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Arts in Society

Film: New Challenge
and New Possibility

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Arts in Society

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Arts in Society is dedicated to the augmenting of the arts in society and to the advancement of education in the arts. These publications are to be of interest, therefore, both to professionals and the lay public. *Arts in Society* exists to discuss, interpret, and illustrate the various functions of the arts in contemporary civilization. Its purpose is to present the insights of experience, research and theory in support of educational and organizational efforts to enhance the position of the arts in America. In general, four areas are dealt with: the teaching and learning of the arts; aesthetics and philosophy; social analysis; and significant examples of creative expression in a medium which may be served by the printing process.

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Manuscripts should be sent to: Edward Kamarck, Editor, *Arts in Society,* The University of Wisconsin-Extension, 610 Langdon Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53706. Address review copies of books, recordings, tapes and films to the same address.

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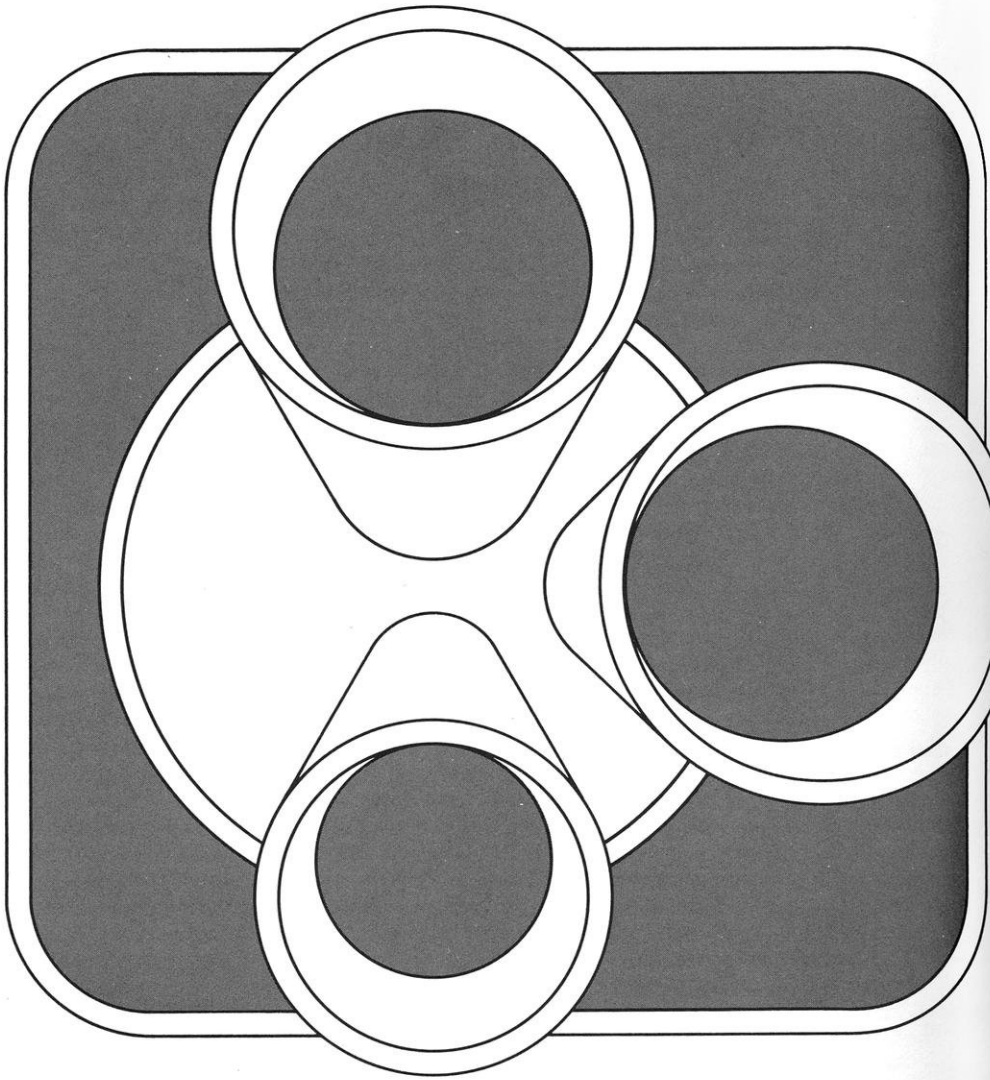
Contents

Editorial



The Film Revolution is Here. Now, Where are all the Films?

According to a recent survey by the American Film Institute, six thousand students are currently majoring in film in the nation's leading colleges and universities. The total enrollment for all film courses must be in the tens of thousands. Most likely, these figures will increase now that academia has come to understand that the motion picture is more than mere entertainment, that it is sociological artifact, political weapon, and the liveliest art.

It is axiomatic that in order to study film one has to see it. But consider a typical undergraduate course entitled "History of Film." Since it is probably one of the more popular courses in the catalog, it will attract a hundred students, more likely twice that number. It meets three times a week—two lectures and one screening. Thus, by the end of the semester the class has seen only fifteen films, hardly a sufficient sampling.

Film societies can and often do supplement this meager fare, but since libraries limit themselves to the printed word, few, if any, films are available to the student for reference use or for close study. The reason for this state of affairs is that most prints must be rented from distributors on a one-time-use basis and at rates ranging from fifty to two hundred dollars and more depending on the title. Indeed, fortunate is the film department that has the budget to rent even fifteen pictures for each of its courses.

This problem of the general inaccessibility of films was given top priority status by the Conference on Regional Development of Film Centers and Services that met in February at the Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, New York, under the auspices of the Public Media Program of the National Endowment for the Arts and the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation. Here the core collection concept offered by the American Film Institute was endorsed by the thirty educators, curators, and film program directors from museums in attendance. A committee is now at work to determine with the AFI the most expeditious approach in securing the rights to five hundred features and shorts representative of the history of film art. The objective is to provide colleges

and universities with the opportunity of acquiring on lease and at a moderate cost a core collection of films essential to the study of this medium. It is an idealistic scheme, fraught with difficulty not only in selecting titles but also in enlisting the broad-based support necessary to convince the industry that its best interest will be served by cooperating.

Meeting the needs of the undergraduates won't completely solve the matter, however. There still exists what to my mind is regressive legislation that is profoundly affecting serious research in film. I am referring to the Tax Reform Act of 1969, which contains a provision that seriously diminishes the ability of museums, libraries, and universities to acquire such self-created works of art as literature, paintings, music, and film. For the creator, these materials are now designated as ordinary income property rather than capital gains property. No longer can a writer, filmmaker, artist, or musician take a charitable deduction based on the market value of his self-created efforts. Only the cost basis can be deducted—the cost of canvas, paint, and wear and tear on brushes for a painter; film stock for the producer; and paper and ink for the playwright or novelist. The IRS has further refined the law by ruling that owners of historic motion pictures may not deduct their value and still retain the right to reproduce them for commercial use. To qualify as a deduction, the gift must include the exploitation rights as well.

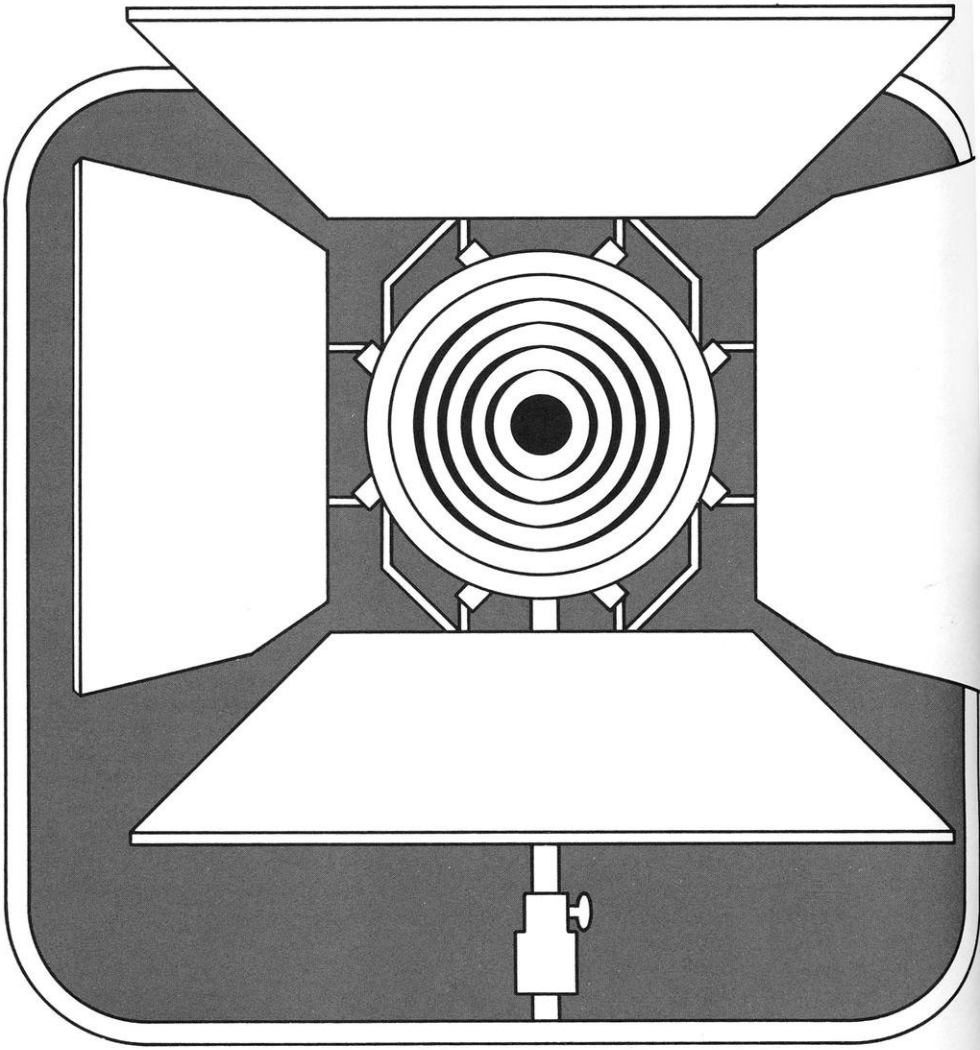
The new tax law in no way affects the private or commercial collector. He may still contribute a work of art to a museum and take as a deduction his purchase price and the appreciated value. It is in this sense that the law discriminates against the artist.

Eliminating the tax incentive has seriously curtailed acquisitions from all fields of arts and letters. The Library of Congress, which may have been hardest hit by the new law, reported that during 1970 it did not receive a single gift of self-created materials. And acquisitions have dwindled at such archives as the Wisconsin Center for Theatre Research and the Theatre Collection at Lincoln Center's Library and Museum of the Performing Arts. Unless the law changes, we face the prospect of losing priceless materials for posterity. They are likely to be retained by potential donors, sold, lost, or destroyed, or willed to heirs, which is precisely what is now happening. Ironically, the government through the National Endowment supports film preservation, regional exhibition, and media research, yet through the IRS, it is impeding the acquisition of materials necessary for the success of these projects—a striking example of inconsistency!

Several bills were introduced in the last session of Congress to correct these inequities, most notably by Congressmen Wilbur Mills and Ogden R. Reid and Senator Frank Church. Unfortunately, the proposed legislation died in conference committees before the adjournment. Now the battle must be waged again. The Conference of American Artists is renewing its efforts to liberalize the law. Professional film societies and everyone interested in film research and study should lend support to the cause.

Tino Balio
Director
Wisconsin Center for Theatre Research

The Search for Transformation



America's Sociological Movies

by I. C. Jarvie

Author of *Movies and Society.*
He is presently teaching in the Department of Philosophy, University of Hong Kong.

American movies have always been more sociological than those of—say—Britain or France. In those countries social forms are taken for granted and drama is played out within them. Characteristically, American movies deal with situations where the social forms are changing, or where an agent wants to change them, or where an agent is changing his place within society. Doubtless this has something to do with America being what Lipset has called "the first new nation;" a nation consciously molding itself in order to be different from and avoid the faults of previous societies. From the earliest movies before the first world war, until some of the most brilliant of today's output, American movies abound in social reflection. The shock of coming from the country to the city; crime; and especially white slavery; these were early themes. Even in comedy, the films of Arbuckle, Chaplin and Keaton took their satire from contemporary life, a period when America was changing fast. A quick look at Chaplin's films *Easy Street* and *The Immigrant* will illustrate all this. The social message film so popular in the thirties and forties is also uniquely American.

Think of Joan Crawford in *Mildred Pierce* (1945). A young widow with a daughter works as a waitress and gradually claws her way up until she is the wealthy owner of a chain of California restaurants. The opening scene shows the shooting of Joan's husband (Zachary Scott) and Joan is arrested for the crime. But why are those huge, damp eyes looking so soulful? Because she spent lavishly on her little girl, who grew up spoiled and snobbish about her mother's social origins. When the daughter (Ann Blyth) makes a play for Zachary Scott and is brushed off as a child, no competition for a real woman like her mother, she becomes enraged and murders him. Joan, of course, in penance, is taking the guilt and the rap. All is revealed, however, before The End appears.

The Immigrant
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center for Theater Research

A sociologist would call this film a study in the strains induced by upward social mobility. The film explains how Joan is able to move up, but is careful to show that this creates new problems for the mobile person. First, Joan's upward mobility is explained as resulting from a combination of intense individual determination and toughness, plus having a simple new idea to which the public will take. Secondly, such strength of character in a woman will cause difficulties in her relations with men: they feel threatened as well as attracted by such a woman. It will be difficult for a woman to find a stronger man on whom she can depend. Third, wealth is a reward for initiative and hard work, but it is also a source of corruption since it can be used as a substitute for care and attention to children. It is easy to indulge, and hence spoil, a child when you have wealth. Fourth, the realization of what inner strength and money can do to men and to children may produce guilt, and a desire to indulge in self-sacrifice as a form of expiation.

Mildred Pierce bristles with sociological themes apposite to its period. A film about women being strong in adversity suited an America where many men were overseas and where women had had to assume unprecedented responsibility as heads of households and as vital industrial workers. That this strength would create problems when the men reappeared was also a timely matter to bring up, as the war was soon to be over. The film still operates on the view that what women—even strong women—want is a stronger man to whom they can yield, no longer having to prove themselves. The film also accepts the view that America is a land of opportunity for those able to grasp it. Little wonder that it is set in California. The film also suggests that real friends and

Mildred Pierce
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center for Theater Research

simple values should not be jettisoned on the way up, else unhappiness will result. And this only touches a few of the many themes which resonate through this film, which has rightly been called a masterpiece of women's magazine *kitsch.*

Social mobility and the impact of social change are constant and recurring themes in the American cinema. The only other theme which is near as popular is that of establishing social order—the premise of almost every western ever made. Ten years after *Mildred Pierce* a great stir was caused by *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) because it dealt with middle-class delinquents. Crime and delinquency had always been put down to deprivation, to environment; yet here were delinquents with seemingly no disadvantages. The film was not awfully good at offering any explanation of what was happening, but at least it raised the matter to public consciousness. 1955 was ten years before Haight-Ashbury and the general alarm about what seemed like a generation of middle-class children spurning the parents who, and the background which, gave them so many advantages. To this day no film has come forward with a genuine explanation of why it all happened, any more than a film has come forward and admitted that far less than a whole generation is involved, much more like a vocal and visible minority. Total bafflement at it all is apparent in two recent films. In *Joe* (1971) both the upper middle class advertising executive, and his hard hat soul-mate have ceased to have contact with their children. In *Diary of a Mad Housewife* (1971) we see alienation in embryo, for the heroine's two young daughters are unreasonably ungrateful little prigs.

In the late sixties films have looked at

a new aspect of social mobility, namely, what goals are left for adults and adolescents when it has been achieved? Boredom and a lack of challenge has been shown in lots of movies to be the direct cause of experiment with sex and drugs. But I shall avoid discussion of this already well-trodden ground. Instead let me look at alienation, as a start. Then at the problematic relations between parents and children, and also among adolescents themselves. And finally come to the emergence and assertion of ethnicity, despite mobility and prosperity.

To begin with the loss of goals consequent upon affluence and comfort, let us look at two very different films *The Graduate* (1967) and *Five Easy Pieces* (1971). Partly they are very different in that although they both made a great deal of money, *The Graduate* made *much* more. Partly they are different in that *The Graduate* deserves a grade of B or B+, whereas *Five Easy Pieces* deserves A+. This in turn is a consequence of *The Graduate* being directed by a talented stage director (Mike Nichols) with no real feel for the movies; while *Five Easy Pieces* was directed by a newcomer (Bob Rafelson) whose style is immediately mature and distinct. But perhaps the greatest difference of all, especially from our point of view, is that *The Graduate* is far less rich than *Five Easy Pieces* as a source of ideas about American society.

Benjamin, *The Graduate,* comes from a wealthy Los Angeles family. Having completed college to the delight of his relations, he finds nothing better to do than stare into an aquarium. He doesn't say very much to anyone, so we are never clear why he does nothing. A family friend, Mrs. Robinson, inveigles him into an affair, which she controls. Finding himself attracted to her daughter, he starts to date her. Mother finds out, determines it shall

Rebel Without A Cause
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center for Theater Research

not happen, and tries to have her married off. Benjamin foils the plot and whisks the almost-a-bride away. At no point does Benjamin want for anything, or have to earn his living. He can slip away to rendezvous with Mrs. Robinson without anyone being the wiser. He has a nice fast car for rushing up to Berkeley to see his girl friend. Sadly, one must conclude that Benjamin's dilemma resonated among the youthful middle-class audience, and his solution—galvanized into action by that old Hollywood standby True Love—offended no one.

Far too much social significance was read into *The Graduate* at the time. It appeared just before a whole wave of films in which outrage, sexual explicitness, antisocial attitudes, and dwelt-on violence became common coin. All the film had was a little naughty sex (not with the nubile young heroine), and a trace of blasphemy (when Benjamin uses a cross as a weapon). Nevertheless, the success of the film deserves explanation. My own guess is that it was a transitional work, pointing the way to more startling and thoughtful films to come about middle-class *anomie,* but at the time widely touted as deliciously shocking. Much the same explanation would apply to the later film *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice,* which at least had the merits of genuine comedy, and again to Mike Nichols' *Carnal Knowledge* (1972)—although the latter film and his intermediate one *Catch-22* (1970) have to me the curious air of a man very keen to be a social critic and satirist but who always seems to be a little off-centre, to get it wrong somehow. Some people might think the success of *The Graduate* is a bit like that of *Love Story:* an updating with fashionable daring of a basically conventional woman's magazine plot. This may be true.

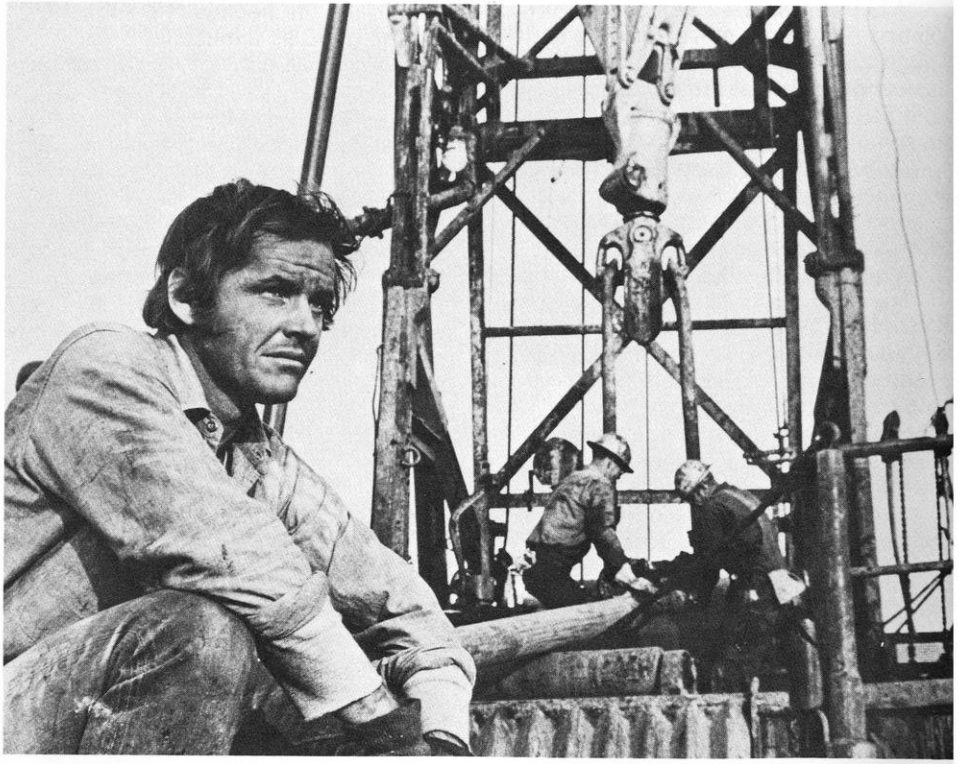
Anyway, let us now come to the much more insightful *Five Easy Pieces.* If *Love Story* is about upward mobility (poor Italian marries well-heeled Yankee), then *Five Easy Pieces* is about downward mobility. There is, however, a twist; the downward mobility is a matter of choice, and, not to be forgotten, comes to be understandable. When first we encounter the hero Jack Nicholson at work on an oil rig, roving around with his friend, arguing with his waitress girl friend, we take it he is just a lively-minded and funny hard hat. But when, in a traffic jam, he climbs on the back of a truck carrying a piano, and gets so carried away playing that he forgets to jump off, we know something is up. Gradually it transpires that he is middle class, well-educated, and somewhat estranged from his family. Meeting his sister, a pianist, at a recording studio, he decides to go home to visit his sick father. The journey north from California to Washington eases the shock of realizing he comes from a very well-off and cultivated family of musicians. The house is set on a beautiful sound and is filled with musicians: his incapacitated father, his brother, his sister, and his brother's glamorous pupil. In a talk with his father he tries to explain that he quit the life because he knew he was no good as a musician. Yet during one evening it turns out to be snobbery and intellectual preciousness that he detests. A key episode is his successful seduction of his brother's pupil (and fiancée). But his assumption that she will come away with him turns out to be badly mistaken: *her* devotion to music is quite genuine and sex will not warp her judgement. Then, he sets out on the journey back with Rayette, the waitress. At a truck stop he gives her all his money and sets out for Alaska. . .

The film is about class, it is about intellect and culture, it is about sex, and it is about authenticity. Jack Nicholson finds the working classes more authentic than people of his own background. But in repudiating all that was in his past, he has lost the sense that some people are into culture quite genuinely and authentically. Rayette and her country music may be authentic, but they also seem banal. Lost now between the two worlds, he can only strike out in a new direction.

Five Easy Pieces was successful especially with the college crowd. Not hard to see the reason why. The authenticity of the world of culture and intellect into which they are being initiated is of great concern. Doubtless few of them will repudiate it the way Jack Nicholson does, but his anti-phoniness will put them on their guard. Additionally, the question will arise as to whether culture or sex or a combination of them is sufficient.

Films which ask questions are in that way directing the attention of the audience to the problem. They may present no solution, or they may present a far-fetched solution. This does not matter. Did it matter, those hundreds of Hollywood films which solved all problems by letting the characters discover True Love, would not have succeeded with the popular audience. Audiences as it were "know" that films are conventions, and that one convention is shape—an ending must be provided—and another convention is Happily Ever After. There is no evidence that I can discover that real people out in real America thought life would have shape and True Love would Solve All. No doubt some people thought this; but probably the literal-minded were with us before movies and will be with us after them. To raise the problem in people's imagination is already to set their minds working on it. This is the only plausible theory of the social function of movies. Realization of this may have something to do with the way recent movies have been open-ended or inconclusive. *The Baby Maker* in the end gives away her baby. The son and the father in *I Never Sang for my Father* never do manage to come to terms with each other, however badly they both feel about it. And so on. The late sixties and early seventies were a period of very rapid social

Five Easy Pieces
Courtesy: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences



change in America, with, in particular, a sharp alteration in attitudes and outlook. Is it possible that this has something to do with inconclusive or ambiguously ended films? Certainly the audience for movies increasingly was to be found among young people, an audience whose own life situation —the beginning of adulthood—is an open and questioning one.

Several films appeared which dealt with adolescence itself, including *Carnal Knowledge.* It strikes me as odd that they should all be nostalgia pieces: *Carnal Knowledge* and *Goodbye Columbus* for the fifties, *Summer of '42* and *The Last Picture Show* for the forties (or early fifties). All of these films explore adolescence, age and experience, and sex. Obviously, all are written by people considerably older than the popular audience their films have found. All are somewhat anecdotal and open-ended. *Goodbye Columbus* we will come back to under ethnicity, but it does something one never thought to see in the American cinema, it separates love and sex. Richard Benjamin and Ali MacGraw have good sex, and fancy that they are in love. But in the end her conventional adherence to values he repudiates breaks them apart. The heroes of *Carnal Knowledge* are looking for love and only ever finding sex. The film is unusually didactic in directly suggesting this is because the society has infantilised their attitudes toward sex.

The better the movies, the more they repay study. *Summer of '42* benefits from having Robert Mulligan as director: he has specialized in films with children and adolescents. Three boys whose voices are just breaking fool around in a summer resort. They are preoccupied with sex. A young soldier and his wife saying good bye fascinate them. They manage to date some girls, and after preliminary maneuvers in a cinema, things get going on the beach. The shy hero does nothing, but his boisterous friend gets the sexual initiation of his life. But the hero is around when the girl hears her soldier husband has been killed and, in a moment of confused emotions, she goes to bed with him. Next day she has gone, but he has grown up. The writing and construction are maudlin, but the film is redeemed by the director and his players who allow contemporary America to confront a true image of itself thirty years ago. It is funny, it is pathetic, it is done with affection. Contemporary adolescents can hear echoes of their own dilemmas, not all dissolved by any means; older audiences can wonder how they managed it all. In particular, there is a quality of innocence about the period and its war which clearly fascinates us.

Ten years later the current war (Korea) is more remote, in the small Texas town of *The Last Picture Show.* Oil prosperity and drift to the city has left little but a shattered shell of a crossroads town. The one remaining movie house is showing two-year old movies and, like the pool hall, is going to close down. Our hero, a shy boy, starts an affair with the football coach's neglected wife (suggestion of implied homosexuality in her husband's devotion to his team). He can't really understand her. He is also duped into running away with the local beauty. There are various other incidents. The film is about nostalgia, the world we have lost. Again and again this recurs, as though looking back to the past is a comfort in an open and hence uncertain present. What was at least was; a fixed point. What is to come, no one knows. A totally unrelated masterpiece on this theme was *The Wild Bunch* in which the heroes, the bunch, were murderous and psychopathic, and so were their pursuers. Yet we regret their passing, even in a heroic cause. *The Last Picture Show* also mourns for a passing way of life. The closing of the movie house, the arrival of television, the death of Ben the Lion, mark an end to innocence, both in a boy and in a society. The subtlety of the film is that it shows the innocence of the fifties to to be only a veneer. Money has already twisted many people's lives,

The Last Picture Show
Courtesy: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

and the teenage sex games are far from innocent. The film completely de-romanticizes the small town. Social class is as divisive, mobility as destructive as anywhere else. The children of the town experience the same boredom and *anomie* as their parents. It is not easy to see what is wrong with America.

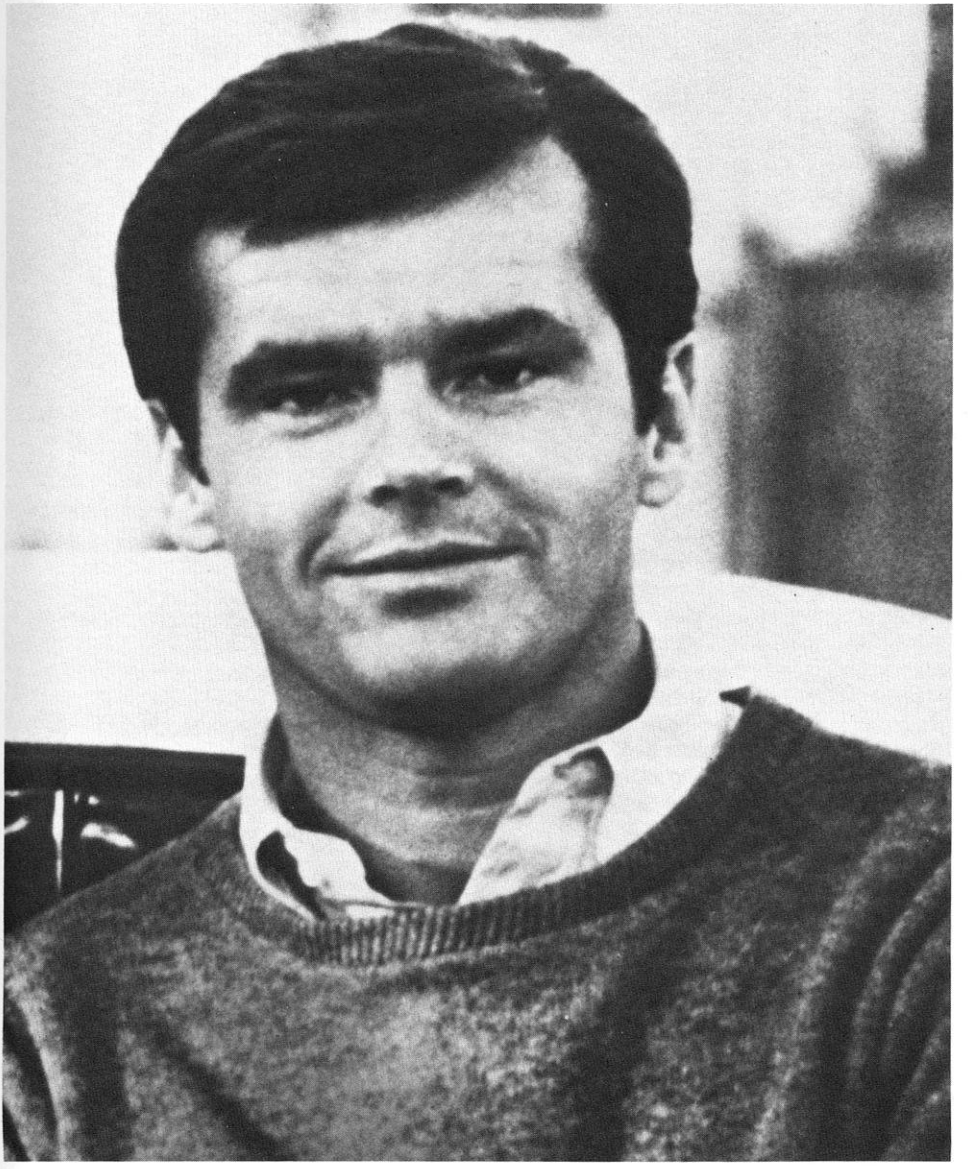
As to ethnicity. After about 1915, there was a brief and intense period in America when the "melting pot" ideology held sway: the final assimilation of the waves of immigrants into American society. Their acceptance of America's language, customs, outlook and values, their abandonment of old world ways. Especially was hope centered on the second generation, those born and raised in America, educated in its schools, socialized by its customs. Films which dealt with Italian-Americans (gangster movies) or Irish-Americans, frequently stressed the generational tension, the end of the old ways. One fascination of the Sicilian gangsters must have been their unshakeable assertion of being different. But later gangster films showed the sons turning into respectable businessmen, pillars of the community. A great many war films have the standard form of assembling a bunch of raw recruits: farm boy, Bronx-type, "Eyetalian," Catholic, etc., etc., and has them express their mutual antagonisms as a prelude to their being welded into an American fighting force.

Perhaps because of the Negro Civil Rights Movement, vocal black Americans openly attacked the melting pot idea. Understandably enough, since black Americans are never going to blend invisibly into WASP America. Black society, black culture, black argot were argued not to be simple disadvantages to be smoothed out. Rather were they valuable in their difference. Pretty soon the same was

being argued by Indians, by Italians, by Jews, by Poles and so on. Pride in being a hyphenated American was a new possibility. Of course, ethnicity was always there, but pride in it was not overtly reflected in the movies.

Goodbye Columbus was in that respect a breakthrough, because it was an unabashedly Jewish movie, but its affection did not stop it being quite savagely satirical. The story is of the intelligent poor boy (Richard Benjamin) who woos and sleeps with the Jewish princess (Ali MacGraw). Her father got rich by working hard, and gives his children all the advantages. Her brother wants to succeed in WASP society as a football star for Ohio State. She goes to college.

Carnal Knowledge
Courtesy: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences



When Richard finds out she left her diaphragm in a drawer and that her mother discovered it he finds her guilt insufferable and breaks off. Although still poor he has genuinely emancipated himself from his class background, she is still ensnared in it despite money and education. Mobility and its problems are never ending.

Lovers and Other Strangers does the same for Italian-Americans. As in *Goodbye Columbus* there is an endlessly long, lavish festival of overeating and drinking called a wedding breakfast. This being a lesser film, it concentrates on personal difficulties which have no real explanation in social surroundings. Practically every couple in the film has something wrong with their sex lives. The only flash of sociological insight is when the mother confesses that sex has always been an unpleasant necessity and, when the children are born, it can be stopped and food substituted.

Ethnic humor then became the basis for too many films to list. Suffice it to mention *Made for Each Other* (1971), where Jewish humor is crossed with Italian. A high strung Jewish girl and an Italian who fancies himself as something of a stud meet at group therapy. They develop a symbiosis of sex and quarrelling. The implication is that the constrictedness of their lower middle-class backgrounds is similar, their grandiose but unrealistic ambitions are similar, that they are made for each other. It is remarkable how this film copes with overt prejudice, when the girl is taken to a meal at the Italian family home and is insulted to her face for being Jewish. While funny, the film does not conceal the deep divisions that ethnicity creates, deeper than class barriers when it comes to intermarriage.

As a final example, a few words about *The Godfather,* phenomenally successful and fully deserving. *The Godfather* is about the power of social structure and culture to dominate and mold the individual in spite of himself. When the film opens, one son of the Mafia family is Americanized, college-educated, and going with a blonde WASP girl. This is tolerated, there are other sons and relatives to work in the business, and his success brings a certain prestige. When the crunch comes, however, he cannot stand aside and see his family and its empire usurped. He personally murders a rival gang leader and a corrupt policeman and takes refuge in remotest Sicily. Here his heritage reasserts itself and begins to make sense to him. He marries a local beauty, who is killed the next day by a bomb intended for him. Returning to New York he takes charge and in one stroke annihilates all enemies and traitors, marries his WASP girl, and tells her that he has nothing to do with all the violence and killing. Even the Sicilian attitude to women has reasserted itself. So the deep roots of culture and family are not easily extirpated. Within a man who had withdrawn from the old ways are the resources to excel at them. Mobility, money, education, intermarriage, none of these make any difference. A man is a product of his early environment and his heredity.

Startling indeed for a popular film in 1972. The first new nation was always committed to environmentalism. If Europeans who came to America were simply going to transplant the old ways in the new world, what hope was there for a land of the free, a home of the brave? And yet, America and its historians have always known that despite constitution and laws, Americans *have* brought much of Europe with them. Political parties, social classes, ethnic pride, injustice, prejudice and snobbery are all things imported to the new world from the old, despite the hopes of the founding fathers. Nevertheless, America is a society constantly trying to create itself in its own image, and its movies have long chronicled that struggle and its difficulties.

The Godfather
Courtesy: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Making the Scene: Some Speculations on the Values of Contemporary American Cinema

by Peter Harcourt

Director, Film Studies Program, Queens University, Kingston, Ontario. He served for six years on the staff of the British Film Institute in London and is author of *Six European Directors* which will be published by Penguin in the fall.

We have now dealt with the kind of things that should and should not be said about gods and demi-gods, heroes and the life after death. If we ask what kind of literature still remains, the answer is, presumably, that which deals with human beings.

Clearly.

But we cannot deal with that topic at present.

Why not?

Because I am afraid that we shall find that poets and story-tellers have expressed the most erroneous opinions about it. They have said that unjust men are often happy, and just men wretched, that wrong-doing pays if you can avoid being found out, and that justice is what suits someone else but is to your own disadvantage. We must forbid them to say this sort of thing, and require their poems and stories to have quite the opposite moral. Do you agree?

I'm quite sure you're right, he replied.

— *Plato*[1]

I'm not saying that violence is what makes a man a man. I'm saying that when violence comes, you can't run away from it. You have to recognize its true nature, in yourself as well as in others, and stand up to it. If you run, you're dead, or you might as well be.

When you say that someone is a real man, what do you mean by it?

That he doesn't have to prove anything. He's himself. My dad put it another way. When the time comes, he used to say, you stand up and you're counted. For the right thing. For something that matters. It's the ultimate test. You either compromise to the point where it destroys you or you stand up and say, "Fuck off." It's amazing how few people will do that.

— *Peckinpah*[2]

What are the forces that mould society? Can they be isolated, studied, and understood? Can they be altered? Can any individual, or a group of individuals, actually change the course of events? Does education play a vital role? Does art?

These are questions which have been debated since the beginning of thought. The debate still continues. It still continues because there are as yet no settled answers. Such answers as exist seem based more on individual conviction than on empirical fact. They touch upon faith. They become tangled up in the ageless wrestle between what actually is and what ought to be, between realist and idealist responses to life, between descriptive and prescriptive interpretations of society.

For the last 50 years or so, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists have been attempting to conduct this debate on a more factual level. But their methods of research are still comparatively crude, their findings inconclusive. Meanwhile, we must think and act, *as if* to some purpose. On the basis of our own experience and of such information as is available to us, we must take up some position in relation to these questions in order to play a meaningful role within our own society. We cannot pretend these questions don't exist, nor can we evade the uneasiness they might cause us when we contemplate them in relation to the absurdities of the contemporary world.

Do works of art affect behaviour or merely reflect it? Do they help to determine attitudes, or do they chiefly embody attitudes that already exist? I think that no one would deny, certainly no teacher, that works of art can expand the range of our experience. Especially for young people who have as yet a comparatively limited experience of life, poems, novels, plays, and films can provide models of behaviour against which their own experience can be tested as they acquire it; but for all of us at whatever age, works of art can provide us with insights into the manners and customs of distant times and foreign lands.

Yet how do we respond to this? Are we directly affected by what we experience in fiction, or is the relationship more elusive? Is there any way of *knowing* about this kind of thing? Occasionally, there is some kind of direct relationship: *Kathy Come Home,* screened on BBC TV, led to such an outcry that action concerning housing problems was taken in the House of Commons; and, more negatively, every once in a while, some disturbed creature will commit a murder in imitation of an influential film. But generally, I should have thought, the influence is far less direct. Even the drugstore cowboys that ape the dress and style of (say) John Wayne may be only very superficially influenced by him, their mannerisms more a kind of self-protective game. Nevertheless, as teachers, critics, thinkers, citizens, we are safe in assuming that works of art can tell us something about the world we live in, whether by helping us to understand more clearly the forces already at work in the world or by enabling us to see the forces yet to come. I think, too, until research proves the contrary, we are safe in assuming that there will be some kind of influence between the products of our culture and our behaviour within it, no matter how elusive and indirect.

