Beery) instead of a deeper analysis of the cause of the Indians' misfortunes, this unusual film which presents the Indian as tragic hero must remain one of the classics of the western.

Two other epics of the land, evidently a popular genre of the twenties, were also in evidence: *The Canadian* (1926) by William Beaudine and Karl Brown's *Stark Love* (1927). *The Canadian* is a brilliant exposition of life in the wheat fields, much in the tradition of *White Gold* or *The*

*Wind* in its handling of the relationship between the land and those who work it. There is an excellent use of landscapes, but these never dominate the personal story, a study of the tense marriage between a wheat farmer and his city-bred wife. The film is low-key throughout, and never resorts to strained effects to make its points. For example, the loss of the year's crop in a storm, the film's greatest dramatic event, is shown in two or three shots of battered wheat and some reaction footage of the face of the farmer (Thomas Meighan in a fine performance). But primarily striking about *The Canadian* is its mature handling of the sexual tensions created by the marriage, and their eventual resolution. *Stark Love,* which brought with it a reputation *The Canadian* never had, was perhaps less satisfying. Brown took his crew to the Blue Ridge Mountains and used actual mountaineers for his actors, but the effect is far from that of *Nanook,* to which it was wildly compared when it opened. Rather, Brown adopts a very Hollywood, *Tol'able David* sort of plot, with a father and son fighting over the same girl, and ending with a last-minute rescue and escape on a drifting log. The photography is excellent, with superb use of locations, but unfortunately the editing is inept; the log scene at the end completely fails to convey the tension it seems to call for. This particular film points up the problem of all film archivists hunting overseas for lost prints: *Stark Love* was hiding for years in Czechoslovakia under the Czech title *In the Glens of California.*

Another film whose landscape and compositional values were exceptional, and given the production date, perhaps most exceptional of all, was Maurice Tourneur's *Pride of the Clan* (1916), a Mary Pickford vehicle about a Scotch lassie who must take over the leadership of her clan when her father is lost at sea. Tourneur's eye for composition is flawless, equalling or surpassing Griffith's work of the same period, and the performances are more restrained than in much of *Intolerance. Pride of the Clan* also exhibits an editorial skill not generally attributed to Tourneur; a scene where Mary is herself trapped in a sinking ship is cut so rapidly and effectively as to be almost a match for the best work of the Master himself. Clearly, this film was ten years ahead of its time, and the batch of newly acquired Tourneur films in the National Collection should be carefully examined so as to place him more certainly in the proper context as regards Griffith, Ince, and others in those formative years.

But perhaps the most delightful of the films were two that exceeded their already considerable reputations: Erich von Stroheim's *The Merry Widow* (1925) and James Whale's *The Old Dark House* (1932). Stroheim's film has for too long been passed off as a purely commercial job, done on the rebound from *Greed* to keep himself and his family from starving. What emerges instead is a delightfully cynical Stroheim essay on "true love," with a number of delightful Stroheim characters, including the degenerate foot fetishist Baron Sadoja (in *The Merry Widow?*) and a *mise en scène* that is truly Stroheimesque. Perhaps the most surprising feature is the use of camera motion—a free style movement which makes the whole film revolve to the waltz strains of the original (magnificently played, by the way, by Arthur Kleiner, still the finest accompanist in the business). This fluidity, rather atypical of Stroheim's work in this period, is most greatly evidenced in the "Merry Widow Waltz" scene itself, where high-angle shots travel along with Mae Murray and John Gilbert. Perhaps this movement was Oliver Marsh's doing, as he got main credit for the photography over Stroheim's regulars, Ben Reynolds and William Daniels. He probably is also responsible for the dazzling glamor work done on Mae Murray, including gauze work, soft focus, and every other trick in Metro's book —rather a far cry from Stroheim's previous film.

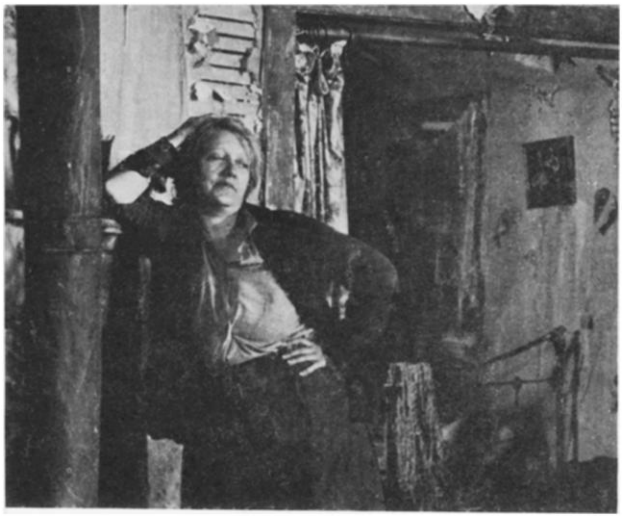
*The Old Dark House* is perhaps the most controlled and completely realized of all James Whale's fine films. Working in a genre which had been milked on the stage since the original production of *The Bat,* and was cliché-ridden even when Paul Leni made *The Cat and the Canary* in 1927, Whale delivers a film which transcends the conventions of the spooky-house melodrama and stands as one of the few really

successful parodies in the history of the cinema. When Roger Corman tried to put his tongue in cheek in a similar manner in *The Raven* he simply gagged, because he didn't understand his own style or respect his material; but Whale has the wit and the discipline to do both. (Consider the dry humor evidenced in parts of *The Invisible Man* and *The Bride of Frankenstein.)* As a character slinks along a shadowy corridor, she will suddenly stop—and turn and make shadow animals on the wall! (Only to be menaced a moment later by *another* spooky shadow). What threatens to be a fantastic brute unleashed from a locked room by a crazed Boris Karloff turns out to be a meek pyromaniac who begs not to be left alone—and who immediately sets torch to the draperies (a raging fire that mysteriously subsides of its own volition, something which the perfectionist Whale would have never allowed had this been a straight film). With that fabulous cast (Karloff, Melvyn Douglas, Gloria Stuart, Charles Laughton, Ernest Thesiger, Raymond Massey, et al.) working like a British rep company, Whale has produced a dazzling melodrama which transcends its conventions by respecting them.

Although one of the goals of the AFI is a repertory film program similar to that run by the British Film Institute, this ideal is progressing slowly, largely to the difficulties in securing exhibition clearances. Although this special exhibition was the first major public showing off the Library's grounds, plans are being made to use the National Gallery in Washington as the first of a network of repertory cinemas. The work of the AFI in arranging such exhibitions, in tracking down and securing from the copyright holders the needed permissions, is nearly as important as salvaging the films to begin with, for films without an audience are not worth saving. Sam Kula, the AFI's chief archivist, has made it clear that the films obtained for the National Film Collection will not be buried away in the Library of Congress, and that every effort will be made to make them as accessible as possible, an ideal being to get as many of these newly obtained films as possible into non-theatrical distribution through an arrangement between the copyright holder and some commercial outlet.

THE MERRY WIDOW

The windfall produced by AFI activities in little over a year has been startling. Two major donations have included the preprint material in the RKO library, including all the master material for *King Kong, Swing Time, Citizen Kane* and dozens more, and the donation of the Paramount silent negatives, among which were such "lost films" as James Cruze's *Beggar on Horseback,* DeMille's original *The Squaw Man,* and Von Stroheim's *The Wedding March* complete with the Technicolor sequences. Other prints now in the collection, besides those in this retrospective, include Langdon's *The Sea Squawk* and John Ford's first feature, *Straight Shooting.* The whole definition of "lost film" is rather loose to begin with, and some would limit this to films not known to exist anywhere. Such was the criterion for a recent exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, entitled "Stills from Lost Films," which included Stroheim's *The Devil's Passkey,* Sternberg's *The Case of Lena Smith* and Sea-



THE GOOSE WOMAN

strom's *The Tower of Lies,* among others. The AFI, however, prefers a somewhat wider definition, largely because it is impossible to state with any certainty just what *doesn't* exist anymore. During the Museum's exhibit, Benjamin Christensen's *The Devil's Circus,* one of the featured "lost" films, suddenly became "found.") To this effect AFI considers "lost" any film not known to be in public hands. Using this rationale, if a film is known to exist only in the hands of some private collector, or if the last nitrate print is slowly decomposing in a company vault, it is as good as lost to the film scholar or researcher, and these are the type of prints the AFI is after for the National Film Collection. While most of the newly obtained films seem to have been discovered in company vaults, many have turned up in the quasi-legal possession of private collectors, whom Kula admits "are owed a great debt of thanks." Any collector believing he holds something of value should get in touch with the AFI immediately, for complete collector ananymity will guarantee no chance of his losing his print of *London After Midnight,* or whatever it is he has been jealously hoarding all these years.

Other films featured at the retrospective were, briefly: *The Kiss Before the Mirror* (1933), a talky James Whale adaptation of an even more verbose stage play, saved by some interesting Karl Freund camerawork; *The Man Who Laughs* (1928), Paul Leni's overblown production of Victor Hugo's tale of a disfigured clown, which despite a valiant performance by Conrad Veidt and a few individual scenes of great power, remains a stylistic mishmash and bears out Rotha's opinion of the film as a "travesty of cinematic methods"; *The Mysterious Island* (1929), an interesting but fragmented melodrama done in the style of a Sax Rohmer thriller (with little to do with Jules Verne) that took four years to make, and went through at least as many directors; *Exit Smiling* (1926), Bea Lillie's debut in a hilarious vamp parody, competently directed by Sam Taylor, then a Harold Lloyd gag-writer and co-director; *The Criminal Code* (1931), an interesting Hawks film, seemingly done as Columbia's "answer" to *The Big House,* featuring a fine performance by Walter Huston and excellent camerawork by James Wong Howe; *Dirigible* (1931), Frank Capra's rather Hawksian adventure saga of zeppelins racing for the South Pole; *Little Man, What Now* (1934), which had the reputation of being anti-Nazi, but is really just anti-politics, and contains some lyrical Frank Borzage love scenes (as well as an opening scene which shows the unmarried hero and heroine searching for an "understanding" doctor to perform an abortion—and expressing no Hays-inflicted guilt feelings, either); two Victor Seastrom films, *He Who Gets Slapped* (1924), a strangely static adaptation of the Andreyev play, with Lon Chaney as the masochistic clown, but displaying Seastrom's great eye for symbolic black/white tonal values, and *The Scarlet Letter* (1926), a much more satisfying film, in which he decorates the white New England snowscapes with the dark costumes of the Puritans, and exhibits a more facile sense of camera movement (as well as extracting fine performances from Lillian Gish, Lars Hanson, and Henry B.Walthall); *The Third Degree* (1926), an atrociously contrived circus melodrama, which Michael Curtiz and Hal Mohr valiantly tried to rescue with some magnificent set-piece photography; and *The Goose Woman* (1925), an early Clarence Brown film in which his sense of lighting, composition, and the dramatic use of the close-up are already in evidence, two

years before the more famous *Flesh and the Devil.*

Not the least interesting part of the retrospective were the short subjects: a series of DeForest phonofilms, sound-on-film records of vaudeville acts made in the early twenties in the days before the Vitaphone. Viewing perfectly synchronized and audible talkies made before *Potemkin* is a bit of a shock, and certain of the films even maintained their entertainment value, notably reels featuring Eddie Cantor, Webber and Fields, and DeWolfe Hopper in a dramatic recitation of "Casey at the Bat." One hundred reels of phonofilm material were donated to the collection by Maurice Zouary, a private collector who had painstakingly assembled them over the years (one wonders what happened to the pre-1914 sound-on-film experiments of Eugene Lauste?).

The excitement generated by the retrospective proved two things: first, the next few years should see quite a shake-up in the writing of American film history; and second, the establishment by the AFI of repertory cinemas across the country to get these films to their audience must be made the prime consideration after the nitrate preservation project itself. If everything in Washington goes as planned, we will all at some near future date have the mixed pleasure of seeing a good many pages of film history being eaten by their outdone authors.

KRZYSZTOF-TEODOR TOEPLITZ

# Wajda Redivivus

Two new films by Andrzej Wajda, *Everything for Sale* and *A Fly Hunt,* appeared on Polish screens during 1968. They show a startling and intriguing change in style for the maker of *Canal* and *Ashes and Diamonds,* and their rapid production may signify that Wajda is beginning a new and vigorous period of creativity.

The "new Wajda" we see in these films is, however, clearly linked with the old, one of the leaders of the Polish school of the fifties; indeed the new could not exist without the old. To understand these new films, then, it is necessary to have in mind some of the background of the postwar Polish film. When Wajda's new films were presented at Cannes, they were criticized as "uncommitted," "escapist," and so on—probably in large part because critics are accustomed to Wajda as dealing with elevated moral and historical problems and felt uncomfortable when he presented them with something new. But we must also bear in mind that in Poland —as in the rest of Eastern Europe—the arts have been confronting two main problems: the national problem, and the civilization problem, and Wajda's work must be seen in that context.

The former stems from the geographical fact that during the last century the very national survival of the Eastern European nations was in doubt. The "fate of the nation" motif expressed so frequently in Polish films of the fifties connected strongly with a whole cultural and artistic tradition going back to the early nineteenth century. Wajda was among the most faithful continuers of this tradition. *A Generation* and *Canal* speak of the struggle for independence during World War II; *Ashes and Diamonds* treats the difficult, ambiguous moment when independence was regained—bringing with it the necessity to make sometimes tragic political decisions; and finally *Ashes* turns to motifs found in the Napoleonic era. All of these Wajda films, like many by other directors, spring from the

years before the more famous *Flesh and the Devil.*

Not the least interesting part of the retrospective were the short subjects: a series of DeForest phonofilms, sound-on-film records of vaudeville acts made in the early twenties in the days before the Vitaphone. Viewing perfectly synchronized and audible talkies made before *Potemkin* is a bit of a shock, and certain of the films even maintained their entertainment value, notably reels featuring Eddie Cantor, Webber and Fields, and DeWolfe Hopper in a dramatic recitation of "Casey at the Bat." One hundred reels of phonofilm material were donated to the collection by Maurice Zouary, a private collector who had painstakingly assembled them over the years (one wonders what happened to the pre-1914 sound-on-film experiments of Eugene Lauste?).

