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Cinemad

JON JOST

HASKELL WEXLER

#3

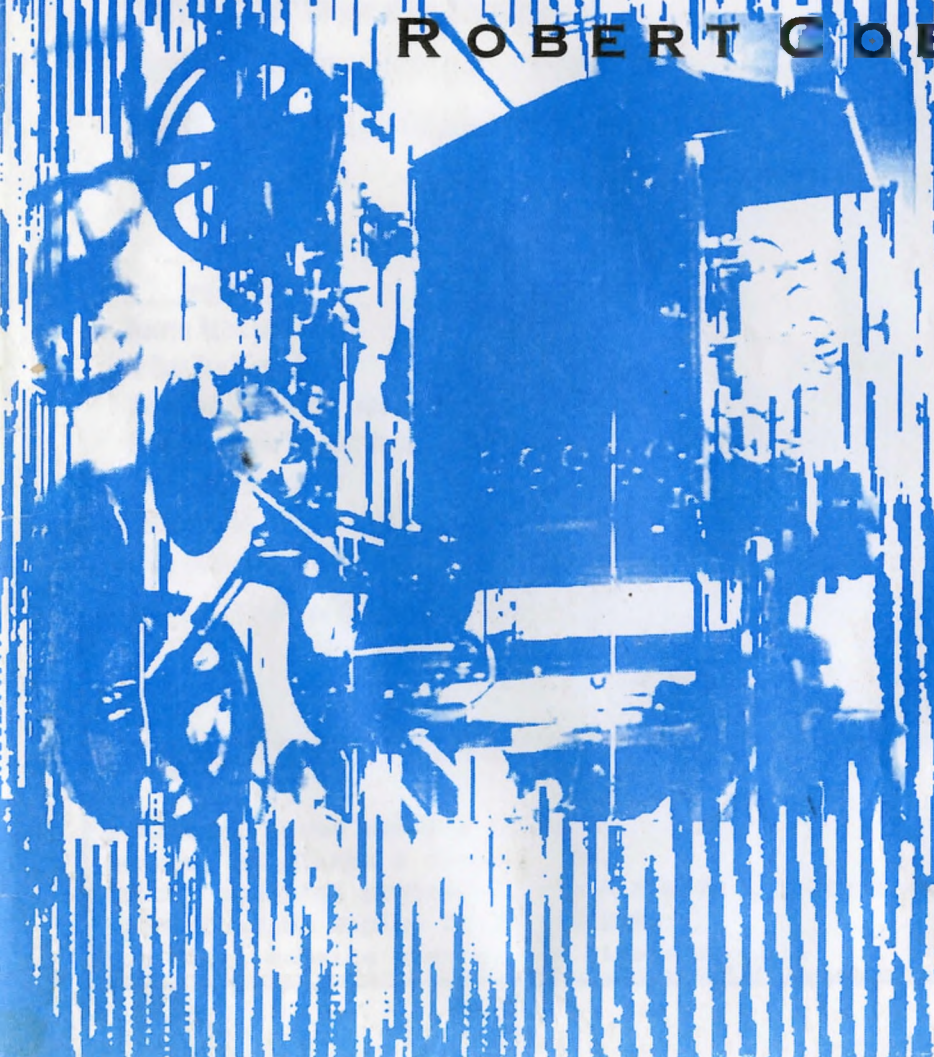
MIRANDA JULY

ALLOY ORCHESTRA

CHARLES NAPIER

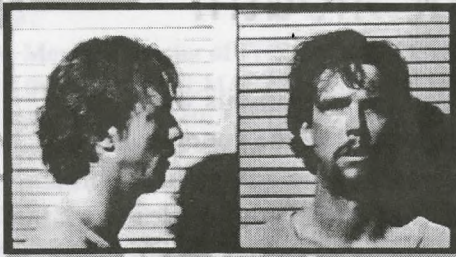
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MORE IN CANADA



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"They say I am searching. But I am just celebrating what I see." -Jonas Mekas

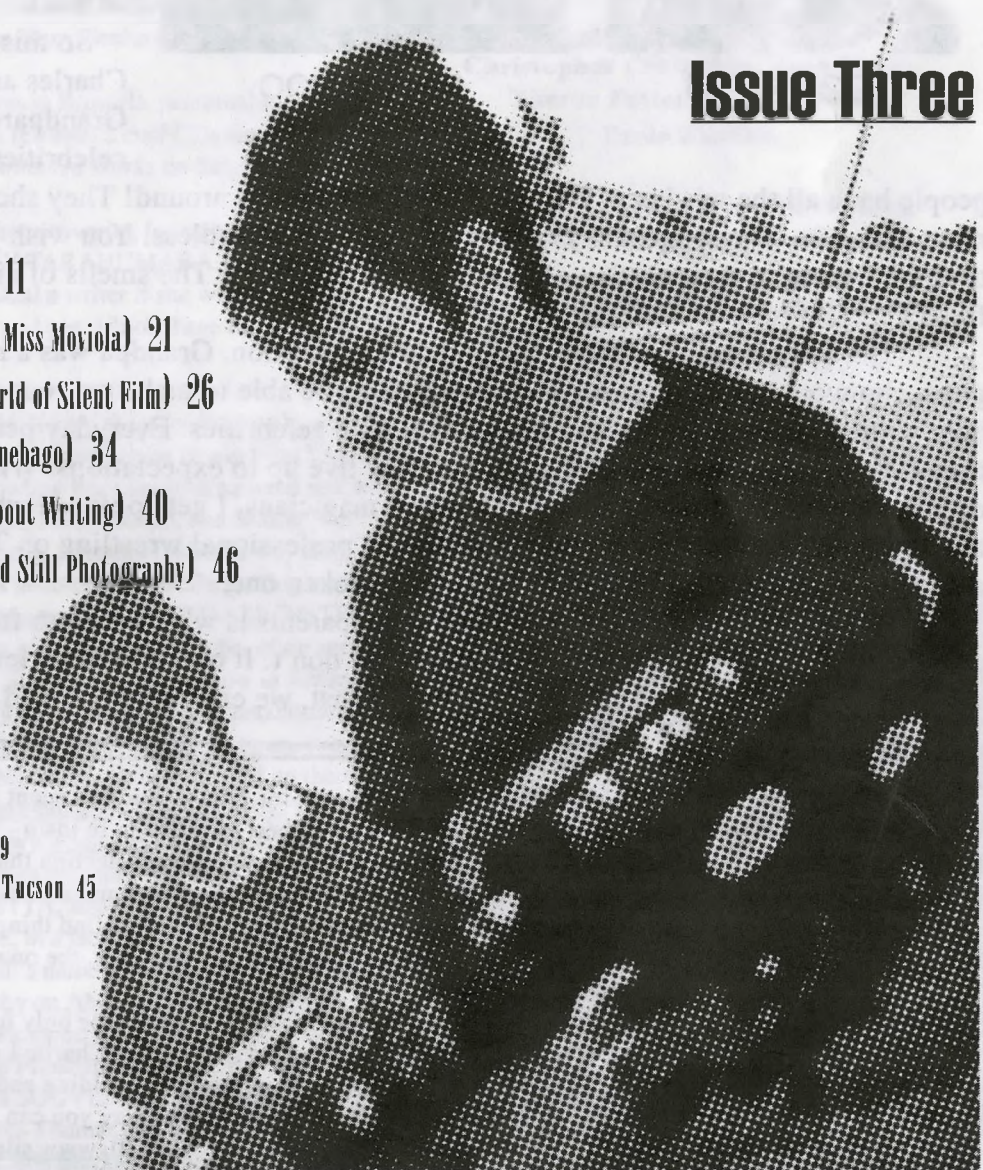
Issue Three

we talk to

- Jon Jost (Retires from Film) 5
- Haskell Wexler (Filming Reality) 11
- Miranda July (More than Just Big Miss Moviola) 21
- The Alloy Orchestra (and the World of Silent Film) 26
- Charles Napier (Driver of the Winnebago) 34
- Jonathan Rosenbaum (Writes about Writing) 40
- Robert Coburn Jr. (and Hollywood Still Photography) 46

lest we forget

- Warren Oates portrait 17
- In Case You Missed It 18
- Where Did Asia Argento Come From? 39
- Living In A Movie Theater: David Tiss in Tucson 45
- I Was A Porn Editor 52
- Fuckfest 54
- Other Zines 55
- Robert Kramer Remembered 56



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FRONT: good 'ol projector from MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

BACK: Charles Napier in SUPERVIXENS

our final website change: www.cinemadmag.com

MIKE PLANTE

Main Man

PAOLO ZIEMBA

Bad Lt.

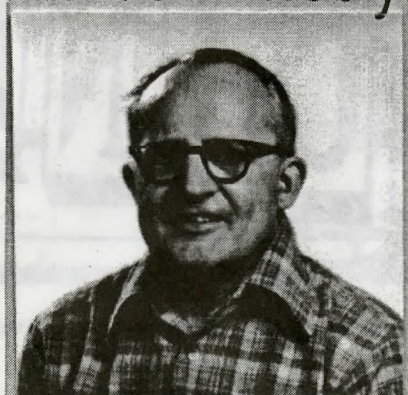
JOHN SCHUSTER

Edit Man

"Work with your hands -- not your mouth."



1921-1975



1917-2000

Grandpa's infamous words were reiterated at the funeral. I try to remember the advice as much as possible, not only in film work but everyday life. At times I complain too much (formative years in the early 1980s) and should just shut up and work.

So this issue is dedicated to Charles and Marguerite Plante. Grandparents are the ultimate celebrities. These larger-than-life

people have all the wisdom - they even order the parents around! They shower you with entertainment and gifts. The stories they tell are impossible and endless. You wish you could spend all your time with them in their castle with all the freaky old toys. The smells of cigars, treated wood and fresh vegetables....

But I don't mean to blow things out of proportion. Grandpa was a real hardass. One of those guys who would emphasize how important it is to be able to make up your own mind, then tell you how wrong you are. But this is also the deal with celebrities. Everyday people with faults. Sometimes you meet an idol and they can't possibly live up to expectations. Whether they're full of shit or just damn cool, ordinary people instead of magicians. I get confused when I think of Grandpa, the circus strongman from my youth, watching professional wrestling on TV with binoculars for his ailing sight, the good set sitting on top of the broken one.

What's good about celebrities and grandparents is what we learn from them. Everybody has some sort of idol. People that have a quality we don't. It could be experience, could be an incredible talent. They are better or worse for it. For that, we can be entertained and learn something.

I didn't have enough space this time to do the Search for Films column: I spent a couple of months in L.A. working a temp tech job and got to hang out quite a bit at the best video store in town - Cinefile (310-312-8836). Located next door to the rad NuArt theater in Westwood, they have a great selection that is growing rapidly. Doesn't matter what you're into, it'll be there. From the mainstream Lucas to the obscure avant-garde George Kuchar with everything white trash, European and Asianophile in between. Loads of hard-to-find things, even a TV movie section. Also with tapes and books for sale. Ask the kind folks behind the counter (a.k.a. the owners) about something and they will actually know what you're talking about.

Space also limited my articles on silent films: Los Angeles is home to the only full-time silent movie theater in the country (David Shepard says in the world). One day at lunch a man named Charlie Lustman walked by the closed movie theater and it got his attention. Lustman got investors, renovated the building and re-opened in 1999. Who would open a new silent theater? This is a love story, please support it any way you can. Not to mention the films are great. Easy to remember - it's called The Silent Movie Theater (323-655-2520, www.silentmovietheater.com).