The snag is that the interpretation of all these matters requires great tact. So often, it involves less a response to

events depicted than a response to tone, to the pervading atmosphere in which they occur. Tone is always an elusive element in any work of art, perhaps especially so within those cultural products that we refer to as the popular arts, our hit songs and commercial movies. Yet, the struggle to define tone is the struggle to comprehend the values that the songs or the films may convey.

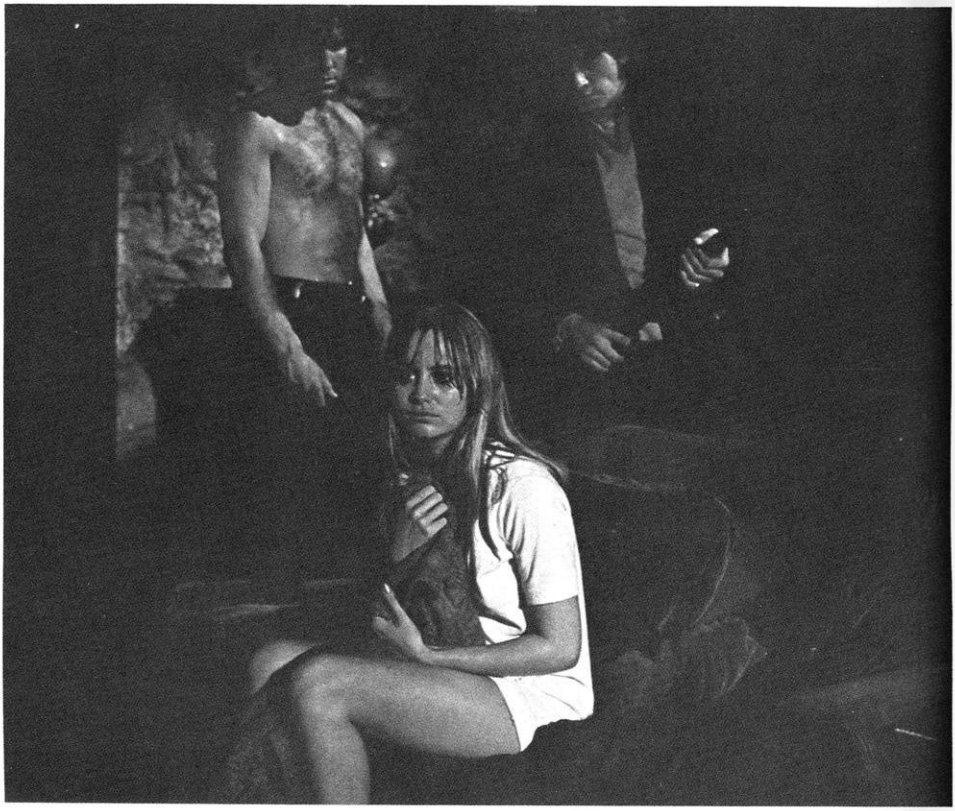
For instance, if we think back to the singing of Billie Holliday, what are the values that her songs seem to embody? What kind of culture do they represent? Might her singing have influenced behaviour in any way? How are these features different from the same elements in (say) the work of Bob Dylan today?

If we put the question this way, we can see how difficult it is to achieve an objective answer; for it is less a matter of individual songs with particular meanings embodied in individual lyrics than a pervasive mood or tone, an attitude towards the world they are singing about. Billie Holliday's singing might seem to imply a world that, while full of melancholy, contains simultaneously a sense of celebration. While her songs are full of sadness and suffering, there is no resentment. In fact, the tone of her singing might seem to imply an acceptance of the world as it is, a world which, while imperfect, is apparently immutable. Her sadness largely springs from the acceptance of this fact:

There's nothin' lef' for me,
I'm full of misery,
I've got the right to sing the blues.

Yet it is less a matter of the cognitive implications of individual lyrics which,

Straw Dogs



of course, cover a wide range of territory, than an interpretation of her whole style. For instance, like the saxophone playing of Lester Young that sometimes, so beautifully, accompanies her, Billie Holliday's singing tends to drag the beat of the songs she sings, thus adding to the pervasive melancholy by giving it a tentative, one might even say a reflective quality which enables her singing far to transcend what might seem to be the trivializing emotions of the specific lyrics she might be singing at any given moment:

I'll be seein' you,
In all the old, familiar places,
That this heart of mine embraces
All night through. . .

It is the lilt and spirit of her singing that we would have to interpret were we to understand it fully, the tone and mood of her entire output. It is more this mood, I would argue, than any statistics concerning actual popularity and the extent of record sales (useful though these too might be) that we would have to apply to the values of the world she lived in, the world that obviously formed her but which she too may have helped to influence in some way.

If, on the other hand, we think of Bob Dylan, difficult though it may be to verbalize precisely the nature of the contrast, his songs definitely depict a very different world. For one thing, Dylan is a more *complete* artist than Billie Holliday was, being poet and composer for most of his own songs, rarely content to draw upon the traditional songs of other people as Billie Holliday was. Though capable of moods of great gentleness, Dylan's art is far more aggressive than Billie Holliday's was. His nasal, whining tone gives to all his work a slightly self-righteous, superior air; and although his style has changed sharply over the years, there is the recurring presence of songs like "With God on Our Side" (from *The Times They are a-changing* album) or "I pity the poor immigrant" (from *John Wesley Harding*) which are angry and directly accusational. Dylan's songs assert a world very much in need of change, a world where there are no social values worthy of respect, a world which the individual of integrity must strive to rise above by achieving a self-contained life-style that will unambiguously distance him from the values of his fathers. For these ideal, liberal values now seem too soft and hypocritical, too unaware of the exploitation and genocide on which our civilization has been based. Thus, this spirit of accusation and of personal superiority is central to the moral world that Dylan's songs convey.

A similar kind of contrast could be established by examining the difference between the tough, good-guy Humphrey Bogart character in a film like *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and Gene Hackman's unscrupulous Popeye in *The French Connection* today. In fact, in the world of film, one might be able to chart a social change simply by examining the change in atmosphere within films made about jazz and pop. Think of the shared excitement and sense of happy participation of *Jazz on a Summer's Day* way back in 1959. This mood was still present in Donald Pennebaker's *Monterey Pop* (1968), in spite of some discordant elements like the Jimi Hendrix number and the antics of The Who. Nevertheless, by the time of Woodstock (1968-70), the mood has altered sharply. Now it seems to be the gentler performers like John Sebastian and Joan Baez who are out of place within the claustrophobic hysteria of that particular film. Then, with *Gimme Shelter* (1970), we have the fearful Hell's Angels acting as police, we have such impatience and latent violence in the crowd that Grace Slick and the Jefferson Airplane can't even manage to sing, a violence that culminates by a spectator actually being stabbed to death on camera—an incident which the Maysles brothers (with Charlotte Zwerin) decided to make the formal center of the film!

The Maltese Falcon
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center for Theater Research

Being documentaries, these jazz/rock films would seem to be very much the kind of art that reflects more than affects behaviour. But what about the music they contain? Could Billie Holliday's melancholy and acceptance be said now to have influenced social values in any way? It would be difficult to establish just how any such influence might have occurred. With Dylan, on the other hand, since he is so much closer to us and since his values are more explicit, it is difficult *not* to see him as the spokesman for many young people today, a spokesman for their own anger and mistrust of the world around them, and yet also for their desire to "make it" in the way that Dylan so obviously has. By being successful and by becoming so rich, Dylan has got free from the values of the world that surrounds him, values that for some time now a good many thoughtful people have described as "absurd."[3] In this way, the singing of a Dylan might seem to play both a reflective and affective role in the lives of young people—crystallizing the values that he finds in the world about him and, by crystallizing them, helping to perpetuate them—in a curiously paradoxical way, thus ultimately tending to *inhibit* change.

If we think now of the films that have currently been popular, which have gained a measure of critical and financial success, we can find the same kind of values clearly within them. Certainly, over the past few years, there has been an increase in sexual explicitness and a crescendo of violence in films like *Easy Rider, The French Connection, Straw Dogs,* and *A Clockwork Orange.* But it is less these facts in themselves that I think are important than their pervasive tone, the attitude the films adopt

towards their characters. Yet this aspect of these films rarely gets dealt with adequately.[4] The films are frequently taken to *mean* the events they depict (or else, as with the audiences who guffaw their way equally through all of these films, they are taken to mean nothing at all!). Yet it is the tone of the film that can most intimately reveal the moral attitude if we read it correctly—not an easy thing to do. For how does one interpret tone in a film? With this question in mind, I'd like now to look at a particular example of the new kind of violence, at Sam Peckinpah's latest product, *The Getaway,* starring Steve McQueen and Ali MacGraw.

In many ways a marginal film, certainly not central either to the work of Sam Peckinpah or to the current crop of dynamically violent films, *The Getaway* nevertheless repays close analysis if what we are after is its particular *tone.* For it is not the violence itself that interests me: it is more the general view-of-life that the film seems to convey.

Since *The Wild Bunch,* Peckinpah has become increasingly a didactic director. His films seem designed to demonstrate a pre-conceived view-of-life. *The Getaway* is no exception. At key moments in the film, even in the final bloody, by-now expected slow-motion shoot-up scene, children are seen in the wings of the action, with their toy guns or conventionally raised fingers, saying "Bang, bang!" as actual violence rages about them. Forced as these effects may appear to us, their intention is clear: the violence is in all of us, both children and adults, and some way or other it will find its way out.

The Getaway opens with images of confinement; animals and men locked up in the same way. How are we meant to feel about this? Clearly, from the way Doc McCoy's face is dwelt upon, registering its anger and hurt,

Gimme Shelter

and from the way during the credits his face is intercut with the faces of those animals, we are meant to sympathize with this human animal locked up, confined to the machinery of his prison-mill. At the same time, we get a quick sense of McCoy as a man who wants to make it, no matter what he is doing. He loses his temper when he sees he is losing a game of chess. "Oh, man, it's just a game," his opponent exclaims. Perhaps that comment will apply to McCoy's life as well.

Further sympathy is created for McCoy through the contrast provided by the prison guards. With their dark glasses, stetson hats, and with those hateful Texan accents that, within current Hollywood mythology, are increasingly coming to stand for the oppression and intolerance which present-day America seems capable of, these guards might appear to be menacing us as well as the prisoners. When his wife, Carol, comes to see him, McCoy can think of only one thing—getting free from prison, no matter how: "Get to Benyon. Tell him I'm for sale. His price." Thus the professional thief is dependent upon the corrupt politician to get free from jail, free in order to pull off a job for the very same Benyon, a job in which McCoy takes all the risks while Benyon stands to get a large share of the profits—a division of labour possibly designed to resemble that found in the "free" business world outside.

Once he's out of prison, McCoy's first meeting with Carol—her school-girlish appearance, their slow-motion swim together, his hesitations upstairs in bed with her, and their smokey breakfast the following morning—all these elements serve to give this relationship the feeling of normality, of sustaining human affection between two people who respect and value one another. For a few moments, the world of crime seems very much in the background. We are charmed into responding to these two people as two people we might get on with, as two people we might know. But not for long. Quincey Jones's harmonica love theme gives way to more sinister sounds as the plans are laid for the robbery and McCoy is introduced to the ghouls he'll have to work with; yet even these expressionistic effects might serve to contrast the essentially decent human qualities of the McCoys themselves.

In fact, it is part of Peckinpah's skill (as well as part of his didacticism) that he can make the so called normal world seem so sinister while creating sympathy for his central characters. The parade in the street in front of the Beacon City bank is particularly absurd. With silly drum majorettes marching to "Be kind to your Fine Feathered Friends" as imitation animals are led by on a string, such a civilization (some small part of ourselves might be feeling at the moment) really asks to be destroyed. In any case, the way the film is structured for us, McCoy is certainly *not* part of that world, and so far in the film, we have been encouraged to become a part of him, to identify with his attitudes and desperate common decency.

I haven't the space here to offer an extensive analysis of this film, revealing though it might be in terms of the values hidden within the nuances of its many scenes. But as the robbery is executed, we get sucked into a world far more treacherous than what we could have imagined during the opening of the film. Bit by bit, Peckinpah wraps us up in a world where even the most intimate human relationships are threatened with treachery, even the relationship between the McCoys. No one can trust anyone, not even the person you're closest to. When Benyon is killed, his own brother orders his fellow thugs to "Drop him in a dry well, if you can find one." It seems a hateful world.

The one redeeming human quality in this film is the gradual restoration of trust between the McCoys—a relationship that comes to fruition upon a garbage heap in Texas! Meanwhile, we see this love sustained through a series of brilliant shoot-ups, fast driving, and many police cars destroyed.

We cannot help but applaud the *skill* with which this is done, both McCoy's skill and Peckinpah's. Nor until the final shoot-up in El Paso, is anyone killed. It's all just a game—a game where you have to be bright and fast to win.

The striking moral fact about *The Getaway* is that the McCoys get away with it. With the manic help of Slim Pickens, they escape into Mexico, their life of crime supposedly behind them. There is a curious feeling created by those final scenes—the feeling of love achieved, of a mission accomplished, of personal values having triumphed over the world in which they lived. But I don't know what Plato would say!

If we turn now from *The Getaway* to consider *Bonnie & Clyde* of a few years ago (1967), the difference is enormous. Working from a fine script by Newman and Benton, Arthur Penn managed to create for us a film that was simultaneously an indictment of society, a celebration of personal vitality and comradeship within that same world, and yet which contained within it the classic moral lesson that crime doesn't pay. The film leaves us both with the feeling of outrage that the two most alive, most spontaneous people in the film should have been shot down, yet with a kind of elation as well: like classic tragic art, we recognize that such asocial behaviour would have to be cut down, that such anarchic vitality would have to be destroyed to enable society to carry on. Through this classic element of catharsis, *Bonnie & Clyde* might appear to have more in common with *Macbeth* or *Hamlet* than it does with Peckinpah's *The Getaway.*

In *The Getaway,* there is no sense of a society at all that might possess values that deserve to be preserved, which, through its farmers and "little people," *Bonnie & Clyde* so beautifully created. In *The Getaway,* corruption and treachery are everywhere, anarchy is pervasive. *Bonnie & Clyde* expressed rebellion against the world, yet also the sense that there are elements in the world itself that deserve to be preserved. *The Getaway,* on the other hand, celebrates the triumph of individual opportunism over all social values. Except for their uncertainties about their own love for one another, the McCoys feel no misgivings about anything that they do. They remain detached, cool, outside the world they inhabit, unrelated to anything that is not immediately a part of themselves.

It is this amoral detachment that I would single out as the most worrying factor in this particular film—an element (I should add) less typical of other Peckinpah films than it is of works like *A Clockwork Orange, Dirty Harry,* and *The French Connection.* Yet it is this element of detachment that might be taken more seriously than the violence which everyone talks about, and thus provides the lasting flavour that these films may leave in individual minds.

Whether the exposure to violence that is so much a feature of so many films today is harmful or not is one of the things that we do not really know. I myself doubt that it would actually encourage violence in any direct way. *It may, in fact, actually provide a safety valve for the frustrations and exasperations that so many of us feel today.* We are all of us faced hourly with problems of pollution, of apparently endless little wars being fought in safely isolated parts of the globe (making Peter Watkins's *The Gladiators* seem more and more like actual documentary and less and less like science fiction)—we are all faced with problems over which we have no immediate personal control. So this violence in the movies might even be valuable as a vicarious purging of individual frustrations, as it might too be a salutary reminder of the violence on which our civilization has been based.

What is worrying, however, is the attitude towards society that many of these films convey. Basically, there *is* no society, no hope of any communal effort, no faith in the validity of people

A Clockwork Orange

working together towards some common end. At the same time, there is a sense that this amoral detachment, this stress on the superiority of individual skill is genuinely reflective of what many young people today are prepared to put their faith in, as we saw a similar element in Bob Dylan's songs.

In what does the self now try to find salvation, if not in the breaking of corporate identities and in an acute suspicion of all normative institutions?[5]

So asked Philip Rieff with what strikes me as frightening precision. People now feel they have to go it alone, that community values have vanished (or else are in need of radical change). Again, to quote from Rieff:

A positive community is characterized by the fact that it guarantees some kind of salvation to the individual by virtue of his membership and participation in that community.[6]

It now appears that there can only be individual salvations, salvations achieved by those who with talent enough (Dylan, in real life) or skill enough (the McCoys in the movies) can outclass or outwit the world.

While I find this notion frightening, I don't consider it totally pessimistic; for it would appear that society will have to endure some crucial changes if we are going to survive. How much anarchy we will have to experience, how much actual violence may be inflicted on the world, I do not know. But our movies and our songs are warning us that the situation is serious, furthermore, that a situation may develop from which there will be no retreat, when we'll really have to stand up and be counted, as Peckinpah has said.

What can we as individuals do within this situation? If we are involved with the arts in any way, if we are teachers or critics, we must take these messages seriously. We can't just shut ourselves away and go on listening to Mozart if the majority of young people are being formed by the exciting but anarchic values of the Rolling Stones which imply a very different world. Above all, we must strive to *read* the values of contemporary art accurately, even when it offends us. If we respect the force and conviction of a film-maker like Sam Peckinpah, we must try to sort out what it is he is *really* trying to convey to us.[7]

Film is a most powerful and most physical medium. Since television has taken over the task of providing the conventional visual musak, film has become more self-consciously an art-form. American directors like Sam Fuller, Don Siegel, Arthur Penn, and Sam Peckinpah are making films of a personal nature, indeed are creating a personal following, that would have been far more difficult twenty years ago. Our youth culture is angry, angry and disillusioned; and we can read this discontent in many of the films they see and in the songs they sing. So we ourselves must be prepared to take a stand, somehow or other—not against the films that distress us but against the social values indicted by those very same films. Plato's position has never been tenable. Censorship cannot work effectively when it is imposed from outside. If we don't like the tone of our movies, we must do something about it. But we can't just alter the movies: we must alter the world.

Notes:

[1]From a conversation between Socrates and Adeimantus in Book III of *The Republic,* by Plato, trans. H.D.P. Lee (London, Penguin Books, 1955), p. 130.

[2]From a conversation between Sam Peckinpah and William Murray in *Playboy* (Chicago), Vol. 19, No. 8, August, 1972, p. 70.

[3]For instance, see Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* (New York, A Vintage Book, 1960).

[4]For a detailed discussion of the implications of three violent films, *Straw Dogs, Dirty Harry,* and *The French Connection,* see the debate between Garrett Epps and Richard Leary in Film Critic (New York), Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 54 ff.

[5]Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (New York, Harper & Row, 1966), p. 19.

[6]Ibid, pp. 52-53.

[7]For a most scrupulous examination of the actual details of *Straw Dogs,* see Charles Barr "Straw Dogs, A Clockwork Orange, and the Critics" in *Screen* (London), Summer 1972, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 17 ff.

Where We Are At: Largely, Dead Center

by Robert Steele

Professor of film at Boston University. He is a critic and has written and directed films.

I would take a wild guess that for every five hundred films I have seen, I can remember one. I used to keep notes on every film that I saw. Then I cut down the chore by itemizing film titles in a notebook. Subsequently I realized that I didn't use the notebook and that if I needed the title to help me to recall the film, it wasn't worth recalling. So I no longer take a clipboard and penlight with me to the movies or bother to record the titles. Except for the few films which become celebrated to such an extent that I feel I would be derelict if I did not offer some comment about them, I review only those films that I feel should be brought to the attention of the public.

I should explain that I attend all the exhibitors' and press screenings that do not conflict in their scheduling. Oftentimes when films show up at exhibitors' screenings, they are unknown items. Frequently, *The Independent Film Journal* has not even announced the film in its blue supplement. Even when it is announced, the miniscule information is of little help, little *dependable* help, in making the decision to attend. Most persons do not know about the voluminousness of film junk. While some exhibitors are looking for junk, if it is cheap enough, the amount of available junk surpasses their willingness to risk even small bids. Frequently exhibitors do buy movies that I think should best be left on the shelves, but they apparently hope that a pile of garbage will bring in some profits at drive-in locations. Good exhibitors know their audiences, and the buying of junk cheaply keeps some of them in business.

Because of the foul tastes of blocks of the public, I find myself defending the modus operandi of exhibitors and distributors. Film buffs wish to tear exhibitors apart. They say there are all those great films that they want to see which exhibitors will not play. Exhibitors are made out to be men of boorish

tastes who care for nothing but popcorn and dollars. It is true that some exhibitors might better manage pizza places because they know nothing and care nothing about films. But many exhibitors do like and recognize good films when they see them, and they would like to buy certain films, but through painful experiences, they have learned that this nice film won't make a buck. For them the culprits are the audiences. They are caught in situations which are not of their making. Of course, they do want to make money and lots of it. They are business men, and what else is there for a business man to do but make money? And for some exhibitors making money becomes their reason for living. It is their sport, hobby, and love as well as their work. Some exhibitors are greedy and crass, but more often they wish to make only an occasional killing. If they can get a run for a good film that is not necessarily a bonanza, they are satisfied, but they cannot continue to meet their expenses showing films to almost empty houses.

Poor Ben Sacks! This exhibition mogul has over a dozen of the finest cinemas in Boston. Speeches are made at the opening of each of his new houses praising him for his civic-mindedness, his maintenance of standards for quality entertainment, and his singlehanded effort to keep alive the cinemas of downtown Boston. He was sued for having cut what he felt was offensive sexual material from *Sweet Sweetback's Baadassss Song.* Mr. Sack shows many films of interest and quality for which he may not deserve credit. Like all big exhibitors, to get the one very hot film, he has to buy a package of films. One out of five—naturally, the one that he felt he had to have—is a hit with the public. The other four do not hit. Frequently, they are the unusual and more creative ones. So he shows many films that are worth sitting through in empty houses after the first week. He was so offended by *Mark of the Devil* that he refused to look at it when a distributor tried to show it to him. Probably he regrets this. By way of a publicity campaign that gave a "V" rating to the film—"V" for vomit, and vomit bags were passed out on the streets—it made money. Also he turned away from *Last House on the Left.* That film retooled the rape and retaliation themes of *The Virgin Spring. House* was another box-office smash. He got *The Stewardesses* and did well with it and did not get arrested. Now Mr. Sacks bought the winner, *Deep Throat.* One would have expected this film to go into the Music Hall of the grind houses and not to a Sacks theater. Because of his films that lose money, I hoped that he would dare to open it in Boston and not get busted. But Attorney Louis M. Nordlinger of the Boston district attorney's office journeyed to New York City to take a gander at the film. District Attorney Garrett H. Byrne has given a notice to Mr. Sacks that his office will seek an indictment against any theater playing the film, so no one will be playing *Deep Throat* in Boston for awhile. Had Mr. Sacks been permitted to show this film, he might have risked more of the films that *Variety* gloomily points out will need "special handling."

Our institutional structures of distribution and exhibition block the development of quality and variety in our filmfare. These structures are responsible for a goodly portion of our barren scene. Along with their direct culpability, they give silent assent to all else that is dismal in that world. After seventy-five years of movies, it continues to remain a fact that distributors and exhibitors still show no inclination to exert responsible leadership. They are show business statesmen. Many of us because of the growing artistry of film today are no longer satisfied with just "show business" films—even with such better examples as *Cabaret.* It is possible that many persons, perhaps as many as several millions, have little love for television but continue to watch it because they simply don't find enough attraction in movies to stir them out of their homes. If we were to poke seventy-five years of movies through an orange squeezer, we could get five years of juice and

seventy years of pulp. Year after year we continue to be served dessicated fruits with brightly dyed skins. The history of movies is the history of a victimless crime.

But equally guilty are those individuals that I would call movie publicists—and by that I do not mean the press agents whose job it is to sell pictures.
I am referring to those publicists whom we mistakenly call critics. Connoisseurs of film who are also able to put their thoughts in writing could well be protectors and celebrators of creativity and experiment. In addition they could be the exposers of copyists and of formula-bound technicians.

The wide popularity of film has provided a single opportunity for the ignoramus to gain attention and even fame. I have in mind a reviewer of *Decameron* who put down the film with the observation that it lacked continuity because the scenario was episodic. Particularly newspapers enable incompetents to become authoritative opinion makers. Plenty of exceptions are to be found in journals and newspapers, but the national scene of film "critics" is another barren one. The qualifications and the sense of responsibility of those who write about novels and visual arts differ markedly from those who pontificate about films. And those critics who spout on television and radio have much in common with the charlatans who pre-sell toys to children before Christmas. Even their opinionated damns as well as hosannahs help sell the film product. Compare the number of photographs in newspapers having to do with films with those that have to do with other entertainments and arts. Huge and numerous photographs of sexually appealing stars help newspapers in their competition with other newspapers. The advertising lifeline of his newspaper is known by the punk who cranks out reviews. Should it slip his mind, his publisher will not hesitate to telephone a kill-copy order. Championing creativity may be appreciated in the reviewer of books, theater and painting, but it is not wanted nor expected in the movie critic.

At this juncture in the development of film, one would think that critics would know that they should have seen a lot of films, studied the pertinent literature, and dug into aesthetics. Film reviewers get away with being wallpaper hangers, and they are not troubled by hanging new paper over old paper covering cracked plaster. Admittedly it is difficult to have something insightful to say about the good, bad, or beautiful. A knowledge of art and aesthetics helps to shape a capable critic, but does anybody know anyone working on a newspaper who has this kind of background? The subjectivity of taste and the capriciousness of perception make film criticism a demanding and mature challenge. How are preferences and judgments to be substantiated? Before releasing his copy a film writer might well give thought to Theodore Meyer Greene's definition of the three areas of responsibility of the critic—the historical, the re-creative, and the judicial. Familiarity with the careful distinction made by Stephen Pepper and Louis Arnaud Reid between the "great" and the "good" in art could put a brake on that journalist who is never happier than when he can open or close his review with a "go" or "don't go."

Even our more capable film writers will scream that the following expectation is just too much: Film writers should have production experience. They should have made films or have been closely associated with others who are making films. You cannot judge films fairly or accurately until you have had such experience.

This is not to say that filmmakers make good critics or that critics should be filmmakers. It is saying that before a person writes about films, he should find out what torture it is to nurture an imaginative concept into being. Filmmaking experience is the way for a critic to see more. And also to have some compassion for the fumbling that precedes creation.

Last Tango in Paris
Courtesy: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Writers abet our wooden film institutions by writing about themselves, their feelings, likes, and dislikes, and too little about the nature of the film being scrutinized. It is almost impossible to imagine what would happen if by caveat for a year film reviewing were to be done anonymously. In the past painting and poetry criticism have been created anonymously, and today editorials and news reporting are unsigned. Of course, signed criticism is justified, and we should have it, but what illuminations might we behold if reviews were talked about and identified by their insights rather than their authors' names. The veterans who are prone to exploit film as a means of magnifying their personalities would become woefully displaced persons.

An eccentric among film writers who doesn't care a hoot about film institutions is John Simon. He is intelligent. He knows something of all the arts. We suspect that he has standards. He can be cruel as well as funny when he pounces upon films that don't measure up. Persons know his name who have never seen a copy of *The New Leader.* He is not only disliked, he is hated by persons who have read little of his writing. I have no wish to make a case for John Simon. I wish to point out what happens to a critic who does not go along with the pack. Movie institutions do not have a place for him except as a foil. Compared to the occasional pimple a critic may be on the cheek of the industry, he is a boil on the behind. Judith Crist with her endless superlatives gets her name in newspaper film advertisements daily. John Simon's name hitched to an excerpt from his review would drive people to the cinema if it were negative and keep them away if it were positive. Whether more independents like John Simon would help break down institutions or not, I don't know. But if writers about film were more intelligent and creative themselves, they might give the filmwriters' fraternity a needed shakeup. At times we have to look to outsiders as our

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie

only hope to undermine suffocating systems and institutions.

A rating system is no fertilizer of film creativity. Now it is curbing freedom in the handling of subject matter. We need regular resuscitation from those Europeans who can't comprehend, and, therefore, have decided to forget our rating system. Instead of a film writer waiting to see if he will be hit over the head for what he has done, now he keeps a hammer close to his typewriter, so that he can hit himself over the head when his zeal begins to lead him to an "R" instead of a "PG." Ratings have to do with insuring big business. They send pictures, for example, *I Am Curious (Yellow)* and *Last Tango in Paris,* to the wrong audiences. Their insightfulness becomes a bore for the viewer who is not expecting or wanting creativity.

The list of box office champs, to the extent *Variety* (January 3, 1973, p. 30) is using trustworthy figures, makes clear what the American public likes to buy: *The Godfather,* $81,500,000; *Gone With the Wind,* $77,030,000; *The Sound of Music,* $72,000,000 (Pauline Kael's disliking the picture and saying so in *McCalls,* which resulted in her being ousted, seems not to have imperiled box office receipts.); *Love Story,* $50,000,000; *The Graduate,* $48,300,000; *Doctor Zhivago,* $47,950,000; and *Airport,* $45,300,000. Conclusion: The American public buys the conventional, narrative film, and it does not care if its creativity amounts to no more than transforming novels and plays into film. More than distributors, exhibitors, reviewers, writers, and directors, audiences control filmfare. Cheers for the democratic workings of the American cinema! Votes at the box office make winners and losers.

The gross for *Sounder* for eighteen weeks is almost three million. That's not bad. *The Emigrants* for the same

number of weeks raked in only a million. *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* and *Chloe in the Afternoon* pulled a half a million each in thirteen and twelve weeks respectively. The Buñuel and Rohmer films possess freshness and evidence creative minds at work. They will never rival *Sounder.* Its success might be read as a sign of the public's being able to take something new. The skin pigmentation of most of the players and their believability as human beings give the film a facade of freshness. The amiability of the film has wooed reviewers into feeling they should be not only kind but generous. Since the beginning of movie-making, the formula of this film, couched in abundant sentiment, has dragged in the bodies. Boy loves mother, dad, and dog. Boy loses dog. Boy loses dad. Boy finds dog and dad. Boy, mother, dad, and dog live happily ever afterwards. (I wish I had bought some Walt Disney stock instead of a college education.)

The thinking in this article will be ignored or scoffed at by the wheels in our movie institutions. Such institutions are congealed. I expect them to remain that way. As long as our movies are tied to economic structures, they will continue in the same pattern for a long time to come.

The development of a vital film art in this country finally and most of all requires a discriminating public. We now have the artists and a vision of possibility for film. Our work for the future is to transform audiences so that they will accept and support more creative films.

In the meantime, we are at dead center.

Chloe in the Afternoon

Educating Filmmakers and Television Directors as Creative Artists in the United States*

by George Stevens, Jr.

Director, The American Film Institute. He is a filmmaker and Director of the Center for Advanced Film Studies.

I. Introduction

Filmmaking is coming to be recognized as the most complex of all the arts, requiring of a creator a grasp of many individual arts, crafts, and technologies as well as humanistic and philosophical background and capacities of leadership and courage. Because of this complexity and the fact that cinema has been practiced for less than a century, there is meager definition and theory of the art, and the education of film artists is one of the least defined of all educational processes.

In order to discuss the education of filmmakers in the United States we must reduce the topic to a manageable scale, and this calls for defining terms and eliminating certain areas which are too broad for a paper of this length. When we speak of the filmmaker, we will be referring to the person centrally responsible for making a film, and this can encompass the functions of the director, writer, producer, or a combination of these. When we speak of film, we will be referring to it in its broader meanings, including feature motion pictures,

*This paper was written by George Stevens, Jr., for a UNESCO meeting on the training of filmmakers which took place in Belgrade in May of 1972. At that meeting, the international delegates discussed the pressing need for teaching materials to aid instruction and learning in the art of film and television production. Since then, The American Film Institute held a meeting at its Center for Advanced Film Studies in Los Angeles among professors of film and television from ten important American universities. The meeting was attended by professional filmmakers, including Alfred Hitchcock, George Seaton, Robert Wise, and George Stevens. A transcript of the session was published in The American Film Institute's series. *Dialogue on Film,* Vol. 2, No. 1, 1972.

AFI will be working with universities around the country and foreign film institutes to spur the development of films, tapes, and books on the filmmaking process which can be available for the growing number of university film and television courses.

documentaries, television, and abstract or experimental work. My reference points will be to American filmmakers, since it is the United States which is the subject of study. This is done with a keen awareness of the internationality of the cinema and with the knowledge that there are comparable reference points in the national cinemas of other nations. Finally, in referring to the education of the filmmaker we will confine our attention to the learning of the creative process of movie-making itself, assuming that the filmmaker gains his humanistic and philosophical education separately from the process of learning his art and craft. This, of course, is not always the case, but it is too ambitious a task to attempt to analyze in this paper the broader humanistic education of individuals.

II. History and Origins

Simply *doing it* has been the traditional basis for learning how to make films in America, dating back to the early part of this century and the first stirrings of a new medium when Edwin S. Porter created "The Great Train Robbery" and later pioneers of American movie-making, like D. W. Griffith and Chaplin, simply stepped out and made movies. The quality and innovation of these early films is miraculous when one considers that they were, in fact, primitive art. There was very little left to invent in terms of film language by the time D. W. Griffith had made his masterpieces. From then on, it was largely a job of refining and using the language. Succeeding generations of American moviemakers learned by doing and through association with accomplished craftsmen. Many came from Europe, some came from the theatre, and scores worked up through the burgeoning film industry which was producing thousands upon thousands of motion pictures, and providing the greatest training ground and field of practice which the medium would probably ever know. This condition existed, in part, because the work was largely concentrated in one community, Southern California, and this concentration provided a synergistic exchange of knowledge and talent. But it was this very advantage which would eventually become the drawback. As time passed, the film industry became increasingly powerful and jealous of its power, which in turn led to a protectionist attitude which saw the walls of the studios become nearly impenetrable and the profession increasingly less hospitable to newcomers.

This rigidity became a way of life after the second World War, and a new medium, television—which the American motion picture industry, to its later regret, ignored at first—created economic competition and diversification of audience which were to mark the beginning of the decline of the American motion picture companies that had dominated the international scene for three decades.

The result was that by the 1950's there was very little learning going on within the American film industry, and there was both a decline of production and a resultant decline of opportunity for new people. There were a few film schools at universities in the United States, but, up to this time, these had exerted no effect whatsoever on American movie-making. It was during the 50's and 60's that technological innovation in the form of portable sound cameras and high-speed film took filmmaking outside of the studio walls and put it into the hands of many different people. In effect, innovation in technology "democratized" the filmmaking process. During this same period, film was beginning at long last to be taken seriously by cultural and academic leaders in the United States who had traditionally looked upon films as low class frivolity and rarely as the creative art form and communications force that it was. These forces collided in what has been called the "film explosion of the sixties." The film explosion, like most periods of great or rapid change, had its beneficial and its negative effects. Interest in film and serious acceptance of it

increased greatly, the gates of academia opened gradually and uncertainly to film study, and new professional opportunities appeared for young people who had previously been virtually excluded from responsible roles in motion picture production. Young people undertook filmmaking without full appreciation of the discipline and knowledge required to successfully sustain a film career. Robert Steele, a professor at Boston University, claimed that many of the young film students lacked "maturity and discipline." He said, "Many of them are not well read enough to be English majors and others do not want to spend the time studying in a scientific course. Film looks like an easy thing, and I am sure that lethargy and indolence brings a lot of them into filmmaking." The spreading idea that cinema was easy and enjoyable was to have a profound effect on the quality and direction of film study in the United States as growing numbers of young people came to the medium, in an era where the watchword was to let the young "do their own thing," unaware that with cinema, as with any art form, there was a great deal which could be learned methodically.

Ironically, whereas previously young people had been excluded from the film industry because they were young, now in an era of national preoccupation with youth they were sought out *because* they were young. Sadly, for the most part, they were unprepared for the opportunities thrust upon them, and the industry's search for the secrets of youth appears to have been short-lived.

It is within this historical framework that we will explore the state of film study in the United States as it moves into the decade of the Seventies.

III. Film Schools in the United States—1971

Almost all *formal* education of filmmakers in the United States takes place in universities, as distinct from the national academies which exist in Europe. The Center for Advanced Film Studies, a "conservatory" established by The American Film Institute in 1968 is one exception, and it will be discussed separately. In 1971, the AFI made a survey of 427 colleges and universities which offer film courses. The survey included programs in which film is studied as art as well as those in which film is studied to learn the creative process.

We will concentrate on the 96 universities at which students may "major" in filmmaking, as opposed to those which offer cinema courses but make no claim to offering comprehensive artistic or professional training. There are presently [1971-72] over three thousand students who are majoring in filmmaking at these 96 colleges. Three-fourths are undergraduates taking their general university education at the same time they are studying film, and although most foresee for themselves a career in filmmaking, experience would indicate that many will move on in different directions when the time comes for them to actually embark on a career. At 47 of these schools degrees in filmmaking are awarded and the percentage of graduates who continue to a filmmaking career is higher, but many of those with advanced degrees seem to drift to other callings due to lack of opportunity, a change in interest, or because of a belated discovery of the difficulty of maintaining a successful career as a filmmaker.

Although not directly related to the training of filmmakers, two important spheres of activity should at least be mentioned. First, a relatively new development of worth and significance is the integration of film into interdisciplinary courses where cinema is combined with anthropology, history, the social or political sciences, or, in some cases, where several universities inter-connect with one another through a cinema course. Second is the training of teachers for the study of film as art or "media understanding" in the secondary schools. As the

United States becomes more and more inundated with television and other visual media, the secondary schools are beginning to recognize an obligation to stimulate young people to appreciate good programming and to help them understand films of value. A stumbling block has been the ignorance and fear of teachers with literary training who are insecure and hesitant about using film in their classrooms. Teacher training, combined with critical studies, is a predominant emphasis at many universities. One of the most respected people in this academic sphere was the late George Amberg of New York University. Dr. Amberg held the view that it was the function of the university to educate scholars who could go on to careers as critics, teachers, or curators. He believed that "there should be professional schools for filmmakers. An artist should not have to fill academic requirements. And the university should not give degrees for non-academic work."

The six thousand students who are majoring in film in the United States are spread about universities throughout the country. In addition to the 427 schools which have at least one film course and the one hundred schools which are offering complete course studies in film, it can be fairly said that almost every important university in the United States is presently contemplating how it should incorporate the study of the visual media into their academic framework.[1]

The best way to gain a perspective on the type of training going on is to examine the larger university film programs, which will reveal the diversity, both geographic and academic, which characterizes cinema studies in the United States. The University of Southern California has the longest continuing program, dating back to 1929 when it established a course entitled "Introduction to the Photoplay." The USC Cinema Department has grown through the years and in 1971 it offers four different academic degrees, a faculty comprising 24 full-time and 18 part-time professors, and nearly 75 courses. Guest lecturers from the motion picture industry include Jerry Lewis and George Cukor. Each film school has its own characteristic and USC, with an enrollment of 100 undergraduates and 350 graduate students, is noted for turning out graduates with high technical proficiency and is generally thought of as the more commercially oriented of the universities. The University of California at Los Angeles, on the opposite side of Los Angeles from USC, is oriented to a more individualistic approach to filmmaking. Whereas film production at USC is organized on a crew system in which students rotate in different roles on production crews, at UCLA there is an emphasis on each individual making his own film more as a personal statement. UCLA is the best equipped of all the universities, with modern equipment and sound stages, and William Menger, vice chairman of the department, estimates that one-half of the graduates "have found work in some aspect of commercial, educational or documentary filmmaking." UCLA and USC each have recent graduates who have gone on to feature filmmaking in the personages of Francis Ford Coppola, who studied at UCLA and is now established as a director of theatrical films, and George Lucas, who graduated from USC and, under the umbrella of Coppola's production company, made a feature film for Warner Brothers which was an expansion of his "thesis" film at USC, "THX 1138." These universities are

[1]This paper draws on the statistics of a 1971 survey conducted by The American Film Institute. Between May of 1972 and publication of this article in ARTS IN SOCIETY, the Film Institute conducted a new survey updating this information and including television for the first time (*The American Film Institute Guide to College Courses in Film and Television*, Acropolis Books, Ltd., 1973). It gives detailed information on film and television courses in 613 American colleges, including specific course titles, names of faculty, and the type of equipment available for students. Also, see *Films on the Campus — Cinema Production in Colleges and Universities* by Thomas Fensch, published in 1969 by A. S. Barnes & Company, which offers an in-depth evaluation of many campus film programs but requires updating.

but two out of 43 in the State of California alone which offer courses in cinema.