The excitement generated by the retrospective proved two things: first, the next few years should see quite a shake-up in the writing of American film history; and second, the establishment by the AFI of repertory cinemas across the country to get these films to their audience must be made the prime consideration after the nitrate preservation project itself. If everything in Washington goes as planned, we will all at some near future date have the mixed pleasure of seeing a good many pages of film history being eaten by their outdone authors.

KRZYSZTOF-TEODOR TOEPLITZ

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national problem—not only in their themes, but also in their style of narration, which is not free from dramatic symbolism and romantic pathos.

During the last years—30 years after the onset of World War II and 25 years after its end—the second problem has come into its own: the problem of civilization in a free country, no longer threatened by extermination. The postwar euphoria at having our country back again has had to give way to considerations of the present, of the actual state of the nation. New concerns have steadily appeared among thinking artists, intellectuals, and the public—fragments of which we will find in Wajda's new films. The threats to nationhood have receded; the threats now are backwardness, deficiencies in civilization, the danger of being wiped off the map of Europe not by military aggression but by being eliminated from the game as an economic or cultural partner. In this perspective Wajda's news films, charged with indifference or uncommittedness, can be seen as in fact a desperate effort to maintain a dialogue with modern tendencies of European film—an attempt to "Europeanize" Polish film and the Polish audience. In the eyes of Western critics these efforts may seem derivative; or perhaps the results do not match the expectations that critics had of Wajda. In the Polish context, however, they are films of great importance.

Signs of a coming turn in Wajda's work can be discerned in earlier films. *The Innocent Sorcerers* is an attempt to penetrate the milieu of postwar youth; the Wajda episode in *Love at Twenty* is a delineation of confrontation between the new generation, altogether unacquainted with the war, and the protagonist of the quintessential wartime tragedy (Zbigniew Cybulski). In both films Wajda was trying to abandon his classic hero—a man of his own age, who matured during the occupation and the first postwar years. He was also chafing against his usual style, with its tendency toward romantic symbolism combined with surrealistic innovations perhaps derived from Buñuel. At the time, however, continuation on this line must have seemed futile to Wajda, or he would not have embarked on the huge spectacle film *Ashes*.

Meanwhile drastic changes have taken place both in Polish and world film: the French *Nouvelle Vague*, the Italian films of Fellini and Antonioni, films of Polanski and Skolimowski. Wajda was not one of the precursors of new dramatic concepts and methods of film narration—which generally could be considered ways of "poeticizing" the medium, a shift toward reliance on visual interest and gradual abandonment of the resources of "canned theater." Although Wajda has a strong visual sense, he cherished too strong a commitment to narrative principles to sail the troubled waters of the stream of consciousness and arbitrary mixing of different levels of reality. His restraint in this respect is comparable to that of the new American directors, or Antonioni —whose *Blow-Up* could hardly be regarded as a blow against traditional principles of film narration.

With his two new films, however, Wajda has declared his adherence to the "new cinema." *Everything for Sale* is unquestionably a major turning point in his work. It takes up and critically re-examines two major aspects of his previous artistic achievement, both embodied in the figure of Wajda's familiar hero, Cybulski.

However we might now, after his death, evaluate Cybulski's over-all achievement as an actor, his symbolic role in Polish society's consciousness cannot be disregarded. As a symbol he fired our collective imagination with his tragic stray in *Ashes and Diamonds;* yet before long no one quite knew what to do with this symbol of the generation of patriotic young men who made a political error. Postwar youth delighted in his style, but showed no signs of imitating his mistaken political ardor. The great social myth turned out to be socially unfunctional: how could anyone imitate a hero whose heroic renunciation of personal goals no longer connected with a society devoted to catching up to western levels of consumption? The Cybulski figure became a pious myth; nobody questions it, but it no longer has any true devotees.

This situation also led to suspicions of mythomania, which found their most drastic expression in Konwicki's film *Salto*—in it Cybulski played a man supposedly hiding from his own

past, supposedly tormented by nightmarish recollections of the war, but in fact running away from his demanding wife and numerous progeny.

Cybulski's sudden accidental death was the starting point for *Everything for Sale,* whose story concerns the disappearance of a famous actor during the shooting of a film. (It is clear from many references that Cybulski is meant—though he is never actually seen. The director of the film resembles Wajda himself, and his wife is Wajda's actual wife; nor does this exhaust the many incidental connections within the film.) The situation gives Wajda the occasion for confronting legend with reality, but he is aware of the danger of facile, shallow "debunking"; the film is far more complex than that. Instead, Wajda is interested in collecting the gestures, impressions, and various incidental fragments of personality or image which the dead actor scattered among the living, and showing how these "crumbs" constitute an awkward gift, like some heirloom one is dearly attached to and yet can do nothing with. The dead actor's legend persists among the living characters as a challenge; attempts to meet it result only in buffoonish or ludicruous gestures. A young actor, dreaming of taking the place of the deceased, hunts through the scraps of his life for materials with which to recreate and then usurp a legend which has already fatally dissolved. The actor's wife pitifully tries to promote a legend of their ideal marriage, which all know to be false.

The discrediting of the legend is here realized much more subtly than in *Love at Twenty* and more profoundly than in *Salto,* where Konwicki indulged in mockery and derision. In *Everything for Sale* the focus shifts to the deceased actor's milieu—upon which his disappearance seems to throw a dazzling light. Among his colleagues, former girl-friends, and acquaintances the old heroic impulses have given way to personal, family, or erotic dramas. Nor does Wajda imply in the slightest degree that these are demeaning; on the contrary, it is the exaltation connected with the dead actor that seems anachronistic, and although the director figure goes through a crisis of conscience in deciding to finish his film,

EVERYTHING FOR SALE

he is not portrayed unsympathetically. It turns out, in fact, that the actor-symbol had been dead long before his actual death. And thus in a literal as well as semi-magical way Wajda manages to shift his point of view from identification with the actor to identification with his milieu. The symbolic transfer performed by Wajda in *Everything for Sale* resembles the operation which Mickiewicz performed in *Dziady (Forefathers' Eve)* by making his protagonist write on the cell wall: "Gustavus obiit—natus est Conradus." In Wajda's case, however, the metamorphosis is reversed: it is the romantic Conrad who dies, and Gustave who is born.

By contrast with Wajda's previous film, *Everything for Sale* introduces us into an entirely new world. Instead of experiences dictated by the great storms of history, we face those stemming from the variety of human character; instead of tensions arising from military conflicts they come from individual needs, poses, ambitions; instead of pathos there is irony. And finally, absolute conviction about the suggestive power of film as an art is replaced by doubts concerning the very nature of film.

This last point demands particularly careful consideration. Now for the first time Wajda examines formal problems which have preoccupied the world avant-garde for some years. I mean the question of authenticity of film as a document of reality, as well as the question of moral and intellectual justification for telling invented and often conventionalized stories

about nonexistent characters. Eisenstein was conscious of this problem in his early films; to cope with it Dziga-Vertov developed *Kino-Pravda* ("cinetruth"). As an antidote to the incredibility and fictitiousness of film, the Italian neorealists practiced almost documentary verism in their treatment of actors, locales, and plots. In the late fifties and early sixties, the *Nouvelle Vague* sought to resolve the problem through reliance on the introspective point of view—a technique largely borrowed from the contemporary novel. In his previous films, Wajda attempted to evade the discrepancy between the general character of his themes and the concreteness of his literary plots through the use of visual symbols and metaphors. But such symbolism has limited effectiveness and, moreover, fares ill in a visual medium with the peculiar objective quality of film.

The guiding formal idea of *Everything for Sale* is Wajda's own malicious destruction of his former stylization. The film consists of a series of pietistically constructed, pictorally beautiful images which again and again reveal their artificiality through ever so slight a shift in the point of view. Thus an attractive picture of a young man playing the violin in a snowy park soon proves false: the beautiful park is bordered by an ugly street, and the young man turns out to have staged the scene just for show. There is a magnificent cavalry charge, as in the best of historical reconstructions, yet at the same time we see the camera shooting the scene and we perceive all the fake details, as if in contrast to these beautiful artifacts. The film abounds in such images, always followed by an "exposure," as if the director wanted to demonstrate the ease of prearranging such scenes, and simultaneously to express his disapproval of their conventional vacuousness. In this way *Everything for Sale* becomes in a sense not only a film about film-making but it also expresses doubts whether film is at all possible.

In short, Wajda, like many other contemporary artists in cinematography as well as literature, faced the problem of self-conscious themes. These themes are both a seemingly indispensable stage of waking up to the peculiarity of one's own creation, and also a dangerous trap. Fellini is the most cautionary example: he immersed himself in the self-conscious form in *Eight and a Half*, but by remaining there (through the "medium" of his wife) in *Juliet of the Spirits* he managed to communicate nothing more than a mere registration of arbitrary associations.

Wajda's next film, *A Fly Hunt*, based on a screen play by Janusz Glowacki, answers some of the questions I have posed above. The hero is an unambitious, rather clumsy young man, burdened with a large family. By accident he meets a strong, aggressive girl who takes it upon herself to uproot him from his miasma and settle his life. The hero cannot resist her peremptory machinations, yet he has neither the strength nor ambition to be someone he is not. It is a comedy situation, but Wajda uses it not so much as a traditional story but as a philosophical tale of a world in which women play an increasingly bigger role, subordinating men to their goals and ambitions.

If in most Wajda films the starting point was an external situation or historical event within which the director showed human characters and behavior, now the characters realize themselves in situations which, though realistically shown, coud be changed without affecting the sense of the film as a whole. In *A Fly Hunt* Wajda is interested in the paradoxical, often psychologically novel situations which result from the headlong emancipation of women, accompanied as it is by widespread emasculation and weakening of man's position. But perceptions of this complex worldwide social and historical process

← *Wajda and cameraman Zygmunt Samosiuk.*

*Malgorzata Braunek in Wajda's* THE FLY HUNT.

could be realized through diverse cases. *A Fly Hunt* is organized like a traditional story, but with a fabular tone, as of episodes illustrating a presupposed principle.

If such construction is hardly novel, at least it enables Wajda to avoid the doubts that arise from naive film fictionalizing; in this style it is irrelevant whether the vicissitudes of the characters seem really real. What matters is the essential problem around which the film is woven, and if this proves credible even when we make the characters act in purposely exaggerated or fixed circumstances (maintaining of course some degree of believability) so much the better for the problem itself. Needless to add, such an assumption opens for Wajda, for the first time, possibilities of comedy. *A Fly Hunt* becomes a satirical comedy not only through the poignancy of its misogynism but also because of the director's facility in manipulating his protagonist's adventures. Wajda's ease in handling the story recalls Voltaire who, for calculated effect, placed Candide and Pangloss in most improbably prefabricated situations.

From this angle, too, the film attacks Wajda's problem of acceptable film form. He no longer attempts beautiful images, intended to suggest through their intensity some profound meaning. Film language now serves modestly to create a reality which is conventionalized enough to escape the demands of mimetic verisimilitude, while remaining sufficiently realistic and convincing to prevent an immersion in illusion. Wajda has noticed that the techniques introduced by the film avant-garde in the past decade—the new montage, techniques of manipulating the camera and focus, the ease of arranging scenes having the abstractness of modern painting, camera mobility combined with a penchant for the close-up—in short the entire language of the new cinema calls not for a challenge of the film as a fictional story but for subordinating the narration to an intellectual discipline which no longer needs to rely on plots that unfold step by step. If the traditional director assumed that only a few scenes truly mattered for him, whereas the rest of the film consisted of necessary explications and connections, the modern director can deal only with that which actually interests him—leaving out all the rest.

From this point of view the problem of "beautiful spectacle," always somewhat bothersome in Wajda's films, disappears or at least loses much of its significance. For here the picturesqueness or harsh brutality of imagery no longer relates in such a direct and univocal way to the subject matter; it is subsumed instead as part of the "handwriting" employed by the director—who may combine different elements of film reality according to his purposes.

Thus, in Wajda's new films, we witness the rare development of a director who attempts to escape—with great success—the magic circle of his own artistic achievements and the problems they inevitably raise.

ERNEST CALLENBACH

# Comparative Anatomy of Folk-Myth Films: Robin Hood and Antonio das Mortes

By an odd coincidence, the San Francisco Festival included two weirdly relevant films: Michael Curtiz's 1938 *Adventures of Robin Hood* (the Errol Flynn version) and Glauber Rocha's *Antonio das Mortes.* Both films are "mythic," having little concern with character in the particularist, realist sense we associate with novels or most modern cinema; they strive instead for epic sweep and symbolic impact. (*Antonio das Mortes,* which is practically operatic in parts, makes some of its points through singing and dance.) Both draw upon folk tradition for much of their resonance—though in the case of the Brazilian film we must rely upon hearsay evidence, since Brazilian culture is very alien to contemporary European or American sensibilities. Juxtaposing the two films may thus throw some light on how we react to folk-myth films, and on some of the distinctions that need to be made about them, both aesthetically and politically. And it may also lend a better perspective for viewing *Antonio das Mortes* than that of certain enthusiastic young American radicals; for it is at least possible that both films are fundamentally conservative, and constitute (like most folk art) diversions of thought and feeling from tender political questions.

*Robin Hood* now looks somewhat quaint stylistically, especially in its detailing: the costumes, the dialogue ("You speak treason! —"Aye, fluently!"), Errol Flynn's flashing teeth. It has a lush, full-orchestra score, and that characteristic Technicolor visual fulsomeness which now seems so overripe. Its photography and editing are straightforward, competent Hollywood craftsmanship; there is not a daring shot, and not an ineffective one, from one end to the other. The compression of the Robin Hood story, though naturally drastic, does violence chiefly in leaving out the real ending (psychologically perhaps the most intriguing part of the legend); the basic anatomy of the myth is kept intact.