Non-film related but an amazing place to visit is the Museum of Jurassic Technology, on Venice Blvd a few streets off Robertson (310-836-6131, www.mjt.org). You can see some creepy, obsessive artifacts for only \$4. Some people still don't believe me that it even exists, but the museum has been there for over 11 years, surviving on word-of-mouth without one single ad. As per tradition, I'm just telling you to check it out, I can't talk about exactly what is there. I can tell you this true story: when I was in one of the many dark recesses of the MJT with soft ambient music filling the room, a woman passed me and unlocked a door I didn't even realize was there. The door opened, letting out a harsh white light and the sounds of jigsaws blaring. She backed into the room and stared right at me. "Don't look back here," she said with a laugh, closing the door.

UPDATES on our past subjects:

Issue #1

*Nina Menkes, director of THE BLOODY CHILD and other films: "I am on the way to CINEMART at Rotterdam Film Fest to hopefully finalize financing for HEATSTROKE, with me is my producer Narween Otto. My CD-ROM *The Crazy Bloody Female Center* is pretty much done, and is being shown in Vienna, Austria, Jan 27-April 16, 2000 at The Generali Foundation. Check out the CDROM at www.annenberg.edu/labyrinth/about.html. I'm leaving USC where I've been for ten years, and would like to relocate to NYC—any leads on fab teaching jobs?. And on a personal level, had my heart broken wide open a while ago, by soulmate who is now my ex-soulmate!! And am now ready to fall in love with someone else. So, anyone brilliant and gorgeous available? Please email me. Sexy Geniuses only, OK????????? Over 35y.o. preferred."

*DJ-Composer David Shea now lives in Brussels, presumably because that's where it's all happenin'. He's released 2 cool CDs since the first issue came out: *Eastern Western Collected Works* on Sub Rosa and *Classical Works* on Tzadik.

*Filmmaker Kathryn Ferguson: "I'm recovering from spending 5 years looking for money for the UNHOLY TARAHUMARA. It drained me — all that begging. But last night, I asked a writer if she would sell the rights to her book for me, and she said yes. Uh oh, here we go again."

Issue #2

*Filmmaker Jem Cohen: "BENJAMIN SMOKE (co-directed by Peter Sillen, 73 min. 16mm color sound) premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in Feb. It is being distributed by Cowboy Booking International and will play in festivals including Melbourne, Edinburgh, and Seattle. We hope to open it in theaters this summer, although finding a way into theaters in the U.S. with an unusual documentary is like pulling teeth. Cowboy can be reached via info@cowboybi.com FUGAZI: INSTRUMENT continues to make its merry way around the globe, often entirely outside of the usual movie stream. Some kid set up a show in Antarctica, which made me and the band pretty damn happy. It was also chosen for the Whitney Biennial, and plays through June 4 at the museum, every Saturday at 3. Other INSTRUMENT dates can be accessed on the web at <http://www.southern.com/southern/band/FUGAZI/>. Lastly, Video Data Bank has an updated web site www.vdb.org, which increasingly posts them little web movie clips from my stuff. Movies I've loved of late: AMERICAN MOVIE, ROSETTA, Bresson's THE DEVIL, PROBABLY. (May he rest in peace, in a land without Spielberg)."

*You might have heard Conrad Hall's name while he was getting one of many awards for his cinematography on AMERICAN BEAUTY.

*Shadow Distribution: "We're working on PANTS ON FIRE's opening (scheduled for March 17 in the San Francisco area) and have just picked up a new film, Michael Shamberg's SOUVENIR, which actually has some movie stars in it (Kristen Scott-Thomas and the voice of Christina Ricci), though the film is a dense, Chris Marker-influenced film (Marker helped work on it too) about memory and time."

We're going non-profit so hopefully next issue will be on time this Fall. It will include interviews with Charles Burnett and James Benning, Heights of the Stars and ThatGuy Precinct. I am also tracking down this guy I used to know who was a stunt man on tv's MACGYVER.

Los Angeles County

Visitor

If it don't say, then Mike Plante wrote it.

Contributors this issue:

**Christopher Craig, Ian, Rush Kress,
Theron Patterson, Tom Vick,
Paolo Ziemba.**

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by Tom Vick

This year, at the San Jose Maverick Film Festival, Jon Jost will receive a brand new award called, appropriately enough, The Maverick Spirit Award. If you haven't heard of him, it's no surprise, for though he's spent the better part of four decades steadily making some of the best and most influential independent films around, Jost has never found a wide audience here. Outside of a small, but fervent circle of admirers, he is virtually unknown.

Often referred to as the "father of American independent cinema" (a term he finds ridiculous), Jost has built a career out of tenacious self-sufficiency, a great photographic eye and a fierce, personal vision of the world. He is completely self-taught; he writes, directs, shoots and edits all his films, and he makes them for peanuts. Equally disdainful of Hollywood and the academic world that supports many of his peers, he's a one-man refutation of just about every bit of received wisdom about how to be a filmmaker.

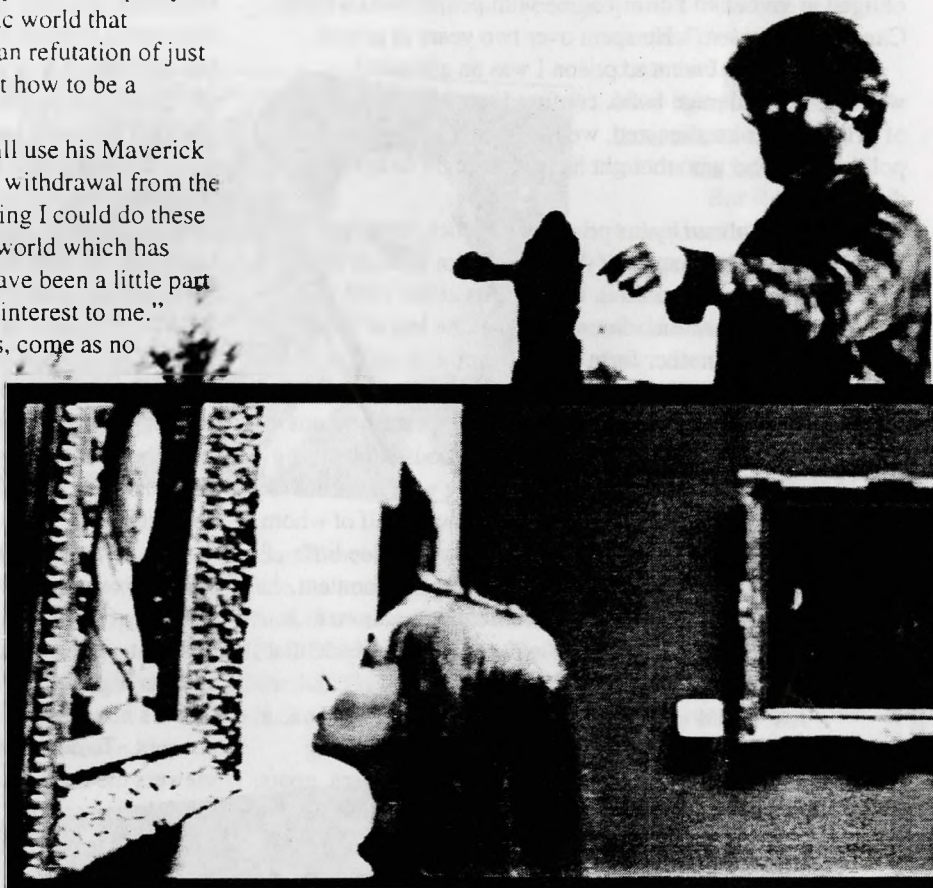
True maverick that he is, Jost will use his Maverick Spirit acceptance speech to announce his withdrawal from the film business. "It is the most maverick thing I could do these days," he says, "to simply walk out on a world which has changed so drastically in the 37 years I have been a little part of it, that it no longer holds any value or interest to me."

For his fans this should, perhaps, come as no surprise. If there's one characteristic that runs through Jost's career it is a particularly American brand of self-reliance, a stubborn commitment to his art and to the idea that what he is doing is important and meaningful, not in monetary terms, but in aesthetic and moral ones. It is an attitude that seems to have fallen out of fashion in these days when supposedly "independent" filmmakers spend more time and money on marketing plans and promotional campaigns than on pursuing personal visions, taking artistic risks, or questioning the ethics of the vast money-making machine of which they've chosen to be a part.

It's also an attitude that has strong roots in American culture, beginning, perhaps, with Henry David Thoreau. Although Jost left the United States a few years ago to settle in Europe, and even though he has formally renounced film and the film business, he still continues to make fascinating work in the emerging medium of digital video, and he remains a uniquely American, uniquely difficult artist with a critical vision of his native land as scathing and rapturous as those of Thoreau, Whitman and Melville.

So, on the ironic occasion of Jost's official recognition as a Maverick, it is probably fitting to look back on his career.

Jon Jost *retires*



Born in 1943 to a military family, Jost grew up Georgia, Kansas, Japan, Italy, Germany and Virginia. In the early 1960s, he studied architecture for a time in Chicago, where he first saw the avant-garde films of Stan Vanderbeek and Stan Brakhage.

As he tells it, Jost's inspiration to become a filmmaker came when "Brakhage was quoted lauding something I saw in a Unitarian church basement screening, saying it was the next awaited genius. The film was an awful psychodrama thing, like a bad Bergman film, pretentious and horrible, with fog effects like three cigarettes stuck in front of the lens...I saw that, and being the philistine I guess I am -

"Jon Jost is not a traitor to the movies. He makes them move."

- Jean-Luc Godard

dumbfuck from the Midwest – I said, quite clearly to myself: If that is considered 'art' I can do better than that."

Jost quit college, bought a 16mm Bolex camera, caught a freighter to Europe, "and arriving there in December 1962 with less than \$50 at hand, commenced my film career with a little portrait of a young girl who was the daughter of the family who picked me up hitchhiking outside of Como, Italy". Jost returned to America in 1963, only to be immediately arrested for resisting the draft.

"I didn't have to go back," Jost notes. "I think I could have figured out how to stay alive, but I felt morally obliged to go back. I didn't agree with people who went to Canada or Sweden." He spent over two years in prison.

"Before I went to prison I was an alienated, weirded-out underage boho, confused, etc. When I got out of prison I was an alienated, weirded-out not so young politicized boho who thought he had the right to speak up. I did."

Radicalized by his prison experience, he helped found the Chicago chapter of the radical film collective, Newsreel, and participated in the protests at the 1968 Democratic Convention. Soon, however, he began to see Newsreel as just another form of conformity, at odds with his rebellious temperament.

"Aside from the paranoia of being on the obvious losing side any time 'they' decide to get serious, and getting gassed and all that stuff, there was realizing your crowd was this completely manipulable bunch of followers half of whom, had somebody gotten up and barked some other nice little rhythmic chanting thing with completely opposite content, would have gone with it. Because it no longer mattered...It was all driven by the rhythm, and as for what was inside that rhythm, it didn't matter."