On the East Coast, New York University and Columbia University are among the leading schools. Several years ago NYU established the Institute of Film and Television under the direction of producer Robert Saudek. This was an ambitious concept of advanced study for the most promising filmmakers in the country, but it lasted only a year due to conflicts within the university and dissatisfaction on the part of the students. It has recently been revived and represents one of three segments of NYU's film activities. The others are the undergraduate program for 400 students and a program in study of film as a "humanist discipline" for 55 graduate students. Columbia recently came under the leadership of the documentary filmmaker Arthur Barron, who has restructured its film training program which is available only to graduate students. Also in New York City is the School of Visual Arts which leans more to the professional school approach since it is not within the structure of a university.

Elsewhere around the country there are schools in different regions, and often these have character of their own. Temple University in Pennsylvania is oriented toward "film as creative documentary, cinema verité, film as anthropological statement, and film as journalism." San Francisco State has a program of growing stature emphasizing experimental filmmaking which is enhanced by the artistic climate of the city of San Francisco. Nearby, in Palo Alto, Stanford University has a program concentrating completely on documentary work for graduate students. Stanford is one of the most respected private educational institutions in the United States, and the film department has established a teaching relationship with the Canadian Film Board. In the Midwest, the University of Iowa, Michigan, Ohio State and Northwestern all have film programs. In fact, the University of Iowa started the first film course in the country in 1916. However, it did not become a continuous activity at the University until more recently. The hope and potential for this school is enhanced by the excellent creative writing courses for which the University of Iowa is famous. The University of Texas has a growing film program, and the opportunity for a strong regional university filmmaking enterprise would be perfectly suited to this state university in an area of the country where there is considerable wealth and industry.

Several of the Ivy League universities in New England have instituted film programs which have their own distinct identity and vary widely. At Harvard, film is encompassed within "visual and environmental studies," and Massachusetts Institute of Technology has recently brought the well-known American documentarian Richard Leacock to its campus, where he is teaching courses and doing research and development work on 8mm synchronous sound with scientists in the MIT community. The innovations from this collaboration of artist and scientists could have profound results. Boston University and Yale each have film programs, with Yale's having the unfulfilled potential of becoming nourished by its excellent school of theatre arts. These universities are representative and rank among the most prominent, but they are only the tip of the cinema studies iceberg in the United States.

IV. University Studies—Today's Problems and Future Directions

The most significant factor in any measurement of the effectiveness of these university film programs is the relatively brief period of time which film has had to establish a formal learning tradition. Academic and professional study in the other arts dates back hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of years, whereas film, which came upon the world scene less than a century ago, has had only a few decades to find its place in the

traditions of artistic learning. This general problem and several specific ones will all be solved as time lends practice and experience and as new awareness of the significance of film to society forces the educational establishment to provide resources for film study which are proportionate to the importance of the discipline and its unavoidable high costs.

Aside from financial considerations, foremost of the problems with which these universities must cope is the basic difficulty of attempting to teach a complex art and a profession and simultaneously provide an individual with a complete humanistic education. One or the other suffers, and frequently the result is that a student has learned a little about several aspects of filmmaking and even less about the general subjects of education and life which are essential equipment for a person who intends to become an interesting artist. This problem is reduced in those institutions where aspiring filmmakers are permitted to begin their cinema studies at the post-graduate level. The hope for the future should be for completely educated students of unusual merit being in a position to join a superior graduate school of cinema where curriculum, faculty, and resources are comparable to those in the finest school of architecture or medicine.

The shortage of trained and qualified people to teach filmmaking in universities is one of the most troublesome problems. Although, increasingly, the schools are able to engage people with technical experience who can teach the crafts of filmmaking, it is rare that a university can attract a person who is equipped to teach or, preferably, to "lead the learning" of the artistic process—screenwriting and film structure and the extension of these through production, including directing actors, cinematography and design, film editing, and sound and music.

In Mr. Fensch's book on university film departments, one professor is quoted as saying that he "doesn't advise artistically, just technically." This tendency to avoid any guidance or concrete instruction on the principles of cinema is widespread because very often the instructor is simply not qualified, particularly those former students who become teachers directly without professional experience. The result is that most of the learning that takes place within the universities is confined to technical understanding of various crafts of cinema. The rest is mostly on a "learn by doing" approach which, while effective in industry in its mass production heyday, is of little value if the "doing" is confined to collaborating with amateurs on a few small films over two or three years. While granting that a dogmatic or narrow approach to teaching the creative process of movie-making would be equally unfortunate, there can be no question that it is possible for certain principles and examples of filmmaking to be passed on from accomplished professionals serving as tutors.

There is a kind of circular domino theory at work which contributes to the maladies in American film education. The limited experience and skill of instructors, which can be considered both the cause and effect of the shortcomings of university training due to the fact that so many of the teachers are former students, is compounded by the dearth of teaching materials. Certainly the shortage of qualified tutors would not be as crippling if an ambitious student or a teacher with gaps in his knowledge could simply go to the university library and delve into books containing examples and explanations of creative experience over the years; or if he had readily at hand the great film works of the past and compilation studies from these works illustrating examples of achievements in filmmaking. Any survey of the books now available in English reveals an almost complete emphasis on film criticism and "scholarship" with next to nothing available on the creative aspects of movie-making, especially first-hand accounts from filmmakers themselves. This is due on the one hand to the fact

that film people are most often not literary people and have therefore been disinclined to write about their art, and on the other due to the fact that universities, by ignoring film as a creative art for so many years, have discouraged funding which could have stimulated works of this type. There are several immediate steps needed, the first of which is some source of funding to encourage the production of films and books about filmmaking, and a second one of particular importance to the United States would be a program of international translation of existing books on film theory and filmmaking. One would hope that UNESCO could take a leading role in this.

The American Film Institute's Center for Advanced Film Studies is creating teaching materials, principally based on first-person "dialogues" with experienced filmmakers. This process is in its beginning stages and over the years should be of increasing importance as more and more of these "dialogues" on the creative process become available in print, on audio tape, and on film. The AFI has completed an hour and a half feature length film on the work of John Ford, written and directed by Peter Bogdanovich, which is an example of one approach to films on filmmakers.

I have not dealt with the curricula at the universities because the sheer numbers of universities teaching film make it an unwieldy topic and also because I believe that the curricula problems will be considerably reduced when teaching materials from professional filmmakers begin to become available, for these will help shape curricula.

Equipment for filmmaking courses is another factor in the educational process, but one that is readily solved by adequate funding. Ironically, universities have been more inclined to allocate funds for the purchase of equipment and facilities than they have for preparation of teaching materials and the hiring of expert faculty, and this is no doubt due to the fact that physical problems are more easily dealt with than intellectual and artistic ones.

Modern Times
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center for Theater Research

Despite all these problems, I find the quantity of activity and interest in film in American universities to be a source of optimism. Inertia has been overcome, and the variety and quality of academic interest in film can only grow and improve. With hundreds of universities active in the field, there will be an increasing number of fine minds devoted to elevating the level of the training. And as the motion picture industry in America fragments, the potential for the universities to assume more significant roles in filmmaking in the different regions and localities of the country will grow, and so, too, experienced professionals will be more likely to join university faculties.

An institution which will hopefully play a catalytic role in this progress is the Center for Advanced Film Studies. It is a new element in the film education structure of the United States, and the concluding section of this report is a description of its underlying philosophy with some insights into its operations.

V. A National Conservatory

The American Film Institute was created in 1967 by the United States federal government. The federal body responsible was the National Endowment for the Arts which commissioned a survey by the Stanford Research Institute to determine the structure and functions of the proposed institute. This report became the blueprint for the governors or trustees of the AFI, and one conclusion stood out: "The training of the artists who create film is perhaps the most important single function which a national film institution could undertake . . . there is no other function that can have so direct a bearing on the state of the art or so immediate an effect on the quality of the art."

Two other conclusions from the Stanford Report had bearing on the creation of the Center for Advanced Film Studies:

. . . A significant gap in the total professional development system appears to exist between the formal education system (i.e., university film schools) and professional experience.

. . . Except for a few notable exceptions, the faculties and staffs of U.S. film schools seldom include a significant number of successful film artists.

The Center was designed to be a bridge between the film school and the filmmaking profession, and it sought to encourage the participation of talented professionals in its educational process. This led us to accept a rent-free mansion from the city of Beverly Hills and locate the activity adjacent to the filmmaking community in Los Angeles, where hundreds of accomplished artists and craftsmen reside. A "conservatory" approach was chosen whereby young people were accepted for individual education. Three criteria govern selection of "fellows":

1. *A candidate is accepted after his or her basic education;*

2. *A candidate is expected to have previously acquired basic skills in cinema or be accomplished in another artistic medium;*

3. *A candidate must have decided upon a career in filmmaking.*

The Center accepted its first fellows in the fall of 1969, and the first two years were for all of us—faculty and students alike—an intensive period of learning. Our goal was to create a structure wherein talented young people could learn with individual guidance and define and expand their own talents. The curriculum included film screenings, seminars with professional filmmakers, and production of films with tutorial guidance from professional advisors and faculty.

The Center opened in the midst of the "film explosion of the Sixties" referred to earlier, and this timing marked the growing pains of the Center. Having selected from 300 applicants the 20 presumed to be the most talented, we created a situation, as we discovered later, which made learning very difficult. The first fellows were justly proud to have been chosen but this quickly translated into a state of mind on the part of some which was typified by the feeling that learning was secondary and the Center's function was simply to provide resources and equipment for filmmaking. After a year and a half, one fellow came to the faculty and said, "just now am I beginning to realize how much there is to learn. I wish I could start over."

After the experience of the first year we began to revise the procedures at the Center. At first, attendance at seminars and screenings had been voluntary, on the assumption that these were the most advanced young professionals and they were in a position to decide for themselves how to allocate their time. In accepting fellows for the third year in the fall of 1971, we created a different climate with different understanding between fellow and faculty in advance. All meetings and screenings in the first three months of the year are now obligatory and the three-month period is one of mutual examination between the fellow and the Center, after which it is determined whether the fellow will continue into the next phase which involves production of individual films. This has vastly improved the learning atmosphere, and it has attracted a more serious and curious type of student, one who is aware in advance that his participation in the conservatory experience will encompass artistic discipline and specific learning goals.

Twenty fellows are accepted at the Center each year for a two-year course, and the complement of fellows now numbers between 50 and 60. The Center program begins with a three-month period in the fall when seminars, script writing, and small produc-

tions in groups of five fellows take place. This reveals to them and to us their strengths and weaknesses. In the next phase the fellows embark on their own productions with some time being devoted to internships on professional productions.

There are no examinations or grades at the Center. All the learning procedures are aimed at personal performance wherein the individual discovers the gaps in his filmmaking skills and seeks to fill them. All production work goes beyond making movies—the emphasis is to learn as much as possible by the process. We remind ourselves continually at the Center that the goal is to "make filmmakers, not films." The learning is organized into five areas which overlap daily—script writing; directing actors; photography and production design; editing; and sound and music.

All of these areas are explored in the screening and analysis of a diverse selection of films, during which fellows are assigned to concentrate on one or another aspect of the production in preparation for a detailed discussion which takes place at the end of the week. This film analysis is at the heart of the learning process and is led by the three permanent faculty members; Frantisek Daniel, Dean of the Center; Antonio Vellani Vice-Dean of the Center; and Jim Silke, chairman of film studies. These same faculty members, joined by professional writers and directors, work with fellows on their screenplays. Once or twice a week there are seminars with guests ranging through noted directors (Fellini, Hitchcock, Hawks, Renoir) through ones with writers, set designers, cameramen, editors, musicians, special effects experts—the entire range of cinematic arts and crafts. There are also regular acting classes at the Center which not only fill a void in the experience of many fellows but also bring them into contact with professional players who can be induced to appear in their films.

Individual progress has been quite remarkable at the Center. Accomplished film work is coming forth and, more importantly, fellows are clearly accelerating their learning process.

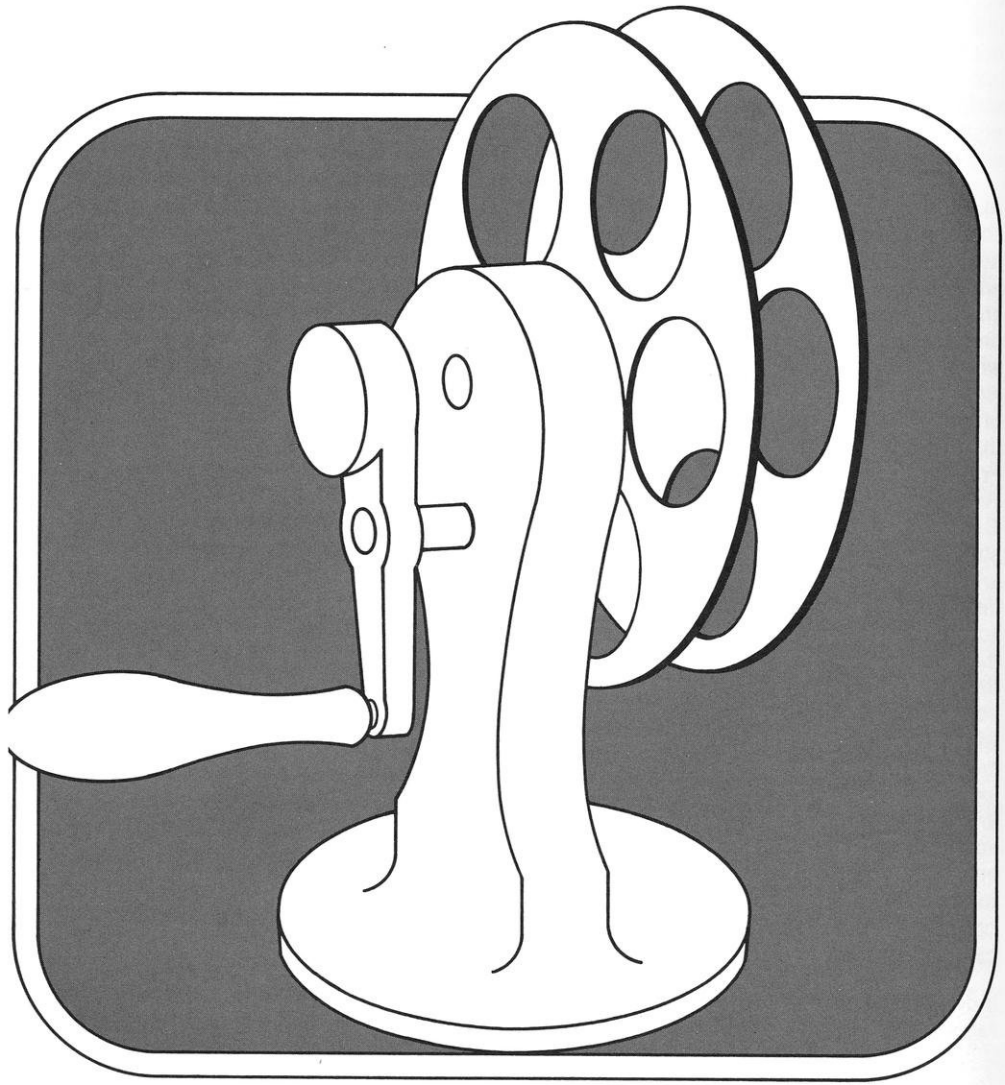
VI. Expanding the Effect of the Center

The purpose of this Center goes beyond the training of the individuals who study there. Its objective is to be a force and inspiration for film education throughout the United States, admittedly an ambitious goal for an institution just beginning its third year. But this possibility is already beginning to be realized. The discussions which take place with the film professionals are published in a series called "Dialogue on Film" which is sent to all film schools in the United States. This information is the beginning of an encyclopaedia of knowledge consisting of the first-hand experiences and insights of the leading creative people in world cinema. At the same time, for many of these professionals the Center experience is an awakening to the possibility of extending their careers to include teaching and tutoring, and we hope this will set in motion an increase in the number of accomplished artists who will teach—a trend which could begin to repair the greatest deficiency of the university film schools.

Frank Daniel has initiated a new program which will enable instructors from the university film schools to attend the Center for one month during the year. Their participation will provide a forum for exchanging information on the educational process and put them in touch with the professionals who come to the Center, which can enable them to recruit participation from these people for their own schools.

The Center for Advanced Film Studies can be one part of a chain linking the film education system in the United States with the film profession, closing the circuit between a generation of young people who wish to express themselves through a career in film and the world of art and industry which they seek to join and change.

Film as an Agent For Social Change



The Role of the Filmmaker: Three Views

An Interview with Emile de Antonio*

Interviewers: Kay Johnson and Monika Jensen

Ms. Johnson is the Assistant Director of the Wisconsin Center for Theatre Research.

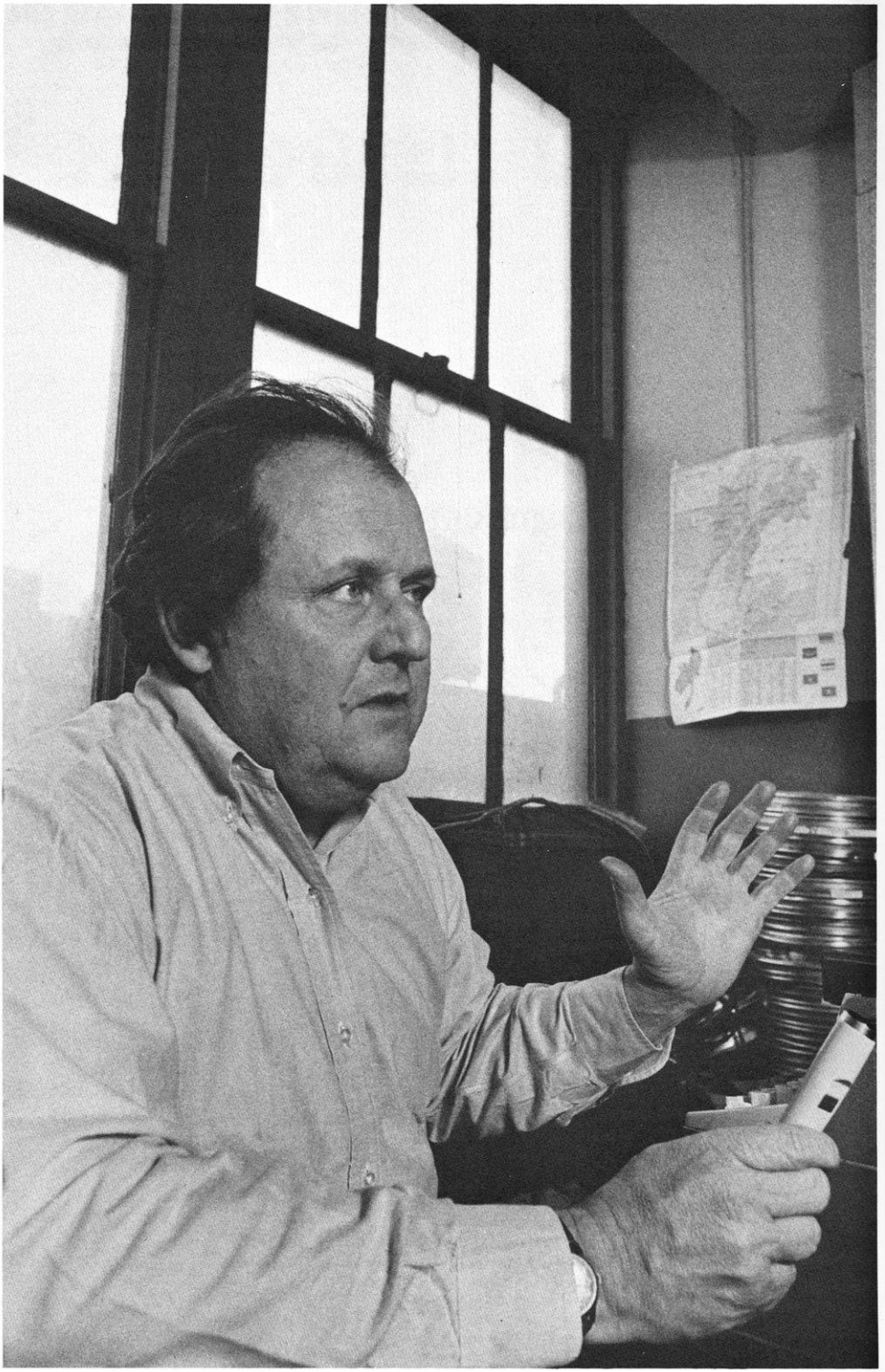
Jensen: Can film play a creative role in our society?

de Antonio: Do you mean as propaganda, to get people to do, feel, or think things, to enlarge consciousness? Because I don't really think it begins with those things, or at least not the kind of films that one finds interesting. I think there is always a somewhat dichotomous thing between people who talk about or write about films or paintings or books and those who make them. Because those who use them see a different function than those who make them. And no matter how political a person is, most people who work in film finally begin with their own egos and they simply filter the world through that ego. This doesn't mean that films or pictures or novels have to be solipsistic and deal only with the psyche or consciousness of the person who made them because obviously you make them hoping to reach other people. But I think if you begin by planning to reach other people, you end up with what is essentially tripe or what is essentially stuff that appears in newspapers.

Jensen: More specifically then, do you think that in comparison with the other arts film has any special capacities that relate to the social urgencies of today?

de Antonio: Well, I think to begin with there's the gross thing that films sim-

*In November, 1972, the documentary filmmaker Emile de Antonio visited the Madison and Milwaukee campuses of the University of Wisconsin. His appearances were sponsored by the Wisconsin Center for Theatre Research (Madison) and the Center for Twentieth Century Studies (Milwaukee). The above is an abbreviated version of a conversation that took place between Mr. de Antonio, Monika Jensen and Kay Johnson, on November 16, 1972.



ply are seen by more people so they have a greater effect. Film has an extraordinary capacity to reveal, so that particularly in the middle of the twentieth century, it is more effective than the written word because we no longer are a reading people.

Johnson: I think that film playing a creative role means, can it help shape values and attitudes in a particular society. Do you agree with that?

de Antonio: The answer to that lies in two directions. I mean, there's no doubt that the history of film indicates very clearly that in a gross way it shaped values and attitudes all through our society. Let's take for instance the days of the Depression in the United States. It was no accident that the business people who produced films in Hollywood in the thirties for the most part portrayed an America that simply didn't exist, no matter how well the films were made. It was Carole Lombard in a white fur coat. It's because people lived impoverished lives—impoverished at the level of physical gratification as well as of intellectual stimulation—that this false image of America was projected on thousands of screens all over the country. And people who couldn't afford a proper meal went to see them because film was not only an escape, but, in being projected in that way, it shaped the image that it was theoretically describing. It took on almost the role of a catalytic agent in a scientific experiment.

If your question really means can films be used creatively because the man who's making them intends for them to be used in a creative way, that introduces the whole idea of quality, and quality is what this is all about. Most films are without any particular distinguishing quality. They provide no memory in a collective sense except in so far as they are seen with many other films of the same kind.

Emile de Antonio
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center for Theater Research

The majority of films being made today are made for television or by Hollywood as commercial products. And these have a much more profound influence than the serious films that are perhaps better, simply because of the extraordinary audience they reach. There's no doubt that *The Godfather* works in two ways on people—it enables them to experience violence in a vicarious way, but also it passes time—it's entertainment. *The Godfather* is not a work of art, but the images are very sharp and strong. We are looking at faces in whom millions and millions have been invested, like Brando, who, of course, is a good actor to begin with. But out of this comes a kind of residual memory which is probably much more interesting, if less creative, than works which are more artistic.

Jensen: You don't feel then that film should be consciously used as a political medium?

de Antonio: This is what I've *tried* to do and I think there are some other people who've tried to use film as a political medium. But I want to emphasize my reticence as to the possibility of art ever moving anybody sufficiently in politics. There are a great many problems. There's first the problem that if you make political films you're only reaching the people that share your own point of view. Or that if you reach people who do not already share your own point of view that the most you can hope for is a kind of an Epiphany, a small awakening in which you can plant a doubt.

If what I seem to be saying here is contradictory to everything I've done, that's because I've always worried about this problem. Every film I've made is a political film; it was intentionally a political film. By that I mean that its subject matter was politics, that the film reflected *my* view, underlined *my* view, of what was going on because no one has a total view. And it was always my hope in making those films that people's minds would be changed. At the same time, I was

From the Emile de Antonio Collection
(The Year of the Pig)
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center for Theater Research

really skeptical that they would change people's minds.

One of the problems of film is that people who really want to change the world have no access to television or other kinds of distribution facilities. You're driven into a more or less personal statement, because the problems you deal with are personal.

Jensen: Do you feel that with your films you influence people through their emotions or through their minds? Are your films constructed intellectually, or do they mainly come out of your sense and emotional experience?

de Antonio: I think that when the films work that they move people in both ways. All my films are first of all loaded with information which is intellectual. But then how is the information handled? I think, for instance, in *The Year of the Pig,* I noticed that a lot of people were impressed with the sequence which separated the French experience from the American experience. It was a sequence with rocket launchers and a sort of helicopter concerto that I made with an electronic composer. Now that wasn't real information because the first time you saw that launcher propel the rockets you understood that that was a rocket launcher, but the point was, by driving it along it produced a visceral impact through repetition. In other words, an emotional result and an emotional response by the steady drone of the helicopter concerto and the repetition of those images of rockets being launched.

Jensen: Is there any kind of aesthetic philosophy that motivates you, say, in the editing process?

de Antonio: Something that's highly subjective and that's in me. I mean, that's the thing that you cannot separate from what you do. There is no poetry in raw facts. It's the way in which it's organized and put together.

Johnson: I agree that your films are highly informational and even intellectual. They're drawn directly from the American experience. Why then do you enjoy such success in Europe, particularly in Scandinavia? Why are your films even more successful there than in your own country?

de Antonio: That's something I've never considered, although I probably should have. I think the chief reason is that the kind of filmmaking that I do, while perhaps not a threat, is at least an insult to much of the other filmmaking that goes on in this country and to the people who control distribution. For example, in Sweden television itself is much freer than our television. It's more open in the sense that it invites controversy. And it's particularly easy to invite controversy about another country. This is true of many other countries, but let's stick with Sweden. In Sweden, all my films have been played more than once on prime time. You know, the United States is the most powerful country in the world and therefore its actions are the most interesting in the world, so that people in a country like Sweden become interested in an American's point of view that isn't a view handed out by USIA and official organs and is, let's say, a more individual view of what's going on in this country. The biggest theater chain in Sweden played *Millhouse.* It was a very big success which is something that could never happen in the United States. Conventional theaters in America simply don't play documentaries to begin with. The economic film structure here of the film industry is such that there's a close alliance between those who make films in a normal way, in the Hollywood way, or the independent producers who still operate like Hollywood, and the major distribution chains. Don't forget the people who own theaters in this country are real estate people, and that they're like any other businessmen. There are a few who are different, particularly smaller ones who have smaller investments, but the bigger ones don't want anything which attacks their basic assumptions about our society. In Sweden the problem doesn't exist, at least as far as Mr. Nixon's concerned There is enough detachment so that a Swedish newspaper said of *Millhouse,* "It's the most interesting political comedy since *The Great Dictator.*" Here people never even got the point. Even critics like Canby of the *Times,* who praised the film extravagantly, never even got the point.

The line that appears in the ads, "A film in the tradition of the Marx Brothers," is a line I rather liked for one reason: there was a real political meaning to the Marx brothers and comedians like W. C. Fields which lay beneath the surface, and maybe this is the only kind of political meaning that you can really reach people with. This is a sort of extraordinary irreverence. Irreverence is very important to anyone who's seeking social change. Think of the roles that Groucho plays —he's president of a country, he's the president of the university, he's a doctor. All those, in the thirties, were very august positions in American society. He played them all, of course, as the sort of leering thief that he was in these parts. It was his basic irreverence, with the throw-away lines and everything else, that made those pictures truly subversive. Subversive is the most you can hope to be. It was that kind of feeling, that kind of irreverence for our institutions, for the whole Protestant myth, the Horatio Alger myth about Nixon that turned sour, I was attempting to do in *Millhouse: A White Comedy.* Now the Swedes could see that, maybe because they're not living in the middle of it. I know a lot of people who share my politics felt the picture wasn't cruel enough. But I wasn't interested in doing a sort of broadstroke put-down of Nixon because


BRING US
TOGETHER
AGAIN

The Great Dictator
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center for Theater Research

that's not only too easy, that simply would be uninteresting to me. I *was* interested in being irreverent, in attacking him politically, but first of all in making a film which I would find essentially funny with certain sadness in it.

Jensen: One of your ideas which interests me most was projected in a comment you made about *Point of Order.* You said that *Point of Order* is about the failure of American culture, the winning of technique over content. I wonder if you would talk a bit of the failure of American culture outside the realm of politics, particularly in the arts.

de Antonio: Well, I'd like to start with politics, if I may, and then we'll go to the arts. I'm not saying that we're alone in bearing this burden of the problem of technique but I am saying that it has grown to such an extent in the United States that it is transmogrified. We really worship at the altar of technique. And Joseph McCarthy was an absolute genius in the technique of the media. You want to know how to reach people? No film ever reached people the way Joseph R. McCarthy did. He invented a kind of theater in which everything he ever said was a lie or a tiny fragment of the truth, but what he learned to do was to dominate the media, which is the trick today in the United States. What he was doing was a sort of fantastic magic, because he was showing all the kinds of weaknesses of our kind of bourgeois democracy by, in a sense, making fun of it all. As we all know the McCarthy cases when they did exist were cases which were dredged up out of the State Department from the days of World War II when we were, after all,

From the Emile de Antonio Collection
(Millhouse: A White Comedy)
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center
for Theater Research

an ally of the Soviet Union. So that most of the cases were phony beyond belief, but McCarthy made simply millions of miles of headlines and space. When you apply this same idea to all of American life it's the substitution of shadow for substance, of the thing about the thing rather than the thing itself. And this is because we also live in a world of public relations and advertising. This is where most of our so-called creative energy goes.

Jensen: Have the arts become a symbol of this?

de Antonio: No, the arts are a refuge from this because the arts are outside the rottenness of the system, or many of the arts are. The arts have a certain truth because they are not manufactured . They are not concerned with turning people's minds into buying things; they're not an aspect of public relations. This does not mean that public relations isn't employed in selling the arts. That's another element and it's indeed true because everything we touch has to do with the selling of culture. But I think it's when the arts are driven all the way back into individual expression that we have the only expression of integrity in our society.

Jensen: Is this the kind of idea you tried to project in *Painters Painting*? What is the substance or in other words, the content, of the artists who appear in *Painters Painting*?

de Antonio: The real content or subject of their work is painting, which has been the subject of every good artist who has ever lived. Technique is something that can be learned. Painting is something that cannot be learned. You can learn how to do an imitation of anybody in a decent art school and you've learned how to apply paint to canvas. What you've not learned is how to be a painter, which is something else.

To get to the painters that I'm dealing with, they are absolutely in the mainline of painting. It is the main tradition, which is that painting criticizes itself as it's created. Every time a new work is created in any art form it changes the relationship—if it's any good—of all other works which have ever existed up to that point. For example, what the Renaissance was really about was the development of what today seems a basically played-out idea, which is to create the idea of three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional surface. Well, in the nineteenth century painters, although they had not intellectualized it then as we have now, got nervous with this and started breaking up the space as, say, Cezanne did, so that everything was being brought closer to the surface instead of pushed back away from the surface.

You get to Picasso—the *Guernica* is something special because it is in the main tradition, because everything is flattened out. It's an acceptance less of the concept of illusion that previous artists had, more of a flattening it out, more of bringing it to the surface—those screaming horses and dying people are pressed toward the surface.

Until finally you get down to the point of Stella and Newman where the whole painting becomes the surface, and that's the part which you treat. Once you get to that point—this is why my film *Painters Painting* ends with that—once you get to that, there's nowhere to go. This is why I say the primary drive of painting, I think everywhere, is over for a while.

Johnson: Is there some point at which you think Marxists will begin to accept artists like Stella and Newman? Or will that generation of Marxist theorists and contemporary painters pass before art and Marxism reach some sort of reconciliation?

de Antonio: In Cuba, both film and pictorial art are much more advanced than in any other socialist country. The Cuban films, for example, are interesting in the way they are done and are technically interesting. They're interesting as film rather than

as just a subject. Particularly, the films of Santiago Alvarez and two or three other people working with him are much better than most American films today. They're done under extremely difficult conditions. People who've visited Alvarez's cutting room say they don't even have a movieola or a steenbeck, that they cut with a soundreader and a viewer. Those are films which are alive to form and which have a kind of formal innovativeness that is interesting. The greatest of those films, *Memories of Underdevelopment,* came from an extraordinary novel also written in Cuba in the days of the revolution. These things show what can happen if a Marxist society has some give to it, instead of being repressive.

. . . My biggest quandary when I was an undergraduate at Harvard—and this to me is the key to the whole thing—was related to the reason why I left the Young Communist League. I joined the Young Communist League when I was sixteen years old and when I was about nineteen I left. And I left over the question of T. S. Eliot, which is a very perverse reason to leave a political party. But I was first reading Eliot at that time and it became instantaneously apparent to me that he was the finest poet I was reading in the English language—of that period. And the older people I knew said, well, he's nothing but a goddam Fascist. And curiously enough he would indeed conform to my idea of a Fascist. He was an anti-Semite, he supported a reactionary religious cause, he called himself a Monarchist, he spoke in favor of Franco—which to me was really the test. On every account he was a

From the Emile de Antonio Collection **(Painters Painting)**
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center for Theater Research

Fascist. And yet, something else was left—his poetry. There was no person on the Left whom I admired who was writing poetry like Eliot. And the whole problem was stated for me right then and there and I, to this day, you know, thirty-six years later, I still don't know the answer.

The artist has a duty, but I think the first duty of an artist is to be honest with himself. And then if you're lucky you can hope to express the aspirations and the truth of your time.

Johnson: What I see in your films is a progression, an historical progression from *Point of Order* through *Rush to Judgment, The Year of the Pig,* culminating in *The Year of the Pig* and *Millhouse.* The American people are no longer innocent, they're very aware of what they're doing in Vietnam and in the election of President Nixon. If they're not indifferent to it, they're apathetic about it. Is that the role of the filmmaker, to show what's happened in the past and allow people to understand it, rather than to act as a propagandist?

de Antonio: Your statement about loss of innocence is very nice. I think it's correct and I think we lost that innocence—which we never really had anyway, but we had it in a way—and what I was trying to do in *Point of Order* was also show that we were all culpable in a sense. I mean, Welch was culpable, the Army was culpable, our society was culpable. That's a complicated, sophisticated message. It's not the kind of message that uncomplicated, unsophisticated people get. Uncomplicated, unsophisticated people go to a film like that and all they want to see is that McCarthy is a bastard who stands for bad things. But that would be a lie. The first concern of a documentarian is truth in a sense. Truth, as he sees it. That's the only truth you have. But even that truth will never be communicated to anybody unless it is also interesting in a formal way, which *Point of Order* is. *Point of Order* is the beginning of a new kind of film. It is the first film that was ever made like that and it has certain formal aspects, that people like Dwight MacDonald have noticed, even though most people who see it don't realize it. They think they're just going to see a film about McCarthy. A film *about* McCarthy was never my intention, but rather a film that was a thing in itself. There was concern with certain formal problems, because all art is concerned with formal problems.

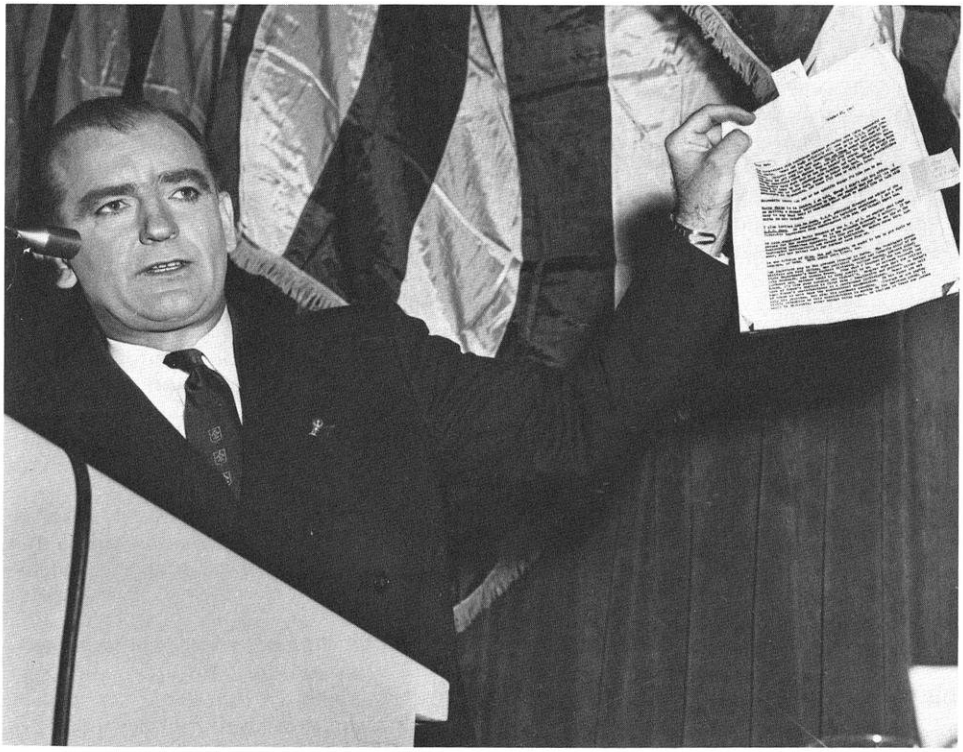
Johnson: Can the kind of complexity you are talking about only be understood with the perspective of years? *Point of Order* was made in 1963 about something that happened in 1954 and it is probably understood better today in 1973 than it was even in '63.

de Antonio: I don't think that's true. I don't think that *Point of Order* is better understood today than it was then. When it first came out there were a lot of people who saw it who had lived through the time and understood what was going on in the film. But, there are a great many young people who have no political education and who know nothing of the history that was existing when they were first alive—the years '50 to '54—and when they see *Point of Order* they have no preparation. In a sense, this is a more interesting situation because the film has to stand or fall on its own. But I don't know what those people think.

Jensen: In light of the problems of the serious filmmakers, as with distribution and vested interests which we discussed earlier, do you think that film is playing the most vital role that it can play in our society?

de Antonio: No, I think that most films are soporific, most films are an opiate. Marx said religion is the opiate of the masses. Today we'd say the media are the opiate of the masses.