Robin and his merrymen were the first—or at any rate the now best-remembered—guerrilla army. Based in the impenetrable wilds of Sherwood Forest, which was the English equivalent of Cuba's Sierra Maestra, they sallied forth on their "adventures" but could always rely upon the safety of the forest. They could also, in Che Guevara's phrase, hide among the people like fish in the sea. Indeed the film, which heavily emphasizes the race conflict between oppressed Saxons and domineering, corrupt Normans, emphasizes this far more than the story. Robin stole from the rich, and gave to the poor, but his political position was unambiguously monarchist. He was trying to save the Saxons from the oppression of King Richard's brother—who was freely taxing, enslaving, and torturing them—until Richard got back from his crusades. Curtiz takes pains to establish the Norman oppression concretely: Robin gives Marian a guided tour of a kind of Sherwood field hospital, where aged or broken Saxon peasants murmur thanks and devotion to Robin; and near the opening he includes scenes of torture, brutality, and confiscation of Saxon property.

The emotional center of *Robin Hood,* in both story and film, is in the devotion of Robin (who is a noble—Sir Robin of Lockesley) and his band to Richard, the true and reputedly just king. It is this which makes it possible for everyone to approve wholeheartedly of Robin's exploits: the people he robs are clearly vile wrongdoers, intent on usurping the crown for venal ends, and the people he kills are their defenders

*Glauber Rocha's* ANTONIO DAS MORTES

in arms. By this device both anti- and pro-authority feelings can be mobilized, alternately or even simultaneously. As Guy of Gisbourne or the hateful Bishop are humiliated by the skillful guerrilla tactics of Robin's men (who drop from the trees like a force of nature, and employ disguises with great boldness) we are thrilled to see the rich and powerful get their comeuppance. But of course it is all in the cause of Richard: in the interest of a higher law-and-order. In the story this duality is explicitly treated: when Richard returns and the aging Robin gives over his men, a strange sadness enters the tale—the jousting and good fellowship and the eventful life of the guerrillas must now give way to peace and tranquillity. But this is utterly absent from the film, where the ending has Richard slide off his disguise like a second-hand coat and give Marian to Robin in a grand Hollywoodian finale, everything forgotten in a blaze of Love.

We could indulge in a lengthy analysis of precisely how *Robin Hood* plays upon its viewers. Suffice it here to recall how skillfully it builds up the suspense of its "military" episodes, and to notice that the other emotional levers upon which it chiefly relies are: (1) the manly —or boyish—fellowship among the band, which is established by the knocking of each other's heads with quarterstaffs, and carried through with lively dancing and feasting (Robin's romancing of Marian never endangers this camaraderie); (2) Robin's dominance over the band, and their ties of mutual loyalty unto death—an unusual devotion for a noble, and a sign that Robin is also some kind of elder-brother figure; (3) Robin's attachment to Richard, and Richard's recognition of Robin's service—a clearly father-son relation; (4) the peoples need and the response of Robin and Richard to it. Reduced to its story-conference level, *Robin Hood* is about the son who fights the evil father (the false king) and is rewarded by the good father.

There are curious political essentials to such a story. For one thing, Robin has to be a noble

—a potential son to the king, and potential husband to the king's ward, Marian. If he was a peasant leader, intent upon confiscating and dividing land, hanging the nobility, and bringing in the republic (i.e., a Connecticut Yankee) there would be no story—or rather, it would be quite another story. It must also be granted that the rule of Richard (before his unaccountable crusading lunacy) was indeed benign: or, more precisely, that society is indeed a family, and that its welfare is secure only if it has a benign father. And it is essential that the Saxon people themselves figure only as extras, a sort of background pattern, rather than entering into the action directly in any powerful way; for, as we shall find too with *Antonio das Mortes*, the story must turn on personal and emotional factors, not external and political ones.

*Antonio das Mortes* is also a color film, but this time the quieter, subtler Eastmancolor. Technically it is polished, especially by comparison with Rocha's very-low-budget *Black God and White Devil* or his visually complex but erratic *Land in a Trance*. Rocha has mastered his lenses and his camera directions and his cutting, and *Antonio das Mortes* has visual coherence and drive. The story concerns a *jungaco* (a specialized hired gun who kills bandits), Antonio-of-the-Dead. He has a record of killing more than 100 *cangaceiros* in the back country of dry, poverty-ridden northeast Brazil. He had killed Limpião, who was supposedly the last, in 1938. Now he is asked to look into the possible reappearance of another; broodingly, he says he will do so, but not for pay. To understand his position and attitude (and why Rocha does not treat him as a villain) it is essential to know that in *Black God and White Devil* Antonio had massacred the followings of a messianic rebel and an outlaw leader—acting, evidently, as a kind of force of history; Rocha has said that just as imperialists are necessary to dig their own graves, so Antonio is necessary to bring about the revolution, or at least its spiritual pre-condition. But Antonio has now been retired for years, and looks like he's been thinking it over.

When he gets out to the *sertão*, it turns out there *is* indeed a new *cangaceiro*—or at any rate a man who goes by the name Coirana, wears a proper leather *cangaceiro* hat, has a following of poor peasants, makes a proud, challenging speech, and engages Antonio in a ritualistic duel. Coirana's sword gets badly bent and Antonio knocks it out of his hand, then stabs him. However, it is not like the old days for Antonio. The land-owner he has been hired to serve is old, blind, and heartless; his purple-gowned blonde wife is sleeping with the manager who hired Antonio and is thinking of stabbing the old man but can't; the local schoolteacher is a drunken bum (and a terrible billiard player, as a rather charming drunken scene establishes). Observing Coirana's followers, particularly a girl in white known as "the holy one," and a solitary black man in a red costume, Antonio begins to doubt his historical role; he asks for food to be distributed to the poor. A gang of less thoughtful hired killers is brought in to finish Antonio's work; the blonde stabs the manager; and the climax is a gun battle reminiscent of the ending of *The Wild Bunch*, from which Antonio and the "Professor" emerge triumphant and during which the black finishes off the land-owner with a lance from horseback.

Can we discern, as with *Robin Hood*, the essential lineaments of this tale? The matter is complicated by cultural barriers: Brazil is hopelessly underdeveloped, feudal, heavily Catholic, and with Indian influences also still vital. And Rocha's imagery tends to be formal and heavy; perhaps only Buñuel, and in a film with the general style of *L'Age d'Or*, could successfully manage a scene like the one in which the Professor and the girl roll around kissing on top of the dead *cangaceiro's* bloody corpse. Rocha has little interest in the fabric of personality, the patterns of what one might call character-in-action. He is a film-maker of the grand agonized moment, the gesture of despair. Above all, he is interested in *revenge*—but as a spectacular event more than as a psychological process. Hence there is a peculiar strain between the generally realistic photography of his films and their mystical, operatic structure. It is as if

Buñuel had remade *L'Age d'Or* in the style of *Belle de Jour.*

But what is really going on in *Antonio das Mortes,* and what is its psychological and political significance? We might, to begin, assign a series of tentative symbolic equivalences. The "Colonel," the local land-owner, is the feudal master; he is blind, rapacious, rather repulsive personally, but strong and determined—especially compared to his manager, Mattos, who represents the bourgeoisie. Mattos is intelligent, reasonably sensitive, but weak—he sleeps with the master's wife, yet cannot openly oppose him. The intelligentsia is symbolized by the Professor, who teaches children history by meaningless rote, drinks too much, is a terrible billiard player, and has a yen for the master's wife. Coirana, the *cangaceiro,* figures as the spiritual symbol of the oppressed; he can hardly be said to be their leader, since all they do in the film is dance and sing—Rocha gives them natural rhythm rather like that American movies used to give their "darkies," and films them against an immense natural stone amphitheater or in the theatrically arranged town square. And Antonio das Mortes? Well, he is employed by the rich to kill the rebellious "bandit" poor; and however sympathetically Rocha may treat him, this role amounts to that of the army—traditionally the open instrument of the ruling class in Latin America. One might search for equivalences with the American movie's frontier marshal; but the marshal works for the (usually ineffectually bourgeois) townspeople or for the federal authorities in Washington. Antonio is the armed servant of the rich.

If these equivalences are even approximately accurate, the film exemplifies ("dramatizes" would be an excessive term) what is in fact a crucial political phenomenon: the going-over of the army from the service of the oppressors to that of the oppressed.

Now we know that this process is a grave and central one in revolutionary history. The disintegration of the Tsarist army was a necessary precondition of the Russian revolution. Castro could not enter Habana until Batista's army had been demoralized. We also know that, in Vietnam, American policy has always been predicated upon the belief that most of the South Vietnamese army would, if left to itself, dissolve or go over to the Vietcong side. We know that the growing political agitation and disaffection among draftees in the American army itself is a source of deep alarm to the Pentagon and the governing and owning elite.

The question is not whether such events occur, but one of why they occur and what one's attitude is toward the causative process. I take it that armies in the real world do not switch their historical roles out of goodness of heart or by some metaphysical impulsion to virtue; and it would be a strange kind of "radical" analysis that would make the army the potential savior of society—especially a Latin American army. As Stalin remarked in his sinister way about the intelligentsia, the army "is not a class." It breaks apart or becomes unreliable only when its control by the governing elite has been seriously weakened. This weakening occurs on political, economic, and moral levels; it results in the realization by many soldiers that their interests are contradictory to those of their officers, that the customary operation of the army cannot and must not go on, and that alternatives are at least thinkable. We see no symbolic equivalents of this process in *Antonio das Mortes;* quite the contrary. Rocha is concerned to exemplify the army only at its moment of crisis; he is interested, so to speak, in the wave breaking, but not in the wave building up. This may be an interesting approach, but it is surely not a revolutionary one.

We must also look at some other symbolic aspects of the film. The crucial step in Antonio's disillusionment with his previous role in his regard for "the holy one," the sad-faced girl in white who accompanies Coirana and his people as a kind of saint. Rocha *does* dramatize the impact upon Antonio of her seriousness and devotion, and it is she who gives him back his gun to begin his new role; by contrast, Antonio's reaction to the people's suffering is slight indeed, and that suffering is referred to

verbally rather than shown. Dragon legends are said to underlie the tale, and doubtless it is appropriate that a dragon should be converted by a suffering maiden rather than by suffering peasants; but this again is hardly a radical viewpoint—it is a traditional and at least quasi-religious one. Antonio has known all along that the peasants were suffering, but it has been his nature and his vocation to shoot down their marauding representatives, the *cangaceiros*. What happens here is not a change in his understanding, but a spiritual conversion, whereby he becomes identified with "the holy one" rather than with his former employers.

Young American radicals who embrace *Antonio das Mortes* as a revolutionary film are thus, it seems to me, very wide of the mark; they are probably deceived chiefly by the ending, whose apocalyptic quality, like that of *If . . .*, has a strong despairing appeal. But this vision of "revolution" is Wagnerian, romantic, and philosophically idealist, and it will get us nowhere. I say this not particularly to oppose Rocha, who is a devoted and personable young director of some originality, and moreover responsible for much of the new élan and confidence of the Brazilian cinema, in the teeth of a repressive, U.S.-backed dictatorship. But his genre of what one might call vaguely political opera-film seems to occasion the same kind of misinterpretation that has been rife with the films of Visconti. And it is important, in this period when film conventions are indeed undergoing revolutionary developments (some fruitful and some barren), to try to be as accurate as possible in our discussions. Thus, when Visconti made *La Terra Trema*, it was not only (justly) praised for its neorealist use of non-actors and real locales, but also (wrongly) heralded as a radical political study of revolt—whereas in truth it was the story of a fisherman family's attempt to escape its poverty by purely petty-bourgeois devices, which would have predictably failed without the catastrophic storm Visconti brings in. When Visconti made *Rocco and His Brothers*, a quite interesting psychological melodrama about family relationships, it was seriously admired as a study of the social dislocations caused by urbanization—though everything in the story could have happened just the same if the family had never left Sicily. And when, in *The Leopard*, Visconti reduced a huge, slow, melancholy, monarchist novel to a vehicle for Burt Lancaster, it was said that he had portrayed the birth of modern Italy. Such things should not happen with Rocha.

What Rocha is really interested in, on the basis of his three films so far, is the emotional stasis that precedes revenge upon father-figures. He takes up his characters where they have been or are being tipped over the emotional brink of revenge, but haven't yet carried it out. Rocha's aim is to explore, in a rather static and allegorical yet fitfully powerful way, these moments of despair and tension and impending doom. Hence his bold—perhaps foolhardy—indulgence in a rather grand style that sometimes loses him the attention of a sophisticated audience; and hence his lack of interest in actual political processes. It is the business of revolutionaries to expropriate the expropriators—but nothing could be further from Rocha's sensibility. What brings him into contact with political themes is that these offer cases where the oppressive father-figure is about to be punished, and provide a more or less cogent framework for the awesomeness of this incipient action. His development has run steadily along that line. In *Black God and White Devil* the wronged peasant falls into a strange messianic cult, and then an outlaw band, which have enough rebel tendencies to warrant the repressive attention of Antonio das Mortes. In *Land in a Trance* the political hesitations and compromises of the bourgeois rebels leave the dreadful revolutionary possibilities clearly formulated, but unseized. Now at last, in *Antonio das Mortes*, the father-figure and his servants and soldiers are killed—but the act is initiated by a turn-coat hired gun, firing from the protection of a church balustrade. One might expect that in Rocha's next film we will observe the vengeance taken upon Antonio by the landlord's compeers; or he might turn to other sectors of society for a re-enactment of Antonio's conversion.

Artistically speaking, Rocha's sensibility has so far confined his myths to psychologically static yet unstable configurations: the evil father-figure may be killed, but there is no good father-figure waiting to take his place, and we can only expect the wheel of revenge to take yet another turn. The sacrifices of the children do not lead to a better life under just rule, as in *Robin Hood;* they are crushed or corrupted; their only satisfaction is in the violence itself. Politically speaking, this is a sensibility of despair, and from what one reads of Latin American politics, it is widespread. If the disorders of society were really diseases of the soul, then paroxysms of revenge might hold some hope of cure. It is even possible that films based on revenge motifs might be useful: *Potemkin,* in a sense, has a revenge plot. But the most one could argue for *Antonio das Mortes* is that, in raising the possibility of the army turning against the master, it might sensitize some viewers to the "feel" of revolutionary actions. What seems to me more probable is that, by formulating the antagonism between oppressors and oppressed in a symbolic and static way, rather than in a process-oriented material way, the film preserves and continues the malaise of Latin American political life. The way to demystify a feudal system is not to play elegant symbolic games, but to show concretely how the system works. Only truth is revolutionary, Gramsci tells us. Antonio is a false hope; his drama is beside the point.