Jost ended up in Oregon and eventually Montana, living in a one-room cabin with "no electricity or running water, wood heat, poverty in very real terms, chickens, goats, rabbits, 12 miles out on a dirt road." It was there that he

made his first feature, *SPEAKING DIRECTLY* (1973), for about \$2,000, editing it on a pair of rewinds in his cabin. An autobiographical essay on film, it documents, with typical Jostian bluntness, his daily life, his political convictions, the war in Vietnam, sex, and the process of making the film itself, among other things. Much like Godard's political films, it exposes the machinery behind its creation.

But what makes it unique is the frank, sometimes brutal honesty Jost brings to it. In a section about his friends and family, he refers to his father as a "war criminal," and shocks one of his neighbors by telling her, on camera, that he entertains fantasies of having sex with her. Not only a fascinating portrait of a particular milieu and time, *SPEAKING DIRECTLY* is also a self-portrait of a man as uncompromising in his personal relationships as he is in his politics. The film made the rounds of film festivals where it was praised as heralding a new, unique voice in American independent cinema.

In 1976, Jost made *ANGEL CITY*, which combined narrative and documentary elements, but he truly hit his stride the following year with his first purely fictional feature, *LAST CHANTS FOR A SLOW DANCE*. Set in rural Montana, *LAST CHANTS* stars Tom Blair in a blistering (and mostly improvised) performance as an out-of-work drifter so beaten up by poverty and desperation that he seems to be corroding from the inside. He lies incessantly, cheats on his wife, and verbally abuses just about everyone with whom he comes in contact.

But two things separate this film from other, more earnest examinations of poverty. One is its formal audacity. The very first shot, a long take featuring Blair delivering an obscenity-filled monologue while driving his pick-up down an endless highway, makes such creative use of off-screen space that it's now used in film schools to illustrate the very concept. To describe it in detail here would ruin for first-time viewers the many surprises this one shot gradually reveals, so I will leave it to readers to seek out the film for themselves.

The other element that sets it apart is Jost's resolute refusal to romanticize his protagonist's plight. Blair's character is a flat-out obnoxious asshole, so blinded by selfishness and self-deception that he can't be bothered to notice that he's speeding down the road to ruin.

Like all of Jost's films, *LAST CHANTS* was made on a miniscule budget, but somehow never seems to look that way. His dazzling long takes, his sensitivity to composition and light, and his deep understanding of the Western landscape and the people who live and suffer in it combine to make a film distinctive both for its vicious humor and its visual beauty.

Jost in mirror and his daughter



Where many low-budget films fail is in their technical sloppiness. Narrative requires the illusion of reality, and bad acting, bad lighting, bad camerawork or bad sound can easily break that illusion. It goes without saying that Hollywood thinks of itself as the most efficient machine for producing narratives, for creating illusions through technical flawlessness.

The result is a kind of tyranny of expertise, and any narrative filmmaker, whether they like it or not, ends up having their work compared to what comes out of the major studios. Good low-budget filmmakers, rather than trying to ape Hollywood polish without the proper resources, craft aesthetics of their own which take into account their monetary limitations. The best turn those limitations into virtues.

Jost claims that his own aesthetic, while rooted in a commitment to working cheaply, is also "an outgrowth both of my own ignorance and my politics: I didn't know that one was supposed to have a cinematographer, and a lighting assistant, and a costume department and all that other stuff, and I just went out and wrote and shot and directed and edited and did the titles and animation and whatever else one had to do.... In going about my work, I have for many years been an agitator - I have advocated for the liberty of expression, I have encouraged people to ignore the deliberate mythologies of the film business - that you need lots of money, you need professionals, you need experts, and so on - and to just find a way to jump in and work.... I have also agitated against the bloated money involved in film, and pointed out its morally corrupting power. I have ridiculed the close-minded professional view that there are trade secrets which only this inside can know, the kind of thing that makes a fetish out of a light meter reading...or the use of lights when there is no need for them."

After *LAST CHANTS*, Jost made a half-hearted go at Hollywood, selling dope



to movie stars and using his counterculture connections to try to stir up some interest in his work in the somewhat looser atmosphere of Hollywood in the late '70s. His attempt was, needless to say, a failure, but he was able to make *CHAMELEON* (1978), which drew on his own experiences there.

"I think the mix of *ANGEL CITY* and *CHAMELEON* sort of sum up my acidic view of LA, Hollywood, etc. I now think my thoughts about any possible leverage there was naive and foolish, and I certainly think that there is far, far less chance these days than then for that. Now it is plain old big business solely for the sake of big business."

But if the American entertainment industry failed to acknowledge him, the art world was beginning to take note of his considerable talents. He received a 6-month DAAD Berlin Artist's Residency, where he made *STAGEFRIGHT* (1981). Two years later, in San Francisco, he made *SLOW MOVES*. In 1985 he made the heartbreaking *BELL DIAMOND* (released 1987), which marked a return to his beloved Montana. The hero of *BELL DIAMOND*, depressed Vietnam veteran Jeff (Marshall Gaddis), is locked in a vicious circle of despair in which personal problems and economic forces feed off one another until they bring him to the brink of suicide. Gaddis gives a wonderfully subtle performance. His sad-dog eyes and droopy moustache, combined with Jost's languid camerawork, give the film a remarkable poignancy.

Two more films in San Francisco followed *BELL DIAMOND*: The essay film *PLAIN TALK AND COMMON SENSE* and *REMBRANDT LAUGHING* (both 1988). In 1990 he was able to make his first film in 35mm, *SURE FIRE*, which features the return of Tom Blair as a scheming businessman and de facto king of a small Utah town, whose obsessive greed and cruelty (mostly aimed at his son), set the stage for an almost Shakespearean rural tragedy.

SURE FIRE, with its wide-screen 35mm vistas, features some of Jost's most dazzling shots, made all the more impressive by the fact that he did them all himself. After the urban drama ALL THE VERMEERS IN NEW YORK (1991), which is at once a visual tribute to his favorite painter and a parable about the conflict of art vs. money, he returned to the West (this time Oregon) to make another searing family tragedy with Tom Blair, THE BED YOU SLEEP IN (1993).

Jost returns again and again to the American West in his work, and his affinity for the landscape and the people there have fueled some of his best films.

"I have advocated for the liberty of expression. I have encouraged people to ignore the deliberate mythologies of the film business - that you need lots of money, you need professionals, you need experts, and so on - and to just find a way to jump in and work."

"The first time I went west," he says, "was on a trip with some friends from Chicago, driving as far as the South Dakota Badlands. I remember having the uncanny feeling that I had lived there before, or that it was intrinsically part of me.

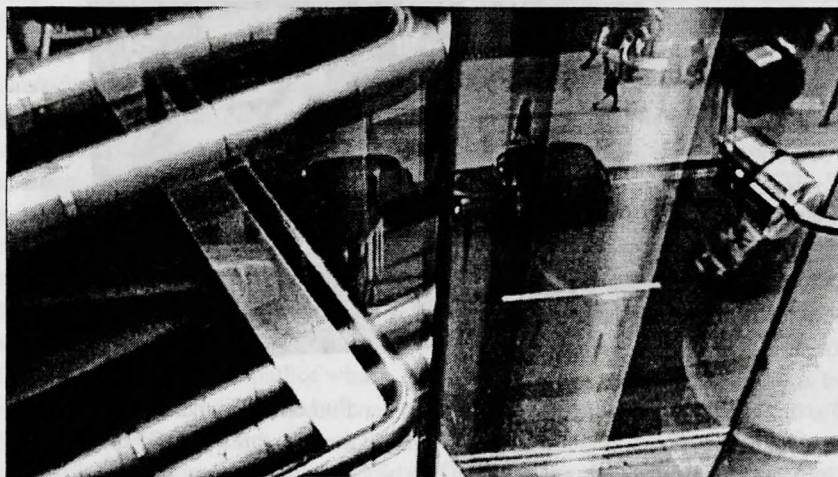
"I am not into mystical things, so I think it was just a kind of strong attraction for the mixture of the landscape, the culture that the landscape imposed, and maybe the mythos that came with it." He also remembers, when he was a child living with his family among occupation troops in Augsburg, Germany, watching American Westerns from the projection booth of the local movie house with a friend whose father owned the theater.

"Anyway," he continues, "I like the west, lived in it deeply enough and long enough to think I have more than a passing acquaintance with it, and I think I can safely call it one of my homes. And that I have a decent enough understanding, for better or worse, of the generalized psyche of those living there.... And I like the visuals - the color, the scale - and as I think we can all see I tilt heavily to the visual in my work. So a little marriage made in heaven?"

Jost's last American film is the vicious dark comedy FRAME UP (1993). Made on short ends left over from THE BED YOU SLEEP IN, it's a gleefully nasty little road movie about Ricky Lee and Beth-Ann (played by the husband and

wife team of Howard Swain and Nancy Carlin), two clueless lovers on a dunderheaded crime spree across Idaho, Oregon and California.

Though many Jost aficionados frown on it, preferring more tasteful and sobering tragedies like BELL DIAMOND and SURE FIRE, FRAME UP is a showcase for Jost's uproariously obscene sense of humor (of which we get just a taste in LAST CHANTS), and his resourcefulness. Road trips are depicted in animated tableaux of ashtrays, postcards, maps and tourist knick-knacks. Entire scenes are made of carefully composed long takes. It also includes at least two of the funniest sex scenes committed to film,



including one in which Ricky fucks Beth-Ann while she shouts out names of tourist spots in California she hopes to visit. The scene ends with her orgasmic and hilariously mispronounced exultation "Yo-yo-yo-yosemite!"

Released a year before Oliver Stone's NATURAL BORN KILLERS, but on a tiny fraction of the budget, it is at least as riveting and funny, if not more so, and the profound moral power beneath its darkly comedic surface puts it head and shoulders above the awful spate of mindless Bonnie and Clyde indie knock-offs that followed. It was also Jost's last American film, a cheerful "fuck you" to the country that both inspired and snubbed him. He moved to Europe the following year, and currently lives in Rome with his wife and daughter.

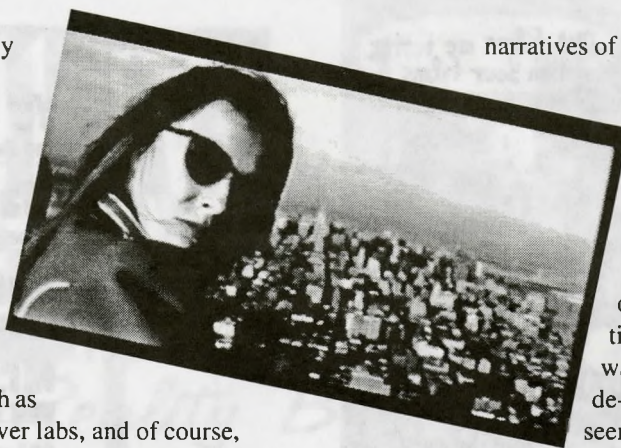
At least one legend - that he was wanted for tax evasion - circulates about Jost's decision to become an expatriot, but according to him the reasons are much simpler, and more personal.

"I am interested in... experiencing lots of things in life. I think I had enough of America, and it seems America had enough of me. Not being able to wrangle a living after all I did is a compelling argument to move elsewhere. I was always very outside the film industry and equally outside its sidekick academic/art wing.... And finally I moved because I wanted to - to live in other places, experience other cultures,

senses of history, etc., and one only gets one things you better do them.”

In 1997 Jost formally announced his rejection of film in favor of the new technology of digital video by publishing an article in the newsletter of San Francisco’s Film Arts Foundation.