Jensen: Is there a possibility of generating a more valid notion of art in our society? Can the film artist participate in such an attempt?



From the Emile de Antonio Collection **(Point of Order)**
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center for Theater Research

de Antonio: He can't do much more than anybody else. You can only do it through direct political action. I mean, I feel all my work is political but what I'm skeptical about is—this is where we began and I don't mind ending where we began—it would be very easy for me to give you the kind of answer that would read well or that would make me look like a consistent person or a rational Marxist, and I would like to appear to be a rational Marxist and a consistent person, but I would also more than anything else like to be an honest man. I believe that if I work politically and act politically that I can make some contribution to changing society, but I'm very skeptical that one's work—if it is serious—really moves people. I mean, it can move people in a historical sense over a period of time, opening up perceptions. It doesn't move people in a way that is immediately political, which is what we need.

Jensen: Are you implying then that there is such despair and disillusion in the United States today that *any* symbolic design worked out by human beings—and that would include all of the arts—has to be regarded as futile?

de Antonio: I think that the fight for justice and freedom in this country is in a state of utter and complete despair. I think it's so hopelessly chopped into bits that it has no force left. And art may be a refuge of despair today. And maybe it's one reason it feeds back on itself more and more.

And to answer Kay's previous question, I suppose the only thing my films do, politically, is that they insistently ask questions about the real assumptions of our life. And that's as much as, I think, work that you hope is also art can do. And I'm interested in making art as much as I am in making politics.

The Role of the Filmmaker: Three Views

Interview with Ousmane Sembene*

Interviewer: Monika Jensen

Jensen: Our special issue on film will deal with the role and potential of film as a cultural force in society. Would you comment on this general idea, especially as it relates to your country.

Sembene: It's difficult to talk about society in general. There are countries—for example, in America—where cinema already has a limited role. But, for countries in the process of development, in countries in the Third World, cinema can play a very important role. You have to know that in the majority of these countries the majority of the population is illiterate. They're still on an oral level for cultural expression. With cinema the culture passes from the ear to the view, so for these people cinema is more important than books. And it's more important to them because in film there is a diversity of language and means of expression. We have to keep in mind that these are people who quite often know very little about their own past. They haven't had the habit of being flattered by looking at their own past.

Jensen: Do you feel then that, especially in Africa, film can contribute in building—I should say re-building—a feeling of African cultural identity and the traditions which were disrupted by the colonial powers?

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*Ousmane Sembene, one of Africa's leading novelists, has since 1963 devoted most of his time to filmmaking — a medium which he considers more effective than writing for reaching the masses of a continent which is seventy to eighty percent illiterate. His award-winning films are often adaptations of his novels and generally follow the same themes — the plight of the lower classes in contemporary Africa, neo-colonialism, poverty and racism.

On December 1, 1972, he visited the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; presented his latest film, *Emitai;* lectured and participated in several lively discussions with students and faculty. His appearance was sponsored by the Department of African Languages and Literature as part of an "African Week" festival. The above is an edited and shortened version of an interview which took place on that day.

Sembene: I'm in complete agreement that cinema for us is an absolute necessity because African society is in a state of degeneration. For this reason, cinema fills the void by providing contact between traditional society and modern society. We were never taught our own history. The only thing colonialism did was to destroy the myths of our heroes. The colonialists made a lot of films on Africa but the stories are of Europeans where Africa served as a decor and the African as an actor. With the birth of African cinema we want to restructure our own history, show the European as the invader, and to create myths of heroes.

Jensen: Does American or European film still play an influential role in Africa in continuing to provide false images?

Sembene: Western cinema from the beginning has and continues to destroy the system of African culture to such an extent that there are an enormous number of people who have never left Africa but who continue to have a certain alienation that they've learned from the cinema. At times they've gone to the point of abandoning their family names to take the names of movie stars and actors. And the effects of cinema have reached the point of imposing a European style of dress, European style of walking, European style of doing. Even African gangsters are inspired by the cinema.

Jensen: Your films seem to place a great deal of emphasis on the roles women play in African society. In this context, particularly, you seem to criticise some traditional values of African society as well as reinforcing others. Is this a conscious motivation?

Sembene: I think I'm conscious of what I'm doing. Women have played and continue to play a very important role in Africa, contrary to what certain European writers say. Even when they were faced with colonialism, when certain of the men were alienated, women continued to guard the tradition and the culture. The little that we do know about African history we owe to our women, to our grandmothers. In every level of life they've participated in one way or another. You can move around in certain African countries and you'll see that it's the woman who controls the economy, who runs the market, and there are certain villages where all the authority rests with the women. And whether African men want it or not they can't do anything without the consent of their women, whether it's marriage, divorce or baptism.

Regarding the question of tradition, there are things which are going to die by themselves and I think we have to start deciding what they are and expect to see them die. What was valid for the times of our fathers and grandfathers is no longer valid today. We haven't changed but our society has changed. Our way of doing things, of working and living, is different and I think we'll have to evolve with the social aspects. People often think it's the men that change but really it's the economy that changes and it's by changing the economy that the men change.

Take, for example, an African who lives in a villa with a refrigerator and a car, with electricity and television. This fellow has a comportment that is in keeping with his environment. He remains African but his conduct is influenced by the things he has around him, his friends. I can't imagine seeing a judge from Nigeria or from Ghana going out twenty-four hours with the peasants. He goes out with people from his own milieu, and they have exchanges among themselves. Their way of sitting down and their way of conducting themselves is different. Even their clothing is different. Those are some of the changes taking place in Africa.

The introduction of electricity changes things, changes the furnishing of the huts. Elements influence men and then in exchange men modify the ele-

ments, and from there a new tradition is born and the old tradition of our grandmothers with their oil lamps or with the fire in the middle of the huts no longer exists. We Africans are not ashamed to evolve in that way.

Jensen: Would you say the African filmmaker should be motivated by present-day social urgencies?

Sembene: I think the artist is someone who is committed. We can neither invent anything or receive anything. We must see and know our society. We have to be within and without at the same time. Within in order to feel the heartbeat, and without to create the image that society gives to us. And it's from there that we take a position. But our role stops there because the artist alone cannot change society. He can, however, help to orient the society.

The artist can also create something but before the end of the act of creation, society has already surpassed it. Because the changes, especially on the level of cinema, are so rapid in Africa. The role of the artist is not to say what's good but to denounce what is bad. He should never *suppose* that he has a profound knowledge of his society. One of the problems he faces is that within African society there are many ethnic groups and each group has its own values and symbols.
I think that the contemporary African artist must do everything to present a national concept without infringing on the local or ethnic concepts. This is very difficult.

I am for change in society and those who are like me are for change. But since we're only a handful, a minority, we don't have a Don Quixote attitude that says we can change society. Historically, I don't think that there has been a single revolutionary work which has brought a people to create revolution. But, for an artist to bring his audiences to the point of having an idea or theme, helps the revolution.

Any work which does not have the movement of transmission toward the people will remain sterile. It's not after having read Marx or Lenin or Marcuse that you can go out and make a revolution. A revolution has to be organized. Men have to come to the point of having an idea in their heads, an idea that they share, and that they will die for. That is why a work of art is always limited. Works of art are just a point of reference in history and that is all. I didn't plan, in making my films, to have people make a revolution after they saw them. Nevertheless, my government doesn't like *Mandabi.** But the people like it, and the people talk about it whether it's at the post office or in the market. At every event they say, "You're not going to pull the 'mandat' on me." They just arrested a lot of people who were doing the "mandat" and who were denounced by the people themselves. It is interesting to note that when they denounce these people, they don't really denounce the person; they say it is the government which is corrupt, and they say that they are going to change the country. They do this with nothing more than the ideas they got from the film. I know my own limits, but I also know that I am participating in the awakening of the masses.

Jensen: I know that you have trouble distributing your films in your own country. Do you have any suggestions about film distribution in Africa?

Sembene: We know what we have to do. We have to change our government. But, unfortunately, we can't do it now. I think my colleagues in other

Ousmane Sembene
Photograph by James Korger

**Mandabi*, the Wolofized version of the French "Le Mandat" or the money order, is one of Mr. Sembene's award-winning films. The film depicts the plight of an uneducated African who tries to cash a gift money order from his nephew who lives in France. He is humiliated and finally cheated out of the money and his home by the neo-colonial bureaucracy and all those who parasitically take advantage of it.

African countries face the same limitations. There is the question of struggle and the relationships of force. We are the weakest. But we are making films which the population supports, we have projections for the population, and we explain the problems of Senegal today. The question of distribution can not be separated from other problems. It's linked to the problems of unemployment, prostitution, the lack of schools, the lack of dispensaries, and a lack of national culture—everything is connected.

Jensen: You mentioned earlier that in America cinema is already limited. Many American artists, critics, and writers, also, feel dispirited about the role of art in a society like ours. They feel that the arts today can not contribute in any substantial way in bringing about change and adding depth to our culture generally. Would you agree with this?

Sembene: America is a racist, capitalistic country. And it is a country where the only moral value is the dollar.

Jensen: Well, what I'm getting at is this: Do you think that art, specifically film art, can play in our society the same vital "raising of consciousness" function you spoke about earlier when you talked about the artist's role in Africa?

Sembene: A long *no.* Only the people can do this. If you only say that artists are making their work and everything is going to change because of it, nothing is going to change. You can put all the revolutionary work you want on the television, but if you don't go down into the street, nothing is going to change. That's my opinion.

Jensen: Would you care to talk about the problems of financing your films?

Sembene: That's the most complex problem. We went all over the world selling and projecting our films, carrying our machines and our tape recorders to raise money. From this we have made a little bit of money. Our films are filmed in Africa while the pulling together, the technical work, is done in France. The sources of financing can vary. You can find, perhaps, a range of people who will lend you money or be willing to participate in the making of the film. Sometimes you can find a friend with credit at the bank who will let you use that credit. That's why our films are so limited. Most of us only make one film every three years. We make it and then we have to run all over the world for distribution. One part of my trip here is motivated by the problem of distribution for my film. With the money I might earn here, we could begin another film—after having paid our debts.

Jensen: Wasn't it a church organization from this country which commissioned your film—*Tauw*?

Sembene: They commissioned the film, I made the film, they paid me, and I took the money and made more films.

I tell you I was astonished when the church asked me to make a film on Africa. When I came to show the film in New York, I stayed one month in Harlem and I asked them why did you want to make a film in Africa when you could have made the same thing in Harlem.

Jensen: Have you gained a good following in this country?

Sembene: It seems audiences were happy but I haven't even asked.

Jensen: Your purpose then was not to communicate to a larger audience, an audience that would include people in countries other than your own? Or don't you think that film can work in this way? Do you feel that a film can only be effective when the subject matter relates to a community sustained by common experiences or undertakings? Let me say at the same time that I recently saw *Mandabi* and though it wasn't made for me I learned something from it and was moved by it.

Mandabi
Courtesy: Grove Press

Sembene: If we ignore the terrific emphasis on folkloric aspects in Africa, we can see that certain films whether they are made in Africa or America can give something to a general audience but initially the film is not destined for other people—each artist works for his own people. And I think with this base firmly established, the work then can make contact from people to people—with things that teach us something or when we have moments of communication, communion, with the hero of the film. There's a film that I like a lot—*The Grapes of Wrath.* I'm sure if they would show this film in Africa it would communicate an idea to the people. It's an old film which dates from the thirties, the time of crisis and danger in America. It doesn't represent present-day America but present-day peasants in Africa are at that level. You see that there are works which create communication.

The Role of the Filmmaker: Three Views

Interview with Marcel Ophuls*

Interviewer: Monika Jensen

Jensen: Would you start by telling us something about your professional background and what motivated you to make the kinds of films you make?

Ophuls: Obviously, there usually is some sort of relation between background and motivation for filmmaking. In my case the connection between both is probably very banal, although the background is less banal than the motivation. I was born in Germany. My father (Max Ophuls) was a movie director. We left Germany when I was five years old in 1933, settled in France, and became French citizens. With the German invasion in 1940 my father joined the French army. By the time I was 13 we had come to the United States. Because of the kind of work my father was in we settled on the west coast. I went to Hollywood High School, college and later became a G.I. In 1950 I went back to France and began working as an assistant director. After a period of time, during the New Wave period in films, because of my friendship with Francois Truffaut who had introduced me to Jeanne Moreau I was able to make a film called *Banana Peel* which starred Jeanne Moreau and Jean-Paul Belmondo. It was a comedy about a confidence man and was based on an American paperback novel. Then I made another film with Eddie Constantine which was, I think, a very bad film. Oh, I had done something else before that—a German film, a sketch movie called *Love at Twenty.* Truffaut had done the French sketch.

What motivated me to go into movies in the first place? I saw that despite all the great stress, crises, neuroses, and sleepless nights, my father was really enjoying himself while people in

*The above interview took place on February 22, 1973, on the occasion of Mr. Ophul's visit to the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His visit, during which he showed his film *America Revisited,* was sponsored by the Wisconsin Union Theater.

other professions seemed to be enjoying themselves less. Perhaps there was some father-son rivalry and competition—although I don't think that really played a major part. Initially my intention was to make movie movies. I wasn't all that interested in documentaries.

I am often asked what do I think of this or that particular documentary filmmaker as related to my work and I have a lot of trouble answering the question because usually I haven't seen the film.

Jensen: What then motivated you to make a film like *The Sorrow and The Pity*?

Ophuls: I made the Eddie Constantine film to pay for the groceries. This, of course, is always a dangerous situation to be in. It turned out to be a very bad film, and—what turned out to be even worse for my profession—it didn't make any money and so I was out of work for quite awhile.

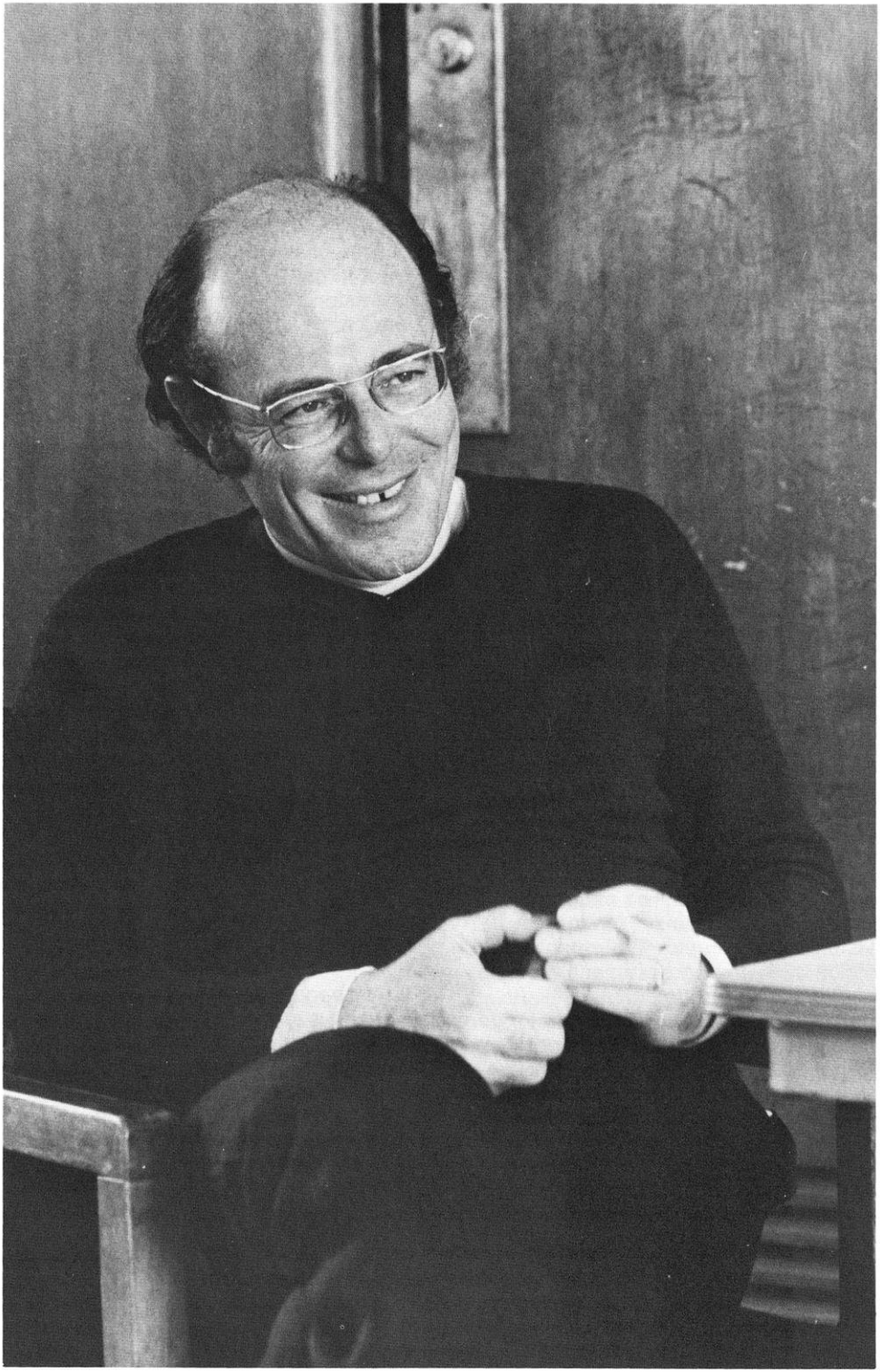
I then met some people who were working on French television in a type of news program who seemed to me to be less conformist and less establishment oriented than the rest of the people working for French television. I worked for them for three years until May-June, 1968, when we were all among the strikers. The people who went on strike against French television were trying to pry French television away from government monopoly and control. Of course, we lost that strike. I had begun making longer films of reportage while I was working for that news program and learning to interview people and to become a journalist.

While I worked for French television the producers of the program I was working on had an opportunity, through negotiations with the management, to get a larger time slot for making historical contemporary films. This led to my making a film for them called *Munich or Peace in Our Time* which featured a forty-minute interview with Edouard Daladier who was at that time the only survivor of the 1938 Munich conference. That program started me on the technique of *The Sorrow and The Pity.* As a matter of fact, *The Sorrow and The Pity* is just the follow-up of this film chronologically and stylistically. We planned it when we were still on French television and later when we were fired, or left voluntarily or whatever you want to call it, I got a job with German television. Since my former associates were more or less without jobs, I said why don't we pick up our old idea again. We persuaded German television to put up most of the money and arranged a very elaborate co-production procedure between Swiss and German television to make *The Sorrow and The Pity.*

I would like to make the follow-up for *The Sorrow and The Pity* because as I explained it is really a predecessor of a trilogy about the history of the French bourgeoisie before the war, during the war, and two years following the war. I've been wanting to wrap it up but I've run into a great many difficulties.

Jensen: Our special issue will be looking at film as a creative force in society. Do you feel that film has any special capacities for being able to relate more to social urgencies than the other arts?

Ophuls: I don't want to qualify your question by separating films and television because that's a little artificial nowadays. Whether your work gets on television or into movie theatres depends on who you are working for and who you are financed by. The fact that my films are shown in theatres is more or less a matter of accident. There's a quantitative element involved in that more people can be reached by audio-visual means than by a very serious book which may be hard to read. There are also notions of entertainment and of vulgarization connected with this. Whatever sense of mission or teaching or social relevance I have is very much



tied in with, not to say subordinated to, notions of entertainment. My priorities in the cutting room are not sociological or historical or even political. I feel more comfortable with the idea of making people laugh or cry, of keeping them interested—show-business things. In this I think I differ from most people nowadays who are interested in films as research tools, who believe in the documentary mystique or that the camera is a particularly well-equipped tool to seek out the truth. I'm not saying that I don't feel a sense of mission or that I didn't have a political purpose when I decided to make *The Sorrow and The Pity*. Obviously there's a political purpose in it. Within the context of French politics, especially, a political purpose is plain. It may have a historical purpose, too, in the sense that it tries to destroy certain myths and reestablish certain balances, but that's about as far as I'd go in tying my work to social urgencies.

How influential can this be? Well, that depends on circumstances. French television refused to buy *The Sorrow and The Pity*. It therefore became part of a political campaign in France, furnishing an example of how uniliberal and how tied to government policy French television is. (This to me was, of course, very enjoyable because I had left French television for precisely those reasons.) The film was used as a political tool long before it came out. It became what is known in France as a *succès de scandale* which certainly contributed to its career. Ironically, I don't think it would have acquired that much notoriety if it had just been a television film, even if it had been shown in France. As it is, it has now been shown on most of the big television networks in the world and it is still playing in the Paris movie theaters. But this is a special case which finally has a lot to do with accident. I don't know whether films can perform a sociological or political function just because the filmmaker decides to make them politically relevant. Again, I emphasize that it has to do with the number of people who get to see it. And that has a lot to do with accident and commerce.

Jensen: Critical reaction in this country to *A Sense of Loss* was not nearly as pronounced as it was to *The Sorrow and The Pity*. Audiences, too, seemed to involve themselves more in the latter movie. Do you think that this is because it is perhaps easier for a filmmaker to move people by depicting the events of the past than those of the present?

Ophuls: I don't know. I think the results you get are different. Certainly *A Sense of Loss* is much more reflective of the viewpoints of the interviewers who in this film are the co-authors. Since I don't make written commentary, I don't make the points in a written way. My point of view only gets across through the shape of the film. So I'm very dependent on what people tell me and what mood they're in when they tell me. They *can* be in a self-analytical, self-critical, reflective mood as they were in 1969 when *The Sorrow and The Pity* was made. We should remember, though, that this was true not just because the events of the film took place thirty years ago but also because it was six months after what had happened in France in 1968. They had been confronted with their own kids on the barricades; they were more insecure than the bourgeoisie usually is. The French bourgeoisie is not in normal times all that self-critical as anyone who knows a little bit about France will tell you. They were then the oyster which had opened a little bit; you could get the knife in and see what was inside. I was lucky in getting, if that's what you're looking for in the style of film, the self-analysis, reflection, and so forth.

A Sense of Loss deals with a *current* situation, the problems in northern

Marcel Ophuls
Photograph by Ralph Sandler

Ireland. I think one of the things that provoked criticism is that people expected to find these same things again and didn't quite understand why that was difficult or perhaps even impossible to get. When people are in the *middle* of the shit, even when they do reflect—and the Irish talk endlessly about their troubles—their analysis tends to consist of clichés, rhetoric, and reinforcement. Within a critical situation, discussion about the situation is most apt to be self-reinforcing. And self-reinforcement for audiences who are not directly involved is dull. Therefore, the priorities turned out to be different for *A Sense of Loss.* One of the things I looked for—whether I found it or not is a matter of opinion—is the emotional impact of violence and loss of life on people's lives. It seems very conventional to say but among other things *A Sense of Loss* is a reaction against the "spaghetti western." It's an attempt to show how *real* loss of life affects the lives of the people involved. I did this by showing what their home movies were, where they wanted to spend their vacations, what their plans were and how they got married. I wanted to emphasize some sense of individual value again. A lot of the opposition that the film runs into is from young people who feel that to put stress on this sort of thing means that you are an old-fashioned liberal, or an old middle-aged humanist, and that it is counter-revolutionary because it's pessimistic. I can't comment on that because I can only make films with my own political feelings, not with the political feelings of others.

Jensen: I was going to ask you earlier whether your films were constructed intellectually or whether they came out of your sense and emotional experience but I think you've answered that by saying *The Sorrow and The Pity* was basically more of an intellectual construction.

A Sense of Loss

Ophuls: Yes, but both of these approaches are not planned before the filming although a lot of things *are* planned beforehand. Obviously, you don't start this type of film without having some idea about what you're going to try to show. For six weeks I work on a ratio of fifteen to one, sixteen hours a day, and most of that footage falls by the wayside. Neither the cameraman nor I know what the criteria for selection is going to be because the structuring, the script-writing, takes place in the cutting-room. That takes six months. And it *is* scriptwriting and a very classical kind because, again, I'm not a cinéma vérité man. I believe in telling a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. I'm very classic in my taste.

Jensen: Many American critics, filmmakers, and intellectuals feel dispirited about the role of the arts, and of film, specifically, today. They feel that the arts cannot really play a vital role in bringing about change and adding depth to our culture. Would you, as an outside observer, care to comment on this issue?

Ophuls: That's an interesting question and one that we are all confronted with, some of us more seriously than others, because some of us have more dedication about serious things that others do. It is a weighty problem and one facing not only filmmakers. It's the problem worrying the CBS newscasters in my film *America Revisited,* for example. Daniel Shorr and Eric Sevareid—the CBS establishment—wondering whether the telecasting day by day of the news about Vietnam and the Middle East is really of value, because they, too, have a sense of mission (even though college people sometimes find it difficult to believe this). I think that the mood of resignation that we are experiencing is part of the mood that is coming over the last half of the twentieth century in all areas. It's a feeling of pessimism and desperation. We all

Dong, Son, South Vietnam
Photograph by Henri Huet
Courtesy: Wisconsin Center for Theater Research

have it. Issues like pollution get worried and talked to death while the lake outside the window stays polluted.

Let me give another answer to your question. My father called himself a pessimistic realist, and had the arrogance to say that this was the only attitude that was artistic. Other attitudes were perhaps more useful in order to make revolutions, but if you wanted to make films an attitude of pessimistic realism was the only one that would help you to see things. He felt that the ever-increasing demands of mass media programming would eventually ride the media to death; that we would end up living in a technological Middle Ages. He also thought that the number of people who are creative are likely, from one generation to the next, to be a constant number. Whereas television has an ever expanding need for films and programs. In this situation non-creative individuals tend to represent an ever vaster majority, which in protecting their own interests, eventually repress those who create new or original points of view. The people who are in the business of communication would then be transformed into a bureaucratic monolith. When that happens, those who dance out of step are repressed. Not for political reasons, but for reasons of survival.

Jensen: You are saying, then, that this is a universal trend and not just an American problem?

Ophuls: Yes, in many ways it is a worse problem in Europe. A condition of neo-capitalist anarchy at least has one advantage, which is that if you lose one job, you can go to a competitor. But European television is a network in the true sense of the word and it is becoming very bureaucratic, indeed. It's not even a matter of rejecting a man because he is too politically committed anymore; it's a matter of life being too complicated. People who sit in offices eventually have a tendency to want to avoid complications. And originality always involves complications. It involves commitment that is not necessarily political. People who are in the communications industry do not want commitment or complications because for one thing they want to go home at five o'clock and they want to enjoy their weekend. I don't think that in the line of business I am in one can do anything without complications and without making life complicated for those who are backing one.

Jensen: Do you think that the film artist can, despite such handicaps, participate in change at least to the extent of creating and supporting a more valid notion of art in the society in which he lives?

Ophuls: I don't want to be pessimistic about this matter of structuring and disseminating information because it's part of education. If we are better informed, the world has a better chance of coming out of its crisis and we will be better equipped collectively to deal with the very complex problems we all face. Although there is the danger that this bombardment of information will also make people careless. This was part of the syndrome of the news about Vietnam and the body counts recounted every night on television. We are dealing with a two-sided question: Do you make people aware by doing that? Or do you make them callous? The answer is really both. Perhaps there may be a limit to the possibilities of attaining a sense of human solidarity on an individual level. After awhile the events may become abstractions and by trying to break through the abstractions, by *showing* things that are happening, you may not really be accomplishing what you want.

Jensen: You seem to be speaking of the media generally. Would you agree that the filmmaker as artist can have a stronger impact on society than those in the media who are simply interested in disseminating information?

Ophuls: Well, I think we probably disagree on priorities here. There may

be times in the life of people, cultural people, when art is less important than the dissemination of information. That's why quite purposely I don't make that qualitative difference. Because for one thing that qualitative difference is very hard to make nowadays. At what point does a man stop being a journalist and become a creative writer?

Jensen: Do you think that the filmmaker moves people most successfully when his film relates to a specific community—people sustained by common experiences and aspirations? Could we look at your film *America Revisited* in this light?

Ophuls: Yes. I think that this film relates to one aspect of what you say about going into a community and relating to it. The structure of *America Revisited* reflects a personal exploration of what the political crisis is about in this country, what the stresses and strains are, where the pain is, and what the contradictions are. I tried to pick up where I left off when I left this country twenty-three years ago. The structure is based on my looking up old friends and seeing what has happened to them—college friends, my relatives, my old teachers, the first black girl who was admitted as a token to the very WASP-ish college I attended. In her case, I wanted to find out what she is doing and how she relates to black militancy today.

I do agree with you on the point that people who want to react to current problems in an artistic and creative way can't really do it in a strictly sociological way because they really have to involve themselves. Since I am a Jewish, middle-class show business guy, I started from that orientation rather than going into factories or visiting American farmers. I restricted the field of investigation to what I thought I would be equipped to cope with.

Jensen: And what is your impression of American culture now?

Ophuls: I think this is in many ways the most mixed-up country of the western countries and the one where the stresses, strains, and neuroses are most blatant; the wounds are more open than anywhere else in the western hemisphere. I'm talking only about the rich nations; I don't feel equipped to deal with the others. But because of this openness, it's also the most interesting of the countries and perhaps also eventually the most hopeful one. I agree with Jean Francois Revel's assessment of this country, that if the social changes that we're all anticipating and working for do, in fact, come, America is probably where they will happen, because it is at the center of the crisis. For better or for worse, this country is at the center of the twentieth century. That's my impression.

Film in the Battle of Ideas

by Vladimir Petric

Author of a number of books, film critic and scholar. He is on leave from his post of Professor-in-Charge, Academy of Theatre, Film, Radio and Television, Belgrade, Yugoslavia. He presently teaches film history and theory at Harvard University and SUNY at Buffalo.

The function of film as the most appropriate and powerful means of ideological communication and political intervention has been repeatedly illustrated throughout the history of cinema. As an ideological tool, film has been treated with ambivalent and controversial attitudes: whenever in the service of the establishment, film has been criticized by the opposition as a propagandistic vehicle, and in the grasp of the political opposition, it has been considered by the establishment as one of the most insidious and socially "dangerous" weapons among public media. Therefore, film has been constantly subject to harsh restraints designed to negate its ideological impact, or it has been exploited as the most efficient instrument for the expression of political views.

The essential question arises: why has film become the most powerful ideological tool, more perilous for the existing social order than any other art, including theatre and literature? All countries subordinate film—directly or indirectly—to censorship control. Even in the most autocratic states theatre and literature are not officially censored by a board of "judges" appointed by the government, while the exhibition of films is almost regularly overseen by the ideological supervisors, in all phases of production from screen-play through actual shooting to the final product. Such intensive monitoring is not applied to other means of communication (press, radio, television) in countries where these institutions are owned or controlled by the government. They, of course, administer all information delivered by mass media by hiring executive personnel who will unequivocally follow the official political line—but they do not impose outside institutionalized censorship on these media centers as they do in cinema.

The control of imported films is even more drastic and common. In the

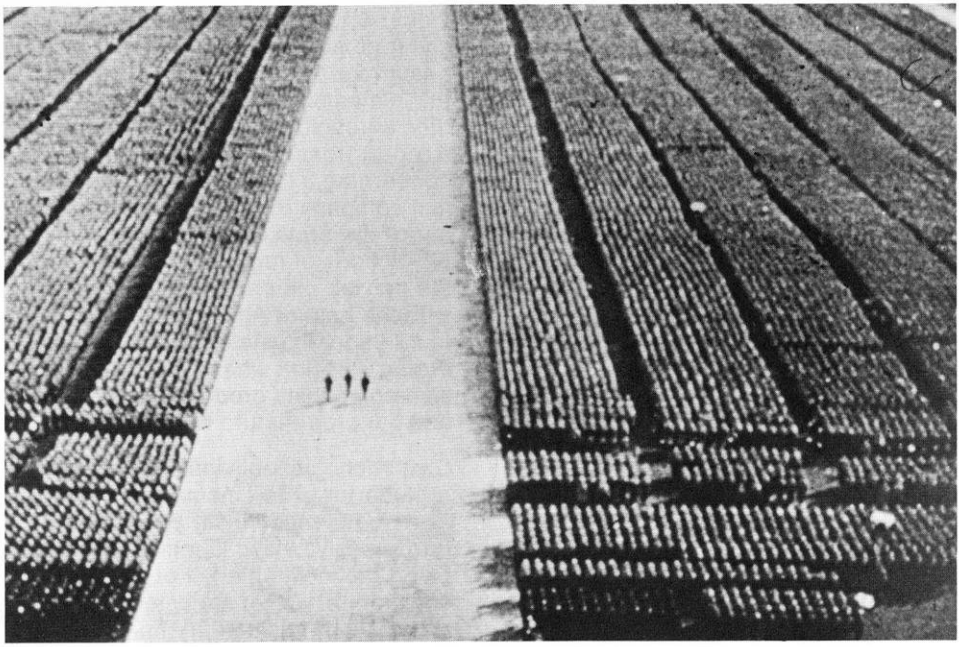
United States, for example, where local film censorship was abolished two decades ago, every foreign film still has to be "cleared" through a Customs officer responsible for the "moral" content of the imported movie (the moral code is not precisely defined in official Customs documents). Similar methods for control of imported films can be found in all Western countries, including England, France, Italy, Switzerland and Sweden—supposedly the most liberal enclaves for the arts.

A partial answer to the question posed at the outset of this article may be drawn from the fact that cinema is the most popular of all arts among common people, and therefore potentially effective in influencing human behaviour and public opinion. Television is even more popular than film today and its programming is designed almost entirely to cater to public demand and mass taste; yet television is not ideologically so penetrative and persuasive as film. Newspapers and television may have stronger *momentary* propagandistic impact on readers and viewers, but never so cogent an influence on mass consciousness as film. Significantly, the most profound influence of television has been achieved by airing films (both rented from film companies and made specifically for television). The output of feature films comprises more than 75% of the total television time in all countries and it has considerable ideological impact on the television audience.

One may say that film affects human psychology not only in-depth, but from the inside, with images that reach man's consciousness through the complex system of interference. Psychologists and politicians know this fact and use it for their own purposes. Only short-sighted traditionalists could not perceive this use and rejected film as mere entertainment. Czar Nicholas II officially announced: "I consider cinema an empty, useless and even harmful amusement. Only an abnormal individual can put this vulgar circus on a par with art. It is all sheer nonsense and should not be encouraged." Interestingly enough, this statement was issued as an official resolution in 1913 in answer to a report from the Interior Department concerning a letter from an American film company to F. I. Rodichev, member of the State Duma, dealing with projections of further development of the moving picture industry in Russia with the help of American capital. In addition, the statement was made during a period when domestic Russian companies produced more than one hundred feature films a year!

Czar Nicholas' oblivious and narrow attitude towards cinema manifested itself in his reactionary politics and retrogressive view: it somehow anticipated the inevitable fall of the Romanov empire. Other statesmen and autocrats of this century immediately grasped the ideological capacity of cinema, and manipulated it to spread propaganda, or fought against cinema whenever it advocated ideas they found threatening to the existing social order. Understandably, government officials often attacked filmmakers for their political ideas, attempting to change their ideology, at least within their films. Particularly in authoritarian countries, official forums are extremely concerned with film: on the one hand they spend an enormous amount of money to aid the film industry while on the other they invest tremendous political influence and energy to annihilate and banish films which proclaim provocative ideological views.

In an open letter dated March 22, 1934, Sergei Eisenstein reproached Goebbels, German minister of propaganda, for constantly citing *Battleship Potemkin* as a film whose structure Nazi directors should emulate for fascist ends. Characteristically, Eisenstein did not say that one cannot produce an artistic work within the Fascist political framework; he simply protested from a personal and human point of view, "how dare you affiliate my film with your political concep-



Triumph of the Will
All illustrations for this article are from The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.

tions?" For he knew that the montage technique set up by Soviet revolutionary filmmaking theoreticians could also be used for conveying the most reactionary messages. Not long after the protest, Leni Riefenstahl fulfilled Goebbels' wish, with the production of her masterpiece *Triumph of the Will* (1936), the zenith of fascist cinema and one of the best propaganda movies ever made.

In film, particularly in documentary films, it is impossible to be ideologically uncommitted. All filmmakers consciously or unconsciously "take sides" during the process of conceiving and shooting their films. The question merely revolves around the degree to which a director is ideologically motivated and in what way he reveals his views through cinematic sight and sound. These are, of course, reflected in the final impact of the film which often changes with the years and is perceived differently in various cultures. The director's personal ideological intention is not important, because it may differ from the message of his final film product, often due to unpredictable reasons. Consequently, it seems more important to explore the specific means and structures through which film conveys ideas, to analyze particular cinematic devices for expressing a political message on the screen, and to investigate why the impact of film imagery and sound on the audience is more psychologically penetrating than that of other mediums.

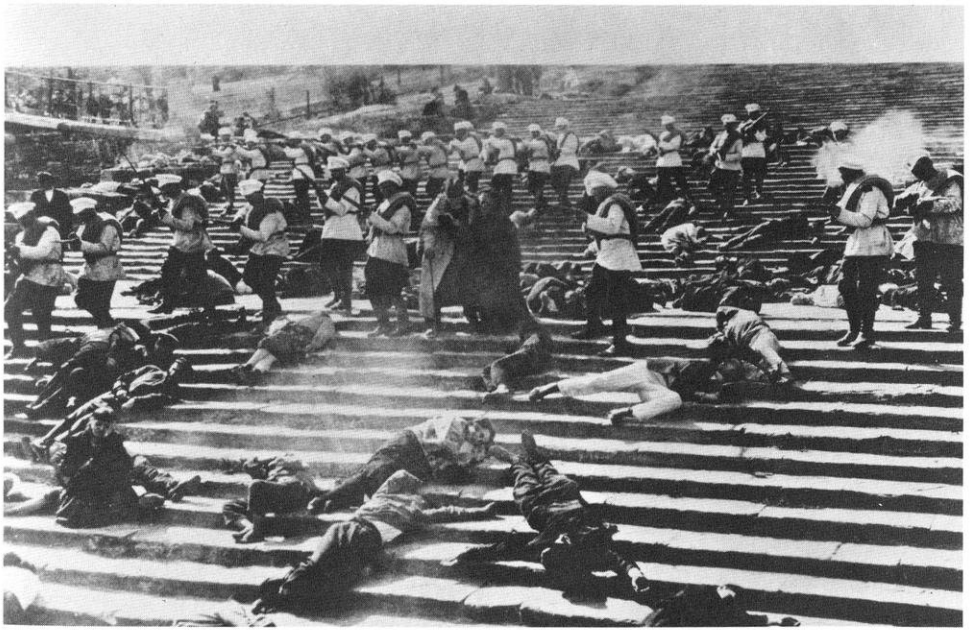
Cinematic images (in both silent and sound film) possess a unique peculiarity in which their extraordinary ideological power is rooted; they can be extremely *manipulative* and *ambivalent.* It is possible to change the ideological meaning of a film by the slightest alteration in the order of its shots; one can also reinforce the psychological impact of a specific sequence by the least prolongation or contraction of the duration of the event it depicts. That is why Eisenstein as well as other Soviet directors insisted upon personally editing each sequence; they knew that the position of a single shot can transmute the

essential ideological import of the corresponding sequence, perhaps modify the impact of the whole film. Eisenstein's political opponents knew it as well, and managed to ideologically castrate his *Battleship Potemkin* by simply moving the climactic sequence (which shows the killing of the rebellious sailors) from the beginning of the picture to the very end. After such editing-manipulation, the killings appeared to be a "justifiable punishment" for the sailors' "disobedience." Another intervention in montage structure of *Battleship Potemkin* (when shown abroad) was the deletion of one close-up which presented the rotten meat, so that the audience was deprived of learning the basic reason for the sailors' revolt! It is hard to believe that the omission of one word in a novel would completely transform its ideological meaning and author's political view. Film is vulnerable to such manipulation, and therefore re-edited films have to be treated as entirely new ideological entities.