It is portentously said of Antonio das Mortes that he prayed in ten churches, yet had no patron saint—at least until he found "the holy one." Maybe he should have tried Marx.

# Reviews

## MEDIUM COOL

**Script, photography, and direction: Haskell Wexler. Producer: Jerrold Wexler. Music: Mike Bloomfield, Mothers of Invention, Wild Man Fischer. Paramount.**

### Stay With Us, NBC . . .

In 1968, Haskell Wexler, one of Hollywood's most talented cameramen, told his interviewers from *Film Quarterly* (Spring issue, 1968) that he wanted to make a film which would be a "wedding" of features and *cinéma-vérité.* As he put it, "I have very strong opinions about us and the world and I don't know how in hell to put them all in one basket." Wexler's film experience had been broad, total, varied, ranging from neophyte productions *(A Half Century with Cotton, The Living City, Stakeout on Dope Street)* to slickly surfaced features like *Picnic, Whos Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, In the Heat of the Night, The Thomas Crown Affair.* His taste was even better, as in the interview he praised the independent *cinéma-vérité* documentaries, *Titicut Follies* and *Warrendale,* while dismissing *In the Heat of the Night* as fake sociology, "a film with little understanding of today's South." Wexler had worked with Joseph Strick on *The Savage Eye* (1960), contributing some of the most impressive shots to that uneven but powerful and little-appreciated precursor to more lauded Godard films, especially *Masculine-Feminine*—that is, a film form using "interviews" interwoven with superficially unrelated vignettes and a kind of love story, fictional, inexplicably tragic yet with an emotional logic which is resonant and pertinent. *The Savage Eye,* no success in general distribution, has been welcomed by university sociology departments (where I saw it screened) mostly for its portrait of Los Angeles faith healers. As I think of its visual impact and note that Haskell Wexler was also responsible for the only minute in *In the Heat of the Night* worth watching—the opening with the gum-chewing cop driving through the darkness of small-town America

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with his plastic Jesus on the dashboard, his transistor radio playing country music, and his eyes searching for a glimpse of the local exhibitionist—it's no surprise to me that given a financial opportunity and the powerful stimulus of American political and social chaos in the spring and summer of 1968, Haskell Wexler should have made his matchmaking dream come true.

He calls the wedding *Medium Cool.* And if the bride is a pretty love feature and the groom the slugging hand-held raw footage of casual death, political hypocrisy, riots, violent entertainment, race hatred, and the pervasive fear/hatred of America for its young, then the ministering spirit is the camera itself—the medium—cool and hypnotic, cool and detached, cool with a hint of the ice-house. The eye of the camera replaces the human eye if not the human "I," especially the eye of the ultra-cool medium, television, our cyclops in the electronic cave, worshipped by a black militant in *Medium Cool* as The Tube. "The tube is life!"—while the raw-footage bridegroom, the cameraman himself, identifies the ministering spirit as "the drainoff of emotion into scripted channels." Click goes the shutter, "gotcha picture" says the boy to the corpse; the young defenseless demonstrators at the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention, beaten, gassed, trampled, and ridden down by police and National Guard tanks, desperately call out, "Stay with us, NBC!" The tube is Life. It passes coolly by.

This is a film which adores the art of the camera and then looks deeply into the nature of that art as if trying to decide, is adoration safe? For beyond its social documentation of violence, *Medium Cool* struggles with traditional moral questions and with a subject basic to all art, the relationship between appearance and reality. We open on a deserted freeway. A car has crashed into the concrete pillar of a bridge and when a mobile unit of WHJP-TV arrives at the accident, the cameraman records the scene and the sound-man records the groans of the injured. Once their work is done, they report the accident and drive off. We are left to contemplate this professional employment of technology. Not a gesture of help. Not a sound of sympathy. Perhaps we weigh the reporters with values: how callous they are! how "inhuman"! as the credits come on over lush tracking footage of a motorcycle courier's entry into Chicago at dawn. But we are being hit with all the composition, color, manipulations of focus, contrast, speed, and light which we have been trained to recognize and admire as visual art. Aesthetic appreciation begins to balance moral evaluation —and why not? They are separate in modern sensibility. Only leftover crusaders still conjoin the good with the beautiful, the old Keats abstraction "Beauty is Truth" and vice versa, that old Platonic rag. But the separation can become facile, a platitude of conversation, which is precisely where we proceed—to cocktails and the dreariest kind of *cinéma-vérité,* as the zoom-in, zoom-out camera dutifully records people with troubled faces and the sound track brings us their inarticulate phrases. No wonder the professional camera and sound men of the opening scene stand aloof from the chatter. The problem sounds simple: determine the moral responsibility of a man with a camera at the scene of violence or tragedy. Example: the *Titanic* is sinking. Do you stand aside shooting the event for posterity? or jump in to save a drowning child? (Sample college freshman answer: Well, of course, everything is relative, so . . . ) Those with cocktail party experience and a critical eye for films may suspect Haskell Wexler is playing. Then The Mothers of Invention play. The Chicago National Guard plays riot control, half the guardsmen play demonstrators, the other half play annihilators, everybody sings "We Shall Overcome"—it's a pop hit—and problems? which problems? Or just, you know, cool it.

There are no simple answers but complicated relationships revealed as we go on with the visual dissection of visual art, as the camera reveals the camera art with indisputable authority. Now a master is hard at work and a few feet of *Medium Cool* is a four-year course in film-making and an encyclopedia of commentary and explanation.

We go with the cameraman and his nurse girlfriend to the roller derby, coming in for the girl's race which is usually grimmer, dirtier, bloodier, and phonier than the boy's race. But lo,

*Haskell Wexler directing* MEDIUM COOL.

the magic of expert editing. Here is the first master-lesson for anyone with a Moviola. Racing bodies in bright costume spin, glide, collide, soar, dip, fall, roll in a graceful ballet to a lilting childish tune which sings over and over "Merry-go, merry-go round," and at the moment we are fully bewitched by this beautiful vision of motion-go-round we are blasted into the screaming ugliness of on-location *real* sound: "Kill her! Kill her!" No editing, no slow-motion, stop-action, skillful intercutting, but a blow by blow close-up fixed-view record of the girl racers shoving, clawing, pushing, tripping—and two fall, tearing at each other, hair and eyes, until the blood comes and the crowd roars, and the nurse goes wild. Screams and curses are carried as the sound over the muted color and supple form of the last part of this brilliant sequence —the naked breasts of the cameraman and the nurse making love. Here the film lesson ends and a deeper, more meaningful and troubling statement begins. A curious scene follows. The nurse reads aloud an article on violence, about the subtle, all pervasive quality of violence in ordinary, daily behavior—say, of the nurse herself, who curses her lover—the cursing excites her. The lover enjoys the sexual "battle" which follows—but is almost destroyed by a different violence, which ends *Medium Cool* and which continues, today, offscreen in Chicago courtrooms.

We can discuss the aesthetics of the process: appearance *vs.* reality—the alchemy of art, turning brutality into beauty. We can discuss the process itself: appearance *vs.* reality—the alchemy of violence turning brutality into pleasure. Odd, but human, transmutations.

The chief law of the Image is that it must be more vivid, more impressive than any spontaneous experience.* For instance, add a liberal statement begins. A curious scene follows. The nurse reads aloud an article on violence, about the subtle, all-pervasive quality of violence in

*See Daniel Boorstin's brilliant book, *The Image, a Guide to Pseudo-Events in America.*

gloss of patriotism and righteousness to slaughter and call it "maintaining the peace." Or, in *Medium Cool,* loudly play "Happy Days are Here Again" as Democratic delegates wearing paper-hats parade national solidarity on a stick, while outside, in the park, police and National Guardsmen riot. This is not the play we have watched earlier although the toys are the same. No one is singing "We Shall Overcome." The young cry out to the high priests of the tube, and as the tear-gas spreads in a white cloud and the tanks roll closer another voice shouts, "Watch out, Haskell—it's *real!*" So much for aesthetics and discussions. The reality is that people can get badly hurt at the derby, through sex, and in Chicago, 1968, 1969, 1970.

The wedding proceeds. The bridegroom cameraman (Robert Forster) has a curious face, at times sensitive, at times crude. His nature too is mixed—callous to bodies in an auto wreck, exploitive of a sexy-nurse body, gentle as he combs a boy's hair, matter-of-face as he punches a sand-bag and explains to his young friend that the idea is to beat the other fellow's brains out. "Then you win." He doesn't consider violence a "modern" phenomenon; he knows better. He enjoys a good fight, especially in bed. Nor does he blast the system he works for until, after a sickening spring, tolling off the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the assassination of Martin Luther King, the muddy failure of Resurrection City, perhaps the last outpost of Negro optimism, bitter encounters with Black Power militants, he is pushed to accuse the system of a monstrous deception: "the drainoff of emotion into scripted channels." Illustrated hatred, and a pause for reflection. Grief for our murdered heroes, and a pause for silent prayer. The funeral timed to the directorial second; on cue a mighty chorus will sing, Hallelujah, and another pause to weep. No message from our sponsor. He too has paused. The cameraman loses his job—he no longer "fits"—but he stubbornly believes that reality will break through these controlled formulations of appearance. The audience is only medium cool, not cold, not dead—yet.

And we mustn't forget the bride. She has been waiting in lyric, fictional asides, softly colored, with pigeons cooing and boys making the best of summer in a Chicago slum, or in brief nostalgic flashbacks to nature and old-time religion—and an old-time Southern husband who teaches his son to shoot at a bottle of Jim Beam, talks of the superiority of men over women, and proves it by deserting his family. This bride comes to the slum by way of Appalachia. Soon her multiple fictions have merged with the grim documentation of 1968. Then we know love won't save her, not with that chill spirit at the altar. The woman from Appalachia and the cameraman search the war park for a lost boy. They only make it to a local news broadcast, sound preceding fury, she "dead on arrival," he "critically injured." Then we see the accident. On a deserted road a car is smashed against a tree and when a mobile unit of middle-class America arrives, a boy with a camera records the scene and the family drives off. Not a gesture of help. Not a sound of sympathy. No report beyond the sharp click of the shutter. Medium cool? Cooler. Getting cold.

But an ending that too nearly copies a beginning is not a serious flaw in a film that takes on the staggering job of considering itself, the art of the twentieth century, the art of technology, while at the same time staying a brilliant example of that art and making a compassionate and complex comment on a situation which almost defies analysis. Even the verbal genius of a Norman Mailer needed long fictional leaps over the events of 1968 to pin them into observable form. Such effort alone exhausts the possibility of satire. And meanwhile statistics line up, published in a foreign newspaper I recently saw under the title, "Disgrace." "There were almost 4,500,000 serious crimes in the United States last year . . . Robbery was up 30%, rape up 15%, murder, 13%, and aggravated assault, 11%. Total losses in property . . . exceeded $70 million." Given such figures it is small wonder that middle-class America snaps its Instamatic and drives off—how many shocks can an organism take? Perhaps we should praise the shutter that reduces reality to a manageable snapshot size and as we settle down with the

tube for the evening utter a word of thanks for its steady supply of novocaine. The windows are carefully locked. The burglar alarm is on. Insurance policy paid. Stay with me, NBC. Tell me—what is happening to law and order in the Chicago courtrooms now?

But Haskell Wexler is out there. His face with its drooping mustache is half-hidden behind the mechanical apparatus of his medium in the last picture of his brutal and beautiful wedding. He took us through the gamut of his craft, the slick and the sincere, the old and the new. Somehow the diverse elements transmuted into gold. Feature mixed with documentary which grew into *cinéma-vérité* and exploded into handheld agony during the Chicago demonstration. Music, songs of The Mothers, old tunes used for contrast, Mickey-Mouse complements, and especially the sound of the untrained American voice with its regional difference and racial accent helped fuse these elements. We could hardly tell the rehearsed performance from the off-cuff interview, the soft twang of West Virginia, the nasal self-satisfaction of a political matron: where did the act leave off and the act begin? Perhaps the clue is that last picture, half-man, half-camera, no technology worth a damn without humane control, even the demon tube subservient to a hand that breaks the connections and a voice that says, No.

—JUDITH SHATNOFF

## Haskell Wexler's Radical Education

Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* is important to the US film industry, because it is making more money than its recalcitrance would have suggested. It is relevant to film history because it breaks a number of political, sexual and thematic taboos, an iconoclasm it shares with a few other current box-office winners. And it pertains to film art because it almost succeeds. I don't like to sound trendy, but the financial breakthrough of *Medium Cool, Easy Rider,* and *Alice's Restaurant* may portend a small revolution in commercial film-making.

*Medium Cool* takes place in Chicago, during the spring and summer of 1968. It follows the actions of John Casellis, a television newsreel cameraman, as he photographs news events, becomes involved with a young Appalachian mother and her son, loses his job and then his life. As the film begins, John arrives on the scene of an automobile crash, takes pictures of the dying or dead victim and then calls the police. (This unconscious implication in the process of dying is alluded to in a similar sequence which ends the film.) We next find him at a newsmen's party, where each cameraman has his own complaints: "What I resent is the fact that, wherever I go, I get beat up." (A woman in a yellow dress is seen briefly in this scene.) A *Mondo Cane* style segment follows, describing the training of National Guardsmen for potential civil disorders. (They will be seen putting the training to use in Grant Park.) John meets a displaced West Virginia boy, whose father is either "at Vietnam" (he says) or "dead" (his mother says). He makes lust with a sexy nurse, chasing her around his apartment, which sports a poster of Belmondo in *Breathless* (an internal quote, since the Belmondo character idolized a Humphrey Bogart poster) and the infamous photo of the Saigon police chief shooting a suspected Viet Cong in the right temple. He interviews a Negro cab-driver, and is himself "interviewed" by a pride of black militants. He befriends the Appalachian woman and her son, who finally compares him with his father in a lovely sequence that shows the boy and his father walking through an endless field of daisies, the yellow sea suggesting both the warmth of the womb and the familiarity of feminity, for his mother often years yellow. When the boy sees John and his mother kissing, he runs away and she runs after him—smack into the police riot outside the Democratic National Convention. She finds John, and they ride away to their death.