Citing the inherent difficulties of working in film, such as scratched prints, lack of control over labs, and of course, the expense, along with the many soured business deals he endured (he’s currently involved in a legal conflict concerning distribution rights to his last three American films), he praised digital video’s self-sufficiency, quality and cheapness, and warned other filmmakers that 16mm was on the way out. His broadside was met with incredulity from fans of his work who’d grown used to the sumptuous, utterly cinematic quality of his films, as well as hostility from film purists suspicious of video in general. But his decision makes a certain kind of sense. If there’s one thing that characterizes



narratives of the places he visits. LONDON BRIEF employs an almost cubist sense of composition, juxtaposing crowds of people against glass skyscrapers, stuffing each shot with so much information that sometimes it takes a while to sort it all out. Subtle video effects sometimes render figures as painterly washes of color. And in one tour-de-force long take, an entire story seems to play out between two subway riders, who appear and

disappear among the reflections in the windows of the train as it moves in and out of stations.

It’s a strange, but somehow fitting turn in Jost’s career. The man whose first feature was a methodical investigation of himself is now content to remain silent and let the world happen in front of his camera.

CINEMAD

Good low-budget filmmakers, rather than trying to ape Hollywood polish without the proper resources, craft aesthetics of their own which take into account their monetary limitations. The best turn those limitations into virtues.

Jost’s career, it’s his self-sufficiency, and digital video allows him to be just that.

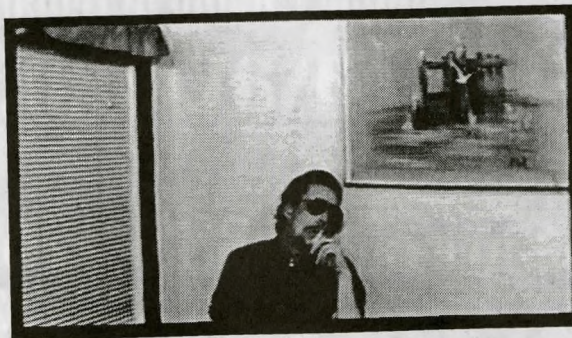
Since 1997 he’s completed no less than four feature length digital video pieces, LONDON BRIEF (1997), NAS CORRENTES DE LUZ RIA FORMOSA, MURI ROMANI, and SIX EASY PIECES (all 1999). It’s interesting to note the changes in his work brought on by the combination of the new medium and his new home.

In both LONDON BRIEF and NAS CORRENTES, he eschews narrative for rapturous studies of light, composition and sound. It’s as if, having moved to another country, he no longer feels the need to impose a narrative on what he sees, and is instead content to submerge himself in the

Photos:

- pg5: Jost with camera in SPEAKING DIRECTLY; & ALL THE VERMEERS IN NEW YORK.
- 6: SLOW MOVES; & BELL DIAMOND.
- 8: LONDON BRIEF.
- 9: ALL THE VERMEERS IN NEW YORK; & FRAMEUP.

Tom Vick is a writer and filmmaker living in Venice, CA. He is the Coordinator of Film Programs at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



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Haskell Wexler

Reality Bound



Haskell Wexler has his feet on both sides of the line in various manners: he is known for being one of the world's best Hollywood cinematographers, but has directed passionate, political documentaries that receive little distribution. His work in black and white is acclaimed as stark and unforgiving while his work in color can be glossy and nostalgic (both of which have earned him Best Cinematography awards). He has shot for John Sayles and George Lucas, the Rolling Stones and Frank Zappa. In 1968 he directed, shot and co-produced the landmark MEDIUM COOL starring Robert Forster and containing actual footage of the 1968 Democratic convention riots. Wexler has been able to see the inside of incredibly diverse systems of how the media covers reality.

CINEMAD: I read you went to Berkeley but dropped out after a year.

HASKELL WEXLER: Not dropped out, I went to sea. The war just started. In fact, I was at sea when war broke out. I was in for five years.

C: Did you get film experience after that?

HW: I did filmmaking as a teenager. Traveled around the world a lot with my family. My Dad had a 16mm Bell and Howell camera. I did family movies. I learned quite a bit that way, edited them and did the titles.... I was in Mussolini's Italy, Palestine before it was Israel. A lot of places. Travelling around when you're young let's you know that the way your life is here is not necessarily the only way that people can live.

C: How did you get into the business?

HW: I shot documentaries and worked as an assistant on newsreels, Paramount News, Fox Movietone News. I never shot footage, I just assisted. Those guys were very competitive, it was very rough and exciting. Because that was the news, there was no TV.

I remember one thing I did with Tony Caputo. Every year there's a flood in a certain area. The water would be up to the roofs of the houses. He says, 'Go find me a dog.' So I found a dog. Then we go out and get the boat. We put the dog on one of these roofs that the water is rolling around. I row around the house and Caputo gets the shot. He says, 'Every year I give them this shot and they love it.'

C: What kind of skills do you think that gave you over

working on an actual set?

HW: You learn a lot by doing it. I have mixed feeling about film schools that just look at a lot of old films and talk a lot. The only way to learn filming is to not just shoot it but to do the whole thing. Get the idea, to shoot it, to edit it. When you're working on documentaries you have to work fast and you have to take advantage of things that you don't have control of. You learn about light. In a certain scene you'll have to shoot an interior and you don't have a gaffer and a 200-amp generator. You know that the scene will have to be done in an hour from 3 to 4 in the afternoon with the sunlight.

C: When did you start working with the influential cinematographer James Wong Howe?

HW: I assisted him on PICNIC. He also let me shoot second unit stuff. The shot that got a lot of recognition was the one done from a helicopter at the end of the film. The military had some helicopters, it wasn't like now where they're all over the place. There were no camera mounts or anything. There's a still picture of me before we took off with 2x4's sticking out of the helicopter. I've got ropes tied around my waist.

C: Was it scary?

HW: No. Although my wife is there and pregnant with my first child. But you don't think about those things. I shot things for auto companies like the Packard. You ever hear of a Packard?

C: Yeah.



AMERICA, AMERICA

HW: Okay, I shot that lying on the hood, ropes around ya. Operate cameras in a hole in the ground with the car going over you. With a little more clearance than usual, but even then.... That kind of stuff nobody thought about. When you look through the camera you're invincible, anyway.

C: Howe seemed pretty accommodating.

HW: He was really tough and mean to almost everybody (laughs). He knew his stuff. For me, it was great. Jimmy liked me and he was sort of a leftist. And I think I am too, or was. That was sort of a bond. Course, back then a leftist was someone who wasn't a racist! (laughs) After PICNIC I got to know him well, and his wife, who's still alive.

C: I couldn't find any of your documentaries on video...

HW: The documentaries I made were not accepted by the system. Most of the ones I made, for example, the one that exposed that there were contras, TARGET: NICARAGUA, were too volatile when they came out and not considered truth. Of course, afterwards — they were. BRAZIL: A REPORT ON TORTURE was used by Amnesty International as the first documented proof that the U.S. was helping the Brazilian military torture people.

C: What are the two BUS documentaries about?

HW: The first BUS was shot in 1963 and it was the story of a group of San Franciscans who went across the country to the Martin Luther King march on Washington. It was the story of the people on the bus who had non-violent

training and were part of the civil rights movement. The second one was made in 1978, about the largest peace demonstration in the world. It was held in New York with the conventional media barely covering it. The group coming from Los Angeles stopped in places like Pentac, where the triggers for nuclear bombs are made. They stayed in churches and school gymnasiums. It's not just about a trip across the country but the interaction of the people on the bus. The arguments, the spirit and so forth.

One way or another they got around. THE BUS 1 played in a theater in New York and was extremely well reviewed. I was in Europe six or seven months ago and a film school had a VHS of it. Schools see it.

C: Why did you prefer to do a documentary where as many filmmakers would study the subject and then make a narrative version of it?

HW: A number of reasons. To do a narrative film, basically you have to find someone with a million dollars, even when things were cheap. Or close to it. You have to have a setup to get it into theaters, distributors and so forth. These were historic occasions that were not being recorded from the people's point of view. They were always recorded from the establishment point of view. That's why I think they are studied in schools now and I'm glad I did them.

Wexler's MEDIUM COOL questions politics and the media in a fictional format combined with stunning documentary footage from the infamous 1968 Democratic riots, where police attacked protestors, resulting in a death. Robert Forster plays a disillusioned TV reporter who can't choose between women, or the truth in his work.

C: Why did you want to make MEDIUM COOL in a more traditional narrative way?

HW: One of the officers of Paramount, Peter Bart (who is now the editor of *Variety*), knew me and thought highly of my talents. He gave me the assignment to make a film about the book *Concrete Wilderness*. The deal was a negative pickup. [Wexler would fund it himself and get the money back from the studio when it was finished.]

The story was basically about a boy in New York who discovered the animals who lived in the city, in the sewers and parks and so forth. The only thing that lasts in MEDIUM COOL is the boy and homing pigeons. I was obliged to make the film with a union crew and

“The educational system is more and more geared towards turning out people who can be more productive in a business system. Not to make renaissance people who think concepts and things that are not immediately quantifiable.”

director's guild and all those things, which I did. I got my \$600,000 dollars back and they didn't want to release it because they were afraid of the political aspects of it. That's a long and complicated story, getting an X rating...

C: Really? Rated more for the politics than for the nudity?

HW: Definitely. Because there was a little bit of nudity in it and I offered to take it out. Then they didn't like the language. We had correspondents cursing at each other. They didn't like the fact someone said, 'Fuck the draft.'

They said the hippies must have said something to aggravate the cops. I said they may have but I didn't record it (and) I was right in the park shooting. The studio said there had to be something to give it balance. So... I had shot a documentary earlier about the Black Panthers and had sound of one of them saying, 'Up against the wall, motherfucker.' So I traded (the studio) one 'pigs eat shit,' one 'fuck the draft,' for one 'up against the wall, motherfucker.' That when on...

C: This was with the ratings board or the studio?

HW: Studio first. And of course since the studio didn't want to release it they maintained that I needed a release for everybody who was in the park. They also said if the film was inflammable, if anyone went and saw the film and then committed some crime, the executives of Gulf and Western Corporation, which owned Paramount, would be sued.

The film was ready five or six weeks after we shot in 1968. After I got a ruling from Justice Goldberg, ruling out the releases for the people in the park, Paramount released it reluctantly. It was in 'selected' theaters. Practically no money was spent (promoting) it. Although, for the creative book-keeping the studios do... although (COOL) cost only \$600,000 and universally reviewed as a breakthrough film cinematically, to this day has theoretically not made any money. I can't go anywhere in the world without people knowing that film.

C: Was everything that happened in the park past your wildest expectations? Or was there a real heavy air something was going down?

HW: I wrote a script that was close to what happened. You're accurate in saying I had no idea the extent. I did know there was a strong ferment in the country against the war and the Democratic Party did not address itself to that.

C: Were the actors cool about being thrown into this situation?