All great directors have been aware of the manipulative nature of cinema, and have developed the most important styles in film history by utilizing the structural nature of the cinematic medium. Leni Riefenstahl engaged a dozen cameramen to shoot the Nazi congress at Nuremberg, but personally selected all the shots which compose the Baroque hymn of Hitler's "will for power," his descent as a heavenly Fuehrer down to his people. She went through the entire process of editing, aware that not only the selection of shots, but their duration, when shortened sometimes only by one frame, could make Nazi leaders more or less convincing in their infatuated adoration of the Fuehrer. The actual duration of each shot and the pace of the event could alter the content reproduced on the screen, redirecting the course of things and shifting ideological import to the opposite viewpoint.

Utilizing the manipulative capacity of cinematic rhythm and duration, an unidentified editor of Movietone Newsreels in England (some indications suggest it was C. A. Ridley) created an uproarious spoof out of the same footage which Riefenstahl included in

Potemkin



her *Triumph of the Will.* By accelerating the speed of the action (of marching German soldiers), shortening the actual duration of shots, reversing the direction of movement (of the troops and tanks), and so on, this politically committed editor was able to make the "Wehrmacht" look like protagonists of a slapstick comedy with a burlesque parade of military marionettes, decorated puppets that mechanically swept back and forth, swinging their legs up and down to the tune of the Lambeth Walk. Released several years after Riefenstahl's original documentary, this short cinematic *tour de force,* titled *Hitler Assumes Command* or *Germany Calling* (1940) exemplifies the manipulative capability of the cinema in the battle of ideas.

Similar principles can be delineated within various phases of film history in all nations. It would be a provocative enterprise to detail how original German newsreel footage from World War II was used in hundreds of documentary films produced in many countries, including the famous American series *Why We Fight* (1942-1945).

At the very beginning of moving pictures, film pioneers became cognizant of their own remarkable capacity to transform the political message of a film. French producer Lucien Nonguet made a "cinematic reconstruction" of the Russo-Japanese war, *La Catastrophe du Petropawlowsk* (1904) with apparent neutrality, supplying it with two concluding titles ("Vive la Russie!" and "Vive le Japone!") to be attached to the film according to the current political climate of the country in which it was shown. In the same manner as the "Kuleshov Effect" (which proved that the emotional and psychological meaning of an actor's expression on the screen could be changed by the interpolation of a symbolic shot), the political message of Nonguet's theatrically reconstructed naval battles could have an opposite effect, depending on which slogan followed them. Literary information (the title) was quite sufficient to make Nonguet's short film neither pro-Russian or pro-Japanese. With hindsight, he could have achieved the same and cinematically more effective statement by offering two different concluding shots, depicting either a victorious Russian or Japanese flag against the background of a sinking Japanese or Russian cruiser. But he found the title message more explicit and easier to handle, as Vertov did two decades later preferring to use titles for the most crucial ideological messages he wanted to convey in his series *Kino-Pravda* (1922-1924).

There is another trait which permits film to be exploited as a deliberate "weapon" in ideological campaigns; its remarkable power of *identification* which is stronger than any other medium's. Knowing that viewers become psychologically tied to the total illusion on the screen, the filmmaker can easily direct their attention and incite their attitude, injecting into their consciousness certain (sometimes most absurd) political concepts; he may trust that—if the audience's identification is complete—three quarters of the viewers will assimilate the ideological standpoint of the hero, at least for the duration of the film projection. Theatergoers and novel-readers intrinsically retain their "distance" from the staged dramatic conflict or described event; in contrast the movie audience instantly identifies with "the world viewed" (to use Cavell's expression) on the screen. No wonder they react aggressively (as they did at the initial release of Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*) whenever they do not agree with the ideological conception expressed in the film. They do not react against the director's political view, but rather against the envisioned reality and social conditions which they do not correlate with real life. Most significantly, a negative reaction against the ideology of a film does not mean that this same ideology has no effect upon the mass audience's psychology.

Goebbels used to say that it is ultimately unimportant whether the viewers agree or disagree with the

political message of the film so long as they intimately participate in its illusion. Hence, Nazi propaganda films spread their tendencies in spite of the audience's resistance to their ideological content. Of course, the final effect of such films tends to be stronger if and when the identification with the main characters is total, i.e. when the cinematic vision of the subject is artistically integrated with the work.

There is no relevant difference in the ideological impact made by films whose authors chose to destroy or "subvert" the illusion of reality on screen. Notably, they do it to express their own ideological positions in a more direct and strenuous way. Almost all so called self-referential films, from Vertov's revolutionary documentaries to Godard's political feature pamphlets, have been designed to propagate certain messages, to convert the audience to the author's social position or his doctrines.

Politically committed films have a common final goal: the filmmaker may reconstruct reality, or build his own vision in the style of cinéma vérité (Peter Watkins in *The Privilege,* 1967). He may employ various cinematic devices, constantly reminding viewers that they are perceiving his imagination and his intimate interpretation of politics versus sex (Dusan Makavejev in *WR: Mysteries of the Organism,* 1971), he may utilize old footage from kinescope recordings of the Senate's Army-McCarthy hearing (1954) and re-edit it (Emile de Antonio and others in *Point of Order,* 1964)—in all cases the filmmakers struggle to convey an idea, to transmit a specific message, to exhibit a personal attitude toward society (be it neo-fascism in England, socialist revolution in Yugoslavia, or McCarthyism in America).

The question of the relationship between content and form is of great importance in dealing with the problem of the ideological impact of a film. The force of the statement

Why We Fight; Battle of Russia

depends upon whether the formal cinematic structure corresponds to the message which the filmmaker wants to express. Godard admitted that all his experimentation in "revolutionary filmmaking" is aimed at solving this formal-contextual relationship; he has been desperately exploring all possibilities of cinematic language which might articulate his commitment in the most effective way. He has realized that the revolutionary content of his films demands a new, unconventional, non-traditional cinematic structure which will permit full "radiation" of the ideas that he espouses and wants to spread among the masses. Such ideological/structural unity has rarely been achieved in the history of cinema. Perhaps it was most nearly realized when neophyte Soviet avant-garde directors—enthusiastically incited by the vision not only of the new social order but also of the innovative forms in art—developed the fascinating montage technique to impart their revolutionary political ideas. Montage decomposition of the actual continuity and factual duration of historic events in Eisenstein's films, or the "subversion" of the illusion of reality and the destruction of the narrative continuity in Vertov's films—always had a specific ideological and political function.

Nevertheless, the ideological/formal unity is not the predominant consideration or stipulation for indoctrinating the common masses. No one can deny the enormous political influence of hundreds of artistically (and cinematically) insignificant Soviet films released during Stalin's dictatorship. In the same manner, Hollywood's anti-Communist productions (mainly financed by the Hearst Trust) had a lasting public impact and created an intolerant political climate known as the "Red Scare" in the United States during the mid-thirties.

Non-illusionism in the contemporary cinema has also a definite ideological intention; it prevents the viewer from identifying with the illusion of reality on the screen, in order to comment ideologically on the events and to indicate one's own conception of a "better" society. In practice the avant-garde cinematic structure that such directors create often works against the ideological content of their films; greatly diminishing the artistic value and total unity of their work; the result of the non-fusion between content and form leaves the messages dull and sterile.

Manipulativeness, identification, non-illusionism—these are three important characteristics of the cinematic medium which make film the most effective weapon in the battle of ideas. These distinctions are so decisive and powerful in transmitting the message from screen to mass audience, that television, whenever it wants to enter into political debate, *uses film* (e.g., *The Selling of the Pentagon, Hunger in America*). The modern technology of video-tape recording and editing is still so unwieldy that television cannot achieve the *preciseness, sharpness,* and *effectiveness* of the film medium. Therefore, if television wants to express its own political viewpoint or to make an ideological statement about a specific social problem, it turns to film as the decisive "phalanx" and strategic "attacking force" of the program delegated to fight a political issue.

Other aspects of this problem deserve special attention and separate investigation, particularly the fact that film can artistically incorporate ideological and propagandistic messages better than any other medium. In the other arts the incorporation of politics and propaganda regularly weakens the aesthetic quality of the work, while in film there exists many a masterpiece which contains the most blatant political and propagandistic tendencies without damaging the aesthetic (i.e. cinematic) value of the work. As previously mentioned, many structural and psychological reasons can be given for this phenomenon, but all of them cannot be adequately discussed at this time. Three points—manipulativeness, identification, non-illusion-

W. R.—Mysteries of the Organism

ism—I find most relevant from the strict cinematic perspective, while others may be equally important from other approaches. Nevertheless, the three discussed traits of cinema *per se* make film the most efficient weapon in the battle of ideas, and it will remain so for a considerable time in the evolution of mass media technology.

Having all this in mind, the question of responsibility in using film as an ideological means becomes crucial. The utilization of this weapon in a specific society, the role it will assume in the relations between various nations and competent political groups, the extent to which it will become a positive factor in the development of mankind—all these depend entirely on the level (better to say: maturity) of man's consciousness in general. For, only man can decide whether film will serve him as a means to further human understanding and communication or as an instigator of mass intolerance and antagonism.

Radical Image: Revolutionary Film

by Margot Kernan

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"To break with the Hollywood system involves a radical change of aesthetics," says an off-screen voice in *See You at Mao* (1968), a film by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, two of the most articulate and productive filmmakers now working to create a radical imagery for revolutionary political needs. In film terms, radical images are those which subvert conventional standards by using unexpected combinations of pictures, sound, and subject matter. The surrealist films of the twenties and thirties, such as *Emak Bakia* and *Blood of a Poet* provide concrete examples of radical imagery used for personal, rather than political, expression.

As Marxists, however, Godard and Gorin are basing their film aesthetic on the principles of dialectical materialism—juxtaposing image and sound to present "a concrete analysis of a specific situation." Their films, particularly *See You at Mao* (British Sounds), *Wind From the East* (1969), *Struggle in Italy* (1969), *Pravda* (1969), *Vladimir and Rosa* (1970), and *Tout Va Bien* (1972) are prophetic examples of how a radical political aesthetic can develop.

Godard and Gorin, however, are only two of the concerned filmmakers who accuse Hollywood films of perpetrating false consciousness and cultural colonialism. Third World directors such as Fernando Solanas from Argentina, Brazil's Glauber Rocha, and the Bolivian Jorge Sanjines make films as catalysts for cultural as well as for political revolution. Rocha has said that "Political revolution is nothing without cultural revolution; for society's present mode of living is

under the oppression of information." In progressive European countries, the movies of Yugoslavia's Dusan Makavejev and Sweden's Vilgot Sjoman flout traditional standards of art, entertainment, and "good taste" to create a radical aesthetic. These directors are all presenting new forms which challenge the Hollywood canons of plot, narrative, character typology, and techniques of camera direction, editing rhythms, music, lighting, and sound. The old accepted elements of film are being shaken up and redistributed. New works, such as ideological essay films and even westerns, now reflect a revolutionary consciousness.

Radicalism has been defined as the advocacy of sweeping changes in law, government, or social patterns. The word *radical* also refers to a shift in the *root* assumptions on which ideas of order are based. To make a radical film, Fernando Solanas believes that you must put yourself "into the realm of the ugly" instead of using commercially accepted standards of beauty and "art." Solanas has also said that the role of the revolutionary avant-garde is "to penetrate the mass culture." Glauber Rocha and Jorge Sanjines do this by incorporating folk traditions and rituals into the structure of their films to make political issues immediate to their audiences.

Radical filmmakers also seek to establish alternative methods of production, where cast, director, and crew work collaboratively instead of hierarchically; and distribution—using film profits (when they exist) to finance new collective productions. The collaborative form has been productively utilized by Vilgot Sjoman in Sweden, especially in his *I Am Curious* films where the plot was developed collectively out of cast discussions. Yugoslavia's Dusan Makavejev, on the other hand, draws on actors as participants but also shapes narrative out of eccentric and

Weekend
Courtesy: Grove Press

provocative combinations of random events and "found materials" (old movies, stills, real people on camera talking about their jobs). And like Brecht; Godard and Gorin believe that art has a pedagogical function, and their films treat "the screen as a blackboard" to teach revolutionary content.

Godard and Gorin use Marxist dialect as the springboard for this process. "Don't say nature, say dialectic of nature," says a voice quoting Engels at the end of *Pravda,* a Marxist-Leninist tour of contemporary Czechoslovakia. Dialectic—building a concept out of contradictory parts—informs the structure of their films. This dialectic exists in the juxtaposition of image and image (as in the movement of character typologies: whore, cavalry officer, Indian in the "ideological Western" landscape of *Wind From the East*), sound against sound (the racist television announcer and the assembly line noise is one such sound dialectic in *See You at Mao*), and more abstractly, between two modes of class conduct in response to a specific situation (the striking workers and the media people in *Tout Va Bien*).

This process of building an analytic cinema is fraught with hazards, and in the case of Godard/Gorin, laced with puns. In *Vladimir and Rosa,* the two directors as actors talk of "cinemama," and Gorin has referred to his partner's work as "God-art." Their films, which have been produced under the collective title of "The Dziga Vertov Group" in honor of the early Soviet documentarian and film theorist, have been praised for intelligence and damned for boredom. Most of all, these films demand rigorous concentration and the intelligent participation of their audience.

"We must return to zero," says Patricia Lumumba, one of the two characters in Godard's fascinating word game film, *Le Gai Savoir* (The Joy of Learning, 1967). And this act of returning to zero means, in the Godard/Gorin films, disordering the expected relationships between word and image so that films can reveal the necessity for struggle by presenting a "struggle between image and sound."

Tout Va Bien, Godard/Gorin's latest and most approachable work, refers back to Brecht in the search for a new aesthetic. In an on-camera monologue, Yves Montand, playing the part of a French film director, speaks of his development as a politically concerned artist who now makes television commercials, and asks us, the audience, if we have read the preface to *Mahagonny.* In this essay, Brecht writes about the cultural "apparatus" that brings us the theatre, the opera, and the press:

We are free to discuss any innovation which doesn't threaten its social function—that of producing an evening's entertainment. We are not free to discuss those which threaten to change its function, possibly by fusing it with the educational system or with the organs of mass communication. Society absorbs via the apparatus whatever it needs in order to reproduce itself. This means that an innovation will pass if it is calculated to rejuvenate existing society, but not if it is going to change it—irrespective of whether the form of the society is good or bad.[1]

In seeking to make movies which provide "a new form for the new content," Godard and Gorin are attempting to change both the "apparatus" and the society which nurtures it.

Tout Va Bien is a fiction film, but *The Hour of the Furnaces,* made by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in Argentina in 1967, uses an "ideological essay" form. It is brilliant cinema, with multi-track superimposed sound, jump cuts, collage, documentary reportage, wild music, titles, and graphics which batter at the foundations of Argentine complacency.

[1] "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre," from Brecht on Theatre, edited and translated by John Willet. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.

Solanas worked making commercials to finance production of *The Hour of the Furnaces,* and he knows how to make image/sound sequences that are elementally persuasive.

The first part of the film opens in blackness. Words by Fanon, Che Guevara, and Sartre flash on the screen. Torches burn in the night, a running figure hurtles by, more blackness, the sudden burst of a spotlight, a policeman crouches over a struggling figure, blackness, a staccato drumbeat and music—a distorted pop tune—surges to the rise and fall of the torchlights. Then after a detailed description, in documentary reportage and graphics, of the history and causes of Argentine underdevelopment, the first section ends with a closeup of the dead face of Che Guevara, held for five long minutes. Somehow as we continue to stare at this dead face hanging relentlessly in front of us, it almost seems as if we detect traces of movement. Even in death Guevara seems more alive than the dull-eyed bureaucrats and landowners we had seen actually moving and speaking in the earlier parts of the film.

In spite of its length, the movie should be seen in its entirety, though the second and longest part is an overextended panegyric to the Peron administration. In Argentina, the film was designed to be shown with pauses to give its worker audiences a chance to talk over the issues raised; and there are titles in the film which say "Space for Speaker." Solanas and Getino believe that a radical film must be structured to involve the audience as participants, not spectators, and to motivate them to complete the liberating act initiated by the film.

Brazilian director Glauber Rocha uses the energy of popular entertainments for political consciousness-raising, and folk music, dance, religious rituals, and borrowings from Hollywood westerns and Japanese samurai films all play an important part in his mov-

Winter Wind
Courtesy: Grove Press

ies. His most celebrated film, *Antonio Das Mortes* (1969), opens with a long shot of a flat dusty plain dotted with little bushes—the arid "sertão" of Northern Brazil and the landscape of many socially-concerned "Cinema Novo" films. Into the frame moves a lone man, and with this image and the sound of a gunshot and a scream (distorted by Marlos Nobre's vital electronic music score), we are introduced to Antonio Das Mortes, the hired killer in long black coat and purple scarf who stalks the sertão as executioner for the rich landlords.

With glowing Eastmancolor and pulsating musical rhythms, the film tells the story of Antonio's transformation from hired killer to political avenger. The character of Antonio first appears in Rocha's *Black God, White Devil* (1964), where characters were rigorously defined in terms of their economic functions—Antonio first shown jump-cutting around on the horizon firing a gun, the poverty-stricken farmer and his wife grinding their corn —but in *Antonio Das Mortes,* the action moves back and forth between realistic and ritualized behavior. The dialectic is established within the shot itself rather than in the editing, as in the scene of the duel between Antonio and the cangaciero folk hero, which pits Antonio's real sword against the other man's tinny costume weapon; or the long take where the village hierarchy—priest, teacher, and whore —grapple and embrace over the bloody corpse of the murdered police chief.

The rhythm of *Antonio Das Mortes* alternates scenes of frantic activity—singing, dancing, gunbattles shot with hand-held cameras and, according to Rocha, real bullets—with passages of hieratic calm, where long processions dance out into infinite space or brilliantly painted doorways frame human figures with the precision of an icon.

In *Capital,* Marx wrote that "the ideal is nothing less than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought." One of Rocha's earlier films, *Black God, White Devil,* shows us a material society so deprived that poor people can only find hope in idealized heroes or outlaws. The literal translation of the film's Portuguese title, *Deus e o Diablo na Terra del Sol,* means roughly "Neither God nor the Devil Belongs on This Earth." The film shows us the bloody struggle of a poor farmer and his wife to make a life independent of gods or devils. Antonio is again the agent of revolutionary change, for in this film he kills both the corrupt black god and the cangaciero bandit called satan, and in a rather ambiguous ending, the couple finds that the sertão has turned into the surging sea.

Black God, White Devil lacks the brilliantly saturated color of *Antonio Das Mortes,* but like the other film, it derives its beat from folk music (and Villa Lobos), and from the ebullience of its editing rhythms, which alternate between raging energy and long still shots. Its clear presentation of the concrete situation of poverty in Brazil and the delusions this poverty promotes makes it a stronger indictment against injustice than *Antonio Das Mortes.*

The Bolivian director Jorge Sanjines also turns to the people for the language of his films. Sanjine believes that true revolutionary cinema must search for "another language" capable of involving the spectator by capturing his inner rhythms, mental structures, and cultural beliefs. His *Blood of the Condor* (1968) is rooted in the Quechua Indian culture, and carries the Indian sense of time and place into the narrative of the film itself.

Blood of the Condor tells the story of Ignacio and his wife, an Indian couple whose lives are destroyed when a Peace Corps medical unit moves into their village and begins to sterilize Indian women. Sanjines uses parallel cutting which merges the present with future and past events to create a language where only the present exists. The film, made in the Quechua dialect, was later dubbed into Spanish for

national distribution, and it caused such a controversy in Bolivia that it was initially banned by the government censors and only released after popular demonstrations and a vigorous campaign in the press. Since then, reports indicate that it has set the highest box office records of any film shown in Bolivia, and Sanjines cites the film as catalyst for the action against the Peace Corps during the Torres administration.

Sanjines has said that "the exposure of truth is the most revolutionary cultural action." In exile since the end of the Torres regime, he has made his newest film for RAI, the Italian television network. Entitled *El Corajo del Pueblo* (The Night of San Juan), it is a reconstruction of an actual event—the massacre of revolutionary tin miners by the army in 1967—and uses many of the actual survivors as actors in his filmed "clarification of history."

In prosperous European countries, we find radical filmmakers investigating new interpersonal and social lifestyles, and in Yugoslavia, director Dusan Makavejev examines sexual behavior as part of the body politic. In his *Love Affair: Or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* (1967), Makavejev created a quirky collage out of real life events—political parades, lectures on sex and criminology, a demonstration of strudel-making, the installation of a shower-bath—to frame the story of two lovers.

His most recent film, *WR: The Mystery of the Organism* (1971), carries this collage technique past emotion into the realm of speculative psychology in its examination of the life and teachings of Wilhelm Reich, the German psychoanalyst and sexual theorist who was imprisoned in the United States for fraud and whose books were burned by the Food and Drug Administration in 1956 and 1960. In this film, however, the collage technique seems to become an end in itself—random events are wittily juxtaposed (a garish feature film about Stalin is intercut with shots of the editor of *Screw* magazine having his erect penis cast in plaster), but the profusion of materials stays on an intellectual level and the games remain games without feeling.

A funnier and more anarchic film is the earlier, less ambitious *Innocence Unprotected* (1968), which Makavejev re-edited out of the first Serbian talking picture (made in 1942). This work is a fascinating example of the radical reorientation of "found" material into a work of personal and social expression. The earlier film told a naive story about the exploits of Serbian strongman Dragoljub Aleksic, who jumped across buildings, sang like Nelson Eddy, and rescued ladies in distress. He was also the director, producer, and star of the film, made during the German occupation of Belgrade during World War II.

Makavejev's contribution includes adding newsreels and documentary footage to put the film into the political context of its time—animated maps showing the Germans advancing into Russia and shots of Nazi troops in Belgrade are intercut with shots of the superhero balancing from airplanes or bending bars with his teeth. These juxtapositions set up a narrative of inverted logic where real life seems unreal and fantasy becomes sane and logical. Makavejev admits the irrational into his work, as if to remind us that it is always part of personal and social behavior.

And in Sweden, Vilgot Sjoman combines Marx, Freud, and Kinsey to make witty and touching movies about young people in a consumer-oriented society. The special nature of *I Am Curious (Yellow)* (1967) has been obscured by its battles against censorship in the United States and the irritation of moviegoers who found it strictly (and deliberately) non-pornographic. The story of Lena Nyman (the name of the real actress who plays the part), her relationship with Vilgot Sjoman who appears as both her director and one of her lovers in the film, and her search for love and

truth-with-a-capital-T becomes a series of playful improvisations on how media controls romantic and political fantasies.

Armed with her truth-gathering kit—tape recorder, magic marker for writing "messages to humanity" on convenient walls, and a large sack labeled "the guilty conscience of social democracy," Lena Nyman goes around questioning people on the street, in airports, gas stations, and hospitals about their sex lives and political convictions. The repetitive questions never seem to get anywhere. "Yes," "No," or "I don't know" are the usual stammered replies as Lena, glasses askew, diligently probes for the facts.

In this film and in the later *I Am Curious (Blue)* (1968), Vilgot Sjoman's investigations of Lena are intercut with Lena's investigations of Swedish Socialism, and both are shaped by sexual needs. Sjoman's technique combines random and fortuitous events with straight storytelling, and rather than using a written script, the action was developed collectively by cast and crew. Songs, interviews, fake dramatic scenes like the imaginary visit with the king, bits with the crew (they all come on camera to help Lena do a difficult Yoga position), comments from the Swedish board of censors ("Did she say *23* men??) and jokes, like the cow with a question mark over its head watching Lena and her lover screwing in a tree, frame the love scenes, which are honest and non-exploitative for they show male as well as female nudity and incorporate sexual behavior into the total experience of the characters.

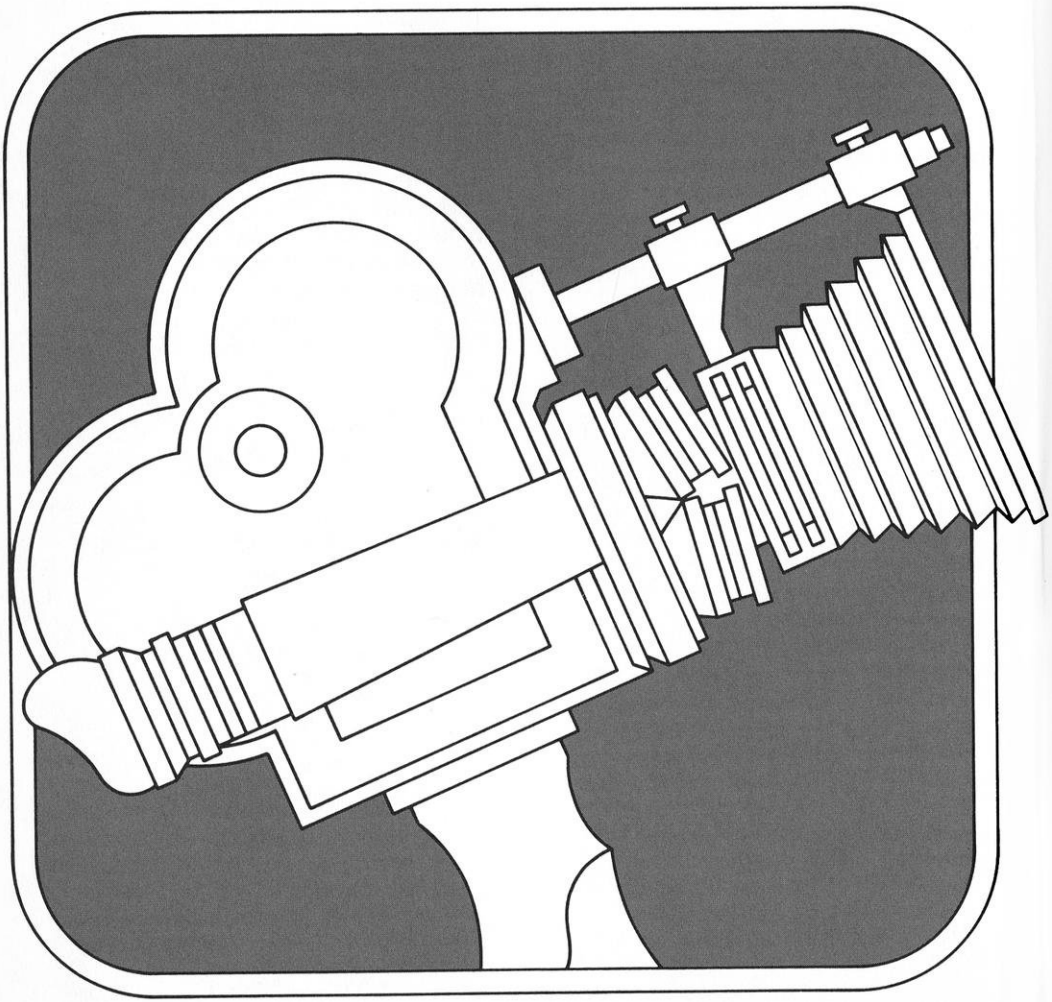
Real people as actors, long takes containing the action instead of cutting away; prolonged tracking shots or shots which remain motionless for minutes at a time; collages of graphics, numbers, and titles; distorted music and sound accompanying documentary footage; long, sometimes unintelligible voice-over passages; quotations from mass-media genres; action shown as ritual, all these techniques are part of the radical aesthetic. By themselves they are nothing new. We must examine how they help advance the revolutionary political and social *content* of the film. In doing this, the following criteria may be useful.

First of all, how does the film destroy or challenge the Hollywood myth of the superhero or supersex-object? Does it show the positive strengths of people, or does it merely dwell on an all-powerful oppressor? Does the film provide a concrete analysis of how oppressive structures work, or does it merely offer a magical or nihilist solution? Does the film invite the intelligent participation of the audience by providing plausible content and believable role models? And, finally, does the director use a combination of intellectual and emotional means to make a film which reflects the physiological-kinetic rhythms of life: stimulus, activity, repose?

The radical filmmaker is concerned with changing both the form and the society which nurtures it. It remains to be seen whether the innovative films discussed here can actually alter the structures of American mass-media mythologies.

El Topo
Courtesy: Academy of
Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Imagery and the Creative Imagination



George Méliès: Forgotten Master

by Lee Alan Gutkind

Full-time freelance writer of articles and short stories and an instructor of writing at the University of Pittsburgh. Recently his series of articles on Hemingway's *Wyoming* appeared in most metropolitan newspapers across the country.

Professor Polehunter, the President of the Institute of Incoherent Geography, had the help of three very distinguished men in planning his fantastic trip. Secretary Rattlebrains, his administrative assistant, handled details and wrote the minutes of the President's meetings with Vice President Humbug and Crazyloff, the engineer and designer of the spacecraft.

Propelled by animals, automobiles, submarines, rockets, dirigibles and balloons, the spacecraft could travel 300 miles per hour. When airborne, the learned group, under the guidance of Polehunter, visited the rising sun and the aurora borealis; they passed through a solar eruption, and were frozen within a heavenly enbankment until a meteorotic explosion thawed them out. And when they returned to earth, they were knighted by an array of "royal" chorus girls.

This film, *The Impossible Voyage,* was produced in Paris in 1904. It is a perfect primitive of a fascinating new art form—the finest product of a brief but grandiose period of motion picture development. It is indicative of the talents and ideas of its producer, director, scenepainter, author and star performer: George Méliès.

Méliès was not the first to discover motion pictures. He had no interest in developing a new industry or spearheading a new art form. Méliès was a magician who found magic in the motion picture camera. But though he commandeered the technology discovered by others for his own purposes, his work and ingenuity was to have a lasting effect on cinematic technique.

He was the first to use sound with motion pictures 30 years prior to its

Trip to the Moon
Courtesy: The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive

sophistication and development. He introduced the techniques of movement and the art of fantasy to the film, constructed the first film studio, increased the length of feature films and created the first commercial for the screen. Méliès, was the father of slow motion, the developer of reverse action, fade-in, fade-out, and other essential cinematic techniques. Most important, perhaps, Méliès was the first man to give shape to this new medium—to tell a comprehensive story on the screen.

Originally, Méliès was a draftsman, and then a caricaturist for a radical Paris newspaper. But in 1888, he met the famous magician, Robert Houdin, who offered him a position at his theatre. Within a few months Méliès had grasped the art of magic so thoroughly that he became the star performer at the Theatre Robert Houdin and, a few years later, its proprietor.

During those years, Méliès developed a fascination for mystification and a thorough knowledge of the stage. In 1895, he heard about a premiere of something called "living pictures" to be given by the brothers August and Louis Lumière at a cafe near his theatre and he attended.

Méliès immediately grasped the potential of the Lumière discovery, not as an art however, but as a new form of magic. He offered the Lumières 10,000 francs for their invention and, when refused, Méliès went to London, purchased what parts he thought would be necessary, and constructed his own living picture machine.

Soon he was roaming the streets of Paris photographing people, buildings, trains or peanut venders—anything that moved. In April of 1896, less than three months after the Lumière Exhibition, Méliès had completed his first

full-length movie, about 2½ minutes long, and featured it at the Theatre Houdin. He produced more than 75 films in all during that first year.

Initially, Méliès and his contemporaries were content to record life as it happened in the city or the surrounding countryside. People had not yet recognized the true potential of the film. It was to them, just a novelty—a curiosity of the age—which might be noted, but easily forgotten. What saved the film from probable extinction was an accident stemming from the mechanical inefficiencies of a primitive camera.

While photographing a scene at the Place de L'Opera in Paris, Méliès' camera jammed. He had to re-wind the celluloid material, re-focus the camera before continuing his sequence of shots. That evening he developed the reel and projected it at his theatre, hoping that the mechanical difficulties would not ruin his efforts. He saw the policeman walking across the square followed by the mother dragging her little girl. The traffic was moving rapidly and a bus loaded with sightseers went slowly down the street. Suddenly, he leaped from his chair and stopped the film. He stood bewildered in the darkened theatre wondering if his eyes were not playing tricks on his mind. Had he really seen the bus turn into a hearse?

Méliès played the film over and over that day. The policeman would walk across the square and then the mother and child. Next the bus. Each time it approached the square, the bus would indeed turn into a hearse.

Méliès searched for the answer to this weird occurrence, but not until he remembered the camera-jamming incident was it clear. He realized he had been photographing the bus when the camera jammed. The bus had continued through the square as he was adjusting the camera and when turned upon the street scene once again, the hearse appeared at the same approximate spot and rolled through the intersection.

Excited, he started immediately to work on a film in which he could create similar visual illusions, using "stop action," the name he had given to his discovery. At the same time, he experimented with other illusive techniques that might confuse and fascinate his audiences.

By the end of that year, 1896, Méliès had completed his first three full-length moving pictures. In the most successful, *The Vanishing Lady,* Méliès surprised audiences in France, Britain and the United States by making a lady disappear and reappear using his newly discovered stop action technique. To vanish the lady, he merely stopped the camera while she moved to the sidelines. A second character or object would assume her place and the camera was reactivated.

These pictures were produced under the name Star Films and enjoyed such financial success that Méliès was able to move indoors to create his illusionary effects. In 1897, Méliès constructed and designed the world's first film studio. Similar to a small greenhouse with roof and walls of glass, it had a large photographic area and a movable stage on which different sets were built.

So well conceived and designed was the structure, that it was still in use thirty years later and only rendered obsolete with the advent of talking films.

At this time, less than two years after its marketing, films were ceasing to be a novelty and a stimulus of intrigue. In fact, in the United States, moving pictures were nicknamed "chasers" and were utilized in one to two minute sequences prior to or at the conclusion of a burlesque or dramatic performance. Even one of its founders, Thomas Edison, first believed that the medium had little long-range future.

Méliès' works, however, brief and unbelievable as they were, gave new life to film, by mystifying and startling audiences across the world. He made people and objects disappear magical-

ly. He cut them in half, put them together upside down, split them in quarters and almost turned them inside out. Human beings suddenly were transormed into lizards, tigers or elephants. Animals became policemen, soldiers and bathing beauties.

An ideal example of his earlier creations is, *The Devil In A Convent*—a religious spectacle illustrating the triumph of Christianity over Satan. The movie opens by showing a devil and an imp jumping from the font of holy water toward the interior of the convent.

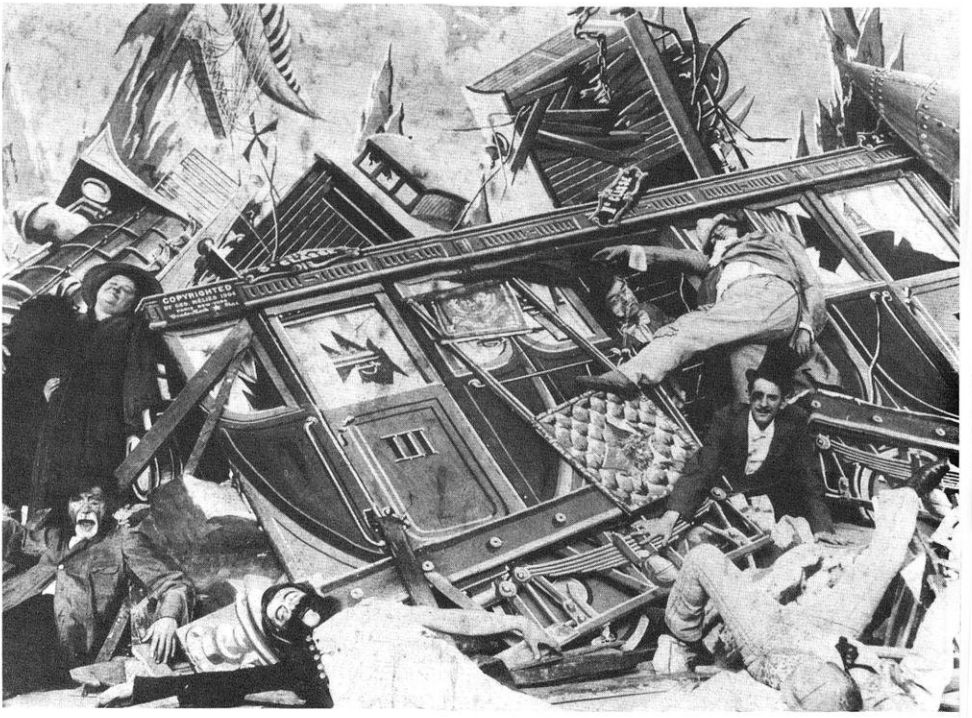
They are transformed into a priest and a choir boy, respectively. The nuns are then summoned to a special religious ceremony and the two imposters take their original shape. When the devil transforms the Church into hell, many imps come forward and dance in celebration around the devil. Suddenly, the ghosts of the nuns appear, driving the imps away.

The devil is left alone to face the ghosts and an apparition of St. George who forces the devil back into the depths of hell. The film ends with a huge cloudburst of smoke.

Like other films of the day, the action of the production was confined to only one scene, as if it were a stage presentation. Unlike others, it was distinguished with the creative use of the camera that only Méliès had mastered—double exposure, stop action, animation, fades, reverse action, fast and slow motion.

It is difficult to isolate when and how Méliès discovered many of these techniques. He neglected to and probably could not have patented such discoveries and the only proof is that all of these techniques were first revealed in his productions. One controversy concerns the use of sound in motion pictures. Many experts point out that one of his films, produced in 1908, of a popular singer named Paulus, had

The Impossible Voyage
Courtesy: The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive



sound. Others, claim that these movies were synchronized with phonographic records. And, conversely, a few authorities maintain that Paulus was located behind the screen to sing in tune with the music. The film is not available today, however, and we are left with the little documentation and a considerable amount of rumor and speculation.

One will never know whether it was for the sake of art or magic that Méliès changed the tone of his productions. His success had been the product of trick films and he, still very much the magician, never eliminated this practice. As his skill developed, however, Méliès placed the trickery in its proper perspective using it as a tool for his art rather than the focus of it.

In 1900, he abandoned single-scened productions and turned to stories of many scenes either written by himself or adapted from literature. This was Méliès' most important contribution to motion pictures. No longer were film producers forced to rely on novelty or trickery to attract audiences. The formlessness of film was gone; it was now taking a definite shape; telling a story—the quality of which was governed by the skills of the director and performers.

For his initial production of this type, *Cinderella,* Méliès devised a method of advanced planning and staging which he called "artificially arranged scenes" or "motion tableaux." He divided *Cinderella* into twenty of these pre-arranged scenes and, prior to filming, outlined the actions of his characters, the method of staging and the type of scenery. By doing this, Méliès had become the first man to divide films into individual scenes and to pre-create entire movies with a written scenario. This method profoundly influenced the techniques of other filmmakers who, at that time, had neglected pre-planning.