*Medium Cool* is notable for its sexual frankness—isn't it? Actually, although the film features (flaunts!) a bedroom romp *au naturel,* the treatment manages to be both cavalier and coy, a tendency it shares with Dennis Hopper's and Peter Fonda's *Easy Rider.* The unfastening of the bosom barrier in the past few years has

changed the name of the game from peek-a-boob to watch-the-crotch—where else is there to go? This has led to an amusing gambit between directors, who feel the inclusion of some "full frontal nudity" is a political, nay, metaphysical statement, and film producers and their legal advisers, who have designated the pubic area as the Excluded Middle. This gavotte is amusing because most males in breast-fed-and-bred America probably find greater visual (not tactile) excitement in a beautiful poitrine rather than in the pudendum. Both *Medium Cool* and *Easy Rider* attempt to smash this particularly absurd DA's icon, but in the same nervous, cutesy-poo fashion in which Hollywood films of the early sixties lowered the decolletage. *Medium Cool* uses a peripatetic camera that swoops in and out of focus so abruptly that both amateur viewer and professional voyeur are left with a guilty, coitus-interruped headache. (Even this has been slightly abridged for the provinces.) *Easy Rider* relies on split-second montage to keep Peter Fonda's manhood from ever quite slipping into view. It's not necessary for performers to stand nude front-and-center for minutes on end; no one's asking for major studio beaver films. But since full frontal nudity will soon be here to stay (hopefully to cause less sensation thereafter), we can at least ask that directors approach the inevitable with a little more grace and a little less self-consciousness.

Though it's usually dangerous to search for autobiographical strands in the fabric of a work of art, *Medium Cool* nonetheless appears to be the professional story of Haskell Wexler, whole cloth. The protagonist is a documentary cameraman seduced in an important way by the medium that employs him. The suspicion persists that Wexler, having been lured from his natural-lighting documentaries (see the accompanying filmography) to the sickening Hershey-Kisses sweetness of *The Thomas Crown Affair,* wanted to bring it all back home in more ways than one when he returned to Chicago, the town where he'd gotten his start, to make *Medium Cool.* With ample dramatic justification, Wexler inserts a lot of documentary footage into the film: National Guard riot training (a bizarre episode, with half of the soldiers playing peace marchers, wearing wigs, delivering peace speeches written by HQ, and the other half playing soldiers who disperse the marchers with gas); a roller derby; an interview with a Doro Merande-like rich lady; an argument with black militants; a Gun Clinic; a discotheque scene; and the conclusion in the International Amphitheatre and at Grant Park. Some of the sequences suffer from the hasty generalizations and facile ironies of left-wing documentaries. The roller derby, for example, is a pretty stale metaphor for violence-as-American-spectator-sport, especially since he underlines it with the raucous, antitonal insistence of Wild Man Fischer, a former Los Angeles mental patient who recorded his maddening shouts for Frank Zappa. The percentage of people who get real kicks from the synthetic carnage of the roller derby is probably no larger than the group of sad salesmen and underachieving underwriters who patronize the sex grind houses, and smaller than the bear-baiting crowds of Shakespeare's era, or the connoisseurs of public executions in Doctor Johnson's time. The film's quasi-interviews are equally as condescending and captious—and as unnecessary. Wexler hardly needs the easy liberal laughs he gets from some of this documentary material, because other parts—especially a confrontation with some militants—are so strong.

A Negro cabbie (nice fellow, articulate, smooth bass voice) finds ten thousand dollars and turns it in, thus provoking hostilities from both a suspicious constabulary and his nationalist neighbors. John does a story on him, and visits him a few days later for a follow-up "human interest" piece, whereupon John is preached contradictory sermons on TV and the Oppressed. One brother calls white reporters "the exploiters. You ridicule and emasculate us" by pasteurizing the "Negroes" who appear on the entertainment shows, and then by patronizing the "blacks" who are seen rioting on the Cronkite program. Another militant sees TV as a source, maybe the only one, for personal and communal black power: a brother is nothing until he carries some appliance—probably a TV—down the street during an urban conflagration,

and his peers watch him with admiration "on the six, the ten *and* the twelve o'clock news." "The tube is life, man."

The group turns on John because they believe white reporters and photographers to be police and government plants. When he is later told that, indeed, "the station's been letting the cops and the FBI look through our footage" (a situation revealed last year and prominent again in the trial of the Chicago Eight), John explodes, like a cuckolded satyr. It is this information, and not the Grant Park police action, that effectively radicalizes him. What he does about it, other than to get himself fired, and subsequently hired by an independent news agency, is not clear. But by this time, *Medium Cool* itself has become unclear. This film has begun to unwind.

*Medium Cool* is so radical, for a commercial enterprise, that advocates may mistake it for a non-linear film. Though its plot-line is occasionally, shall we say, oblique (or interlinear), *Medium Cool* relies, at times desperately, on old-fashioned plot devices. Its East Coast cousin, Arthur Penn's *Alice's Restaurant,* also has enough plot strands to choke Henry Fielding, what with splintering marriages, relapsing junkies, expiring fathers, and vanishing ethoses. And *Easy Rider's* few moments of life are inspired by a hokey, Hollywoodian Southerner (broadly and charmingly played by Jack Nicholson) whom the script, in its oafish way, tries to make sympathetic by tying him in with the American Civil Liberties Union—gilt by association.

Through *Medium Cool* may be the least serious offender on this charge, the accumulated coincidences and contradictions establish a structure of artifice that almost destroys the impressive realism of the rest of the film. Some critics have suggested that Eileen, the mother who walks through the human debris of the convention trying to find her friend and her son, is sinfully irrelevant to the shame of the nation going on around her, and that her flimsy yellow dress seems even more patchwork and substanceless, like the film's form, when contrasted with the dull rust of demonstrators' blood. These critics have missed the point: it's the convention and riot footage that is irrelevant to the development of the film's characters. The radicalizing impetus on the photographer is his realization that he is a captive agent of the news media and, by extension, of the FBI, CIA, and CPD. The convention itself has no demonstrable effect either on him or on Eileen, who is, after all, only looking for her run-away son. Wexler betrays the film's realism more blatantly at the end, when John and Eileen have met and driven away into the sunset, only to die in a car collision. Wexler telegraphs the impact by having the car radio announce the crash before it occurs, and by then tracking back from the scene of the wreck to a man with a movie camera, recording, exploiting, or transcending it all . . . why, it's Haskell Wexler! Whether this is meant as a Pirandellian put-on or as a searing admission of the artist-photographer's complicity in the exploitative process of gathering information, it's difficult to repress a giggle or a groan. Wexler then turns the camera to us, and keeps grinding away; who's exploiting whom? (But the most radical image is yet to come. The credits crawl past and disappear — and that quintessent mountain of American industry appears. "This statement was presented in the public interest by

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A Gulf+Western Company."

Some of the awkwardness in these films can be traced to the absence of an experienced scriptwriter. Even if you don't hold to the minority tenet that the author of a film script is the *auteur* of the film, you can appreciate the relative freshness and unity of characterization that an old pro like Waldo Salt, whose first screen credit was *The Shopworn Angel* in 1938, brought to John Schlesinger's compelling and competent *Midnight Cowboy.* Granted, Salt had a head start with James Leo Herlihy's novel, a shrewd and winning modernization of the sure-fire lonesome-boy-and-his-maimed-puppy plot. And Salt can probably be accused of playing up, or down, to the audience by making Joe Buck and Ratso Rizzo so damned likeable in spite of themselves—whereas you really have to work to get to like the bike boys in *Easy Rider,* or the

New York neurotics in *Alice's Restaurant*, or even the relatively orthodox photographer in *Medium Cool*, let alone understand any of them. Peter Fonda does occasionally display the blandly pleasant semi-articulation that leads an outsider to conclude that the purpose of a California education is to breed TV announcers; but Dennis Hopper, when not enshrouded in sullen muteness, mumbles with Delphic disdain. The two not only don't verbalize, they give no hint, through gestures or camera angles or sound track, that they empathize. You can argue, I guess, that they've dropped out of the cannibalistic fascist society and so they *must* be nice guys and get along, but this isn't supported by anything in the film. Alice and Ray Brock, the false dramatic center of Penn's film, are easier to define, and to fault, because they verbalize—shout, that is—all over the place. Their ancestors can be found in half the Broadway dramas, and nearly all the New Yorky movies, of the past decade *(Shadows, An Affair of the Skin, Faces,* and more of the same in *Coming Apart).* While shouting has its dramatic function, its effect can be sculpted more persuasively if the volume is filled with coherent, cohesive dialogue—and this, *Alice's Restaurant* lacks.

*Medium Cool* was written by its director, who is a cinematographer. *Easy Rider* was written by its director and its producer, who are actors (with negligible help, bordering on interference, from Terry Southern). *Alice's Restaurant* was written by its director, who is a director (with the help of one Venable Herndon, about whom I know nothing except that he has no major script credits). While a strong case can be made for cinematographers and actors turning to direction, the indication of these three films, and of most of film history, is that cinematographers, actors and directors should not turn to scriptwriting—at least, not *these* cinematographers, actors and directors. We may be approaching a point in commercial movies where the audience will accept a film without a traditional plot, but it's doubtful whether they'll also be able to do without character and dialogue, two other items scenarists and scriptwriters are responsible for. The long-held prejudice against screenwriters, a reaction against the power they supposed held in the thirties, has been accelerated recently by the widespread acceptance of the *auteur* policy (or theory, if you like) and by the emphasis on visual style. These critical messages have gotten through to the directors . . . or rather, film-makers. The director is God, visual style is Om. Movie reviewers, who are writers themselves, don't seem to analyze plots anymore, so why bother with a script, much less a scriptwriter? Don't Godard and Fellini work from scribbled notes? (Well, no.) It might be well for the *auteurs* to realize that screenwriters contributed as much as anyone to the vitality and sophistication of the American talkie, and that to discard this foundation of sheer entertainment is to encourage the movie audience to take their fun where they can get it—on the Late Show. (A recent poll of *Life* subscribers revealed that the average reader goes to the movies three times a year.) Hopefully, the current crop of directors will understand why so many writers become top directors, and why so many top directors kept working with the same fine writers and rarely, if ever, wrote their own scripts. "In my opinion," said Orson Welles, no mean hyphenate himself, "the writer should have the first and last word in film-making, the only better alternative being the writer-director, but with the stress on the first word."

*Medium Cool's* dialogue often sounds clumsy, self-consciously ornate, or banal. Is this because it accurately represents "real" conversation, with its nervousness, awkward pauses, and scrambled syntax, and which our familiarity with Hollywood's sophisticated dialogue makes sound banal? Or is it simply that Wexler's dialogue *is* banal, not surprising since he's inexperienced at writing "real-sounding" conversation, or at eliciting it from his actors? The latter seems more likely. Further, although he deserves much credit for his strength in creating credible characters through his performance, Wexler's sense of plotting is slight. His film is a train of events, whose alternating units are streamlined coaches of realism and rickety freight cars of artifice. It's little wonder *Medium Cool* ends up a wreck.

It may be instructive to compare the film with the movie tradition it springs from, beside the obvious documentary strain. This is the newspaper reporter-photographer genre, from *Revolt of the Kinematograph Cameraman* (Ladeslas Starevich, Russia, 1912), through Hitchcock's light and black reporter comedies *(Foreign Correspondent* and *Rear Window),* to the recent, more querulous examples *(La Dolce Vita, Blow-Up).* But the liveliest finds come from the thirties, when the voracious demands of King Mike helped reporters-turned-writers turn scenarists, and these men produced an informal cycle that began with Lewis Milestone's adaptation of the Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur broadside *The Front Page,* included films like *Platinum Blonde, Five-Star Final, It Happened One Night* and *The Philadelphia Story,* and culminated, conveniently enough for our purposes, in the Howard Hawks-Charles Lederer remake of *The Front Page* called *His Girl Friday.* Hecht and MacArthur rose, or escaped, from the milieu they half-canonized and half-cauterized. Their cynicism, toward both City Hall and those who would fight it, might be confused with misanthropy if it weren't so cheerful, energetic—and compromising; for they were too much a part of the city not to love it a little or hate themselves a lot. The business, after all, was prostitution, so you might as well lean back and enjoy it.

The difference between Old Hollywood Hecht (who probably worked on more good films than *anybody* else in Babylon West) and New-Direction Wexler is that between the sarcastic professional and the idealistic ingenue. The reporters in *The Front Page* and *His Girl Friday* take it for granted that every aspect of life, themselves included, is completely corrupt, and the films' two idealists look more than a little foolish; you'll recall that the condemned man in both versions was considered a sympathetic, though psychotic, character because he'd shot a Negro policeman and was thus under pressure from the vile "race vote" to be hanged. (Cynicism amid despair pervaded the whole *Front Page* enterprise. Louis Wolheim, a film actor and director who had worked for Milestone in *Two Arabian Nights* and *All Quiet on the Western Front,* was ambitious to play the managing editor part in the Milestone version, according to a contemporary source, "and dieted to bring himself down to a suitable weight, losing twenty-five pounds in a few days. At this time he underwent an operation for cancer, and his weakened condition caused his death"! One can easily imagine this appalling story, told during the *Front Page* poker game, eliciting a cantata of wise cracks.)

*Medium Cool's* photographer, in the same racket in the same city thirty or forty years later (but in an entirely different world), reacts to similar corruption like a child who's just been told there's no Santa Claus. It's as if the genre was blessed with a lost idealism for part of one film, only to have it blackjacked away in the end.