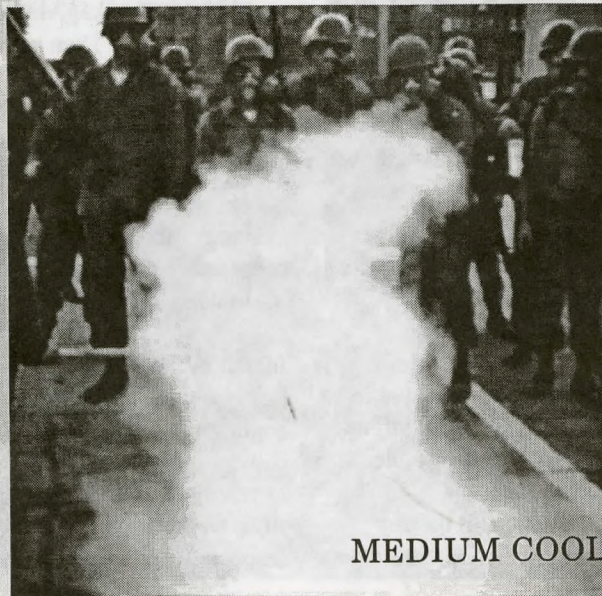
HW: They were frightened, even while shooting. Before the action you see in the film we were shooting other things. Verna Bloom and Marianna Hill were walking the streets of Chicago and were arrested for prostitution and held. Guys in our crew who had beards or long hair or wore tennis shoes were kicked out of restaurants.

There are layers of reality. The cameraman is asked to record a required layer of reality for the media. At the end of the film you see me and the camera. It has to do with the feeling of: when you see an ant you crush it with your thumb. Some times you have a feeling to someone that is larger or bigger than you, thought of as a God, watching you or controlling you. The whole idea of levels of reality exist in reproducible medium, which in this case was film. Marshall McLuhan, for whom the film is titled for, deals with the whole cycle.

C: There's always controversy as to how films deal with real subjects and even become history. You've been involved with some, like BOUND FOR GLORY (about Woody Guthrie, who Wexler was friends with) and MATEWAN (which was from a researched book Sayles wrote) or even the notions of the times like in COMING HOME or MEDIUM COOL. Do films have to interpret history exactly or is it okay for people to take a little bit from history and add their own art to it?

HW: What you're saying is that the line between entertainment and film and video and fantasy and drama has disappeared in peoples' minds. That's a very accurate description.

In the early days, the only people who could write in most communities in Europe would be the monks. They would write down events in big books. But it would be their interpretation of what they see happen. A better example would be Soviet Russia. Every five or six years they would rewrite their encyclopedias using different interpretations of history. When you talk about people seeing MEDIUM COOL and not understanding the times - most young people now have been robbed of any knowledge of history. Even the perverse knowledge that's presented by the media. I was talking to a college professor the other day and he was joking that students not only don't know about World War I and II, they don't know which one came first. I don't blame them because the educational system is more and more geared



MEDIUM COOL



MEDIUM COOL

towards turning out people who can be more productive in a business system. Not to make renaissance people who think concepts and things that are not immediately quantifiable.

Filmmakers - we do what we can do. Look at all the cop stories that you see, even in films. I defy you to see more than

one out of nine films where there is not a gun or a shootout or some violence or some fire. We are conditioned to assume that the resolution of dramatic situations has to be cataclysmic, violent, orgiastic - however you want to say it. This is not an accident. This is because the media thinks of us not as citizens who have this marvelous thing of television which can educate and inform us and make us better and healthier people. They are there to sell us things. If you want to sell people things you have to excite them on a lowest common denominator level.

The fact that so many fairly decent films do come out is a tribute to the strength and perseverance of artists. People who want to communicate something more than shit. But it's getting worse. This tightening of media control is something dangerous for our democracy, I think.

C: Can you feel a difference, at least in studio films, in how films were made in the '70s and today?

HW: They've always wanted to make money. But now marketing calls the shots. I'll give you a simple example. Someone has a script. They submit it to a studio. It's an action story, meaning its not so important what the ideas are so long as they run around and shoot and drive fast cars and fuck a little bit.

C: Sure.

HW: It goes to readers, most of which are younger people. They get paid by the script and they go quickly and they don't read descriptions at all, they read the dialogue. The descriptions are more novelistic rather than cinematic. Because you want to interest the reader.

Okay, it passes the reader. First they say what category it's in. Then marketing looks at it and says, 'If you can get one of four (big name) actors to play the lead role and if it's made for less than or more than X amount of dollars and we can get it out by Thanksgiving or Christmas or some other important day.... Then we would say a possible go.' Literally they call it the product.

Also, they change the script. They can't just buy somebody's script, they have people to make it better. Marketing will say, 'Look, we're getting Meryl Streep for this role and the character dies five minutes into it.' The writer says she's supposed to die because this and this.... 'Well - fuck it! Fix it.' Making a product that will sell.

In that mix comes people who also want to make a product but who want to shoot it so it's beautiful, have the framing mean something, have the lighting mean something, have the camera moves, against a director who's interested in presenting the characters.... In that there is this struggle. So many films which would probably be great come out homogenized, (especially with) four or five producers on each film.

After you make the film it goes to focus groups - doing preview screenings and polling the viewers. I shot a picture once (RICH MAN'S WIFE) where the focus groups didn't like the end. Someone in the group said, 'Well, the bad guy doesn't die bad enough.' We re-shoot the ending and instead of Halle Berry just shooting him, she puts a hatchet in his back, kicks him in the balls, breaks out the back of a Cadillac window and steps on him on her way out. I'm oversimplifying but that's the difference.

And of course they show it to a focus group again and they still don't like it! They don't know what they didn't like - they're not filmmakers.

C: How do you feel when you go back to re-shoot, knowing the reasons why?

HW: I think it was full of shit. I'm very much against violence. The lady who directed it was a very nice woman and it was her first directing job. She had to comply. But there are much more horrible stories than that. The long point is: the business has become more business. It always was business but now - it is business.

C: So how does somebody like John Sayles stay away from that? [Wexler worked on Sayles' MATEWAN, THE SECRET OF ROAN INISH and LIMBO.]

HW: Literally with great difficulty. We just made LIMBO. It did not make money. (So) they're not saying, 'John Sayles, what about doing another picture for us?' I mean, he's out there writing scripts for other people. Then when I work for him I work for half of what I ordinarily get. I throw my camera equipment in as well. Because I like the man and I like what he does.

C: Another director you worked with a lot was Hal Ashby (BOUND FOR GLORY, COMING HOME, SECOND-HAND HEART and LOOKING TO GET OUT).

HW: He was a great guy. I worked with Hal on a number of films where he was the editor so I knew him very well. He was Norman Jewison's editor. Ashby was a hippie (laughs). He was an

"The media thinks of us not as citizens who have this marvelous thing of television which can educate and inform us and make us better and healthier people. They are there to sell us things."

extremely hard worker and incredible editor. A beautiful person. And at a couple points in his life he took too many drugs. That was too bad.

C: The second half of his career was quite

different from the first.

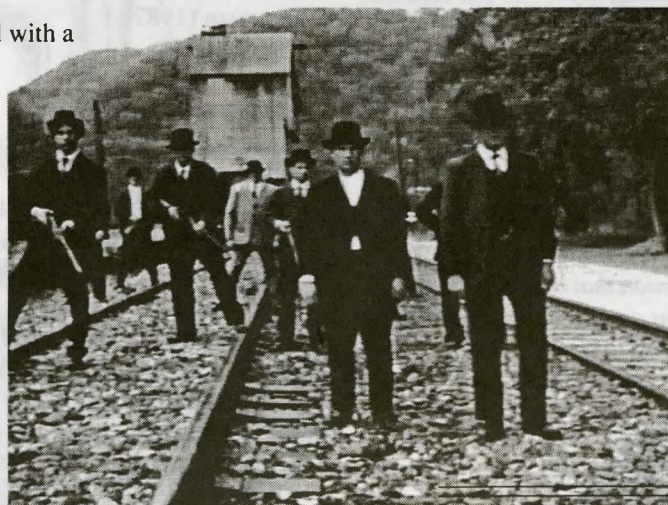
HW: I think BEING THERE (1979) was one of the most exquisite movies I've ever seen. Acting, shooting, directing, everything about it. It was a really neat film. After that, it wasn't like he was doped too much but producers got afraid of him for some reason. He had more control on the earlier ones, Norman was in the background. Ashby was a true artist.

C: The first time I saw MEDIUM COOL and heard Zappa's songs I just pictured it as simple hippie music. Later a friend showed me the lyrics making fun of hippies and I saw it differently.

HW: Frank was a friend of mine. People who they call hippies and anti-war people, they could accept a lot of humor about themselves, different from political fanatics and so-forth about themselves. 'Oh, my hair's looking good in the back.' That type of thing. 'I love everyone, even the police as they beat the shit out of me.'

The music I used in COOL came only after I had heard him with the Mothers of Invention. I showed him parts of the film and he gave his permission. From that I started shooting his film UNCLE MEAT (off and on) over a nine-year period. It was the most ridiculous experience I had in my life! I don't think I ever saw the final film. Somebody gets hot when they run hamburgers on their body. Somebody transforming....

C: It's two hours.



HW: (laughs loud) I gotta find it!

C: I think it was finished in 1987. It's on video. Another one of your films I just watched is THE LOVED ONE.

HW: It is a cult movie. I keep running into people

MATEWAN

all over the world that like it. A wild film to make. We had a number of writers: Terry Southern, Christopher Isherwood, a lot of crazy people. Everyone was doped up a little bit. Not bad, though.

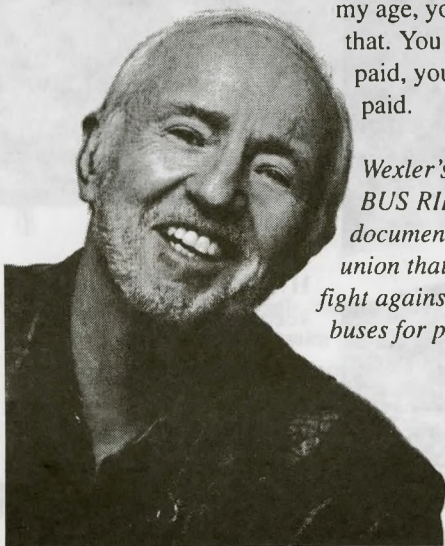
Of course there were a lot of legal problems. The book is supposed to be Forest Lawn. So they were gonna sue us. We had to put in a line saying, 'Well, this place is not like Forest Lawn.'

The first cut was really much funnier and much wilder. MGM wanted to cut out when the refrigerator falls on the fat lady. When the girls come out of their coffins, we had them come out balls-ass naked but we (also shot a) thing where they wore some clothes [which is in the film]. Lawyers went over that film a thousand times.

C: It seems there is not only just a different type of filmmaker today, but different type of people all-together.

HW: People used to be more adventurous physically. So much centers on money now. I can see it in my grandchildren. They don't think, 'Fuck the money, I'll go somewhere and I'll work and I'll try this and I want to see this.' They think, 'what'll you give me?' (laughs) The whole idea of having your money work for you is a bizarre thought. For someone my age, you don't think about that. You work and you get paid, you work and you get paid.