Success with these techniques led Méliès to elaborate and sophisticate his productions. Most popular of his fancy-type fantasies subsequent to *Cinderella* were *The Christmas Dream, Red Riding Hood* and *Bluebird The Pirate. The Christmas Dream,* had twenty pre-arranged scenes, dissolving effects, ballets, marches, and night and snow scenes. In making these pictures, Méliès not only directed the cast and the action, including 200 extras, but wrote the script, designed the set, selected its costumes, and acted its star role. In addition, all of the illusionary effects accomplished by the camera, were invented, and performed by Méliès.

A significant aspect of Méliès' success and popularity was that he continually worked toward refining and improving his film techniques with each production. His 400th effort, *A Trip To The Moon,* was more than 825 feet long—twice the length of *Cinderella* and at least three times the length of the average film of the day—and was a perfect example of the "Méliès imagination" and of the satirical potential of the motion picture camera.

The film, adapted from a story written by Jules Verne called *From the Earth To the Moon and Around the Moon,* lambasts the scientific establishment of the early twentieth century. Servants accompany the astronomers who take the journey and the projectile holding the group is powered by a monstrous mechanical gun, resembling a dragon. While traveling, the astronomers pass the constellation of the Great Bear, made up of a group of chorus girls. They enter the moon through its right eye, which sheds a tear at their arrival, and are almost immediately captured by the hostile Selenite army. Their inglorious escape and ridiculous return to earth, ending in the bottom of the ocean, made the film the "Dr. Strangelove" of its day.

Méliès was best known as a master of fantasy and spectacle. But he also succeeded in recording and representing reality on the screen and, at the same time, provided the initial

stimulus, which helped to establish the documentary film movement two decades later. *The Dreyfus Affair, The Wreck of the Maine* and *The Coronation of King Edward VII* were ideal samples of his skill and his integrity in reproducing history. For *The Coronation of King Edward VII,* for instance, Méliès sought out the original master of ceremonies and transported him to Paris to assist in the direction and supervision of details.

One of the most important aspects of his techniques was the continual exploitation of devices of the theatre. Trapdoors, backdrops, wings, elaborate settings and costumes were essential and, at the same time, gave his works an aura of grandeur never before exhibited in moving pictures. Eventually, however, he became a slave to the conventions and traditions which had once given to him the freedom of creativity.

All of Méliès' productions were performed on stage and everything happens in his films as it would in a theatre. The scenery is arranged horizontally and actors enter from the rear or the wings of his studio. At the conclusion, he would even bring back the cast to bow to the anticipated applause. In fact, his studio, once an innovation, virtually held him prisoner.

It was a chief merit of Méliès that in his hands the camera was made to perform miracles, bordering on the limits of his creativity and ingenuity. Why, then, it may be asked, did he refuse to move his camera away from the stage? Is it possible that his fascination and dedication to magic forced him to regard his camera as a celestial or mystical being?

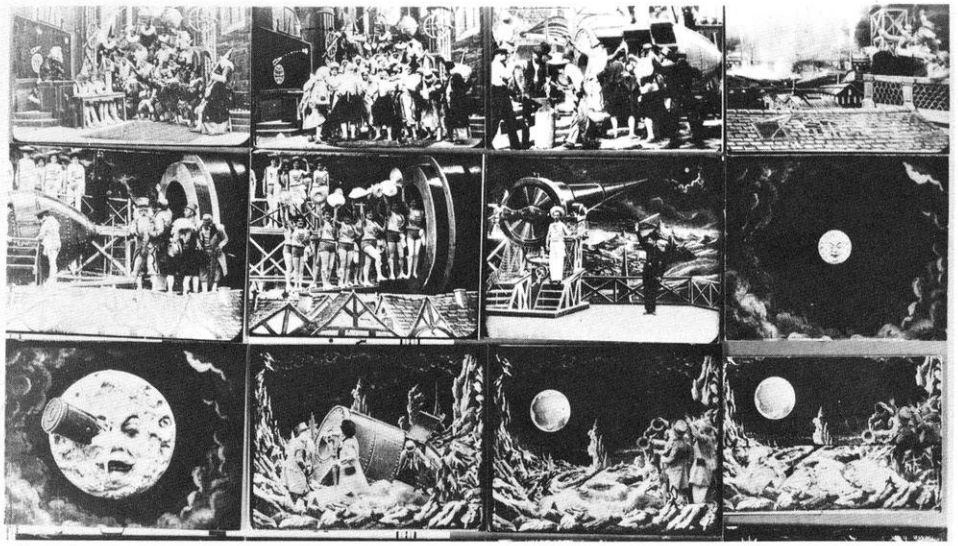
In *A Trip to the Moon,* for example, Méliès had a huge paper maché model of the moon pulled slowly up a platform, from the boards of the stage up towards the camera. This was done to create the illusion of the rocketship traveling toward the moon. A similar arrangement was used in *A Man With A Rubber Head,* which he made in 1901. To make the head seem to swell, he moved the man up a platform toward the camera. The head, then, seemed to grow larger as though being blown up by a bellows. And, in the *Conquest of the Poles,* he created a huge mechanical monster to animate a giant. What could have forced this man to refuse to move the camera; allowing it to remain stationary, the sole spectator of his theatrical extravaganzas?

Other directors, however, adapted the techniques of Méliès, but liberated the camera as well. Méliès could not accept the idea of moving cameras and angle shots, dismissing them as unconventional.

It is certainly a strange paradox that one of the films, scorned so quickly by Méliès, was to outshine his finest and most spectacular effort, *The Impossible Voyage.* The film, Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery,* was released a little less than a year before the marketing of *Impossible Voyage.* Porter's film broke decisively with the conventions of the stage. Each scene was arranged in chronological order bringing the production into a more realistic atmosphere. Porter's ingenuity of direction allowed the film to achieve more tension and excitement than ever before stimulated by the film.

But it was not his failure to keep up with the ever-improving technology that was to cause Méliès' ultimate ruin. George Méliès was an artist and a mystic as well as a man of science. His mind was a fertile and well-oiled mechanism that continually searched for and created the unreal, yet fanciful moments of life. Though his defeat was tragic, it certainly was not disgraceful; for the cause of his downfall has and will continue to topple far more experienced men than he—the American business structure.

In the United States, film prints were produced in volume and rented or leased by contract to movie houses. Méliès, on the other hand, sold his



Trip to the Moon
Courtesy: The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive

prints outright, not wanting or caring to be burdened by the complexities of modern business techniques. He would gladly have been labeled a magician, an artist, actor or producer. But a bookkeeper? Never.

But merchants would purchase as many of his films as possible and then reproduce them and act as an official distributor. After a few years of this practice, Méliès' fortune was virtually depleted, though his films were still relative box office successes. As an added burden, in 1907, the warehouse of his one and only authorized distributor in America, burned to the ground. More than 300 of his finest films, some of which had never been duplicated, were destroyed.

Méliès continued to make movies during the following years. But his failure to keep up with the new technology and new ideas led him steadily away from the mainstream of competition.

At the outset of the first world war, his offices and studios were commandeered by the government. Lacking the money to open new headquarters and the heart to continue, Méliès, in a fit of desperation, sold all of his remaining movie prints to a junk dealer.

In 1928, fourteen years later, a journalist stopping to buy a newspaper in a Paris slum, recognized a grizzled old newspaper peddler as George Méliès. Soon after, friends and fans celebrated his re-discovery by conducting a Méliès festival of films and buying him a small newspaper and toy stand in the Paris railroad station. In 1933, at the death of his wife, the Chambre Syndicate Francaise du Cinématographe, the organization of which he had been both president and founder, granted Méliès admission to the French film industry's Maison de Retreat at Orly. There, midst the pomp and ornamentation of that lovely mansion, he happily received infrequent visitors and recited from memory the scenarios of his more than 4000 films.

On January 22, 1938, George Méliès died. He left to his heirs very little in physical possessions—a suit of clothes, a small library and a few francs. To civilization, however, he left much, much more—an enchanting wonderland never created before or since—but one that will live on the screen forever.

The Universe of Cinema

by King Vidor

Director of such classic films as *Our Daily Bread,* he recently wrote a book, *King Vidor on Filmmaking,* published by David McKay and Company.

To understand the scope and breadth of cinema as medium we must become fully aware of its aesthetic potential. Because it is *movement* it speaks in tempo, in pace and rhythm; by its *form* it is most graphic but is free to become literal or abstract. There are no limits to its *color language* and when the mood demands it can avoid color and speak in all the graduations of opaque black to glaring white. The voice of words and the sounds of music are not adjuncts to its nature, instead they are manifestations of its inherent character. It can be superficial or thought-provoking in accordance with the one using it. Its terms can be grossly physical or it can soar in an essence of the metaphysical and spiritual.

Since the turn of the century when the medium of cinema was first introduced to the public it has, in most aspects, been looked upon as a device for storytelling, or what is loosely referred to as entertainment. Its full potential as the most articulate of all means of expression has been slow to be appreciated, much less realized. Because its uses embrace all the other arts the discoveries of its limitless scope are still going on.

Concerning itself principally within the realms of commercialism, its possibilities as an articulate medium of communication may have been to an extent neglected. It is not to be expected that the same medium that exploits a John Wayne or a Raquel Welch is going to appeal to the experimental psychologist or philosopher as a viable tool with which to operate. I am not overlooking the fact that there could be an area of association between the use of white rats in clinical psychology and a Mickey Mouse cartoon.

What would Aristotle or Plato have done with a 16mm Beaulieu camera? I am certain that da Vinci would have made good use of one along with his other searches and experiments.

I will not attempt to elucidate here a pattern to follow in putting the medium of cinema to these more substantive uses. That, too, would be restrictive. I simply would like to direct the attention away from the conventional acceptance that only the printed word or spoken word can best convey a philosophical truth.

William Blake, Kahlil Gibran, as well as Raphael, Tintoretto and Michaelangelo have made many attempts to reduce their inner convictions to a form commensurate with their understanding or those of the church which they served.

In recent years we have watched the content of film evolve from a plot structure, a story form with its beginning, middle and ending; first act, second act, third act, into the unstructured form of a psychological examination or a philosophical statement. These new fields of exploration have freed the filmmakers to search out as many untapped sources of film material as that represented by the endless variations of the human psyche itself.

It was quite evident that with the inundating effect of the typical television series plot line the public would become bloated with this overindulgence. The movie maker would have to turn elsewhere to lure the ticket buyers away from their comfortable living rooms.

There were some who began to say that they liked the old movies best but the filmmakers were so involved in their new mood of cinema vérité they seemed unwilling or unable to make new movies which preserved the charm and charisma of the old. Perhaps the sudden disappearance of censorship had the telling effect of soul searching on those who found themselves riding the crest of the new wave.

Filmgoers would emerge at the end of a film by Fellini or a *Last Year at Marienbad* and find that they had lots to argue about after they arrived home, or even into the next day. The package had not been delivered to them neatly tied up in pink ribbons. They found they had to work out what they had seen in relation to their own lives, conditioned by the boundaries of their psychological and philosophical experiences. They found that Ingmar Bergman was using an intensity of subtle communication that could not have found expression in many of the earlier films. Life in general was becoming more introspective, so were the films.

Film is life. We can learn about films from many angles. But anything with a touch of the infinite is impossible to circumscribe. Film and life take on new directions at any moment, one must be prepared psychologically and spiritually for any eventuality.

During the last decade or so we have been moving from an era of outside truth, outside authority, to one of inside realization. "The Kingdom of Heaven is Within," has been with us a long time, but it has taken the courage of recent generations to put it into practice.

As we evolve into an era of conscious subjective reality, as we become convinced that all of life is an outpouring of conscious awareness, cinematography becomes the most complete medium of expression. Several years ago John van Drutan wrote a play which he called *I Am A Camera.* This is an intriguing idea as it expresses a profound truth. A camera observes, records, and, guided by the individual, interprets everything. I, as existing, conscious man do all that the camera does, but in addition I am able to reverse the process of absorption and express all that I am capable of perceiving. Therefore, the movie camera becomes my most useful tool.

Solipsism is a word being seen more frequently in print because, in a way, solipsism approximates the revelation inherent in this inner discovery. All life is outgoing. That is why the cine-

Our Daily Bread
All illustrations for this article are from the Wisconsin Center for Theater Research.

ma camera becomes the instrument of the new philosophers.

This instrument to be able to speak the ideas of the new universe must have no impediment. It must be able to speak in light and color, in movement and music, in rhythm and poetry, in words if need be, in flowing abstraction or specific documentation. The movie camera is an instrument of subjective expression, a means for the fulfillment of the individual as a life-giving view of existence instead of a life-getting one. Cinema becomes an extension of the I, or ego, and as such becomes the spokesman for the solipsist in his universe of solipsism.

I will not ignore the direct attempts to communicate revelation through the use of moving abstractions, recurrent rhythmical patterns, flowing light forms but I would like to call attention to the repeated discovery that within the framework of a story-telling film there occurs a scene or series of scenes which achieve a philosophical import that makes them unforgettable over the decades. Such a scene has been synthesized out of the material at hand, but the content of its message overflows the boundaries of its linear dimensions. It is these extensions of which I am particularly aware. It is their recurrence and repetition with which I am impressed.

Today the most active proponent in employing the direct attack to philosophical content in filmmaking is probably Ingmar Bergman, the Swedish director. His films repeatedly spring from religious-philosophical beginnings and seldom stray far from this intent. Fellini has used a more self-analytical motive through which to set forth his philosophical undercoverings. Antonioni in his film *Blow-Up* imbued a number of scenes

Director King Vidor
on the set of **Our Daily Bread**

Our Daily Bread

with meanings deeper than those which met the eye.

Cinema along with the other graphic arts is supposed to be limited to a two-dimensional operation. It is known to overcome repeatedly this supposed limitation. By its nature it is projecting the inner life of man onto a viewing screen so that it can be analyzed and studied. It is the perfect mirror of life and living. It hastens the analytical process of the human psyche to such an extent that ordinary man finds it difficult to keep apace of the revelations. But this too is progress.

Filmmaking has been so inexplicably tied in with entertainment that one famous producer was often quoted as saying, "If you want to send a message go to Western Union." Whenever one of his films failed at the box-office he no doubt blamed some thoughtful message in its theme. He could have realized that all films contain a message no matter how remote it may be. Sometimes the message may be on the dark side, life is futile, etc. Often it upholds the glories of courage, faith and love. In the case of a documentary its message may concern the marvels of a tractor, the prevention of disease or the protection an African lioness feels for her young. There is always a smattering of philosophical content to ponder over.

Herein lies the fully unrealized depth of filmmaking as well as its future strength. As humanity becomes more susceptible to introspection there will be an increasing challenge and obligation to those who sit in the driver's seat of the omnibus called cinema. They must become aware of the responsibilities of their medium and exercise the vision and courage to let it grow to full maturity.

Duel in the Sun

The Challenge of Non-Linear Films

by Warren French

Professor in the Department of English, Indiana-Purdue University at Indianapolis.

While crowds throng the lobbies of shopping-center Cinemas to attend such banally conventional narrative films as *Love Story* and *The Godfather,* it is disappointing to observe that the most exciting and imaginative films made in recent years have been poorly attended and generally misunderstood. I am not speaking of the experimental work of "underground" filmmakers (though extraordinary conceptions like Steven Arnold's *Luminous Procuress* seem to baffle even the cultists who expected to admire them), but of the occasional commercial films that have demonstrated new possibilities for story structuring in the cinematic medium—Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad,* Richard Lester's *How I Won the War* and *Petulia,* Frank Zappa's *200 Motels,* Ken Russell's *The Boy Friend* and George Roy Hill's *Slaughterhouse-Five.*

What these half dozen pictures have in common with each other but with very few other films of the past decade is that their organization is basically non-linear, that is, they do not tell a story by presenting a chronologically ordered sequence of events having a cause-and-effect relationship to each other, as, for example, *The Godfather* does.

Actually non-linearity is no new thing in story telling. Even classical epics began "in medias res" with some climactic event and then flashed back to pick up the earlier episodes in the history, although the organization remained basically linear. With the advent of the novel, experiments with further disordering of the temporal process were made, especially by Laurence Sterne *In The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), which was largely organized according to principles of associational psychology, the narration of one event being followed by that of another that it brought to mind regardless of the temporal relationship between them.

Few readers, however, grasped what Sterne was up to; and his method still requires new explanations after two centuries. Although Sterne was imitated, by the nineteenth century writers had largely returned to linear modes of organization, though at least the works of Dickens show some evidence of experimentation that are not to the point here. (The time-scheme of *A Christmas Carol* is perhaps the most obvious example of Dickens' use of a technique employing visions to escape the limitations of conventional linear logic.)

Non-linear experimentation did not really flourish, however, until the 1920's in the work of writers like William Faulkner, Marcel Proust, and Djuna Barnes. Joseph Frank explains in "Spatial Form in Modern Literature"[1] what is distinctive about their work, "All these writers ideally intend the reader to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence." Frank goes on to explain that in poems like T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* "syntactical structure is given up for a structure depending on the perception of relationships between disconnected word-groups." The difficulty of such poems, Frank concedes, is "the internal conflict between the time-logic of language and the space-logic implicit in the modern conception of the nature of poetry." (Out of this very tension, however, grows the power of such poems, novels, and films to enhance our apprehension of reality by forcing us actively to resolve the conflicts rather than passively accept a linear pre-ordering that reinforces stereotyped expectations.) Frank concludes that "the reader is forced to read *Ulysses* in exactly the same manner as he reads modern poetry, that is, by continually fitting fragments together and keeping allusions in mind until, by reflexive reference, he can link them to their complements."

The discomfort that some readers experience with such works is shown by the confused early response to Faulkner's novels and subsequent efforts to rearrange the events in *The Sound and the Fury,* for example, in a linear sequence—as though that is what Faulkner might have done if he could. Gradually, however, a criticism has arisen that displays an ability to understand the novelists' efforts and to appreciate their works on their own terms, exploring the reasons for employing non-linear techniques rather than trying to accommodate these radically experimental works to old expectations.

No similar film criticism has yet emerged, despite the great shift of public attention to visual forms. An understanding of the structural principles of linear fiction is, however, a stepping-stone to an appreciation of the films that I mentioned at the beginning of this discussion.

Actually non-linear devices have been used in filmmaking ever since the possibilities of film as a narrative art were recognized. D. W. Griffith employed forms of the "flashback"—the most ubiquitous of non-linear devices, in which the action moves from an established present to some antecedent action—in such early works as *Man's Genesis* (after a narrator begins telling a tale about the past, the present scene is replaced by an enactment of his story) and *The Avenging Conscience* (1914), (a dramatic moment in the past is presented to us as it flashes into "the mind's eye" of a character). Indeed few pictures of the last sixty years have been as adventurous in manipulating time sequences as Griffith's spectacular *Intolerance* (1916), in which the action shifts back and forth between stories set in four different historical periods from ancient Babylonia to the twentieth-century United States as all four of the stories move

[1]The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 3-62. The essay originally appeared as three articles in The Sewanee Review, Spring, Summer, Autumn, 1945.

toward analogous climaxes illustrating —in the three earlier stories—the triumph of intolerance and—in the modern tale—its ultimate defeat.

Intolerance was a financial failure, probably in large measure because audiences found the shifting story line too difficult to follow; viewers still complain about it today. The reaction to this mammoth picture discouraged Griffith from further experimentation and was probably a major force in inhibiting the introduction of complicated non-linear devices into film for the half century during which novelists were exploring their possibilities.

Recently, however, some of the less traditionally-minded filmmakers have turned to non-linear techniques. I would like to discuss the way in which the films I mentioned at the beginning of this paper represent four different departures from normal time sequences in a kind of ascending order of complexity.

Frank Zappa's *200 Motels* is an episodic picture in which no temporal sequence is even suggested. The picture aims to present in visual form not even what can in any accepted sense be described as a narrative, but rather a series of "happenings" that suggest the feelings—especially of loneliness—engendered in travelling musicians by the necessity of spending long periods of time on the road doing one-night stands in small communities and often staying at the garish motels that provide the film's title. To appreciate the relationship between the sequences one must be—as Joseph Frank explains one must also be in approaching a novel like *Ulysses*—"continually fitting fragments together and keeping allusions in mind until, by reflexive reference, he can link them to their complements."

200 Motels is not simply, however, a random collection of episodes that could be put together in any order. An organizing principle governs the arrangement of the sequences, but not a temporal principle; they are arranged rather on the basis of the increasing emotional intensity of the action. Each succeeding episode demands an increasingly intense response from the viewer; it is disastrous to walk into the middle of this picture—as I did the first time I saw it.

The only way in which the structure of the film can really be made clear is by comparison with a work in another art form, Ravel's "Bolero," which consists of a number of repetitions of the same pattern of notes, played, however, louder and with more intensity with each repetition. Zappa strives for the same effect. Although the separate episodes are not identical in content, they are identical in theme. (It would be interesting to see what could be done to transform exactly the technique of the "Bolero" into cinematic form by repeating the same episode a number of times, increasing the loudness of the dialogue and background music and the intensity of the color with each repetition. Perhaps some experimental filmmaker has already done something like this.)

Ken Russell's *The Boy Friend* and Richard Lester's *How I Won the War* (as well as, to some extent, Luis Buñuel's *Belle de Jour* and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*) are basically linear works that employ a device that audiences have found puzzling. The only way to characterize the technique briefly is to say that the forward movement of the narrative line is arrested and the "theatre" of the action is expanded, as in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* in the account of the spirits' visits to Scrooge. The most easily perceived use of this technique is in *The Boy Friend.* Much of the action of the film is a play-within-a-play, the photographing of a production of *The Boy Friend* itself, ostensibly in a somewhat run-down London music hall in the 1920's (earlier, incidentally, than Sandy Wilson's play had been written). The performance is being witnessed by a motion picture director who is thinking of filming the play. On several occasions during musical production

How I Won the War

numbers, the framing proscenium of the music hall disappears and the productions become vastly more elaborate—with more people involved, louder music from a larger orchestra, more expensive sets and costumes. On the last of these occasions, the background is completely transformed into a huge motion picture studio set, an artificial snowstorm is in progress, and the director and his camera crew are involved in the action. The film's audience is no longer seeing what is being presented on the London stage, but rather what the director is visualizing in his mind as the cinematic potential of the production numbers.

Of course, the expansion of production numbers far beyond the capabilities of the theatrical stages on which they are represented as being performed is a venerable technique of the musical film, exploited by Busby Berkeley in his revered productions of the 1930s. What is new in *The Boy Friend,* however, is the shift of the action that the audience is witnessing from an external stage into the mind of a director. The temporal progress of the picture is disrupted while the audience sees brought to life before it an elaborate mental variation upon a physical stimulus.

The same technique is employed in *How I Won the War,* in which we discover only at the end that we have been seeing a sequence of events as they are recalled in the mind of a madman. Generally, the picture presents a linear sequence of events, but director Lester occasionally alerts us that any normal chain of cause-and-effect relationships is lacking. For example, the scene in which a classroom entered by a military instructor and his pupil is suddenly transformed into the stage of a theatre in which they are performing before a large audience of soldiers. In *Belle de Jour,* several times the title character looks through an apartment window and sees not the buildings across the

street that have earlier been shown to be there, but a landscape that exists only in her own head.

Buñuel works an even trickier variation on a timeworn technique in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie.* Several times in the film actions that the audience has been led to believe are actually happening are revealed—at the end—to be only dreams. Buñuel himself had used dream sequences earlier in films like *The Young and Damned,* but he had indicated at the beginning of the sequences which were dreams. In the newer picture not only are the dream sequences identified only as they end, but some equally horrifying sequences are suggested not to have been dreams, so that the insinuation of the picture seems to be that in contemporary bourgeois life dream and reality are really indistinguishably horrible.

A device that viewers have found even more disconcerting than the internalization of external action—whether as dream or vision—has been employed not only by Lester in *Petulia,* but also by Sydney Pollack in *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* and Joseph Losey in *The Go-Between.* Already generally categorized as a "flash-forward," the device disrupts the linear time sequence in exactly the opposite manner from the flashback by allowing the audience a glimpse of an event that has not yet occurred and that he will not understand until the end of the picture. Both Pollack and Losey try to signal the lack of chronological relationship of these very brief scenes to those that precede and succeed them by some kind of color clue—the use of a monochrome in *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* and the use of blurred, fuzzy tones in *The Go-Between.* Lester provides no such clues in *Petulia;* it is not even clear, in fact, after the picture is

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie

over, which shots have been flash-forwards and which flashbacks, because Lester is not simply interested in disrupting the time scheme. Basically *Petulia* has a linear organization, but the abrupt disjunctions in time that characterize not only the flashbacks and flash-forwards, but the shifts in the present action itself serve to take the viewer's mind off the sequence of the action and force him to focus—as in *200 Motels*—on the states of mind of the principal characters. Everything is mixed up in the "kooky" world of Petulia, and the violation of orderly linear sequence serves only as an indication that time, too, is out of joint.

The unambiguous flash-forward as used in the other two pictures has yet to prove its artistic worth. While one finally understands the relationship of these brief flashes to the narrative, they strike one as not so much devices essential to the impact of the story as baroque decorations.

The most complicated uses to date of non-linear techniques in film occur in *Last Year at Marienbad* and *Slaughterhouse-Five,* both of which are derived from the works of prominent avant-garde novelists, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Despite superficial differences, I am going to maintain that both films also employ quite similar techniques to achieve similar ends.

In both pictures the action moves unpredictably back and forth between past, present, and future. No base time is firmly established at the beginning of either. The opening scene in *Last Year at Marienbad,* a roving camera tour of the faded elegance of a great baroque hotel—overlaid with a narrator's droning comment—may be in the "present," but it is less impor-

They Shoot Horses, Don't They?

tant in establishing a time for the action than a place for it. *Slaughterhouse-Five* opens with a scene during World War II, though the base point for the movements appears to be many years later after Billy Pilgrim and his second wife are firmly established as space travelers between this world and the distant star Tralfamadore.

Resnais establishes differences between past, present, and future by the use of different gray tones in his black-and-white film. The opening scenes, probably in the "present," establish the normal gray-tone intensity for the film; the scenes in the past are much darker and appear to have been overdeveloped; the potential scenes in the future are almost ghostly pale and appear to have been underdeveloped. (Unfortunately the marvelous results of this elaborate effort often don't come through very well when the film is transposed to 16mm., so that to be appreciated fully Resnais's work must be seen at a showing of a 35mm. print in an adequate theatre.)

In *Slaughterhouse-Five,* George Roy Hill depends entirely upon verbal clues to identify the shifts. "You were back in World War II" or words to that effect, Billy Pilgrim's second wife says at the opening of the second sequence, giving us the first indication that the film is going to be something other than a prisoner-of-war story. No experiments are made with color variations, but they would probably not be appropriate, because I think that one difference between the two films is that in Resnais's the future action is only potential—the ghostly scenes suggest what could happen rather than what must—whereas in *Slaughterhouse-Five,* Billy Pilgrim's repeated assertion to disbelievers is that one can exist simultaneously in past, present, and future, and that there is really no difference between them. Life's variety comes not from the duration of experience, but its intensity. The vivid moments—pleasant or unpleasant—past, present, or future—stand out from their dull context. To be experienced adequately, life must be perceived qualitatively rather than quantitatively. The film explores the concept that introduces T. S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton," "Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future,/ And time future contained in time past./ If all time is eternally present/ All time is unredeemable." For the hesitant pessimism of this statement—which surely might be justified by the destruction of Dresden—the film optimistically eliminates the "perhaps" and suggests that not all but some time is redeemable. Resnais's film, on the other hand, seems to me also to suggest that some time is redeemable, but to leave the "perhaps" as a challenge to individual action.

Both films present man as a prisoner of the present unless he frees himself from the trammels of time. The girl played by Delphine Seyrig in *Last Year at Marienbad* is a prisoner of the decadent society that moves between the great fading European spas as surely as Billy Pilgrim is a prisoner first of the Nazis and then of middle-class American suburban life. Both pictures culminate in the characters' freeing themselves of the bondage of an eternal present. The intervention of the visitors from outer space into the affairs of Billy Pilgrim may be a hokier device than the urgings of the elusive narrator in *Last Year at Marienbad,* but in both films the really significant actions occur in the minds of the leading characters. Neither Billy nor the girl could have made the break with the world that engulfs them without an act of their own will—without the acceptance of the rare aid that has been proffered them. Both find that they are not trapped in a single inescapable situation, but that there are alternatives available if they are capable of breaking out of rigidly linear patterns of thought.

The reason that the inadequate receptions of not just these two pictures,

Slaughterhouse-Five

but the whole group discussed, is lamentable is that the danger of linear art is the same as that of linear thought—it develops stereotyped expectations; it fosters, not necessarily consciously, the feeling that all experience can be assimilated and understood in oversimplified linear cause-and-effect patterns. But if we examine our experience, we see that we rarely learn—at least the things we want to know—in a linear fashion. Rather we accumulate bits and pieces of information from the past, present, and perhaps even the future that we must fit together into a constantly changing and expanding pattern. Clearly films that are structured in a way that forces us to employ and understand these patterns of learning can function as powerful creative forces in our society, especially since the unremitting demands of the cinematic medium for our attention force the speeding-up of the process of discovery that is the mark of any effective educational technique.

At a symposium in the summer of 1972 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where I presented some of the arguments in a different form, Dr. C. E. Benda, an existential psychiatrist, observed that "intelligence is the transactional ability of the human mind to respond to transmitted data and return it to the community in a new form." An inadequate response to data received in a new and unanticipated manner inhibits the development of intelligence. In view of the increasing influence of visual media on shaping our minds, it strikes me that it is imperative that viewers—especially developing viewers—respond to the challenge of non-linear techniques in film in order to expand their own consciousness and the consciousness of the community.

Freeze Frame

by John L. Fell

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A curious element in popular movies of the past few years locates itself in the ending: one or two figures, freeze framed, poised in mute immobility, or else emotionally transfixed. Recollect *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Easy Rider, Death in Venice.* One simple variation presses in tight on a human landscape (the face of Dustin Hoffman in Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs,* Malcolm McDowell in *Clockwork Orange*). Another draws away from cyclic, ambiguously resolving action, like David Hemmings with the invisible ball in *Blow-Up,* or Alan Arkin determindedly paddling nowhere in *Catch-22,* miniscule in an expanse of seascape. *The King of Marvin Gardens* shares something of all these qualities: Jack Nicolson, sitting in the dark watching old, silent home movies of his brother and himself playing in the sand, the projection spilling oddly out onto stairs and bannisters. Or Luis Buñuel's shot which intersperses and concludes *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*: three couples walking down a country road which seems to come from nowhere and lead no place.

The commonality these films share is the irresolute, a conclusion that combines some sense of incompletion with (at best) a general feeling for the apposite. The endings are independent of style and prior substance, be it farce, suspense, action, irony, outrage, satire, or commercial humanism. With their suggestion of the thing not finished, or else the thing about to recommence, they are redolent of predispositions in today's theatre, particularly the endings in Beckett, where characters like Vladimir and Estragen or Hamm and Clov hold each other in some kind of uneasy psychological balance as the curtain falls.

Perhaps the endings of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* strike notes more consistent with what has preceded them than do the cited films. Modern drama, by lowering its sights to academe and Off-Broadway, has negotiated an integrity foreign to the popu-

lar film by releasing itself from certain requirements of audience expectation: not altogether, of course, for Beckett draws cannily on traditions of the music hall, but certainly the stage commands more latitude than multi-million dollar commercial ventures which dominate a large part of the Hollywood-Cinecittà-Mosfilm-Pinewood complex.

Years back, the French critic André Bazin itemized several genres which, he said, characterized the outputs of the major studios, and had since the thirties. In fact, these types (musicals, gangsters, westerns, religious epic, and so forth) are rooted in all the paraphernalia of popular culture as it evolved with the Industrial Revolution. They have permeated our dime novels, radio, comics, pulps, and bubble gum cards.

A hundred years ago, genre in the popular melodramatic theatre served most of the functions of *Easy Rider* and *Super Fly*. In that time, plots organized the good-and-evil antagonisms into a single pattern whose outline charted the sensibilities of working class audiences: Evil was to be enjoyed by way of "thrills," the resulting guilt resolved in final triumphs of Good. The ritual was clothed in trappings of Naturalism. The parties at issue amounted to simplified moral polarities. Hero and antagonist strutted through an ethos of patriotic, social and political jargon, embodying rural-urban suspicions, class resentments, and Mithraic adumbrations of Bunyonlike Christianity. Resolution-through-physical-conflict reinforced, rather than questioned, the anxieties and superstitions of the times. Endings were positive, uniting, and tidy. If they concluded in a freeze-frame clinch (called a *tableau* or *picture scene*), there was yet no sense of incompletion or disorganization in their promise of future stabilities.

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid
Courtesy: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Easy Rider
Courtesy: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Modern melodrama is little different, albeit muddled in its polarities with the appearance of mixed motives and ambiguous characterizations. Basically, the old formulae hold, and the interchangeability of empathy-cues is interestingly apparent in current black films, largely exploitational, which reorganize the villain-in-black costume schemes so that a new minority audience can be effectively sold by confirming its anxieties and angers. See, for example, the indignities perpetrated on Diana Ross in *Lady Sings the Blues,* and compare them to the actual details, equally depressing but differently experienced, in Billie Holiday's life.

If the adventure film were distilled to its elements, what remained would be the desideratum of a form which separates elements of the human character into independent "humors" that have the appearance of autonomy, although experience and common sense easily advise us otherwise. Such a distillate could be said to bear striking resemblance to the topography of Freudian psychic structure: the energy to break out, the energy to contain and control, and a mediating agent.

A popular example is the detective story, itself blossoming in Freud's era. The criminal breaks social rules. The detective pursues him like a "prey." If there is a sidekick, he represents the audience and reports what he experiences, arbitrating in a muddled sort of fashion. If there is no associate, the detective ruminates to himself with an interior monologue that is somehow ignorant of real feelings and even thoughts: from Sherlock Holmes (Columbo) to Sam Spade (Banacek) to Nick and Nora Charles (Macmillan and Wife).

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Becket
Sheridan Square Playhouse
February, 1971
Photograph by Alix Jeffey

Interestingly, contemporary versions of the pattern have reversed roles while maintaining the elemental antagonisms, so that Billie Holiday or Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, whatever their limitations as human beings, are characterized by essentially healthy resentments toward their culture. They must, of course, be punished for breaking out, just as King Kong suffered his biplanes in the past, but their impulse has our sympathy. Dirty Harry discarding his police badge into San Francisco Bay confirms the antisocial quandary of the seventies as explicitly as Bonnie and Clyde in their last dance of death. Passing attention to any current movie theatre audience will substantiate where anyone's sympathies rest.

In genre, then, character is reduced to elemental forces, like modern theatre. Beyond that point, the extent to which a parallel operates is measured by the kinds of confrontations which ensue. The horror film is a case in point. Its quintessential plot device is sometimes termed "doubling," after the German *doppelgänger.* Id and superego cannot continue in compatible coexistence. The mediating ego breaks down, and, when the wolfbane blooms, Lon Chaney turns into a wolf, or Simone Simon a great cat, or Frankenstein's monster raises his eyelids. The eventual result is that the darker side of the self must be destroyed, and it is uncommon if what remains, our Dr. Jekyll element, can survive alone *(cf. The Picture of Dorian Gray* or Poe's *William Wilson).*

Beckett, too, doubles his characters, albeit in more involved ways. The difference rests in the absence of a plot which requires that one side vanquish the other. In the second act of *Waiting for Godot,* Pozzo will still brutalize Lucky. He is blinded and

Lucky dumb, but they continue side by side or fore and aft. Like Clov in *Endgame,* who seems at last about to abandon Hamm and yet we know he cannot leave, or if he should leave he must return. This is the pattern of Vladimir and Estragon as well.

Our feelings about the like, incongruent, but vaguely fitting movie endings may reflect our general sense of what commercial film is about in this decade. The endings "work" in that they seem somewhat contemporary. They finish the story, but when we were *in* the story we didn't think it was headed exactly in that direction.

Unlike theatre, movie audiences are inclined to believe rather than use their myths, and the movie must compete in the marketplace for audience attention, luring bodies away from the living room tube. Too, films are produced for a particular sort of commercial promotion and distribution, one great enough to warrant their financing in the first place. Otherwise, a sensible money-lender would make Movies for TV or network series. High profits require high investment. High investment is traditionally and understandably conservative, at least as conservative as it has to be. Popular film is a business while remaining, curiously, an art. This duality, inexorable as the linkage of Lucky and Pozzo, results, then, in films which reinforce the suspicions brought to them by audiences: that Southern Crackers prey with shotguns on bizarrely dressed young motorcyclists; that the Ku Klux Klan attacked Lady Day; that Butch Cassidy was a handsome rascal who went out in a blaze of glory; that if British villagers see your wife nude, the best defense is a beartrap. Simultaneously, there is strange beauty in a shot like that of the bodies of Bonnie and Clyde, riddled by machine gun fire, dancing in the dust. It transcends the story. To some critics, this is immoral; for others, it is what film is about.

When the nickelodeons swallowed up theatre's working class audiences and its accompanying formulae, the stage emerged economically wounded but eventually emancipated, just as the invention of Dagùerre and Niepce had earlier commandeered portraiture and released art. In our time, commercial television has acted somewhat similarly on commercial film, seizing the movies' hoary proscenium plots in turn to elicit predictable results from dependable audiences. In consequence, we are witnessing today the throes (birth? death?) of the theatrical film. The confusion as to what exactly we *are* seeing stems from some peculiarities in the movies' very form and lineage.

On the one hand, commercial film's costs, institutional stranglehold on distribution (which is part of its traditions), and an awesome capacity sometimes to earn millions of dollars for lucky or clever investors, all shackle experimentation and change. In its own way, these qualities—expense, commercial tradition, and power, characterize the state of most of our large institutions—education, government, religion, manufacturing—whose very commitments to size seem depressingly to cancel out imaginative efforts toward innovation.

On the other hand, the very nature of film's relation to its audience requires that it stay in reasonable contact with the sensibilities of people who themselves are aware of their responses in little more than a generalized way. Further, the relations between movies and television are unique, unlike photography and painting, or theatre and film. For good or ill, television's efforts to define a formal aesthetic peculiar to itself (*i.e.,* "live TV") are moribund. In the seventies, television's distinctiveness is in its function as a transmission medium, whether it carries products, news, gossip, life styles, or movies. Mostly it carries movies.

For this reason, most film, either by immediate or long range design, is prepared for ultimate distribution via television. Codes and audience tastes

aside, the very symbiosis both businesses (and often the same businessmen) enjoy has worked against the movies' opportunities to evolve, to approximate something of the condition of modern theatre, modern prose, and modern art. At the same time, this very intransigence marks film's elemental links to great audiences who do not respond at all to other forms.

What we *may* be experiencing is a diversion outside mainstream, network "Hollywood" into lesser eddies and byways whose commitments to smaller audiences can augur more direct responses to the concerns of this decade while yet maintaining something of a popular base. One example would be Ingmar Bergman, who successfully finances his Swedish theatrical ventures by making movies for a particular brand of middle class American arthouse sensibility. The latitudes of this audience allow Bergman to experiment with narrative design, and such productions as *Hour of the Wolf, The Silence,* and *Cries and Whispers* investigate alternate ways of counterpoising internal and external realities toward the end of several-planed character delineation. On a broader scale, Fellini commands enough prestige to enjoy personal, grotesque, caricatured fantasies which are both garish and prurient enough to fill larger theatres—a whimsical combination of Ignazio Silone and Busby Berkeley. A feature film industry in Canada appears to be emerging, and Claude Jutra's *Mon Oncle Antoine* suggests a brighter future. If distribution can be effected, Third World films may reach Third World audiences by moving across national boundaries. The remainder of this paper will try to sketch three apparent tendencies that have gradually gained visibility and may indicate future directions for the broad-based, genre-derived story film, if, indeed, the latter survives. (Three of every ten features are said to earn money these days).