This naivete is a little surprising, partly, of course, because John is a product of that Toddlin' Town that has hardly changed its image from the Gun City of "Scarface" Al Capone (the anti-hero of Howard Hawks's most violent film, also written by Ben Hecht). New York politics may be handled by J. Walter Thompson and William Bernbach, but in Chicago it's business as usual. Rather than trying to amend its muckraking, gangland reputation of old, the city seems to revel in it, as if Murder, Inc. were the Chamber of Commerce. A handout issued by the Chicago Police Department's Information Division in 1968 read: "Welcome to Chicago, the city of *The Front Page,* with an outstanding tradition of competitive journalism. Another tradition has been the excellent rapport between the Chicago police and working newsmen. You can be sure of our continued cooperation as you report to the nation about the 1968 Democratic Convention." Prescient irony to the side for the moment, the handout might have sprung from Sheriff Hartwell's own mimeograph machine. (Chicago has since become an obscenity beyond satire. When a judge exonerates three policemen for attacking two boys who had spoken to them in language Mayor Daley was seen to use on network TV; when Bobby Seale is sentenced to four years in jail for the use of lewd

phrases like "I demand my Constitutional rights," it's time to cap your poison pen, throw yourself on Dean Swift's grave, and weep.) Handouts, payoffs, punchups—the *Medium Cool* photographer is a knowing part of it.

His furious innocence is doubly surprising because he himself reeks of diaphanous violence. John is a flat-bellied, belligerent "ethnic" (Greek). When he talks, he grabs your arm; when he makes love, he runs a sheet-waving steeple-chase that barely conceals his arterial brutality. (Work hard, play hard, as Hef says.) He was CYO Welterweight Champ in '58, still displays the gold trophy as a relic, still works out. "Really," he explains as he socks the punching bag, "the object is to knock the other guy's brains out. And then you win." He's not only from Chicago; he's *of* Chicago, he practically *is* Chicago. Politically, he's hardly committed: he's as suspicious as the kids who holler "Hell No We Won't Go" (mass chanting, for whatever cause, always runs the Kierkegaardian risk of building up to "Four Legs Good, Two Legs Better') as he is of the Ladies' Artillery's weekly jamboree at the local pistol range. But, whatever his political thoughts, there's a more important *visceral* fascination with the danger that lurks behind a good news story. Watching the 525 lines that coalesce into a TV image, he whispers — half-Minuteman, half-junkie; half-De Sade, half-Masoch — "Jesus! I love to shoot film!" and tries to explain the aggressive sensuality of his calling: "Can you feel the violence?" If Hecht can be described, however fondly, as a whore, John can be said to suffer from a kind of photographic satyriasis: with him it's not a job, but an obsession. He has to be where the action is. And action means violence. These coordinates define a man who isn't easily shocked, let alone radicalized, so his conversion should be all the more convincing.

A year after "Chicago," *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker wrote about "The Day America Was Radicalized." Like many pundits from the great cultural ghettos of Manhattan, Cambridge, and Berkeley, Wicker was guilty of a hasty, if heartfelt, generalization. The millions of middle-aged, middle-class Americans who watched the Slaughter on Michigan Avenue on their TV's were shocked, but not by police brutality. They were shocked by those unruly, essentially unphotogenic anarchists who provoked Chicago's Finest—and it was TV that, all along, chose the unruly demonstrators as being somehow more "newsworthy" than the silent, clean-cut majority of protestors. True, families of four from Albany to San Diego had flirted with liberalism, if only as the unwanted but necessary baggage carried by the politicians who would save America from the adventurist policies of Lyndon Johnson. But they returned soon enough, and gratefully, to the apolitical—and thus conservative—fold that covers the country like an electric blanket. (Most people, after all, want to conserve what they have. Those who haven't, want to get something to conserve. Add to this doctrine the Puritan Work Ethic, mix with black civil and economic rights—"something for nothing"—and you've got a conservative backlash.) These Americans were hardly radicalized by a few evenings in front of the tube—evenings like most others. Only Tom Wicker, and a few other moderates shocked at the sight of fathers visiting their own sins on the heads of their sons and daughters, and the realization that Hubert Humphrey was actually too *liberal* for the country, were converted. Wicker wrote columns of radical, responsible outrage (erring only when he took his own high temperature and applied it to the entire body politic). The children of the Windy City and the Woodstock Swamp emerged with a pacific toughness that led to the Moratoriums. And Haskell Wexler made *Medium Cool*—a brave and portentous beginning. —RICHARD CORLISS

**Haskell Wexler Credits:**

*A Half Century with Cotton* (Haskell Wexler)
*The Living City* (Haskell Wexler)
*Picnic* (Joshua Logan) 1955, second unit
*Stakeout on Dope Street* (Irvin Kershner) 1958, cinematographer
*Five Bold Women* 1959, cinematographer
*The Savage Eye* (Ben Maddow, Joe Strick) 1960 cinematographer
*The Hoodlum Priest* (Irvin Kershner) 1961, cinematographer

*Angel Baby* (Paul Wendkos) 1961, cinematoggrapher.
*A Face in the Rain* (Irvin Kershner) 1963, cinemaphotographer
*America, America* (Elia Kazan) 1963, cinematographer
*The Best Man* (Franklin Schaffner) 1964, cinematographer
*The Bus* (Haskell Wexler) 1965
*The Loved One* (Tony Richardson) 1965, cinematographer
*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Mike Nichols) 1966, cinematographer
*In the Heat of the Night* (Norman Jewison) 1967, cinematographer
*The Thomas Crown Affair* (Norman Jewison) 1968, cinematographer
*Medium Cool* (Haskell Wexler) 1969

See also interview in *Film Quarterly,* Spring 1968.

## MA NUIT CHEZ MAUD

**Director: Eric Rohmer. Script: Eric Rohmer (No. 3 of his SIX MORAL TALES). Producers: Barbet Schroeder and Pierre Cottrell. Photography: Nestor Almendros. Editor: Cecile Decugis. Cast: Jean-Louis Trintignant, Francoise Fabian, Marie-Christine Barrault, Antoine Vitez.**

*Ma Nuit chez Maud* opens in a way calculated to dispel any erotic illusions that may have been suggested by the title: in the bleakness of an early morning before Christmas a young engineer (Jean-Louis Trintignant) drives to Mass from his home on a hill above the industrial town of Clermont-Ferrand. Not only does he go to church, he listens respectfully to the priest—and cinema audiences generally begin to titter uncertainly, wondering just how seriously they are supposed to take all this. Intellectual self-respect is momentarily restored, however, as Rohmer begins to cut between Jean-Louis and an attractive girl (Marie-Christine Barrault) in the congregation, and it seems likely that his attendance is caused less by religious fervor than by the more traditional and reassuring desire for an assignation. This impression is strengthened as he follows her out and trails her in his car as she cycles through the narrow streets of the town, while his voice on the sound track announces his intention of making her his wife.

The film quickly makes clear, however, that our first impression, unfashionable as it may be, is the correct one: Jean-Louis's religion is not a façade; he is a devout, practicing Catholic, looking for a devout, practicing Catholic wife. On Christmas Eve he meets Vidal, an old school-friend and a convinced Marxist, who persuades him to pay a visit with him to Maud (Françoise Fabian), a beautiful divorcee whom he intends as a test of the younger man's intellectual and sexual self-sufficiency. In a series of conversations in which humor, seriousness, and attempts to palliate seriousness with humor perfectly combine, Jean-Louis defends his faith against the other two, admitting his own weaknesses and vulnerability, but arguing the need for principles and distinctions against their worldly-wise *laissez-faire* attitude. Manoeuvered into spending the night alone with Maud, he refuses her frankly offered sexual invitation, with a mixture of touchiness and shame; the next morning he arranges a date with Françoise (the girl in the church). Despite this, he sees Maud again that same day, but after bad weather forces him to spend the night (equally chastely) in the student hostel where Françoise lives, he and Françoise move swiftly towards marriage. An epilogue shows a chance meeting between Jean-Louis, Françoise, and Maud some years later, in the course of which it becomes clear that an affair which Françoise had confessed to having with a married man before meeting Jean-Louis had been with Maud's former husband.

Most contemporary directors, dealing with a subject of this kind, would probably present the debates about religion, the unexpected sympathy for chastity, as symptoms of boredom, the reaction of people to whom even "do what you will" has turned sour and who are searching for some new kick. This may be true of Maud and Vidal, who respond to Jean-Louis's heart-searching with wry and slightly incredulous amusement, but Rohmer presents Jean-Louis and Françoise quite straight forwardly as people for whom principles are genuinely important and adultery and infidelity really matter. The film is all of a piece: characters, setting,

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and camera style constantly reinforce and interact with each other, yet within this apparent uniformity Rohmer creates effects of great subtlety and depth. Despite the fact that the film centers round the long conversation in Maud's apartment, filmed largely in long-held, almost static shots, and that this scene is paralleled, though more briefly, by the later dialogue in Françoise's room, it never loses visual interest. Rohmer controls the rhythm of the film perfectly, making the editing reflect all the facets of the debate—the flashes of intensity, the struggle for self-expression, the lapses into misunderstanding or confusion, the moments of slackness and tiredness. As the conversation develops we begin to see the characters from a variety of perspectives: Maud develops a respect for Jean-Louis's intellectual position which doesn't, however, prevent her from being amused and later contemptuous at his rejection of her, and this in turn gives way to a qualified renewal of the earlier tolerant liking. Jean-Louis's loneliness and self-doubt make him genuinely responsive to what Maud has to offer, and his attempts to combine an honest adherence to his own standards with an outward respect for the rules of the game which the other two are playing make him both ridiculous and pathetic as long as he is on Maud's territory; with Françoise, however, the same kind of behavior appears almost debonair. Rohmer shows great sensitivity to the ways in which behavior and even personality can shift according to situation or circumstance: Jean-Louis is one person with Vidal, another with Vidal and Maud, yet another with Maud alone, and different again with Françoise; each situation allows or forces a different facet to reveal itself. And behind each individual episode is the mingled austerity and joyfulness of the season, handled in such a way that the bleakness of the winter appears as a conditioning factor in the relationships.

Trintignant's performance complements the visual clarity of the film to perfection. His face takes on an expressiveness which reflects the various shifts from self-assured argument to alarm as he becomes aware of the test he is undergoing. He is by turns relaxed, nervous, puzzled, resigned, angry, as the nature of the situation, the implications of the others' behavior, subtly shift around him. Through his body and movements he conveys beautifully the tension between his desire to play along with Maud and Vidal on their own level and his fundamental anxiety, his consciousness of being a square outsider in their world. His hands are constantly intertwining nervously; he wraps himself tightly in a rug by a comically intricate process of turning himself and making the rug enfold him, then hops in to a chair safe from Maud's ravishments; later, prompted by a mixture of shame and a desire to risk temptation, he moves, still in his rug, to her bed and stretches himself out stiffly beside her. They both wake at dawn and move half-asleep into a mutual embrace before he recoils from her and then, in a scene which crystallizes the partly ridiculous yet fundamentally serious tone of the whole evening, apologetically and gallantly tries to redeem himself and is refused. Picking up Françoise in the street shortly afterwards he stands shivering in front of her, moving uneasily from one foot to the other, rubbing his hands to keep away the cold in a gesture which has an inadvertent air of intense self-satisfaction, and looking for all the world like an unfrocked priest with his turtleneck shirt showing palely above his black sweater. In Françoise's room he cradles a teapot between both hands and gently swirls water around inside it, then provocatively drops a minute pinch of tea inside. Banished to the adjoining bedroom he lies for a time with arms folded tightly around him, his turtleneck pulled up over his mouth; returning on an innocent hunt for matches he finds her propped up in bed, looking at him warily over her book.

Trintignant creates Jean-Louis as shy, withdrawn, literally wrapped up in himself. Maud (superbly played by Françoise Fabian as alternately cool and responsive, amusedly detached and genuinely involved) offers the kind of temptation he has consciously chosen to avoid and the encounter between them humanizes them both. Jean-Louis is forced to restate and

reassess his moral position; his new awareness of his own vulnerability (his readiness to lie to avoid embarrassment, his sexual fallibility) helps him to forgive Françoise unhesitatingly when she confesses her "sin" and even to renounce any possible excuse for future superiority over her by allowing her to believe that he too is "weak" and had slept with Maud. While Maud herself, like the audience, is brought to understand and at least respect an intellectual and moral position currently very much out of favor.

"To understand a work, one should not criticize intentions but instead discover its sense in the very forms it invents." Jean Hilar's words help to explain why *Ma Nuit chez Maud* should be so very much more than an arid and possibly outworn intellectual exercise. The structure of the film appears clear-cut, the images distinguish sharply between black and white, the rhythm is assured and self-confident, the settings are pared down so that they reinforce the argument rather than suggesting alternatives or variations of it. Yet within this framework people reveal themselves to be confused and hesitant, projects never work out in quite the way they were intended to, motives are mixed and muddled, and every act, however decisive and apparently self-sufficient, has its shadow. And over and above this is a final layer, in which the enclosures and limitations have their truth after all. The film moves through a series of clearly defined spaces—rooms, cars, streets, a church—within which each person has carved out his own personal space and within which the camera generally isolates him. In church the priest is rarely seen in relationship to his listeners: he is caught mainly in close-up, speaking into a void, while Jean-Louis and Françoise listen, each alone on the screen or focused sharply against a blurred group of fellow-worshippers. The same procedure holds true for the other scenes: Rohmer cuts between characters but seldom joins them. Jean-Louis's world is like that formed by the narrow streets of Clermont-Ferrand: ostensibly two-way, they allow effectively for movement in only one direction; to permit movement the other way, you have to abandon your own claims and pull aside. Two-way traffic is impossible, and this perhaps helps to account for the fact that one of the strongest impressions left by the ending of the film is a sense of lost opportunities. —GRAHAM PETRIE

*Françoise Fabian in* MA NUIT CHEZ MAUD.