Wexler's newest is called A BUS RIDER'S UNION, a documentary about the L.A. union that organized with the fight against MTA to have better buses for poor people.



split-screens from THE THOMAS CROWN AFFAIR

PARTIAL
FILMOGRAPHY AS
CINEMATOGRAPHER:
(*=also director)

Stakeout on Dope Street (1958)
Hoodlum Priest (1961)
America, America (1963)
The Best Man (1964)
The Loved One (1965)
The Bus* (1965)
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966)
In the Heat of the Night (1967)
The Thomas Crown Affair (1968)
Medium Cool* (1969)
Interviews with My Lai Veterans* (1970)
Brazil: A Report on Torture* (1971)

American Graffiti (1973)
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975)
Bound for Glory (1976)
Days of Heaven (1978) (additional photography)
Coming Home (1978)
Second-Hand Hearts (1981)
Lookin' to Get Out (1982)
Richard Pryor Live on the Sunset Strip (1982)
Target Nicaragua* (1983)
The Man Who Loved Women (1983)
The Bus II* (1983)
Latino (1985) (director-writer-producer)
Uncle Meat (1987)
Matewan (1987)
Colors (1988)
Blaze (1989)
Three Fugitives (1989)
Other People's Money (1991)
The Babe (1992)
The Secret of Roan Inish (1994)
The Sixth Sun: Mayan Uprising in Chiapas (1995)
Canadian Bacon (1995)
Mulholland Falls (1996)
The Rich Man's Wife (1996)
Limbo (1999)
Bus Rider's Union* (1999)

Warren Oates

BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA

by Rush Kress



- IN CASE YOU MISSED IT -



THE RING and THE RING II

By Theron Patterson (courtesy of Warsh international)

Upon my first few weeks of living in Singapore (summer '99) I heard tell of a film that was the "runaway smash hit" of Asia and scaring the shit out of everybody. I have very rarely been effected by horror films, especially American ones, and decided to check it out.

THE RING (1997) and its sequel have finally satisfied the urge. THE RING, originally made in Japan, tells the story of a curse wherein if one watches a mysterious videotape, a phone call will follow, and a week later, to the minute, you will die... or so the story goes.

A TV reporter investigates this rumor and it's connections to the deaths of some kids outside of Tokyo. She finds a copy of the video, watches it, her phone rings, and we have a week to see if she will live or not and just how she will die if she does. In the meantime her psychic ex-husband helps her to unravel the mystery of "Sadako's Curse." Who is Sadako and how does the curse work? What's with the fucked up images and sounds in the video? How does the curse dispatch of its victims? What the hell is "The

Ring"?

One thing about THE RING that really makes it rock is: just how TWIN PEAKS was constructed, the mystery never fully unravels, and what was once innocuous and banal becomes essential and slowly terrifying.

Watching the film with a large audience in Singapore was a rare cinematic experience: I never seen such a responsive and electric crowd, people screaming, hiding, leaving the theatre going fucking crazy, testifying to the film's amazing construction.

Less than 2 months later, THE RING 2 hit theatres! Then, I found out that THE RING 12 had already been made! Only in Japan... The surface of the mystery had barely been scratched. THE RING 2 did not let down at all.

I could easily describe the films as the opposite of somewhat "typical" Hollywood horror fare out at the same time. THE RING is low budget but doesn't wear it on its sleeve, it's just money well spent. There is no gore and very, very minimal special effects, so how does it scare? Mostly through very subtle sound and truly creepy images and the way in which tension is built with these elements. Both elements employ the opposite of the Hollywood strategies: a sound is only really effective if it has silence to contrast it, to work off of. The control exercised in the sound design in the film is superb, not through excessive, never-letting-up subwoofer bass, etc. but through the balance and contrast of silence and piercing moments of terror (Japanese noisician Aube is listed in the credits for RING 2).

The directing is also with a very controlled and deft hand, the editing and blocking almost with the precision (dare I say) of Bresson. Again no rapid-fire editing, steadicam jaunts, or stylized sets; the terror is created with juxtaposition of images and specific timing of the editing, not just overblown CGI morphing that only dulls the eye more and more (as in Hollywood). The film is subtle in a way horror films rarely are.

Now, this is a horror film and it is schlocky and fun, but it's refreshing to see something made in this genre with some intelligence in it's design and execution that truly scares, not just providing silly eye and ear candy. THE RING 1 and 2 are available on VHS or VCD with English subs here in Singapore, and maybe other places, and you can get all 12 RINGs with Mandarin subtitles here on VCD (if that's of any use to you).

Why Did You Miss It? I doubt this would ever come to the US theatres, as the main market for foreign films in the U.S. is for "serious" foreign films (this ain't KOLYA or LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE). These viewers would probably not stoop to watch "mainstream" horror from another country. Now why the more underground/cult horror crowd in the U.S. has not gone for it, I'm not sure. But one guess is that the film is not over-the-top in the way a lot of imported horror films are, such as Argento's work or TETSUO. In fact it doesn't really fit into this genre of horror at all. And it's just hard to find on video with an English translation. RING 3 has yet to be released outside of Japan.



AMERICAN JOB

(1996, Chris Smith)

The epitome of a zine made into a film. I cannot believe this wasn't made in the 1970s. A low-budget drama with a lot of humor, *JOB* has the feeling of a great film made over 25 years ago, the last great era of storytelling in film.

Following a typical American worker through various minimum wage work experiences, *JOB* captures exactly what most people are expected to do to make a living: fit as a cog in the wheel while the Golden American Dream of the lottery is always dangled out of your reach. Of course, you are not really expected to make it big, it is more important to be part of the ever-growing

service industry.

Yet, *AMERICAN JOB* is not condescending or sarcastic. Director Chris Smith keeps the tone realistic and modest – which is why it's so funny. How can you not laugh at some of the ridiculous situations we all put ourselves through? Like when our hero (played to the hilt by co-writer Randy Russell) gets talked into going to a strip joint. Or when a boss asks him to take his seat and consider “what he would do” if in the boss' position. The film is full of oddball conversations with co-workers, about secret inventions or the finer points of working an overnight shift and still being to do things outside of work.

Although completely scripted, the film is uncannily real. The insight the film has is probably from using the actual employees in the scenes. The actors you see really do the particular job. They pull it off beautifully, not stuttering their lines or freezing in front of the camera, and not coming off in a fake-pity way, either. At times it is hard to believe *JOB* is not a documentary.

The scenes come from real experiences Smith and his collaborators had. Actor Russell used to have a cool zine called *American Job*. The film was made entirely in the Midwest for \$14,000. The cast and crew donated their time.

Smith's follow-up film is the great (and real) documentary *AMERICAN MOVIE*, with many of the same themes and ideas from *JOB*. The website for all the films can be found at www.americanmovie.com.

Why Did You Miss It? I'm not sure what, if any, distribution *JOB* received to theaters. You can call Smith direct to get a copy of it on video for the local store. Critics liked it enough but there is little marketability in the film for moron distributors to reach people who can't see past Mel Gibson. Wait, this is a good thing....

SMILE

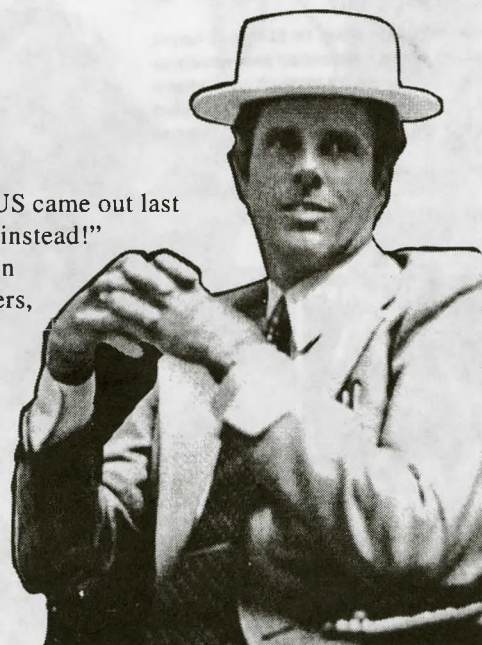
(1974, Michael Ritchie)

I was reminded of this film when the film *DROP DEAD GORGEOUS* came out last year, as in, “Gee, that looks like a piece of junk. I think I'll rewatch *SMILE* instead!”

SMILE is not only a great satire on the whole Miss Teen Anything in America, it is also a prime example of a 1970s comedy: 20 different characters, smartass kids looking into locker room showers, one-liners that cut through the crap, decked out vans, etc. Not to mention the great Bruce Dern.

Director Ritchie also made two solid '70s dramas; *DOWNHILL RACER* and *THE CANDIDATE* (both with Robert Redford) and another prime comedy from the same decade: *THE BAD NEWS BEARS*.

Why Did You Miss It? I don't know. Especially with everything so retro now. But no one seem to mention it much and I just saw it because Conrad Hall shot it. It's even got a young, pre-*NIGHT MOVES* Melanie Griffith in it.



You Said You Came From The

Future And She Believed You

THE MISSING MOVIE REPORT

BIG MM is a distributor of both completed and missing movies. As you may know from experience, a lot of us ladies don't have the time, energy, resources or support required to make movies, or even think of ourselves as storytellers. Missing movies are particularly easy to ignore. It is easy to say: too much sexviolence in the theaters. But not enough WHAT? What are the missing movies about?

It is hard to even guess. Maybe they are are very sexy and very violent. More sexy and violent than we can even imagine. Maybe they are Dullsville. Nobody knows.

To help you crave these Missing Movies, we at Big Miss Moviola interviewed busy women on the streets and busses of our town. The Missing Movie Report is a 4ft tall alluring blueprinted poster featuring 24 snapshots of Missing Movie makers and their answers to the question: "If you could make a movie what would it be about?" Buy this or make a report in your own town. (\$5.00)

IF YOU COULD MAKE A MOVIE, WHAT WOULD IT BE ABOUT?

"I'm a single person that doesn't have sex. I intend to stay that way for the rest of my life. And I'm 51 now, I'm a mature woman."

WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE A MOVIE ABOUT THAT?

"No. I wouldn't make a movie. I'm 51 now. I'm too old. I'm a mature woman that's celibate and I would probably never make a movie. It's too much introduction to that kind of thing, of...it's so widespread, so much delinquency about it, so much pornography. It doesn't interest me. I'm not interested in anybody getting at me, trying to kill me because of it, either."

—FROM THE MISSING MOVIE REPORT



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Behind the scenes at Big Miss Moviola: Interns assemble your Chainletters for shipment



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"If you want something and it's not there, you have to create it."

I was in New York City in the sweaty summer of 1999, sleeping on a friend's floor, attending the NY Video Festival at Lincoln Center. Closing the whole shabang was a 'performance art' piece by filmmaker Miranda July. Performance art, huh? I don't think I like that.

Then I remembered putting off watching Powell and Pressburger's *THE RED SHOES* because I wasn't into ballet. Until I read an interview with the cinematographer, Jack Cardiff. Co-director Michael Powell told him their next film would be based on the famous ballet. Cardiff scoffed. Powell asked him if he ever actually saw a ballet performance. Of course not. They went to one and Cardiff was blown away. He made the movie, which I finally, begrudgingly saw after reading this. Sure enough,

SHOES kicked my ass all over. I loved it.

So why not check out a performance art doo-dad. Never mind the images of black clothes, berets and long sentences in my head. It'll get me out of the humidity.

Another case of why you shouldn't pre-judge.

Sure enough, Miranda July's solo performance, *LOVE DIAMOND*, was great. July 'plays' various characters, roles from life: a teenager to a scientist to a woman straight out of an *Adbusters* soap box design for prozac. July slipped between personalities and voices so easily it got to be kinda weird. Her piercing eyes can pull you in.

I liked the themes: the suffocation of pre-determined roles, especially in suburbia and authority, the neuroses we seem to have to give ourselves to really get what we want in life. Most importantly, none of this came off as pretentious, some rich kid trying to find his or her artistic place in life. Or at least how I imagined this type of performance.