One line of potential development and change may be exemplified by the Bernardo Bertolucci film *Last Tango in Paris* as well as whatever serious discussion has attended the pornographic epic *Deep Throat.* In the latter instance, what seems to excite attention and speculation is the *possibility* that images of special "power," could still somehow accommodate themselves to dramatic and narrative intention. Thus far, such a wedding (to use an old-fashioned image) has not transpired. The very documentary candor of explicit sexual imagery would seem to have diminished whatever illusionism was requisite to story films, just as Godard was criticized for injecting actual war footage into *les Carabiniers,* his Brechtian tale of two soldiers who went to war to pillage and loot. Projected images of photographed sex and death are inescapably *themselves* and *there* to experience in all their isolation.

An effective amalgamation of the two idioms would seem to require joining Naturalism and voyeurism into a kind of sur-naturalism toward the end of intensified self-knowledge of a sort which most of us customarily avoid, either because it is too painful, because it is offensive (some still distinguish pain and offense), or because our lives themselves lack the conditions to trigger the awareness into consciousness. Some such responses have attended *Last Tango in Paris.* (Pauline Kael's deeply-felt review of the film is a case in point.)[1]

The encounters of Marlon Brando and Maria Schneider, where they are exclusively sexual, betray qualities of dominance that characterize male sexuality in our society but are rarely recognized in so candid a manner. The contrasts of these scenes with the rest of the principals' lives after they have "met" point up confusions of role and relationship that continue, too, in our "liberated" society between our public and private selves. Finally, Brando, whom we have known for years, watched age with ourselves, is quite as explicity *there* as the sex.

In lesser vein, apologists for the current Black exploitation films (usually

themselves engaged in one such project or enthusiastic of the results in terms of some socio-political strategy) argue that these productions coat the stark realities of Black life with enough fantasy to make the product palatable. It is a combination of grits and jive that is reminiscent of Sophia Loren's emergence as a Neo-Realist heroine.

In each of the above cases, the intention is similar: where the Naturalism of the old fashioned novel has been usurped by journalism, replace it with something starker, more real without becoming surreal: the integrity of documentary riding high on dramatics of a personalized and intense story that is "true." Again, Miss Kael made this point in contrasting Brando's performance with a like motivation of Norman Mailer's. Mailer tried to inject himself into personal fictions in *Maidstone; a Mystery* and *Beyond the Law* with less success. Of our three "trends," this is the most traditional because its avowed intention is to worry out new subjects, new depths of feeling, new confrontations in territory that has been thoroughly explored since Balzac and Stendhal.

Secondly, there is the psychologically-based popular film, aggressively "post-Freudian." Such works operate on a premise that the modern character and present human conditions are no longer congruent with those disputed interior boundaries staked out by the Viennese doctor in Victorian Austria.

A colorful (largely red) example of this is *El Topo:* the young person's pastiche of Jungian, Eastern, tarot, and drug-pop symbols which proves singularly offensive to the middle aged and attractive among youth. Flamboyantly defiant of social convention, bloody, incestuous, grotesque, and so forth, *El Topo* is usually defended as "not to be taken literally," "standing for," "representing" and otherwise indicating by allegory various states of consciousness and life-circumstances, especially those experienced by adolescents. (Another instance of the post-Freudian film would be *Performance,* replete with Mick Jagger and a psychodelicatessen of shifting identities and masks beneath masks.)

In general, it might be said that a Jungian organization of psychic dispositions ought to be less melodramatic than Freud's impulsive, bad-boy libido striking out against the bulwarks of the superego. Perhaps the Swiss analyst *did* more closely approximate needs of our modern disposition (and consequently the contemporary film) when he required a coexistence of opposites for the integrated personality, and a view accommodating altered states of consciousness, one where dreams and images become an avenue and not just a mirror.

On the other hand, movies are characteristically indisposed to symbol-making. Projected images remain truculently, singularly themselves whatever other qualities they may assume through a director's aesthetic strategies. An object is an object is an object. In this respect, film seems less amenable than other arts to pat, formularized archetypal imageries, however close it may otherwise locate itself in the oral traditions of fairytale, legend and myth.

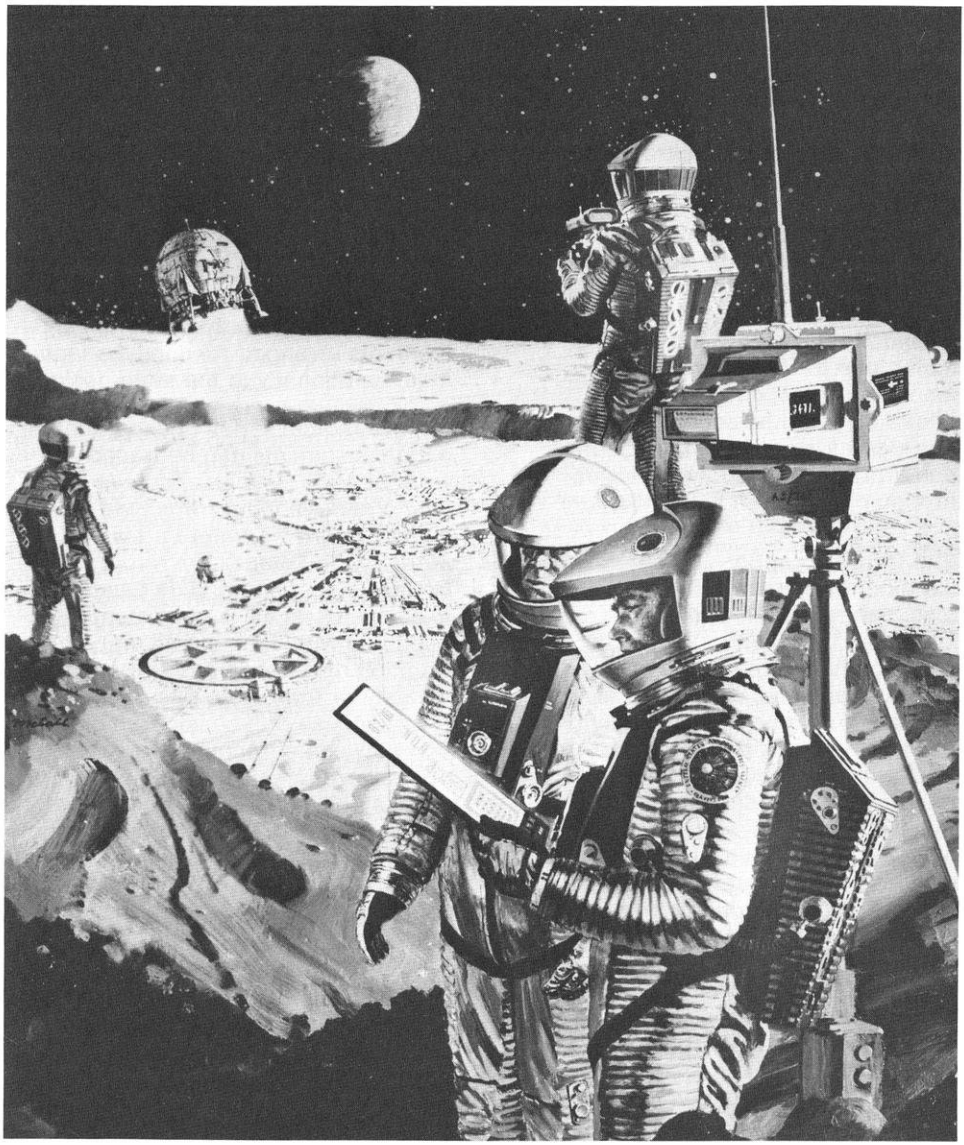
Nonetheless, the attractive aspect of potentially new patterns of psychic relationships is that such film experiences might help us to internalize again in happier condition what are now separated components of personality which have become stranded in fictive uselessness, riddled through by too many confrontations on the battlefields, in the dank alleys of the asphalt wilderness, and out behind the O.K. Corral.

In several respects, film should be appropriate to such an undertaking, for it is yet a ribbon of dreams, as Orson Welles called it, with controls over spatial/temporal orders which are now so practiced that other media, notoriously prose and the stage, simulate continuities in the narrative film

where once they fed it discarded forms. The surrealist elements of movies like *Performance (Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* are other examples) echo, too, an inclination to overlay identities, time periods, and locations—the alternative perhaps to antagonizing them in confrontation.

For want of wiser nomenclature, we might term one additional impulse among post-Freudian films the R.D. Laing aesthetic: in bypassing or breaking up Ego we can experience other worlds, other consciousnesses. Sometimes only imprecisely aware of this notion, commercial film allies itself with the narrativeless filmed or staged light shows of the sixties (*cf. 2001*) to combine ineluctable, ineffable moments with a thrust toward deeper levels of awareness, other dimensions

2001: A Space Odyssey
Courtesy: MGM



to knowledge.[2] One danger here is obviously a likelihood that those occasions which may transcend customary experience are equally likely to escape narrative. By its own nature, the ineffable may be inappropriate to popular forms, although a film study by Paul Schrader suggests otherwise.[3]

The third tendency includes varieties of experiments with the formal orthodoxies of story construction. One example might have been the post-Sorbonne Revolt Godard. Before then, Godard remained essentially loyal to Hollywood conventions, whatever his manipulations of them to private purpose. When he foresook commercial financing, Godard seems also to have removed himself from its traditions, and this in itself promised a vitalization of forms from a director of great talent. Unfortunately, in films like *Vent d'Est* and *Vladimir and Rosa,* Godard has literally abandoned the audience as well; that is, he now views his films as textual training grounds for a particular kind of studious revolutionary; hence, other responses to the films, if indeed they can be seen at all, are regarded as amounting to no more than arbitrary sensations distorted through class-based perceptions.

With minor exceptions, the eighteenth and nineteenth century narrative traditions maintained chronological, spatial, and illusionary integrities; they told straight-ahead stories in clear and coherent fashions, with the presence or absence of an author sensibly comprehensible to all, and the matter of credibility easily accessible to a reader who maintained a collusive frame of reference with the writer-playright. In one sense, film heralded twentieth century forms by its very nature—shifting apparent points of view and subjective/objective perceptions with the ease of a mobile camera. The interchangeability of snippets from the cellulose nitrate ribbon could as easily shift chronology as they juggled space. The most mundane film comedy echoed the multi-perspectives of Cubism; any sentimental romance had its Proustian flashback.

But the very success of the entertainment film shackled formal experimentation, for seeming Naturalism (however thinly it guises fantasy) is a requisite of mass taste. Thus, no truly modern film narrative parallels Ionesco, Adamov or the *nouveau roman,* let alone James Joyce.

Goaded in part by television commercials (themselves largely cribbing techniques from the Underground film avant-garde), many recent films have the semblance of innovation: Richard Lester's Beatles movies, for example, or *Petulia,* or *Slaughterhouse-Five* by George Roy Hill, who also made *Butch Cassidy.* In fact, these films largely shift locale and chronology like early stories, only omitting the attendant, explanatory stenographic cues. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is the most interesting, for Vonnegut's message, that life is no more than a series of moments arranged randomly, adapts most functionally to the story design.

A more radical series of experimental accomplishments can be traced in the work of Alain Resnais: *Toute la mémoire du monde; Hiroshima mon amour; l'Année dernière à Marienbad; Muriel ou le Temps d'un retour; la Guerre est finie;* and *Je t'aime, je t'aime.* Resnais is consistently preoccupied with time and memory, in the tradition of Bergson and Proust. His films differ from more glib time-tripping because of a considered integration between chronology and the objective/subjective continuum. Thus, while all his images (like most clearly focused photography in general) share a bond of "realness," the credibility of any particular episode—which is established by a given context in the narrative design—becomes a matter for constant later reconsideration. In consequence, each of Resnais' films maintains a strikingly independent autonomous life of its own, and each amounts to a paradigm for mental process. (The metaphor is explicitly drawn in *Toute la mémoire du monde,*

where the dome of the Bibliothèque Nationale is equated with a human brain).[4]

In pursuit of time, Resnais has collaborated with various literary talents, including Alain Robbe-Grillet, who has directed three films of his own since writing *Marienbad.* Robbe-Grillet's novels draw clearly on film sensibility; for instance, in *Project for a Revolution in New York* he describes images as "in the frame." In the preface to that work, Robbe-Grillet characterizes older narrative as "definite as a judgement" and rejects its "fossilized use of language." With his own work, he plays endless variations on the same events, shifting actions, viewpoint and context so as to deny "bourgeois values connected with the destiny of the individual and the history of society." (Curiously, filmmakers and writers and critics who deny individual stories continue to sign their names to their work). Robbe-Grillet's "story" themes are located in the popular ephemera of everyday life.

Yet, in the final analysis, have any of these alternatives quite escaped melodrama? For that matter ought they to? *Last Tango in Paris* carries its own modicum of soap opera. *El Topo* reads like a Marvel Comic. *Performance* boasts the slick violence of *Get Carter.* Resnais draws his materials, like Alfred Hitchcock, from comics, serials and pulps. Robbe-Grillet seeks new generative themes in newspapers and posters. His strongest image in the first section of *Project for a Revolution in New York* is that of a woman being seized, drugged, fondled, assaulted, and ominously "operated on."

What, of course, each filmmaker would propose in defense is that such stories and likenesses compose the underlying, anonymous mythic substratum to everyday life in industrial civilization. (Too, such employments are useful at the box office).

Perhaps this is the case. Perhaps like Joyce the modern filmmaker will find his myths both in national legend and the comic strip, although apparent distinctions between archetype and stereotype would seem in the process to have become dysfunctionally muddled. Perhaps our own soap opera lives may hold the key to the usefulness of modern movies. Existence for many people, like the fiction of Joyce Carol Oates, seems to be a shifting balance between melodrama and tedium. For the emerging underprivileged, the combination can weigh toward the libidinal culture-hero: John Wayne disguised as Malcolm X. For the middle class, where most of us live willingly or not, the melodrama seems alternately to excite our feelings, then turn us off again on that last ambiguous freeze frame. We can inhabit the world of Beckett only on the stage. Indeed Beckett himself cast Buster Keaton in the only movie he ever wrote. The story film appears to be something of a different order, striving like Yeats' System to hold reality and justice in a single thought, although sometimes neither is very apparent.

NOTES:

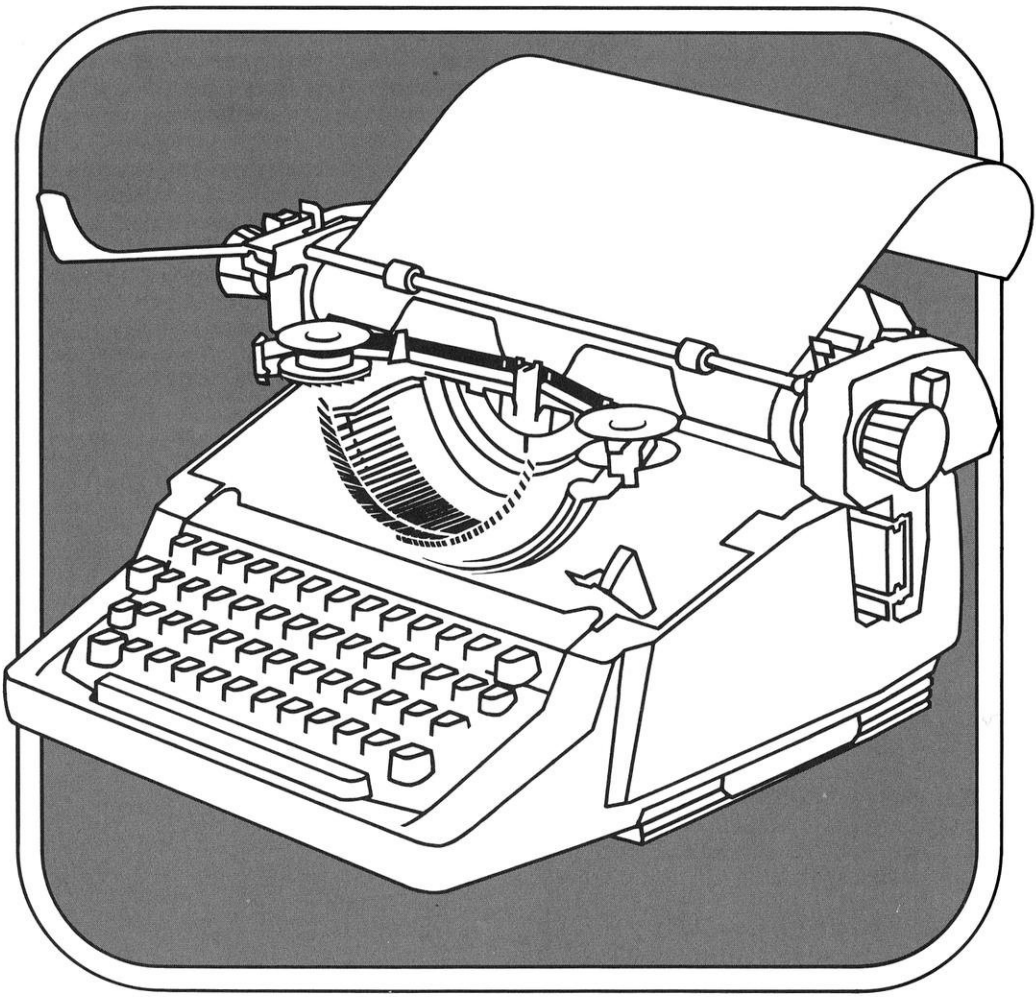
[1]The *New Yorker,* Oct. 28, 1972.

[2]A like trip through Freudian symptoms, past the shattered ego into transcendental experience by way of Jungian archetypes is described by Dr. Stanislav Grof of the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in Leo Litwak, " 'Rolfing,' 'Aikido,' Hypnodramas, Psychokinesis and Other Things Beyond the Here and Now," *New York Times,* Section 6, Dec. 17, 1972, pp. 18-38.

[3]Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer,* Berkeley, 1972.

[4]Alan Casty compares Resnais to Fellini in this respect in "The Experimental Art of the New Film," Ron Henderson, *ed., The Image Maker,* Richmond, Va., 1971.

Poetry



The Last Dance

by Michael Bullock

Author and poet. His most recent publication is *Green Beginning Black Ending*. He is an Associate Professor in the Creative Writing Department of the University of British Columbia, where he directs the Translation Program.

When the river rounds the island for the second time
our crimes will climb the trees and mock us
apelike with their gibbering cries
The mountain will break loose from its moorings
and drift out onto the flowing water
A basket of carnations sliding down the bank
will launch itself to the cheers of the assembled birds

I shall be standing there beside a moss-covered pillar of rock
and shall add my voice to the mocking and the cheers
But you book in hand will invite the clouds
to walk with padded feet over your new-mown grave

Arabesques

by Michael Bullock

Trailers of blackberry
describe arabesques over a mossy rock
and write indecipherable messages
over the grass beside a path

Brown pools by the wayside
the homes of insects
contain the secrets of the universe
revealed to a Chinese sage

The bark of a tree
wrinkled with thought
is fixed forever
in a puzzled frown

A myriad flowers
at the bottom of the ocean
smile and smile
with the shifting tide

Twigs on the water
form letters and signs
spell out the words
of an inhuman language

Looking Backward

by Lawrence Fixel

Author of *Time to Destroy/to Discover,* a long poem published by Panjandrum Press (San Francisco) in 1972. He is also a consummate writer of surrealist prose and his "parables" have appeared in a volume titled *The Scale of Silence* from the Kayak Press in Santa Cruz.

Who lived here then? The name should reach
to gather the filings, hold fast, protect
the thread of vision — yet where is one
to believe and revere? Former tenants
supply stories of this house:
Some went this way: the view of machines
held attention for days: the carousel
and the cyclotron turning —
some went down in the strangeness
of valleys; others to die on the acreage
where they were born. I recall passion vines
in the garden: the steady work of shears
kept nerves from tangling; children full of guile
peered through the windows; priests and neighbors
took sides in the quarrels; a few made appeal
to a higher court: their claims for damages
suffered in the course of aborted careers.

But choose no resemblance: as it quickens,
let it fall: let memory create the country,
laws that serve the season of endurance.

The Biographer

by Lisel Mueller

Author of *Dependencies* (University of North Carolina Press, 1965) and of *Life of a Queen* (Northeast/Juniper Press, 1970). She reviews books for the *Chicago Daily News* and for *Poetry.*

"A biography is something one invents."—Louis-Ferdinand Céline

God knows I've used
what surgical skills I have
to open you up through minor incisions
—larger ones might not have healed,
left you a cripple or a corpse,
and I love you too much for that.

For years, I lived
on a diet of your words,
letters, diaries, the collected works,
till they dropped from my mouth like pits
each time I spoke, and my friends
could smell you on my breath.

I took the journeys you took,
walked in your tracks like a Chinese wife;
asleep, I spoke in your dreams.
I would have eaten your heart;
like Snow White's mother I wanted to turn into you,
but chaste and tricky, you slipped through your facts.

I came to live in your house,
restored your pictures, bought back your books,
discovered the key to your desk,
moved the yellow chair to the window
—and now you come in, asking
whose house this is.

Divorce

by Lisel Mueller

We never saw her except
flat against the big trunk.

Now that it's cut away
we see she has
branches, leaves, tiny blossoms.

There are new shoots
and on old leaves white blotches.
Tart red berries grow from the shock
of living out in the open.

Travel Poem

by Lisel Mueller

From the harbor of sleep bring me the milk of childhood,
from the ocean of silence bring me a grain of salt,
from the city of chances bring me my lucky number,
from the lookout of morning bring me a speckled egg,
from the palace of mirrors send me my old, lost self,
from the hill of bones send me a drop of your blood.

From the province of spring everlasting
bring back a rose that remains half-open,
from the drydock of mute old men
bring back the miracle of a tear,
from the delta of good intentions
bring back the seed that will change a life.

From the fields of the dispossessed bring me a donkey
with Byzantine eyes, from the wells of the mad
bring me the bell and lantern of heaven.

From the bay of forgetfulness come back with my name,
from the cave of despair come to me empty-handed,
from the strait of narrow escapes come back, come back.

For an Artist on the Art Commission

by William Stafford

One of this country's outstanding poets. Among his recent books are *The Rescued Year* and *Allegiances* (both published by Harper & Row) and a new book is due this year, titled *Someday, Maybe.*

What happens once
is what you want—
    a glance, restraint,
    then one best time,
    found and held—
    not looking into,
    but out of,
    the picture.

You work for the state—
    it whirrs, pounds,
    returns to hammer
    again and again.
    May the sly magician
    from anywhere
    keep coming along—

    Book,
    song,
    Mona Lisa.

The Poet's First Song

by Dabney Stuart

Professor at Washington and Lee University and editor of poetry for *Shenandoah.* He has published two books of poems, *The Diving Bell* and *A Particular Place* (both published by Alfred Knopf in 1966 and 1969, respectively) and has a new book ready for publication.

Whatever I bear
In the song's name
I cannot cage
Or tame
Or bring to book
For a song

Whatever my age
Wears for skin
Under button and hook,
Stay and pin,
Can go hang
For a song

Whatever you took
From me, or another,
While flies sang
On all together,
Rides the wind
For a song

The brute tongue
That dresses this dust
After its kind
And for its loss
I share
For a song

The Poet's Second Song

by Dabney Stuart

Nothing I make
Is artifice:
All rivers return
To their source,
Stones burn,
The dove's track
Draws the hawk.

What can the world be
Unless I realize
Its ears, its eyes,
Bounce on its knee,
And by measure, by design
Quicken
Its gross latency?

Nothing extends
But by me. And yet
The line depends
Not only on ardor
On craft, on wit:
Poeta nascitur
Non fit.

The Poet's Third Song

by Dabney Stuart

The world I am given
Reveals nothing
Until it be riven

I had not thought
To come this far
Shifting the same pieces

And stitched up again
With such skill
That no one find the seam

No matter how I fit
Them together the flawed veneer
Fouls my disguises

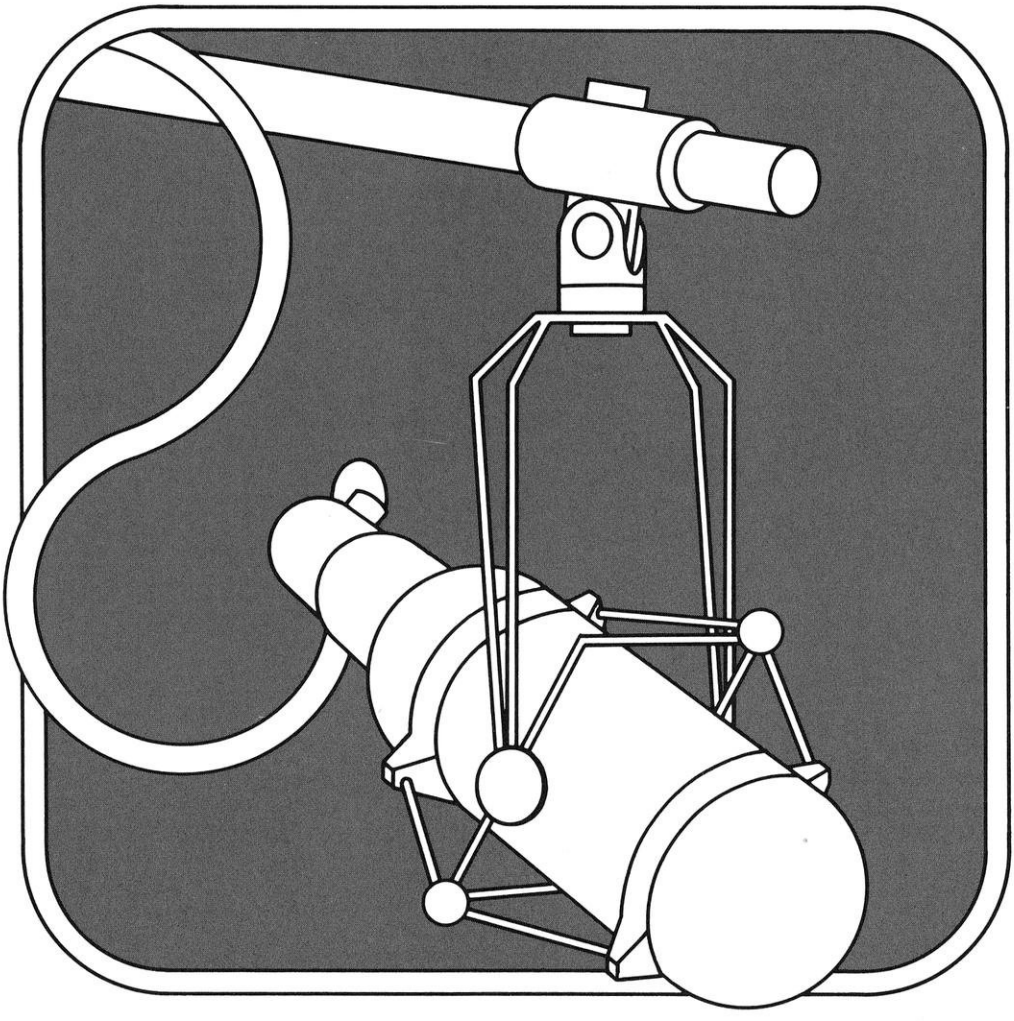
Hopkins' coal
Was fine bluffing

One after the other
Each shape
Falls by its own ruses

Beside that other's crazed
Bitch in whose esteem
The swine's base
Founded the mansion

I sit in the center
The lines of the web
Mocking the creature

Notes and Discussion



Death of a Filmmaker

by Susan Beach Vaughn

Film commentator and former library consultant.

Peter Watkins isn't dead, but he is sounding the knell on his life as a film and television communicator. The director of *The War Game, Privilege* and *Punishment Park* speaks disparagingly of media at the 1972 Atlanta Film Festival and says one-on-one communication is his answer to the miasma of suppressed and one-way information of movies-television-newspapers. Watkins, a native Australian who has lived and worked in Great Britain and France as well as the United States during the last fifteen years, doubts he will make movies anymore, preferring to speak directly with people of his concerns of the threat of thermonuclear war, political polarization and the loss of personal freedom in the modern age.

"If, for example, a West German television station were to say, 'Here is a budget. We want you to make a film about the thermonuclear question, and we will show it'," Watkins hypothesizes, "I probably would not make the film."

A strange statement from the young man whose picture, *The War Game,* won the 1966 Oscar for best feature-length documentary. But that film which reconstructs in newsreel manner the effects of a nuclear attack on Britain was banned by the BBC for whom it was produced because, according to Watkins, it was too hot to handle. And his most recent film, *Punishment Park*—which deals with domestic reaction to the war in Southeast Asia: draft resistance, civil disobedience, peace marches, rallies and riots—remains undistributed—suppressed—although it won a major award at the 1971 Atlanta Festival.

At a time when media is more popular than ever, when the global village of Marshall McLuhan convenes each evening with the television news, when filmmaking courses span kindergarten through Ph.D. curricula and when visual literacy is a prerequisite for the man of humane letters—Watkins steps back, after more than a decade of

Privilege
Courtesy: The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive

film and television documentary-making, and says, "Media blocks two-way communication." Speaking with a group of film festival attenders—movie-makers, media teachers, hecklers and disciples—during an informal roundtable in Atlanta's Memorial Art Center, Watkins purports the idea that media, rather than enhancing one's view of the world, limits it, because media is non-participatory. "Ingestive" is the filmmaker's media adjective. He questions advocates of the expansive influence of media such as Canada's McLuhan, saying, "McLuhan does not push beyond the fact that media is having an effect."

"What is the effect," Watkins asks, "for modern youth who by age twenty have experienced one to two full years of total electronic input? Not asking 'Who? What? Why? When? and How?' but ingesting." A mesmerization, a silence to society's ills, is his answer. Watkins sees social opposition throughout the world in a state of collapse, and he blames media's one-way, leveling influence.

"What is media doing to destroy social opposition?" he asks. "It plows into America's folk myths of radical opposition before radical opposition has been formulated," he charges. "And beyond the physical reasons for social explosions, there is a psychic disturbance or frustration caused by being unable to answer back." He cites media silence on the threat of nuclear war, the subject of *The War Game,* as exemplary. He also perceives individual uneasiness over loss of identity within society's systems, the topic of *Privilege.*

"Concerned dialog has run down. Viewers feel something is wrong. We viewers would like to communicate these feelings and fears, but we may not. Media always says, 'No'." Here Watkins moves to a second charge:

Not only does media cut off two-way communication but Watkins contends that it is loaded against thought-provoking, action-initiating information. Two examples he uses: a television news report on a speech delivered by Jane Fonda concerning black militancy which was followed by a television anchorman's remark, "Well, something we can be non-partisan about is the weather." Watkins labels this a diversion technique, calculated consciously or unconsciously to defuse controversy. The way Paul Erlich, spokesman for Zero Population Growth, was handled on a television talk show, Watkins sees as a second example of media defusing. According to Watkins, the program's moderator played down Erlich's statistics on population and statements on hunger, cutting him short when the ecologist became impassioned, only to return to the point following a commercial with, "Now, let's get back to that bit about suffering."

"We underestimate the way we are being mentally clobbered, the way media is dampening controversy," Watkins warns. "On the BBC they always have a balance of opinion on the talk shows." Listening to Watkins, one thinks he is going to shed a ray of hope from abroad to contrast with what he finds as dismal American media coverage. "On these shows if Erlich were being interviewed, there would be not only a pro- but also anti-ZPG and an impartial interviewer. In this broad spectrum-of-thought-format used in British television and, at times, in the United States, "the edge of the controversial man's remarks are taken off" is Watkins' contention. "The Erlich-figure is sandwiched between those who negate him."

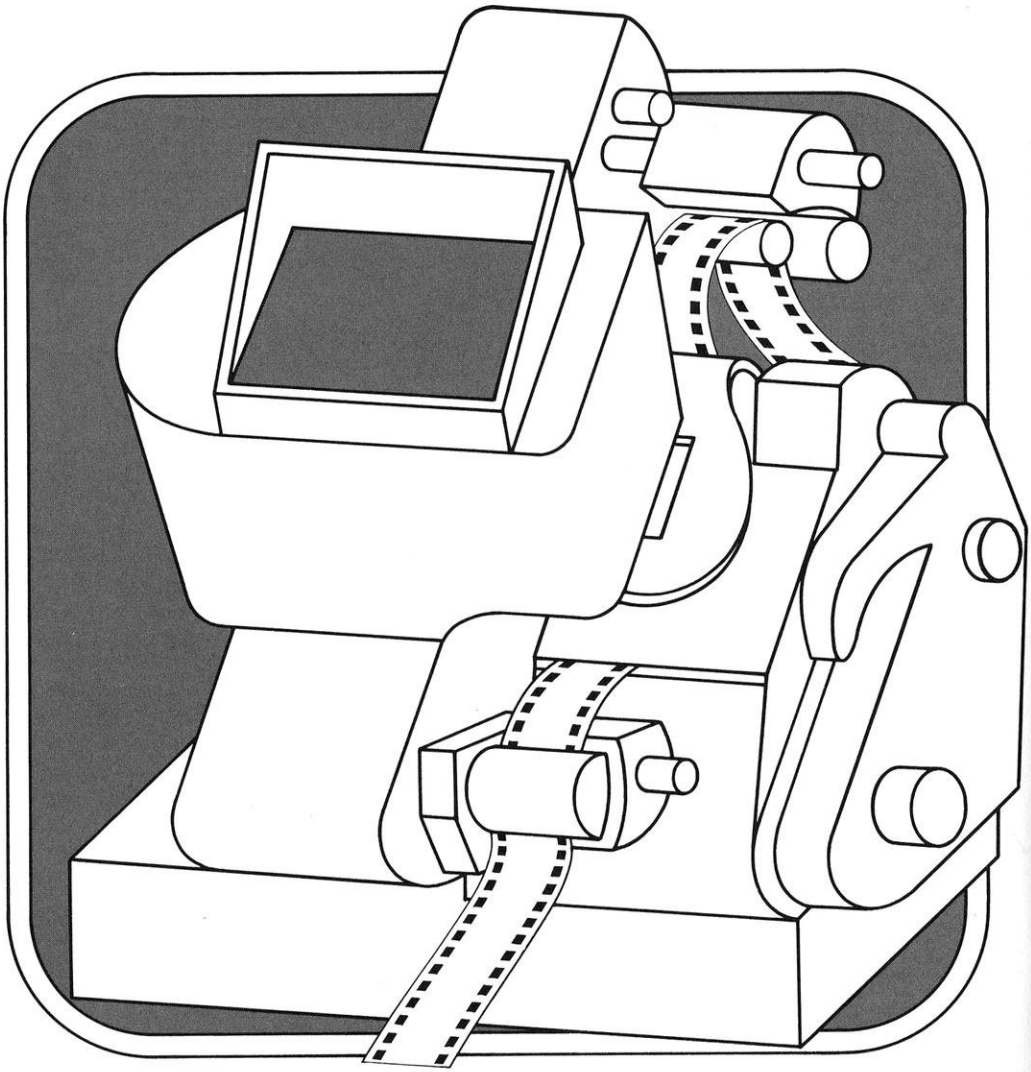
Watkins calls television "a euphoric. It demonstrates an 'All-is-well-with-the-world-ism' and allows for no democratic involvement." But his condemnation is broader, encompassing all media, when he says, "We have entered a condition of conditioning where choice is not available. 'We've taken the mirrors off the walls because we just don't want to look'." The filmmaker gives credit to Friedrich Nietzsche for the quote.

Accused by listeners during the group discussion of being overly pessimistic, Watkins counters, "Because an ethic is emerging which does away with individualism, social criticism is dangerous. But I wouldn't be here speaking if I was completely negative. I'm trying to create the means for lots of people to communicate with others. All I know is that there is a problem, that there is almost a total silence in the media, and that my solution is to throw the problem out to you."

Watkins calls film viewing and discussion at festivals such as Atlanta's a cathartic experience. He says much media criticism comes from those within the media generation, but he criticizes film schools for graduating filmmakers who know little of the economics of film financing and production, and who do not know how to deal —as he himself cannot, he admits— with repression of socially controversial matter. "A lot of filmmakers go under. It is good to find out that the attrition is happening to other people too," he quips.

"The psychic situation in media is so strong today, that to throw a film into that denuded atmosphere—I'm not sure I would want to do it," he says. Watkins' decision to bring his concerns of media's dampening effects on social criticism directly to people —rather than through film and television documentary statements—cuts his audience. From the millions who have seen *Privilege* in American theatres and on television, from the hundreds of thousands who have seen *The War Game* in American schools and on non-commercial screens, Watkins brings his message to small groups of festival participants. He sums up his hope for his new role— out of the director's chair and into the seminar seat—"It would be nice if the fight had some effect on the freedom of the individual."

Book Reviews



Establishment Images and Elite Adornments

by Jacques Maquet

Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles.

Fraser, Douglas, and Cole, Herbert M., *African Art and Leadership.* Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1972. $17.50.

African Art and Leadership is a promising title, not only for the anthropologists and art historians specialized in traditional Africa, but also for all those who are concerned with the significance of the arts in our society.[1] Indeed societies outside the Western world are not any longer perceived as fundamentally so different from ours that what is observed in them has no relevance for us. The end-of-the-nineteenth century view that "we" should not be put in the same category with "them" expressed a smug sense of racial and cultural superiority that two world wars and a few other West-initiated disasters have made obsolete. Now we accept the premise, substantiated by anthropology, that the ways of mankind reveal deep-seated similarities across cultural boundaries, and that we may understand ourselves better by looking at our overseas brothers.

It is in a general perspective that I shall approach *African Art and Leadership.* In a recent review, Robert Plant Armstrong has stated what anthropology and art history Africanists will find in the book.[2] There is no need for another presentation from the same standpoint.

The book is divided into two sections. The first, covering about 290 pages, is an anthology of fourteen essays "on aspects of art and leadership in a dozen or so specific areas." The second, called an overview, is an interpretative essay of about 30 pages "which attempts to discover the ways in which art and leadership relate to one another in African cultures" (p.4). This essay concludes the book and is written by the editors, Douglas Fraser, professor of art history at Columbia, and Herbert M. Cole, who teaches art at the University of California, Santa Barbara. I read this section before the

anthology, thinking that it would provide me with the analytical framework and the key concepts used throughout the monographic essays, but it does not. The authors of the essays obviously enjoyed a complete theoretical and conceptual freedom, so there is a fair amount of inconsistency between the two sections.

What brings together the different parts of the book is the question-theme: what are the relations between art and leadership? Any research that attempts to elucidate relations between two sets of phenomena may be usefully analyzed into three components: the two variables and the link.

*

Art is one of the variables. The editors and the contributors agree at least on one point: African art is a concept that does not require any discussion. I have not found a single sentence in the book that indicates what is meant by "art" in a traditional African context. This is surprising. A reader without a previous familiarity with African cultures would reasonably conclude from this absence of comments that Africans had a concept of art similar to ours and that they used it, as we do, for setting apart some objects among all the artifacts made in their societies. These legitimate assumptions are wrong.