## BLACK GOD AND WHITE DEVIL

**Written and directed by Glauber Rocha. Camera: Valdemar Lima. Allart International.**

Glauber Rocha's masterpiece, which will shortly be released in a drastically shortened version, is a challenge to our tired presumptions which we can ill afford to ignore. When compared to those trivial problems so often decorously buried under stunning camerawork, anything as affronting to a narrow definition of what constitutes art and what constitutes politics as Rocha's film has the liberating effect of an explosion; we either remain buried in the debris of our inanity or we piece ourselves back together from our preconceptions. A film which because of its extreme simplicity attains what it strives for: the film as epic, without any of the redundancies of well-tailored spectaculars; the landscape of a nation in the perpetuity of time's convulsions. Through the simplest and oldest narrative device, linking together a man's three encounters through an epic folk-ballad, Rocha has actualized a myth about Brazil and Atlantis, a cataclysm which recreates our perception by giving our eyes a new world.

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Rocha works with a well-established Brazilian tradition. *Black God and White Devil* is rooted in the Brazilian equivalent of a Western, a half-true half-fictionalized rendering of life on the Brazilian frontier. In the novel the tradition dates back to the turn of the century when Eclides da Cunha's *Os Sertoes,* a semidocumentary account of the frontier revolt of a messianic cult, was first published. The first Brazilian film to have attained any widespread acclaim, *O Cangaceiro,* simply transposed the Western's plot and technique into a Brazilian backlands environment. Rocha has tried to return to the native roots of the tradition. His script is based on the popular ballads sung in the streets of Bahia, including several which have to do with the relatively recent elimination (in 1939) of the last frontier outlaws. He uses popular tradition and myth as elements in a compelling and lucid inquiry into the social dynamics of contemporary Brazil. And he has deliberately chosen not to reduce the ballad tradition to the level of a good fast-paced story.

A realistic prologue in which the hero Manuel, a backwoodsman, murders a wealthy rancher in an argument over a steer develops into two archtypal encounters which, taken together constitute Manuel's attempt to ascend into identity. After the murder Manuel attempts to purge a guilt he can neither comprehend nor dismiss by devoting himself to Sebastão, black leader of a messianic cult. As a gesture of his total commitment, Manuel offers Sebastão his child as a human sacrifice only to see the Black God (Sebastão) murdered by his (Manuel's) outraged wife. But then other forces are at work, for Sebastão has given the frontier poor a form of self-possession which can eventually only lead to an open revolt against established religious and secular authority.

And so at this point, to pre-empt a revolt, Antonio das Mortes, hired gun, one of History's furies armed with a Winchester and the reflexes of a trained predator, singlehandedly massacres Sebastão's followers. As the bodies pile up on the long stairway leading up Sebastão's Monte Santo, the sequence is handled formally and expressionistically. Yet somehow, it is not as contrived as the Odessa steps massacre. The cross-cutting, a simple juxtaposition between Antonio and his victims, becomes a clash between two rival forms of redemption. The sequence becomes an evocation of the repression every backwoodsmen's revolt has met with as well as a reference to the actual massacre in 1890 of Antonio Conselheiro's followers.

Manuel, now an outcast, proceeds to the next stage of revolt. He joins Corisco's band of outlaws. But then Antonio das Mortes must stalk and destroy Corisco. And little by little as he stalks the band, Antonio's sober awareness that he must play out his role as agent of repression if there ever is to be a productive revolt, gives him a dimension which makes him more than just another mercenary. Antonio das Mortes becomes agent and conscience, Grand Inquisitor, history as the mysticism of action. (The motto on Brazil's flag: "Order and then progress.")

Orthon Bastos as Corisco gives a performance which compares with Mifune's best. Caged, exalted animal, rippling with energy, trapped White Devil with a voice like a sandstorm.

Having escaped again Manuel is left with the apocalyptic vision that one day the *sertão* will be the sea and the sea the *sertão,* the revolutionary eruption of a continent or an annihilating paradox.

Threading his way through each episode, linking them together, commenting, clarifying, intervening, drawing the moral like a street singer in Bahia, a blind singer sings the ballad of Sebastão, Corisco, Antonio das Mortes, giving each of them a dimension which has roots in Brazil's history.

The landscape is filmed as if the *sertão* were a huge bronze mirror on which the sun had shattered itself, as if time were beginning; a horizon which strains to escape the bounds of each frame, a hieratic formality of composition which functions like a reiterative epic formula. Rocha is not concerned with the continuity of his story as much as he is with giving visual form to an idea. A montage of jump-cuts highlighting the most crucial and violent aspects gives the film the quality of a fragmented hal-

lucination. Through rapid zooms, Rocha fractures his frequent slowpaced long shots into ragged shards of detail. The film is elaborated into a series of explosive bursts, each of which only leads to another series—a supple depiction of Manuel's itinerary. For Manuel has not yet realized the futility of a revolt which cannot be successful until it is conscious, until it has developed a tactic, until it has a goal, until it is more than a reflex.

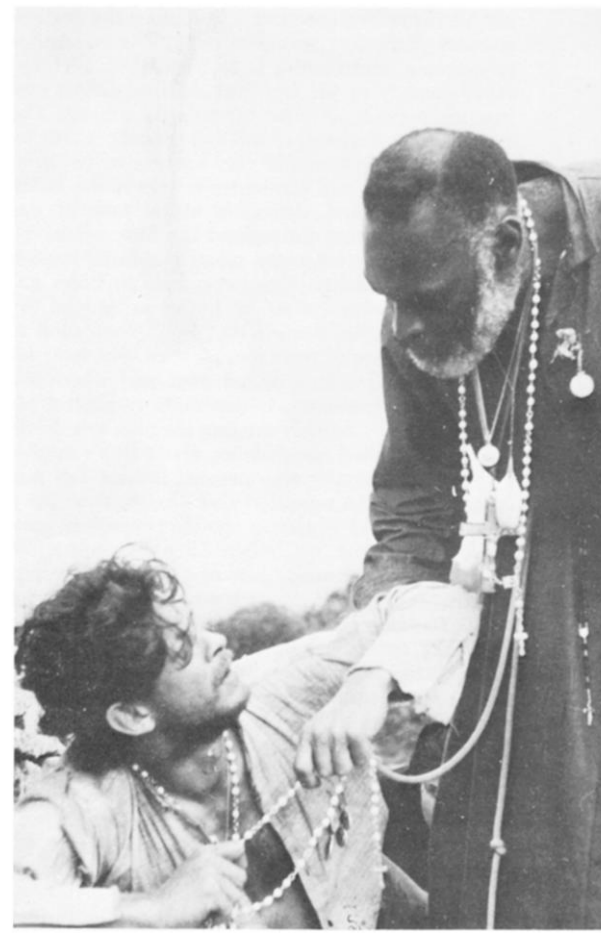
Rocha starts from where Eisenstein stopped in his Mexican film—a montage which distends our sense of time and space, figure-shadows of contorted screams with the *sertão's* silence gnarled around them; he creates a formal cinema which is not anemic. He is not after the exotic, the picturesque, or the clever. He does not reduce myth to beautiful composition, strange angles, and contrived symbols. He doesn't tamper with the landscape, he doesn't use it as a symbolic backdrop. For him the mythical consists in giving the ordinary a terrifying presence. He starts at a point where simplicity becomes audacity and vision replaces detail.

For his troubles Rocha has spent time in prison and had his political rights rescinded.

I cannot think of any film which comes closer to a dialectical analysis of a society, any film which is as complete a description of those wretched of the earth who scratch at the surface of each day. Fanon in images. No despair here; violence because it is as much a gesture of the mind as a poem, a means of expression for those who have no words.

In our intellectual ghetto (live in a suburb, work on a campus), one of the most thoroughly alienated minorities anywhere, so articulate we do not really speak to anyone not as hip as we are, the only thing which reminds us of our situation seems to be a cop beating us over our heads. If unlike Rocha we cannot even attempt to strip bare the dynamics of a situation and provide a framework of interpretation which is accessible but not petty, then even if our hands are clean our only "talent" consists in our ability to rationalize our way out of what we have tacitly become—fascists.

Rocha's attempt to recreate Brazil's present through an evocation of legendary figures operates at levels he could not have attained had he been satisfied with his neorealistic technique. The technique is all there: location shooting, handheld camera, direct sound recording, amateur actors. But Rocha doesn't place his film within a specific realistic setting just so he can create meaning through the ironies of articulated plot (*Bicycle Thief*). He gives us a fresher sense of human relationships by paring the present into the bones of the past. By playing one level off against another we not only see Manuel's situation, but how given his situation his present options are limited to the same ones that prevailed in the past. The dangers of tell-



BLACK GOD AND WHITE DEVIL →

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# Short Notices

**Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice** is a genuinely intelligent American comedy which, in a series of almost revue-like encounters, examines the permissiveness of the new sexual morality. The variations-on-a-theme construction is as unusual in a Hollywood comedy as the fact that the film defines and sustains a point of view towards its subject. The ironic tone is declared in the first episode, a visit by Bob and Carol, a couple very anxious to be up to date, to a week-end encounter session in the country. The detached, delicately satiric tone of this prologue is present throughout the film, whose exploration of contemporary moral standards focuses on marital infidelity. Carol responds to Bob's announcement of his affair by trying to be cool, by trying to convince herself that Bob's confession to her is a measure of their mutual trust. She later reacts by having a fling of her own, and when Bob drops in unexpectedly, he attempts to control his true feelings by blithely inviting the man to a drink. Carol's attempted nonchalance about Bob's infidelity upsets their very conventional friends Ted and Alice. Alice is so unsettled that she starts to see a psychiatrist, Ted works up enough courage to have fun on a business trip. When Alice finds out about Ted, she wants to prove her own liberation by desperately suggesting wife-swapping. The two couples try exchanging partners, but they don't get far before they freeze. Many critics have attacked their retraction as a cop-out ending, when in fact, it is the only ending conceivable if the film is to remain consistent with its ironic point of view towards both its subject and characters. All four characters are basically conventional, suburban, middle-class, and rather puritanical; the entire film insists on their conventionality and much of the comedy derives from our awareness of this, and to have them behave differently in the end would only undermine all that has gone before. They are people trying to adopt a life style for which they are not prepared, and in the attempted wife-swapping orgy, each has a moment of self-realization in which the masks are dropped: the game has ended, and they are all relieved. It is a very wise and even moving conclusion. Under Paul Mazurky's direction, the actors work for a wry, underplayed, improvisational style. The intent is to avoid any sense of acting at all, and except for Natalie Wood's strained performance, the results are appealing.—FOSTER HIRSCH

**Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid,** which is about two affable bandits and their gorgeous moll, is a playful, effervescent Western that has been tailored to the tastes of the Pepsi generation. Chic touches are everywhere: a jazzy score by Burt Bacharach; a slow-motion slaughter like the one in *Bonnie and Clyde* (it may become a staple in action films); a breezily romantic bike ride through the woods with the accent on pretty colors, flowers, and cooing; a stopover in turn-of-the-century New York that is entirely recounted with touched-up stills. William Goldman's script concentrates on quips rather than motivations, so the characters are lovable, but rather shallow. Butch (Paul Newman) and Sundance (Robert Redford) are everything audiences love—witty, cocky, tough, handsome, and smashing successes in their line of work. So skilled are they in robbing trains, that the railway hires several gunslingers to wipe them out. We never see their pursuers close up, but they are a constant threat (director George Roy Hill practically hits us over the head with them); they are a ponderous symbol of progress closing in to snuff out the desperado's way of life. With these fanatics on their trail, the outlaws panic and flee to, of all places, Bolivia. After a series of hilarious hold-ups, they try to throw the posse off the track by going straight. The girl, played by uncommonly beautiful Katharine Ross, is shipped home when she tires of being on the run. The reformation, of course, is a flop and they are eventually bushwhacked by a horde of Bolivian cops. Hill plays almost every scene for laughs, and on several occasions his light touch runs amuck. He has us snickering at violence, like we do at cartoons or at those brawling, bloodless John Wayne Westerns where people clobber each other just for fun. We laugh when Butch and Sundance are battered by a dynamite blast and when Butch audaciously kicks an adversary in the groin. As

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—Dennis Hunt

**Paris n' existe pas.** There is something cloyingly fashionable about Robert Benayoun's *Paris Doesn't Exist,* which had its first American showing recently at the San Francisco Film Festival. Perhaps it is a matter of its subject, which is Time, or its techniques—pixillation, painting directly on film, black-and-white footage in a color film, sepia toning of newsreel footage, etc.—which have become the tiresome stock in trade of every young cineaste. In this first film Benayoun, a card-carrying surrealist and the editor of *Positif,* demonstrates that technical agility is sometimes a stultifying rather than a liberating force. *Paris Doesn't Exist* describes the situation of Simon Devereux, a young but rather old-fashioned artist suffering from a crisis of inspiration, during which he discovers he can recreate the past in his mind, consequently alienating him from the present. The crux of the film is Simon's extended exploration of the past and its contrast with his present. Simon's present includes an attractive, delicately featured mistress, a fashionable Paris apartment done in basic orange, blue, and white, and a well-intentioned, if slightly insensitive friend. In contradistinction to this modish present, his past primarily consists of several rooms decorated in art nouveau style, a pretty lady whose relationship to him is never made quite clear, and a progressively expanded picture of Paris some forty years ago done in old newsreel clips. The most tempting, perhaps the easiest explanation of Simon's psychic experience is that it's a kind of insanity induced by his inability to paint. But judging from the final scenes, in which we glimpse the pretty lady walking across a street in contemporary Paris and we see Simon and his mistress in a photograph meant to demonstrate their journey into the past, it is amply clear Benayoun has intended a metaphysical mystery, not a psychoanalytical drama. Indeed, at one point Simon professes: "Paris doesn't exist, we ourselves exist . . . we are immutable, eternal."

But we aren't convinced, largely because Benayoun allows himself to be ensnared by the mechanics of film-making. His cinematic devices never resonate beyond themselves. They are tricks and nothing more. In his contrast of past and present, mainly a difference of rooms, he seems far more interested in decor than in creating a believable present or a mysterious past. The end result is an academic exercise in surreality.