"Maybe because I'm not influenced by performance art," July says in a phone interview. "I'm influenced by movies and books. And life. The fact that it's performance art didn't even occur to me. It was, 'Oh, wouldn't it be cool if you were watching a movie but the person is really there?' I make what I would want to watch."

Technically it was impressive. You might think just the writing and rehearsing of lines goes into something like this. But the interplay of three slide projectors, a video projector, a video camera and July was carried out well. The interaction not only made it interesting to watch, but made it possible for July to not have to explain everything to the audience. The mood was enough.

But *LOVE DIAMOND* didn't just happen. July has been performing all her life.

I mentioned the intensity of her eyes - July has a painful undiagnosed eye disorder. Her first performances were years of going to doctors for the condition. Various scientific notions come up consistently in her work: tests, uncomfortable examinations, charts, instructions, demands, expectations of performance, all yearning for results.

July watched movies growing up, but "it's not like I was in love with movies. I watched a lot of scrambled TV, because my Dad was obsessed with getting East Coast baseball. He's from New York and we lived in California. Before satellite technology was very big, he went in with all his friends on buying one.

"For a brief time, there was a wonderful heyday where I got every channel in the world, except that they were all scrambled. But we kept watching them (laughs)... me and my brother. That was in the garage. My Mom wouldn't let it be in the house."



From age 7 on, July wrote and performed plays. With both parents writers themselves, the 'quiet' climate in the house couldn't have hurt. Her play *Lifers*, based on her actual correspondence with a prison inmate, got her some attention at the club Gilman Street in hometown Berkeley.



THE AMATEURIST

wasn't doing a lot, I was starting to perform," July says. "It was intended to be much bigger than me, I wanted a way to meet people.

"My sort of fantasy is that if I keep working alongside BMM that I can propel it in kinds of ways that I wouldn't be able to if I wasn't also growing myself. Creating new territories with my own work."

I wondered if doing the publicity matched the stereotype of kissing ass to big publications, it all being in the approach rather than the product.

"The things that are like that tend to not really work out. You have a 1-in-50 chance if that's really the kind of person you're dealing with. It is a matter of finding the rad people. Maybe this magazine isn't that cool, but this individual person is actually really interesting..."

"I started in punk clubs," July remembers. "(The performances) didn't used to be so long. I tried fitting myself into the space of a band. So there'd be a few bands and me. It confused people, (they'd) start talking to me while I was performing (laughs). Not understanding that this was it! I'm not just setting up my equipment, I'm acting right now - it's not really me!"

After doing many plays and the zine *Snarla*, July moved to Portland in 1995. She has found the city inspiring, saying "There's a ton of support and people to be interested in and work with. In every area, cinematography, video editing.... I feel lucky (that) people give me a lot of their time in their off-hours."

July's music collaborator on *LOVE DIAMOND* is DJ and composer Zac Love. He provided a good ambient score that ran under the performance, emphasizing the acting and slides without becoming overbearing.

It was in Portland where July started *BIG MISS MOVIOLA*. A great concept that no one seems to be doing: the video chainletter. Any woman who has made a short film or video can send it to the *MOVIOLA* project with \$5 and get a tape back with the film and nine others.

July's endurance has made *MOVIOLA* a success, resulting in six full chain letter tapes, two compilation tapes and more in the wings. It seems simple, but if you collect and trade videos, especially with deadlines or people anxiously waiting, you learn the project is huge. Keeping things organized, making a master copy, video copies, artwork, putting film info together, more copies... it doesn't leave a lot of time for your own work.

Appropriately, July is getting paid back in various ways for her perseverance.

"When I started BMM I had never made a movie. I

One lure of BMM is the connections made - distribution that subverts the common so-called professional system. (Of course, many of the shorts are better made or more interesting than others. But this isn't a competition, only in that you have done something instead of just talking about it.) With home video cameras, people have more power than ever, as opposed to a few deciding what history will remember.

"The whole funniest home video thing," July says, "that phenomena started around the time

I started BMM. I know we're considered differently, but I always saw this weird parallel.

"It seems like there was some point where people recognized the power of video and said, 'What can we do to make it seem not powerful or empowering? Oh — its funny! People are shooting things all the time and they're funny and stupid! There, we've nullified that threat, that comes from people documenting themselves or watching themselves, as opposed to watching people copy them.

"In a way the opposite of what I'm doing. Filling itself with accessibility. An everyman sort of thing but trying to make it as unspecial as possible."

Starting with 8mm film in the



1950s and exploding with cheap home video cameras, one's awareness of the world is almost too immediate now. Less and less time is given to thought about the images. People would rather sit and 'vege' out while watching something, yet staying obsessed with looking.

July thinks the human need for observing things and trying to fit in is from "the sense of trying to feel what is real. How is the quality of life itself, what makes that real?"

"That's the thing - as if you could capture that on film. In some ways, an artist's representation of reality or trying to make you feel what you might feel in reality, could be so much more accurate than something that was accidentally caught on video.

"Because it's just surfaces that you're capturing on video. How real was the actual situation in reality? (laughs) Maybe everyone there wasn't too committed to reality at that moment. (They were) somewhere else inside themselves. Maybe the way that woman looks in that body is really only half the story."

July is influenced by reality as it appears to filmmakers considered very realistic, such as John Cassavetes and Robert Bresson.

"All the time I think about these issues. I'm influenced by whatever's happening in the culture. I don't know if it seems that way, but I feel like I used to write so much more. Now all the crafting seems to be more about showing things."

As if getting more visual than spoken in the work?

"Part of it is more visual. Like all the talking that's in NEST OF TENS is sort of meaningless babble on purpose. It's not like anything anyone's saying is that important."

Besides being a writer, performance artist and chainletter curator, July makes good, unique short films.

On *The Underwater Chainletter* is July's ATLANTA. As in her live performances, July plays multiple characters: a young girl whose dream is to compete as a swimmer in the Olympics, and her Mom, who gives her daughter the push she wishes someone had given her. You can guess whose dream is really being played out.

While minimal — hell, it's three shots — the film is pushed by July's force. She completely changes her mannerisms and voice as easily as changing her looks with clothes and wigs. It's funny to see the exchange between too-young athlete and too-burned out coach that must take place all the time in the athletic world.

On *The Ball and Chainletter* and the BMM compilation *Joanie 4 Jackie 4ever* is July's THE AMATEURIST. The 10-minute film features the scientist July carefully studying and interpreting lab rat July by watching her from a surveillance camera. The combination of July's voice, ambient

ATLANTA



soundtrack and distant images provide for some hypnotizing moments.

July's newest film, NEST OF TENS, was inspired by a photo in a coffee-table book of the 1930s Czech film ON THE SUNNY SIDE.

From that stimulus, she made the characters and a script.

"There were four stories I knew I was gonna shoot," July says, "separate stories on four weekends, consecutively, and that's all I

knew.

"So, the ways that they fit together or even what they mean... I wrote the whole thing and shot it without thinking about it once. In terms of where was this coming from.

"Which is really similar to ATLANTA and THE AMATEURIST and most of the things I make. That I try and move quickly. Most of my conscious thought has to do with design and artistic surface things. Which is consuming to me, but that's where I'm calculating. Everything else is sort of the raw materials this other part of me provided. (But) this is probably the case with everyone!"

NEST is the first film project July has made with other actors.

"The actors? That was... Learned a lot there! I had directed plays before so it wasn't daunting to me. But being aware of all the technical aspects at the same time as having to have a real connection to (the actors)... I was constantly looking at the monitor - does this shot look right - and then trying to figure out how to psychically make this poor girl stop smiling. (laughs) Without upsetting her and making her cry.

"She turned out pretty well, I think, but she's the most grinning person in reality."

Funded by the Andrea Frank foundation, NEST OF TENS concerns various power struggles, human interactions and as July puts it, "a kind of sexuality that doesn't have to do with sex."

The interactions are between speaker and crowd, men and women, young and old, and the young and newborn.

Aspects of NEST are in line with other July work: experiments, numerology and obsessions. You can almost see and hear July performing the various characters and voices herself (she has only one role in the video, however). While other actors don't pull the material off as well as July can, it is the material that gets in your head, providing some interesting scenes.

"Especially the scenes with the baby and the little boy came out pretty much what I pictured," July says. "Which is weird because it came from such an odd place. (When) I was writing that scene the only other thing I had to do that month was to go to this doctor in California who was moving the bones in my head to help my eyes.

"Every time I was waiting for my appointment the patient before me was a baby. I would always wonder, 'What the hell are they doing in there?' Picturing the same adult people who would work on me working on this thing that was as big as my foot. It was during the time I was waiting that I thought of that scene.

"In some ways it doesn't matter that no one's ever going to know it, but that's what it means. That encompasses all these things having to do with my eyes and babies and control and all."

July thinks that scenes in NEST "will probably be interpreted consistently — differently (laughs). It is much more about physical connection precipitating psychological change. I thought, 'who never touches each other?' I know: pre-teen boys and little girls. Or maybe they do, but it's always something horrible. Even when we were practicing, a lot of it was teaching the actor how to pick up a baby and having him feel comfortable with that. And watching him do that that was really interesting to me.

"It would be so different if it was a girl. It would be maternal. Most of the relationships in the movie, I'm trying to show things how I feel them. I don't feel maternal to 7-year-old girls who I see in the airport."

Some of the tags put on July's projects include "experimental", "feminist" and "Laurie Anderson."

Of the general notions surrounding short films and performance art, July says, "I have so little room in my head for all those kinds of thoughts. I mean, I forget. I usually refer to my things as movies. For some reason, people describe them as 'short/video/lady-made', it becomes this thing that I guess is more descriptive, but that's not how I carry it around inside me."

Unfortunately, although tags can help describe and bring people in, it can also keep people out.

"It really depends on the venue. I feel my own work is pretty accessible in a way. It's just a matter of getting there. I usually have a pretty good reaction from the wide range of people that might be there.

"I was presenting NEST OF TENS in Olympia a couple of months ago. I was talking and staring out at all the people and I just couldn't help saying, 'What a bizarre group of people.' I guess this is my audience. There might be this hipster element. Thing is, my stuff is kind of weirder than that. It seems to appeal to lonely people (laughs), who don't have their scene figured out.

"So I'm usually happy that someone might come with their mother. It seems to extend pretty far. I love that."

July's venues for performing are usually "film festivals, because I've been making movies all along, that's

formed the work because now I make work that can't really be done without space and time."

The greatest aspect of all of Miranda July's work is the connection between the audience and performer. On the surface, many can relate to her themes, especially anyone under supervision in their life or job (uh, does this leave anyone out?).

The link with audience and LOVE DIAMOND is two-fold. In the second half of the performance, there are moments when July would disappear behind the curtain. Slides would light up between one and three microphones. The same number of voluntary audience members would come up, listen to an earpiece and repeat what they hear, explaining the Love Diamond itself. The results ranged from funny (the disarming kind) to quiet and poetic. July actually has enough faith in the audience to give them some of the final words in the play.

The other link deals with artists coming to the show.

Director Alison Maclean (CRUSH) interviewed July for *Filmmaker* magazine and later came to a performance. She asked July to try out for her next film.

When I worked at the Telluride Film Festival, one of the films I had to project was MacLean's JESUS' SON starring Billy Crudup. Already a sudden fan of LOVE DIAMOND, I freaked out when Crudup is in a hospital and - wham - July walks up as a nurse with a black eye. So many times you discover an actor and no one knows who you're talking about and then they pop up all over.