In the European tradition, "art object" has come, during the last three centuries, to designate artifacts whose primary usage is to be looked at. They are set apart for an exclusive visual apprehension because they are particularly apt to stimulate aesthetic perception and enjoyment. Such objects were not unknown in Africa but they were few and of secondary importance, such as the copper figurines of the Mossi, mere "trinkets", according to Michel Leiris.[3] In the Fraser and Cole book, the gold-plated fly-whisk handles of the Baule (in Hans Himmelheber's essay), and some of the Chokwe chairs (in Daniel Crowley's essay) are the only objects mentioned which seem to have been for the Baule and the Chokwe art objects in the Western sense.

Then what are the other objects subsumed under the term "African art"? For the Africans who made them and looked at them, they were defined by the context of their usage: cult of the ancestors, government, title associations, secret societies, regalia, etc. For us who have taken them out of their original contexts and have put them in the new environments of galleries, museums and homes, they are Western art objects by "naturalization." An Ashanti stool is not any longer a throne for the divine king, but an object whose design we admire. Incidentally the well-balanced and harmonious design was also perceived by the Ashanti, but they did not isolate the artifacts with a predominant aesthetic component in a special network of galleries and museums. They did as we do when we appreciate the visual quality of a car—keep driving it.

But, it may be objected, all the items mentioned by the contributors of *African Art and Leadership* are not in Western museums; most of them have been studied in the field. On what basis did the authors choose some ritual, dynastic, or funerary objects and attribute to them the artistic qualification? In fact, all the artworks analyzed in the book either represent human beings or animals, or are ornamented with motifs and patterns. Image and adornment are the implicit criteria of selection. Noting "the uneven distribution of the arts in Africa," Fraser and Cole add the reason: "one leader may express values or power with a stone or a bundle of magical substances; while his counterpart elsewhere may employ a sculptured form" (p. 299). A few pages further they write that "the items of clothing (sandals, textiles, hats, and jewelry) [of the Ashanti, Benin, Yoruba, and Cameroons rulers] are so elaborated as to be distinct art objects" (p. 304). For our authors sculptured

forms and elaborately decorated items are thus art, whereas stones and plain clothing are not, even if usage and meaning are the same. To grant a privileged artistic status to images and ornaments is in agreement with the practice of 19th century art academies, but is a very questionable assumption.

In a book focused on two variables and their relationships, the "African art" variable should not be taken for granted, particularly when the labeling has some impact on the problem. Let us take a scepter for instance; if one calls it "a royal object" (as Africans do) its relation to leadership seems less unexpected than when one calls it "an art object" (as we do).

*

The other variable, leadership, is, on the contrary, extensively discussed. Leadership is understood in its broadest sense. The overview begins by the following statements: "In all human societies, no matter how small or egalitarian, there are those who lead and those who follow. This is as true in Africa of small bands of Bushmen or Pygmy hunters as it is of the powerful medieval Sudanic states or the more recent kingdom of Benin." A few lines below, Fraser and Cole add that "what is common to all leaders is their influence over other people, whether this be in the moral, military, spiritual, economic, social, or political sectors of life." The only sector excluded is the nuclear family; "the head of such a family is not, in our terms, a leader" (p. 295-296).

It is, of course, legitimate to abstract from different societal roles (patriarch, king, priest, elder, hunting band head, aristocrat, warrior chief, wealthy householder, etc.) a common characteristic (their ability to influence others). But is it operational? Is a category with a maximal denotation and a minimal connotation, such as "influence," useful as a variable, a phenomenon to be related as precisely as possible to another? Can we expect to find the same artistic form associated with leaders as different as the Ashanti king and the Kwele village war-chief? To consider separately political rulers, kinship patriarchs, superiors in stratification hierarchies, lords in patronage systems, and association heads is likely to be a better strategy than to dump them all under the single heading of "leaders." In fact, this difficulty appears only at the generalization level, in the overview; in each paper only one concrete category of leaders is described.

*

Between the two variables, the link is not causal. This is Fraser and Cole's conclusion. Indeed they prefer words that indicate a correlation, an association. Yet, I do not think that they mean that it is impossible or irrelevant to ascertain which, of *art* or *leadership* is the independent variable, and which is the dependent. They mean that "the nuances and complexities of the leadership sphere" cannot be precisely correlated to the nuances and complexities of the visual domain (p. 299). They do not deny that *leadership* has priority over *art,* and that it is the conditioning variable. Then what kind of association can be established between the variables?

Most of the associations are not unexpected. We are told that ivory, bronze, brass, gold, and overlaid beadwork are elite media; whereas wood is used in the commoners' productions. Other aristocratic characteristics are "exquisite execution," intricacy of details, more complex iconography (p. 303-305). These associations are expected: they are direct consequences of the control on the society's resources that a privileged minority is able to exert (precious materials and skilled labor). This can be observed elsewhere than in traditional Africa, where there is a specialization of occupations and groups which have a differential access to societal resources. In the industrial world of today, what has been called in recent years The Establishment is made up

of the personally rich and of those who dispose of public and private funds in the capitalist societies; in the socialist countries, of the bureaucrats who control a sector of the collective resources. Where these social conditions are realized, an elite art emerges.

Other associations between variables are functional. The art objects of the leaders isolate them from the ordinary people, make their power visible (by their regalia, the elaborate architecture, and furnishings of the palaces), and provide them with locations and situations where they can maintain an appropriate rapport with their subjects. Finally, Fraser and Cole mention that art objects are instrumental in the basic functions of political leaders which are (for our authors) regulation, adjudication, distribution and socialization (p. 309-313). These functional associations are not to be questioned. But the importance granted to them is a little disturbing, as the introduction makes clear that the book goes beyond the functionalist approach which, say the authors, together with the formalist approach, has characterized the study of African art until recently (p. 3).

"Art objects" are thus related to leadership because they are made in noble materials and are instruments of power. These relationships deserve to be documented, but they are neither new nor very illuminating. It is on the possible relationships between *forms* and The Establishment that lies the crux of the matter. Investigations in that line are particularly difficult. In his essay on Lega figurines, Biebuyck notes sadly that "for the large majority of carvings, equivalences between form and meaning are totally absent or, at least for us, not directly understandable" (p. 17). Yet Fraser and Cole indicate that there is *some* correlation "between the extent of naturalism favored in a given culture and its degree of socio-political differentiation" (p. 306). This opens exciting comparative perspectives. A naturalistic style of representation is a facet of the socialist realism favored by the rulers of the Soviet Union. In a few other cases the preference for naturalism of governments and politically conservative groups suggests a positive correlation between a system of forms (the naturalistic style) and a privileged political and social position. The part of anthropology concerned with the study of aesthetic phenomena in their cultural settings—aesthetic anthropology—should concentrate its efforts on the *forms* of the artifacts belonging to its field of research. A scepter and a throne function as political instruments; if they are also aesthetic objects, it is through their formal aspects. To relate them *as political instruments* to the kings is almost trivial; but *as aesthetic objects,* their relationship to power is highly significant.

*

As contributions to the theme of the book, the fourteen papers are of unequal relevance. The most off-target one is Simon Ottenberg's functional analysis of a secret society play among the Afikpo of southeastern Nigeria. One wonders why this essay has been included in a book concerned with art and leadership. On the other side, Robert F. Thompson's study of the Yoruba bead-embroidered crowns shows how far a careful analysis of formal characteristics may lead in the understanding of the value system and the symbolism of a culture.

The lack of an analytical and conceptual framework common to the editors and the contributors has already been mentioned. It is ironical that the contributors' freedom has resulted in a sort of consensus on a functional approach that the editors purported to transcend. The latter write in the introduction: "The [functional] approach involves the examination of a single art style or ceremony in detail, and is usually more concerned with function than with aesthetic matters" (p. 3). This seems to be an appropriate description for most of the essays. In fact, a comparative approach is hardly possible when one

remains confined within the limits of a single society, which seems to have been the original design of the Columbia symposium of 1965 on "The Aristocratic Traditions in African Art," out of which the book grew.

The only essay moving freely across cultural boundaries is Fraser's "The Fish-Legged Figure in Benin and Yoruba Art." Looking for similar motifs, Fraser ranges from Benin to Romanesque and Gothic Europe, and from Etruscan Italy to Luristan. I do not think that it helps us to understand art and leadership in Africa, but it is an erudite study in diffusion at its best, like his previous brilliant paper on "The Heraldic Woman".[4]

Fraser's essay is excellent, if considered on its own merits (and not as a contribution to the theme). From the same point of view, a similar assessment may be made of the other essays. Their authors are very competent anthropologists or art historians, and they write about artifacts and cultures with which they have gained a very educated familiarity through long and careful fieldwork. They cannot fail to produce pieces of quality and expertise.

But the book as a whole is far from living up to the reader's—at least, to this reader's—expectations, and to the editors' stated aims: bridging "the intellectual gap between the functionalist and formalist approaches . . . [and revealing] more clearly how and why *art* is used to promulgate a culture's fundamental values" (p. 4). Yet it is not a failure. It documents usefully some already known relationships between "art" and government or "art" and aristocracy. And it indicates implicitly that for a further advance in that promising field, we need better conceptual and theoretical tools rather than other monographic studies. The absence of any discussion on the art variable has been costly. In a recent book on Yoruba sculpture, Robert Plant Armstrong devotes more than half of the book to a theory of art.[5] In *African Art and Leadership,* out of more than three hundred and fifty book references, there is only one reference to a book on aesthetic theory (Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* cited by Frank Willett).

In another publication, Douglas Fraser writes that art history is not to be "confused with aesthetics and art criticism, which actually have quite different aims."[6] Certainly, and they should not be confused either with anthropology. Yet, at a certain point in their research, art historians and anthropologists cannot afford to ignore some questions that fall within the realm of aesthetics. *African Art and Leadership's* shortcomings indicate that this point has been reached.

Notes

[1]Fraser, Douglas, and Cole, Herbert M., eds., *African Art and Leadership.* Madison, Milwaukee, and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972.

[2]Armstrong, Robert Plant, Review of *African Art and Leadership* ed. by Fraser, D. and Cole, H. M., *African Arts.* Los Angeles, 5, 4, p. 81-82.

[3]Leiris, Michel and Delange, Jacqueline, *African Art.* New York: Golden Press, 1968, p. 35.

[4]Fraser, Douglas, "The Heraldic Woman: A Study in Diffusion." *The Many Faces of Primitive Art* ed. by Douglas Fraser. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, p. 36-99.

[5]Armstrong, Robert Plant, *The Affecting Presence: An Essay in Humanistic Anthropology.* Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press.

[6]Fraser, 1966, p. 34.

Please Don't Wrap Your Fish in it

by Ellen W. Jacobs

Dance Critic for *Changes*. She was in charge of publicity for the Connecticut College American Dance Festival during the summers of 1971 and 1972.

Siegel, Marcia, *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance.* New York, Saturday Review Press. 1972. $8.95

Dance exists at a perpetual vanishing point. At the moment of its creation it is gone. All of a dancer's years of training in the studio, all the choreographer's planning, the rehearsals, the coordination of designers, composers, and technicians, the raising of money and the gathering together of an audience, all these are only a preparation for an event that disappears in the very act of materializing. No other art is so hard to catch, so impossible to hold.

—Marcia Siegel

Why would anyone choose to write about dancing?

With only one full-time dance critic employed by an American daily, serious dance writers are forced to struggle along, scraping together whatever bits a kindly editor tosses their way. But even more disheartening than the meager economic potential of the profession, the art itself is naturally resistant to being talked about.

Dance is an art of process. The moment of a movement's birth is necessarily the moment of its death. A lowered arm is raised; a flexed knee is straightened; a leap becomes a turn before our eyes. Each new shape dissolves into the next, obliterating its most recent pass. Its future is dependent upon the destruction of its history. And when the curtain finally falls, a great stillness settles. The dance disappears, leaving no score, no manuscript, no canvas to consult for reference. Aside from the old time story ballets, most dance is about nothing literal. Rarely is there a message that can be comfortably translated into words; mostly, it is about nothing that can be comfortably assigned a name.

Yet Marcia Siegel, certainly one of the finest dance writers in America, who is as intelligent and eloquent as she is persistent, continues to write. She has just published *At the Vanishing Point.* The arrival of the book is a landmark on two accounts; it is her first book, and it is easily the most important dance book to appear in the past twenty years.

Despite the tremendous dance explosion that has taken place in the past seven or eight years, the media and press remain quietly asleep, refusing to acknowledge the need to hire knowledgeable critics. Dance events are covered by music editors, theater writers, sports reporters or once in a while, the community balletomane. The resulting criticism, bloated with adjectives to cover the thinness of thought, appropriately reflects the poverty of knowledge. On occasion the local dance teacher or a retired dancer is sent to review, and though the commentary may be more perceptive, the writing is graceless and suffers the awkwardness of a novice writer.

And the dance publications offer little compensation for readers who take the art seriously. All too often their critics are fans. Similar to opera claques, they are fervent, passionate lovers, who being creative parasites live vicariously off the glamour and sparkle of the artist. But, unfortunately, they offer little provocative criticism in return.

Dance Magazine is the art's only real national publication, and it still treats its subject like a closet-racist treats the blacks: with paternalistic and uncritical zeal. The magazine is the field's house organ and the subject is approached with little intelligence or depth. For the most part its writers are innocent of serious aesthetics and desperately ignorant of even basic journalism.

For the general public, as well as dance writers, dance students, choreographers, dancers, for anyone involved in the arts, Ms. Siegel's book must be read. Again and again.

At the Vanishing Point, which covers dance events that happened between 1968 and 1971, is a compilation of Ms. Siegel's criticisms as they appeared in newspapers such as *The Boston Herald Traveller, The Wall Street Journal* and *The Los Angeles Times,* as well as her more lengthy criticisms, feature stories and analytical articles that appeared in *The Hudson Review, New York Magazine* and *Arts in Society.* Divided into five provocatively titled sections—"Ballet: The Uncertain Establishment;" "Pop Dance: The Disposable Now;" "Black Dance: A New Separatism;" "Modern Dance: The Process of Redefinition;" and "Experimental Dance: Firebrands and Visionaries," she presents a carefully and thoughtfully constructed overview of the most energetic and creative of all the performing arts at the moment.

And so it is appropriate that Ms. Siegel should, as indeed she does, examine dance as a contemporary phenomena. With little emphasis on historical relationships, she deals with dance in terms of the social and cultural environment in which the art currently exists. She sees dance in terms of the public's present needs and wants. For better or worse.

While in many articles she again and again cheers on the growing public interest in dance, ballet, in particular, she also reiterates concern about the concessions made by artistic directors and choreographers to their newly won public. In her ambivalence about the growing dance audience, she inadvertently presents the crucial and persistent question haunting the souls of artists: when is the compromise good business sense, to assure the next season, and when does it sell the artist and his work down the river? The question, though moldy in age, is still vital in its present relevance. How much soul can be contracted for popularity? When is the artist victim of his own stubborn puritanism, and

when is he compelled by true artistic vision? It takes prophetic faith, as well as sheer guts to risk waiting decades for recognition of artistic innovation. Meanwhile, dancers must be fed. Is balance another name for compromise?

Ms. Siegel loves dancing and resents the intrusion and inevitable influence of its new rich audiences. For along with their patronage they tempt an exchange of artistic integrity for a secure financial future. Ms. Siegel claims that the big ballet companies have shifted purpose from serving the choreographer's artistic needs to indulging society's whims. Often the repertory is designed for audiences who desire their dance diet light:

In recent years, pressured by the competitive demands of our abundant cultural life, Ballet Theatre has invested a great deal in revivals of crowd-pleasing nineteenth-century story ballets—Swan Lake, *a new* Giselle, *and this winter,* Coppelia. *These quaint old parties dominated Ballet Theatre's recent one-month holiday season at Brooklyn Academy. If they managed to look more like festive roast goose than cold turkey, the credit must go to some unusually fine dancers.*

She resents the popularity contests that many of the ballet companies are finding themselves engaged in. And with the Joffrey's zingy nowness she loses all patience:

The City Center Joffrey Ballet is the tourist attraction of the dance world. Like some air-conditioned Hilton Hotel in a tropical country, it keeps you away from snakes, bad food and dirty natives, but you can look at the scenery and pretend you've been there.

She is argumentative, impatient and refuses to patronize cultural fashions. The glamorous fringe benefits of her profession irritate her strong democratic spirit and protective concern for the art. So with tongue in cheek she reports:

This opening night was definitely the snob event of the year. The City Center lobby resembled rush hour on the BMT, although it smelled more expensive. At the door, members of the press were handed lists with the seat numbers of various moneyed big bugs and show-biz celebs, either so that we could rush up and ask them how they like being there, or so we'd feel we'd given up our accustomed seats in a good cause.

Most revealing about Ms. Siegel as a dance critic is the fact that she is a writer before she is a writer about dance. The distinction is not only important, it is crucial. Being a writer affords her the important distance from her subject that assures an objectivity and skepticism not found in lovers.

Faced with a public that is basically unacquainted with dance history, except for Nijinsky's legendary leap, Isadora's lovers and Pavlova's balletic beauty, the writer is often forced to start from scratch. Inevitably part of his function becomes the education of his readers. Not only historical, but also contemporary references must be carefully explained. The infant of critical writing in the arts, dance has a meager literary past.

Without over-simplifying her intellectual and aesthetic insights, Ms. Siegel's book is full of provocative ideas and observations which she makes intelligible and exciting to even lay readers. Devoid of the big-worded mumbo-jumbo that the mystic qualities of the art often inspires, her lucid prose reflects the precision of her intellectual and analytical understanding of her subject. As a matter of fact, she is so clear, so down-home at times, that it becomes almost possible to gloss over the intuition and professional knowledge necessary to discern and articulate such elemental truths, truths that most of us can only sense. In an article called *More Geese Than Swans,* in which she discusses the ballet classic *Swan Lake,* she says:

The New Dance Ensemble
University of Wisconsin
Photograph by Del Brown

In dance there are three ways to tell a story: pantomime, or stylized movement that is distinct from dance itself; the realistic imposition of a role upon the dance movement; and acting out by combining inner motivations with *the movement. Pantomime is the favored method in* Swan Lake.

In a single sentence she succinctly distinguishes the dramatic techniques used to advance plot and develop character in dance. Her knowledge and analytic insight pull back the skin of the art to provide readers with a structural underview.

Even after thoughts and ideas have finally crystallized, the actual writing of a piece of dance criticism is fraught with peril. Writing about dance has its special problems. In order to create a sense of movement in a basically static media, the writer must be gifted with a poetic sense of language. As tools of expression, dance and words differ. The English language separates noun and verb, while in dance,

the noun (the dancer) and the verb (movement) are inseparable. The dancer is both noun and verb. Translation difficulties are further compounded by the linear structure of language. Dance is a three dimensional art and actions happen simultaneously, as where words must necessarily happen one at a time. The dancer raised and lowered her leg at the same moment. In dance we see the concurrence of the action.

Writing with enormous economy and uncompromising strength, Ms. Siegel uses description as a means to an end: to illustrate an aesthetic or philosophical point. Her description is always functional, her language, vivid and precise. Carefully selected words, well-pruned sentences etch indelible images in our mind's eye. Most important, however, she never lets us forget that it is a dance event that she has experienced—not theater, music or art—for she explains the emotional impact of what she has seen in terms of the art's vehicle: movement. In doing so, she improves both our vision and insight. For instance, she describes the figure of Death in Kurt Joos' *Green Table*:

The pivotal figure of Death gains its power from the varied use of two principal movement qualities, a purposefully channeled strength and a controlled use of energy that flows in toward the body. These qualities pervade all the actions of Death and define his character as one of self-centered, consuming appetite and implacable determination.

Death stands fiercely before us. In evocative language she verbally conjures up his emotional character and gives us an analysis of how his character and personality are developed through movement.

While informed by great knowledge and sensitivity Ms. Siegel's criticism is neither cerebral nor academic, for it is always riveted to the dance experience itself. Emotionally, she has the courage to be vulnerable, and verbally, she has the talent to express it. She is not afraid to reveal herself from behind her opinions. About Robert Wilson's work she wrote:

Watching The Life and Time of Sigmund Freud *is like rummaging around in somebody else's attic. Everything up there is very interesting, but there's no use trying to figure out why it's there or what it all means, and when you come downstairs again you realize you haven't accomplished anything in the past three hours, but you've seen a lot of curious things.* The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud *is about symbols and disguises and time, about people known and not known, who are endlessly plodding back and forth the dim recesses of the mind, and about the imperceptible way this landscape shifts and changes before we can become quite familiar with it.*

Unafraid to deal with art as a personal emotional experience, Ms. Siegel translates the essential quality of Wilson's work into visual and sensuous imagery. We see what she felt. And by letting us in on her experiences in attics, we are given a sense of the critic as a real human being.

At the beginning of her book Ms. Siegel tells us that she likes to write for newspapers and magazines. "I know I'm trying to catch the wind, and I like the impermanence of knowing that before you've written the words, they're being superseded." Though Ms. Siegel feels most at home with the transient life of journalism, she is no philosophical gypsy. For when read in its entirety, her book reflects a consistent point of view and a quite definite aesthetic. Her writing and commentary are of enduring importance.

Ms. Siegel may choose to have her criticism appear in the daily newspaper, but please don't wrap your fish in it, at least not until you've read what she has to say.

The New Dance Ensemble
University of Wisconsin
Photograph by Del Brown

Anais Nin and the Truth of Feeling

by Robert Zaller

The author of *The Year One, The Parliament* and editor of the forthcoming *A Casebook on Anais Nin.* He is on the faculty of the University of Miami.

Nin, Anais, *The Diary of Anais Nin, Volume 4, 1944-47.* Gunther Stuhlman, ed. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1971. $7.50

"In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms." Yeats wrote a celebrate rejoinder to that celebrated dictum of Thomas Mann and called it *Politics.* As poetry it is unassailable, but only prose can answer prose on the level at which our lives must be lived, and on that level Mann's statement has remained unchallenged. Politics—by which I mean the forms of government and the human activity which surrounds them —is a natural and important concern of men; and in times when old forms are questioned and overthrown, it is apt to preempt a great deal of time and energy. But that activity has widened, in our society, to engulf everything else. It has so saturated our imagination that we have come, as a matter of habit, to evaluate and justify all other activity and experience solely by their relation to politics. Not only does politics tyrannize every aspect of social existence, but all of our moral, intellectual, and personal life as well. Nothing is exempt. As all men were once Christians, we are all Marxists now, from William Buckley to Mao-Tse Tung.

Nothing epitomized this universal pervasion of politics so well as the current publishing craze for books which avowedly politicize their subject. A casual survey of my local library turned up *The Politics of the Family* (Laing), *The Politics of Ecology* (Ridgeway), *The Politics of History* (Zinn). There is a *Politics of Violence* and a *Politics of Disorder* (as somewhere else there must be, or shortly will, a *Politics of Nonviolence* and a *Politics of Order).* The title I like best, though, is *The Politics of Authenticity,* by Marshall Berman. It is a title a sur-

realist might well envy, for no amount of argument or explication, I am sure, could ever coax any rational meaning into it. At least, however, one thinks, there will be no Hollywood sequel to this. But open the book, and you will find Mr. Berman has gone himself one better: "Section IV: The Politics of Inauthenticity."

At this the mind (politicized like everything else) begins to riot. Why not a Politics of the Esophagus? of the Spleen? of the Snark? How had we managed so long without a *Sexual Politics?* How happy I would make my editor if I came up with a snappy title for this essay like: "Anais Nin: The Politics of Love." Right on!

Anais Nin is one of the crucial figures in our culture: a writer whose penetration of human character has widened the dimensions of the novel, a great and lyric master of English prose, the friend and peer of such men as Otto Rank, Antonin Artaud, and Henry Miller. More than this, she has symbolized the complete woman, fulfilled as artist and lover, to millions of others struggling to escape a false identity; and in her long-secret *Diary,* which has been appearing in regular installments since 1966, she has shown others her own way.

But open the *Diary* of Anais Nin, which now numbers four volumes and runs to nearly thirteen hundred pages. It spans the years 1931-1947: the era of the Third Reich, the Stalin purges, the Second World War, the dawn of the Atomic Age. Of course one expects the personal in a diary, but how could the individual sensibility not be overwhelmed by such events, what could it do but offer itself as a faithful prism of the age? Yet a glance through the index reveals only five brief references to Hitler in sixteen years (e.g., "Hitler marched into Austria," II, 292; "Bomb attempt on Hitler failed," IV, 22), and none at all to Stalin. Churchill and Roosevelt are mentioned three times between them: or rather, friends' mimicry of them is cited. In Nin's world, these famous names are cardboard figures, mere images of the events they represent. One can worship an image or mock it: but what else can one do?

This is not to say that Nin is indifferent to or unaffected by the events of her time. Quite the contrary. Her own life in Paris, the life she describes so vividly in the first two volumes, was shattered by the war, and some of the most moving passages in the *Diary* tell of her anguished separation from France, and the pain of resettlement in New York. Often she feels her frailty, her singleness, her impotence in the face of war and suffering, and despairs of "the individual loves which change nothing in the great currents of cruelty" (II, 345).

When Nin notes political events in the *Diary,* it is in a brief staccato totally at variance with her normal style: "U.S. troops have broken through at Saint-Lo." "Formal German surrender signed." When she reacts to them, she reacts with collective emotions only:

"Liberation of France!
JOY. JOY. JOY. JOY. JOY. JOY.
JOY. JOY. JOY."

"An atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima. A horror to stun the world. Unbelievable barbarism."

These entries stick up from the close, fine texture of Nin's prose like bits of broken glass in a beautiful garden. They have the bare innocence of a wounded child—the exclamation of wonder, the cry of pain. Consider the statement about Hiroshima. No amplification, no analysis, no art either—just the utterance of human pain. To *comprehend* the bomb, to place it in some political or military or moral context, even to simply speculate about what would happen next in the world—there is no attempt at this. Miss Nin gives us the keenest, closest analysis of dreams, daily events, personal encounters; there are vivid descriptions of a woman's dress, diaphanously subtle comments on the

web of relationships at a party, long quotations from private letters: but nothing about the most horrific and portentous act of the century.

Yet in this silence is Nin's greater wisdom. The Herman Kahns of the world have comprehended the bomb, and the feeble successors of Churchill and Roosevelt—smaller men even than they—have placed it in suitable contexts in their timetables for Doomsday. The loud and potent silence of Anais Nin, silent but for the single cry of pain and outrage, is more eloquent than any analysis, more passionate than any condemnation. In the refusal to speak—it is not the inability—is her honesty and fidelity to true feeling. In this silence is the kernel of her truth.

For if Nin speaks of her private world rather than the public one around her it is not from ignorance or incomprehension and still less a decision to withdraw. On the contrary, she recognizes the responsibility of protecting her own humanity in order to extend it to others. She lives in wartime as she has always lived and always will, in the truth of her feelings, in her own spontaneous present. But nothing could be more mistaken than to regard her as a "special" or feminine writer, cultivating the garden of her sensibility and locking an ugly reality out. It is always toward the larger issue of man that her art and her life are directed. She rejects politics not as a condition, but as a solution. Political events are a secondary reality, a colossal projection of the individual drama. When we watch newsreels, we see X-rays. We are not lost in the mass events of our time; we are those events. War is the collective nightmare of one man's soul.

The wars we carried within us were projected outside. The world was waiting for France and England to declare war. A general war. I had seen all the private wars, between lovers, husband and wife, brothers, children and parents. I had seen the secret love of destruction now mobilized. And now all of us were waiting, and piling sandbags against our windows, and crating statues, and burying paintings in the cellars.

Destiny was taken out of our hands. But it was the same madness, the same personal fears that were let loose upon the world. While waiting for the ultimate war, which would engulf all of us, I tried to understand all that had happened. While waiting for the magnified irrationality, I had already suffered from all the personal irrationalities around me.

You give your faith, your love, your body to someone, year after year, and within this human being lies a self who does not know you, does not understand and is driven by motives even he cannot decipher. In one instant, all that was created between you, every word said in trust, every caress, every link as clear to you as a piece of architecture, an architecture born of feeling, of mutual work, of memories, is swept away by some inner distortion, a twisted vision, a misinterpretation, a myth, a childhood being relived. And this was the madness we were about to enter on a grandiose scale. For war is madness. (II, 347)

Those who live by politics alone live by and with and ultimately for the violence it entails; live in a trap in which they will eventually be caught. They live half-lives as half-men; moving among an illusory mankind, they lose all sight of real men and women, and finally of themselves. They waste at the core from a universal radiation far more subtle and pervasive than any from nuclear weapons—propaganda. Not the marrow of bones but of the free imagination is sucked up and destroyed by this deadly emanation of war and crisis. Miss Nin keenly observes the effects:

. . . because he only has one *life, the one he shares with the present, in history, because he is not creating an antidote to the poisons of history, Gonzalo has no hope. He is crushed by events. (IV, 19)*

And with equal clarity she stakes out her own position, her own relation to the calamity of her time:

Before the war, . . . I set up individual creativity against the decomposition of our historical world. I had severed my connection with it, but now nothing was left but to recognize my connection with it and to participate humanly in the error . . . I knew I could not separate myself from the world's death, even though I was not one of those who brought it about. I had to make clear the relation of our individual dramas to the larger one, and our responsibility. I was never one with the world, yet I was to be destroyed with it. (II, 348)

Nin wrote those words in wartime Paris. When the bombs fell, she refused shelter to see the "burning face" of war. With love she had striven to avert war, with love she would strive to bear it. It was a pitifully small resistance in the face of history. The men of power would annihilate it with the least of their commands, would not even notice they had done so. But resistance is always pitiful and small; it is the residue of the human spirit in dark times. It always fails, and always survives; and when the works of power have blown away, it alone remains.

Forcibly evacuated as an alien, Nin was spared and denied the destiny she had accepted. With characteristic simplicity, she reports the event. She is told to go, packs her things, and ships off. There is no irony for her in the fact that at the very moment she had decided to remain with her adopted countrymen, they had decided to reject her offer. The two events belonged to separate and autonomous realms. The first problem was to decide what was morally necessary: only then to consider whether it was physically possible.

The second volume of the *Diary* breaks with the departure from France; volumes three and four deal with the problem of establishing a new life in America. These are difficult years; the romance of youth wears thin against the hard facade of New York, and the mature writer's struggle for recognition replaces the careless verve of the novice. Some readers will find these latter volumes of less interest than the first two; I do not agree. It is easy to be young, poor, and picturesque in Paris; harder to keep the same elan in a hostile and alien land, baffled by indifference and misunderstanding. Often Nin is discouraged, occasionally she despairs. But her quiet, firm, steady, unemphatic belief in the destiny of her life never wavers. Single and frail, wounded as she well knows by childhood betrayal, she believes herself capable of freedom—the modern Grail—and pursues it as the saints of the Middle Ages pursued grace, with faith, gaiety, and the most mildly unshakeable persistence. This is the freedom that cannot be ladled out of soup kitchens, the salvation that is not to be had by Papal blessings in the square, but is formed out of the conduct of an entire life, and attested to only by that life. Yet it is a freedom which by its very nature cannot exist for itself but must open out toward others, must embrace others with the gift. (It is a gift, of course, no matter how hard we work for it.)

How easy it is to overlook such a life, how easy to misunderstand its significance. It is simple to produce history, to fan the cruelty and rage in the individual heart to a common spark. Then there is great storm and great suffering, the easy magnitude of events. But when it is all over, nothing has changed, and the task of human potential we call peace begins to labor again up the mountain of human failure we call war. There is no way out of the cycle but by the mighty two-fold effort that is the inherent possibility and obligation of every man's life: the effort called resistance, resistance to the lure of the quick cure and mass solution, the shortcut to men's souls called power; and the effort called affirmation, affirmation of the joy and the out-going of one's being, of the

resources of love. You will know such persons not by their doctrine (they will have none), nor by the tell-tale effects of spiritual weight-lifting (they do not lift things but release them), but by their gaiety, their fine sensual responsiveness to the pleasure of being alive. They may not change the world, but they show the only way it can be done. Anais Nin is one among them.

This then is the ultimate value, and, I think, the ultimate meaning of the *Diary*. It is a record not of the great and famous (though they appear in plenty), nor of a literary or political period (though it is an invaluable source for such a record), nor of the opinions and animadversions of a writer great in her own right (though Nin says plainly what she thinks, and it is not all sweetness and light), but above all of the journey toward human love, the freedom, the power, the wisdom to love. If the *Diary* is full of humble detail, that is because real life is made up of such detail. There is not a scrap of ephemera. It is all part of the portrait, it all belongs. If there are setbacks and sterile plateaus, that is because it is not melodrama but human existence. What raises the *Diary* above mere fiction or drama—and I believe that biography, especially autobiography, is the crucial form of expression in our time—is the utter unwavering sincerity of the project, that lifts details to a significance a work of the imagination could never attain.

It is true, this fine, deep, and very unsolemn seriousness of Anais Nin is almost belied by the grace and sweep of her style. One is almost tempted to think that something told so well could never have been so difficult to live—not that it is any way facile, but that the manner of speaking is so poised and lucid from the start it is hard to believe the life was not equally so. And indeed we've plentiful examples of writers whose lives were less than worthy of their style—there is even a theory to the effect that it should be so. But Nin has trained her style on the relentless examination of her own life, and made, if one may say so, the growth of one dependent on the growth of the other. It was Yeats again who said that we must choose perfection of the life or of the work. Anais Nin has chosen to accomplish both; and she comes as close to success as anyone who lives or writes for us now.

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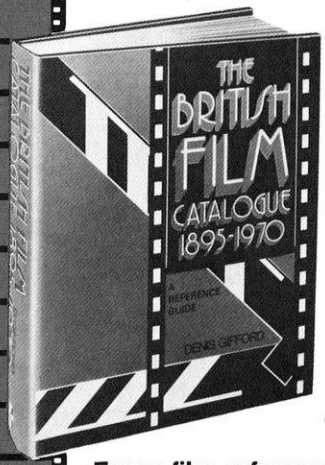

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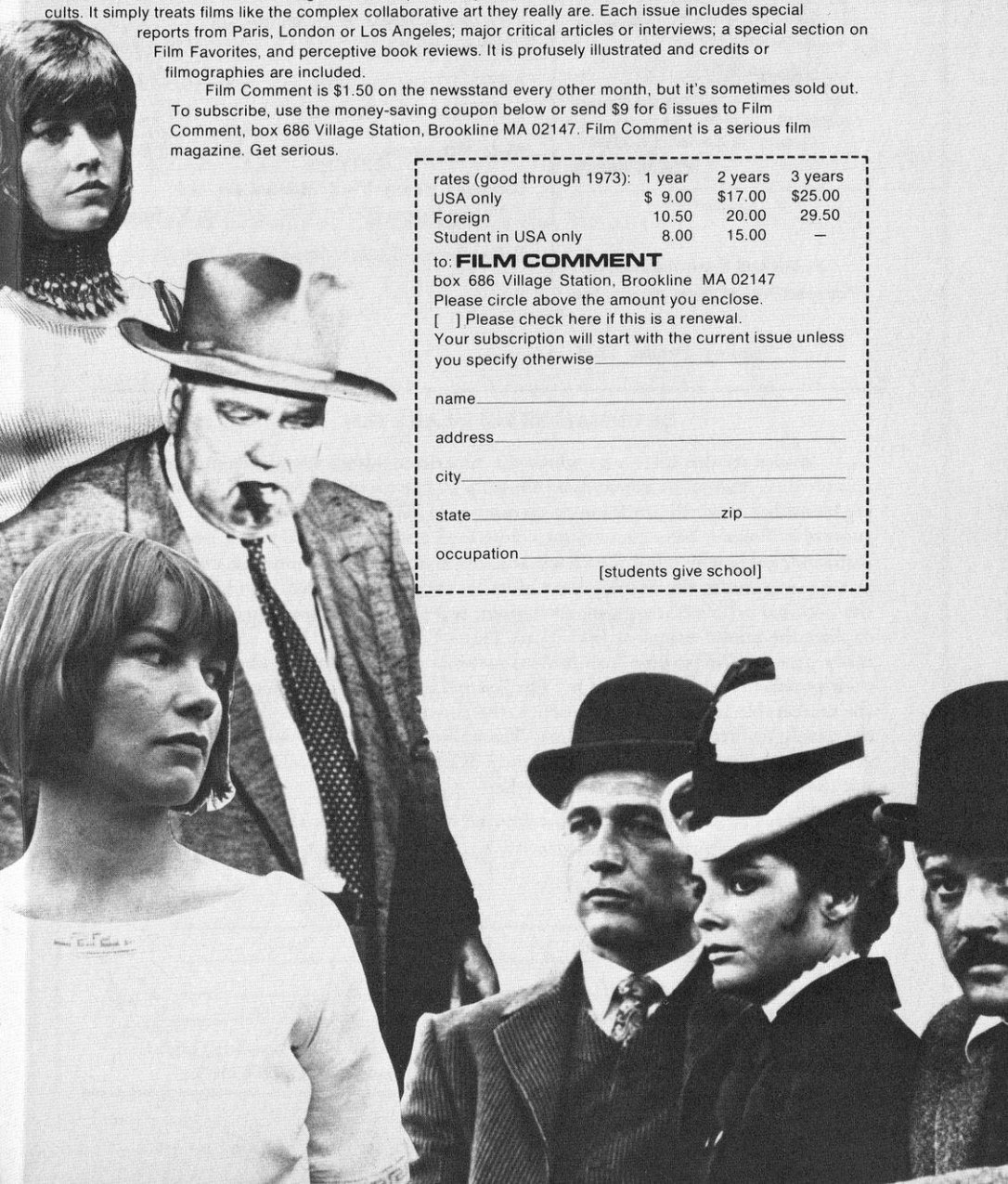

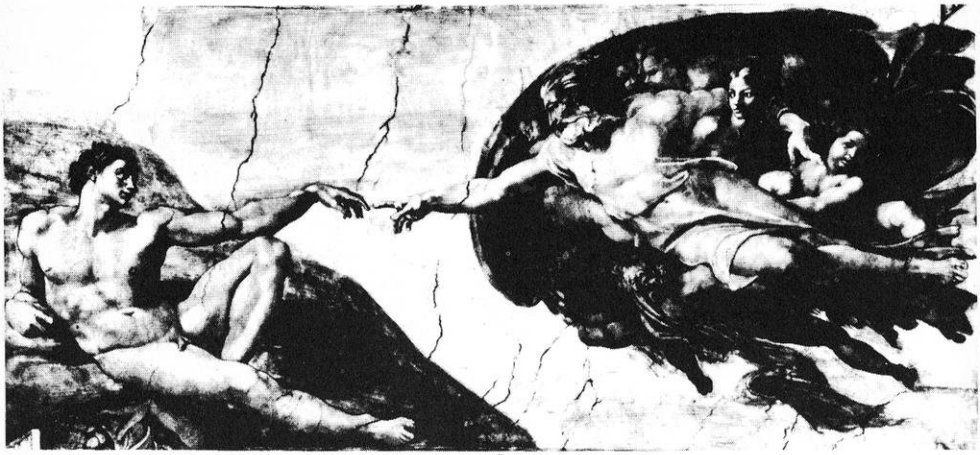

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