—Lawrence Loewinger

**Take the Money and Run** is Woody Allen's first film as a director, after having written the original screenplays for *What's New Pussycat?,* a frivolous spectacle directed by Clive Donner in which Allen appeared as co-star, and *What's Up Tiger Lily?,* a rare commercial experiment in which Allen silenced a gaudy Japanese spy thriller, then dubbed in a gag sound track recorded by himself and a group of actors. (Allen told me in 1968 that he learned nothing from Donner: "*Pussycat* was butchered; they only got 50% of the laughs they should have." "*What's Up Tiger Lily* came out so bad that we sued the producer. I thought it would make a good short . . . ") *Take the Money and Run,* written by Allen and Mickey Rose, is a festival of the diminutive comic's peculiar and prolific wit, a meld of ruthless satire, surrealism, and blatant absurdity. The film, done in mock newsreel-biographical style, recounts the life of Virgil Starkwell (Allen), a maladroit petty criminal and occasional convict. Bungling burglaries, hold-ups, and prison breaks are intercut with deadpan interviews with Virgil's parents, his cello teacher, his warden, a psychiatrist, his wife (Janet Margolin) and so on. The episodic nature of the movie is intrinsic and entirely suited to Allen's rapid-fire humor; the sight gags are numerous, unself-conscious, and are never allowed to perform as mere specula of the spoken jokes—an index of Allen's talent and promise as a director of comedy. Indeed, many of the most memorable scenes are purely visual (the escaped chain gang, the shirt-folding machine, Woody's parents, the conversing ventriloquists, the car in the house). The prevailing prison atmosphere in *Take the Money and Run* is effective, although a bit too benign and glossy. Allen's performance is laconic and sprightly, and his caricatures of the biographical interviewees are uniformly appropriate; however, Janet Margolin as his wife often plays her tentative role with untoward stiffness. Allen's comedy style, which is situational and considerably more sarcastic than slapstick, is a reflection of his favorite comedy films, "*Seduced and Abandoned,* and all of the Marx Brothers," and his highly regarded and influential stand-up colleague Mort Sahl. Allen, with his successful directorial debut, is now responsible for three of the

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**Take the Money and Run** is Woody Allen's first film as a director, after having written the original screenplays for *What's New Pussycat?,* a frivolous spectacle directed by Clive Donner in which Allen appeared as co-star, and *What's Up Tiger Lily?,* a rare commercial experiment in which Allen silenced a gaudy Japanese spy thriller, then dubbed in a gag sound track recorded by himself and a group of actors. (Allen told me in 1968 that he learned nothing from Donner: "*Pussycat* was butchered; they only got 50% of the laughs they should have." "*What's Up Tiger Lily* came out so bad that we sued the producer. I thought it would make a good short . . . ") *Take the Money and Run,* written by Allen and Mickey Rose, is a festival of the diminutive comic's peculiar and prolific wit, a meld of ruthless satire, surrealism, and blatant absurdity. The film, done in mock newsreel-biographical style, recounts the life of Virgil Starkwell (Allen), a maladroit petty criminal and occasional convict. Bungling burglaries, hold-ups, and prison breaks are intercut with deadpan interviews with Virgil's parents, his cello teacher, his warden, a psychiatrist, his wife (Janet Margolin) and so on. The episodic nature of the movie is intrinsic and entirely suited to Allen's rapid-fire humor; the sight gags are numerous, unself-conscious, and are never allowed to perform as mere specula of the spoken jokes—an index of Allen's talent and promise as a director of comedy. Indeed, many of the most memorable scenes are purely visual (the escaped chain gang, the shirt-folding machine, Woody's parents, the conversing ventriloquists, the car in the house). The prevailing prison atmosphere in *Take the Money and Run* is effective, although a bit too benign and glossy. Allen's performance is laconic and sprightly, and his caricatures of the biographical interviewees are uniformly appropriate; however, Janet Margolin as his wife often plays her tentative role with untoward stiffness. Allen's comedy style, which is situational and considerably more sarcastic than slapstick, is a reflection of his favorite comedy films, "*Seduced and Abandoned,* and all of the Marx Brothers," and his highly regarded and influential stand-up colleague Mort Sahl. Allen, with his successful directorial debut, is now responsible for three of the

best modern comedy movies. As his filmography expands and his acting skills develop, it is altogether possible that Woody Allen will become the funniest filmmaker alive. —MICHAEL SHEDLIN

**A Time for Dying,** Budd Boetticher's first Western since *Comanche Station* nine years ago, is an attempt to reverse the heroic image built up over a period of seven remarkable Randolph Scott vehicles. It is nearly destroyed through a stroke of incredible bad luck in the casting of the lead role, a problem that reportedly could not be resolved due to a commitment to the same kind of 17-day shooting schedule used with unarguable success in the Scott films. Richard Lapp's anti-hero must constitute a film landmark as the most singularly unattractive, impossible-to-identify-with screen lead character in recent movie-going memory. Yet, Boetticher seems to have been irretrievably stuck with him, and so, unfortunately, are we. This fatal flaw aside, Boetticher's script, an original written as a joke when he was surviving on tortillas in Mexico, has some things to say about moral commitment and survival of the fittest that seem astonishingly dated, yet for that very reason touching and thereby emotionally involving, in this day of overabundance of X-ratings and cataclysmic screen outpourings of gore. Boetticher never gives his hero a chance. When Lapp leaps on his horse to rescue the heroine from a mob at the film's beginning, the loose saddle flips him off. Undaunted, the lad mounts the horse again, this time bareback with the saddle *underneath,* and gallops to the rescue. And, at the end, when comes the inevitable showdown in the superbly lit street (photographed by Lucien Ballard, who reportedly took half his normal salary to work with Boetticher again), the outlaw villain Billy Pimple (the very name conjuring up echos of the Billy Bobs of *Ride Lonesome* and *The Tall T*), cleanly outdraws the sweat-palmed hero whom he shoots first in both shoulders, then as an after thought rides down and kills at close range with his rifle. Boetticher's point, as he put it at a private 16mm screening of his own print in Hollywood, is that even self-appointed heroes can fuck up and get themselves killed. It's hardly an original thought and, though one hesitates to berate the host after his own screening, I wonder if Randolph Scott, were the central role rewritten to accommodate an older man, would accept so loosely written a script? Nine tough years in Mexico would seem to have wreaked their vengeance on the director many British and French film writers tend to compare with Ford and Hawks. While still able to conjure up colorful supporting characters like the Judge Roy Bean raucously hammed by Victor Jory in the present flick, Boetticher's sense of focus, rarely astray in his long years of working with Burt Kennedy and Harry Joe Brown, is sufficiently askew in this independently released production for Audie Murphy's new Fipco company to question whether an American B-Western director with a largely foreign-born reputation should attempt to live off it. In Boetticher's case, judging at least from the present effort, the answer would appear sadly obvious. Unless, of course, the script that Boetticher himself calls a joke is on us. In which case there's a tortilla-bred strain of black humor in him yet to be harvested, and the best may be yet to come.—DAN BATES

**Z,** by Costa Gavras, is what Hollywood once would have called a "blockbuster." It's got an all-star, largely French cast, including Yves Montand, Irene Pappas, Jean-Louis Trintignant, Charles Denner, and Jacques Perrin. It was photographed by Raoul Coutard, a star in his own right, and it's got the requisite number of filmic tricks—cut-in memory flashback sequences, jump cuts and extreme close-ups. Yet with all its contemporaneity, Z is really an old-fashioned melodrama. The story, based on a series of actual incidents, is simple enough. It concerns the efforts of a liberal Greek politician to speak in public, his subsequent death and the tortuous governmental investigation that follows which reveals, what we know all along, that he was assassinated. Though *Z's* pace is hectic, its cutting quick and its fine camera work is consistently agitated, it begins to drag after awhile. I think this is partly because it is too long but also because the film's dramatic climax—the death of the politician—comes too soon. The rest is anti-climactic. Too, Z tends toward a Manichean simplicity. Its heroes are cardboard saints, resulting in a series of wooden performances, and its villains, who interestingly enough have greater dramatic substance, are little more than caricatures. In America Z is already being received as a revolutionary movie. Why I don't know, because in its celebration of parliamentary democracy Z quite consciously takes an optimistic liberal position, one which the film itself shows is betrayed by events. In the bulk of the film Costa-Gavras seems to want to say there is justice, even in Greece, but history, in the form of the present reactionary regime, tells us differently. Thus in a pessimistic coda to the film we learn that most of the justice meted out by the dedicated prosecution was subsequently nullified, and he himself went to jail.—LAWRENCE LOEWINGER

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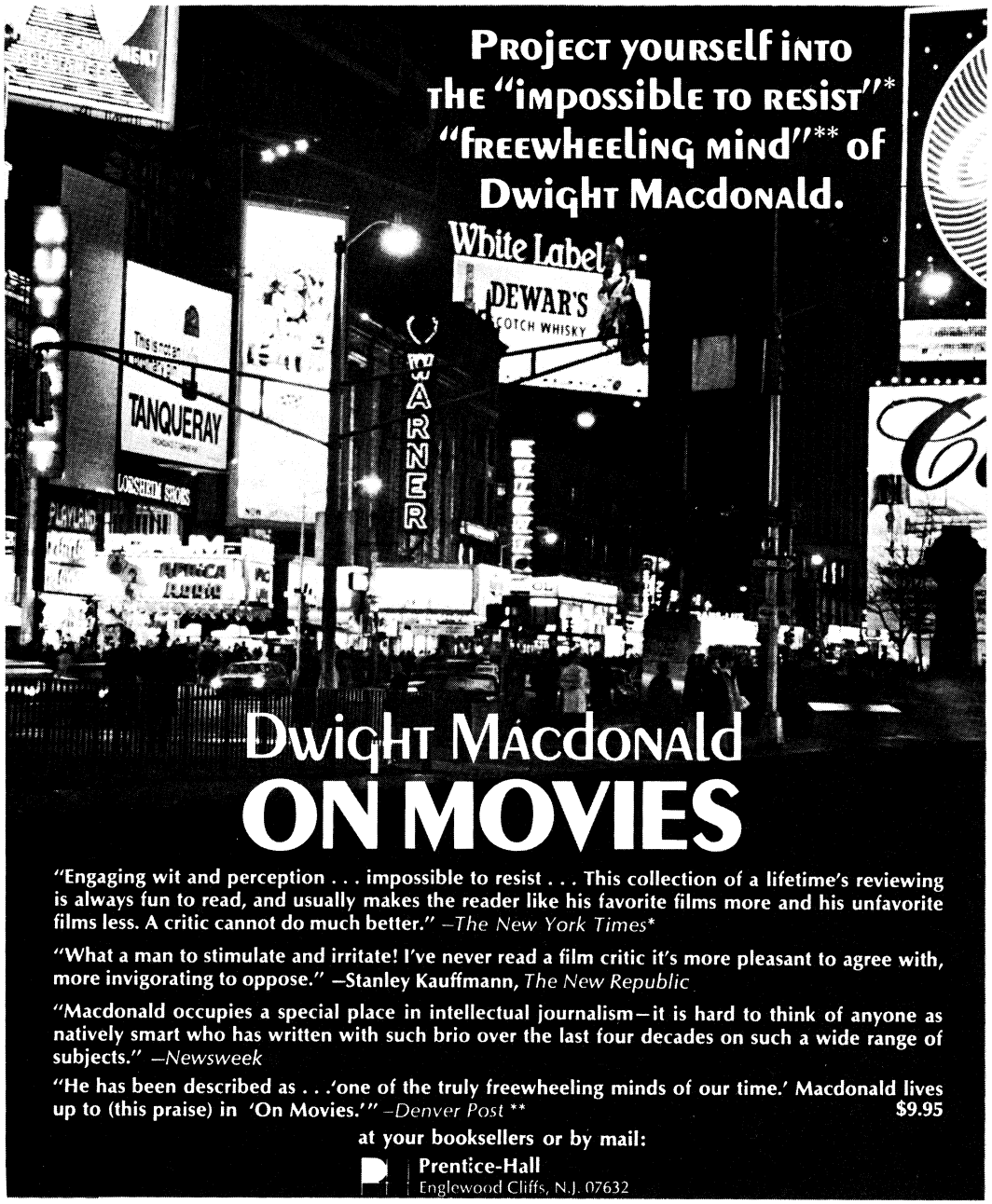


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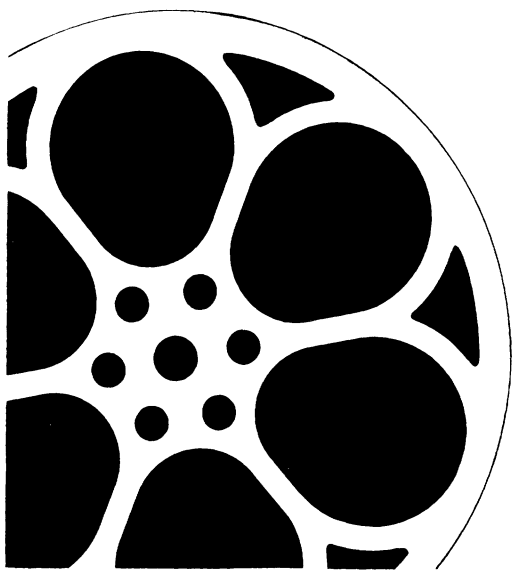

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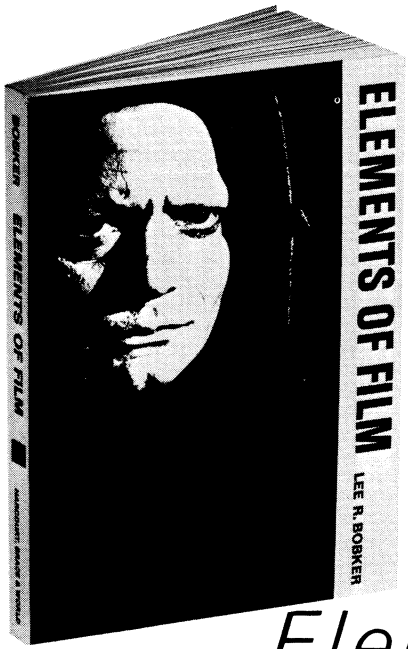


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