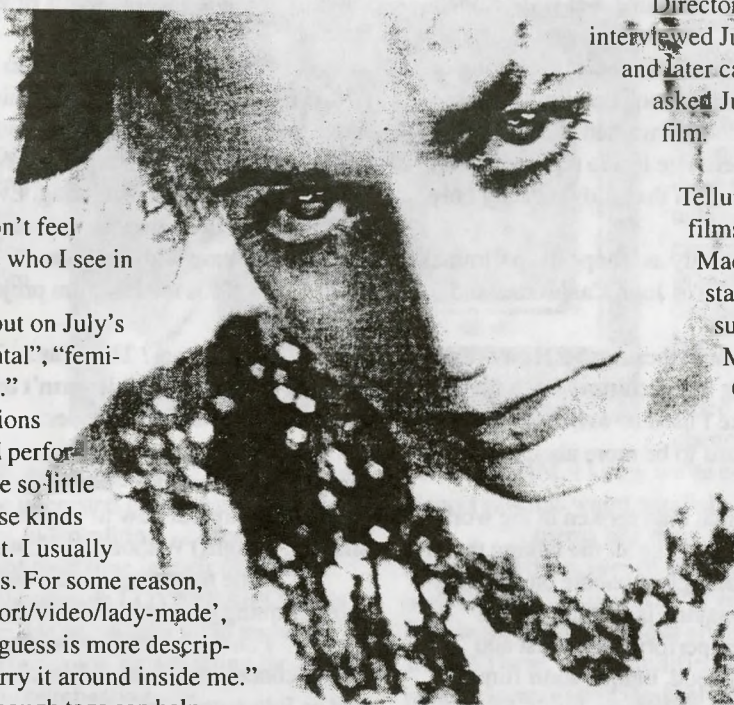
July says, "I'm not trying to be a movie star! (laughs) I'm really not. I'm embarrassed by it. Luckily,

it was mostly cut out. So no one can see the fact that I don't know what I'm doing!

"I had this weird feeling throughout, wondering whether I was being saved by the fact that it was 'just' a movie. Even if I was horrible, I was in a current, or river, or weird pool of movie magic. Where if I was being that bad on stage it would just be blundering. But there's something about the not-realness of it, all the equipment and everything between me and the final project."

SON was not made on a blockbuster budget, but obviously more than what July had dealt with before.

"It was incredibly informative for me. Being in that and also (directing a) Sleater-Kinney video, those two things were my crash course in doing something other than just me and a camera. And probably the reason I went ahead and



made NEST OF TENS so much more complicated.

“(On SON) I was just floored by everything! The fact that I didn’t even put on my own clothes. It was someone’s job to tell me to sit down until we call you.”

Overall, July enjoyed the experience of a big-crew film.

“It’s more if the idea is good. It would have been really different if there hadn’t been this rad woman director who I trusted.”

Another audience member of LOVE DIAMOND is giving July a film gig. She is currently a ‘consultant’ to a Wayne Wang and Paul Auster (SMOKE) film in preproduction.

While travelling and doing Big Miss Moviola screenings, July also set up a booth (called *One Minute in Heaven*) before the show where audience members could enter one by one and talk to a recording video camera. All they had to do was start by saying ‘Nobody ever told me....’

July says, “There were amazing things that came out of that. There was a really large woman who said, ‘well, nobody ever told me I looked good on camera.’ She’s just standing there. You’re staring at her, trying to decide if she does look good or not.

“Then she says, ‘But everyone always tells me I have a pretty voice.’ She starts singing this incredible opera song - you’re moved to tears instantly. It’s just breathtaking.”

Some must bomb as well.

“Sure, that’s kinda what makes it good,” July continues. “Usually the people who are, (breaks into cool guy character) ‘Oh yeah, let me get in there - Coz it’s my moment! I’ve waited all day for something like this to happen!’ Then you can’t even watch them, saying *exactly* what that person just like them in the last town said. (laughs)”

Becoming almost a professional observer, at least in that she’s paid for her thoughts and observations, hasn’t changed the process of making art for July.

“I make everything I make in order to feel more. And make a possibility for other people to feel more. I think the ways that being an observer as an artist removes me are pretty small compared to the way that it forces me to live each situation and kind of encode it into myself and use it.”

She says it doesn’t become a struggle or a notion of having to go out and find subject matter because a project has to get done.

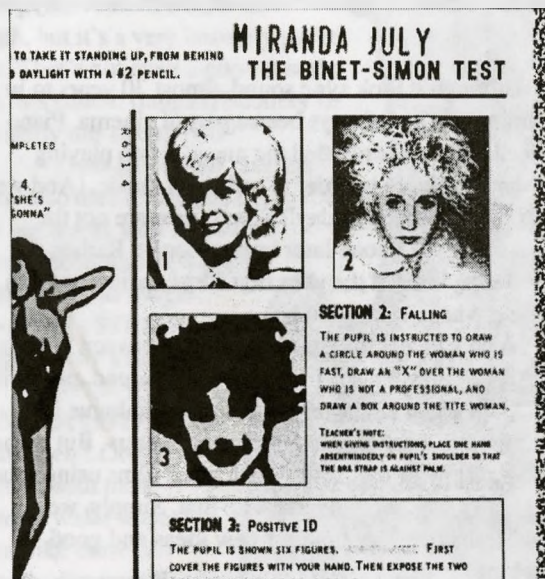
“Because I know that I can’t, as much as I’d sometimes like to, have things work

consciously that way. I know that anything that might happen to me now, I won’t actually be able to use until it’s gone all

the way through me and I’ve forgotten about it. Then it comes out in something. It works from such a subconscious place... I’m in control of the craft of it but not really what meaning comes out next.”

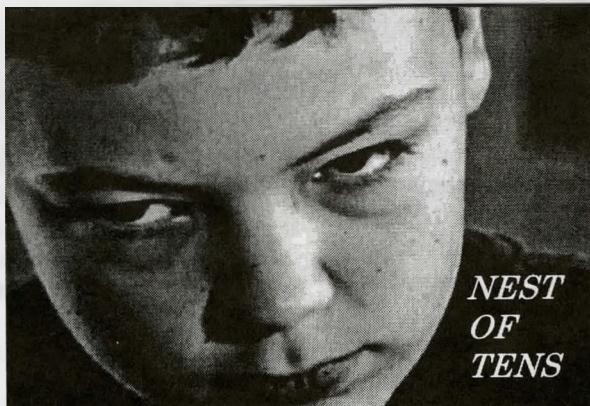
“It seems like there was some point where people recognized the power of video and said, ‘What can we do to make it seem not powerful or empowering?’”

NEST OF TENS is playing in various film festivals. July is currently touring across America with screenings of BIG MISS MOVIOLA. Her new project, called THE SWAN TOOL, will premiere winter 2000.



July’s projects include:

- NEST OF TENS (video) 26min
- GET UP (video for Sleater-Kinney) 1999
- LOVE DIAMOND (live performance) debuted Dec. 1998
- THE AMATEURIST (video) 14min 1998
- ATLANTA (video) 10min 1996
- THE REST (film) 4min 1995
- CDs: “Girls on Dates” (with IQU) (K Records) 1999
- “10 Million Hours a Mile” (Kill Rock Stars) 1998
- “The Binet-Simon Test” (Kill Rock Stars) 1997



INFO ON MIRANDA JULY AND BIG MISS MOVIOLA CAN BE FOUND AT: www.bigmissmoviola.com (where did you think it would be?) and you can buy her stuff.

The Alloy Orchestra

After hearing about Alloy and other bands doing new soundtracks for silent films, I was lucky enough to be working at the theater for the Telluride film fest where Alloy did its newest performance. When we projected the films for the band's rehearsal, I figured it was seven or eight guys playing the complex tracks. Instead it's three: Ken Winokur and Terry Donahue on percussion (and a few other things) and Roger Miller on keyboards. I interviewed them later by phone.

Although it took sync sound almost 30 years to be a part of film, music had always been a part of cinema. Piano players in each theater provided the music, often playing specific popular pieces in order to sell sheet music. (And we think we're so advanced to-day.) Silent films are not the caveman's scrawl to a eons-later impressionist. Rather, the images and storylines of the very first films are just as fresh and stunning when watched today.

So let's face it: the major obstacle between today's jaded audience and silents is the lack of sync sound, primarily dialogue. I can argue all day about pointless dialogue in today's films; it's what characters do that matters. But we've been brought up with sound, and with good films using sound in amazing ways. Nothing wrong with that. Simply, we should look past our own time for new ideas and good entertainment.

Okay, so you start renting silent films on video (unless you live in LA - see this issue's *intro*). Here's the next obstacle: whoever transferred the film to video grabbed the closest CD on the shelf and hit play, so you get a great film with stark images but a how-to-play piano lesson over the speakers. I would bring my Walkman to college classes for the silent screenings, listening to The Germs before the uninspired soundtrack.

The solution? A band like the Alloy Orchestra. Now in their eleventh year, Alloy composes new scores for silent films, touring with films for live performances. Based in Boston, they choose their films with care and compose for each individual project as opposed to just jamming the same way every time.

"We'd all been playing together in different projects and bands," percussionist and band coordinator Ken Winokur explains. "We got together originally to do a performance for a New Year's Eve celebration in town called First Night. Set up a giant assemblage of junk metal objects literally 10 or 15 times what we bring on tour with us now. It was a great show and people loved it.

"A local film programmer from the Coolidge Corner

Cinema saw us do it and he had already scheduled the film METROPOLIS (1926). That film usually comes with a rather bad rock and roll track by Giorgio Moroder, a 1984 version. He didn't want to show it with that. He actually had a long history of encouraging people to do live accompaniment. So he asked us to do it.

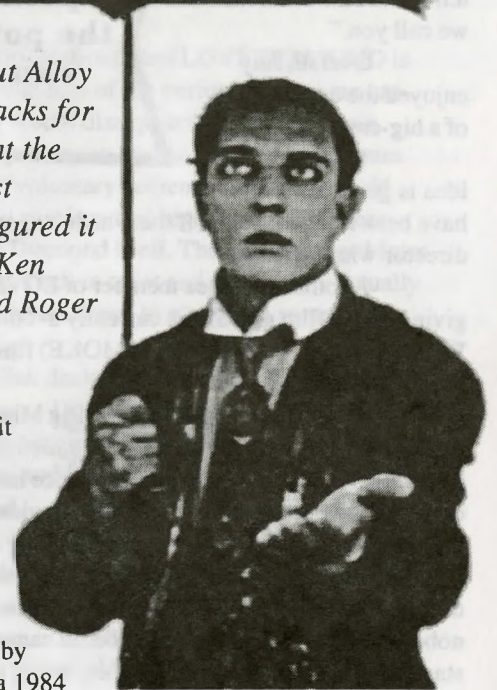
"People were really enthusiastic about it. So we started doing it again and again. We didn't set out with the intention of doing this, it was something that kind of found us." Winokur believes the Alloy has now done around 300 performances of METROPOLIS, the band's staple. They still perform it today.

The original members were Winokur, Terry Donahue and Caleb Sampson.

"We were kind of the two junk guys in Boston," Donahue says of he and Winokur. The two play some traditional drums in the Alloy but also an amazing array of pieces of metal, from beams and car springs to gongs and a bedpan.

Donahue continues, "In the real early '80s I was in a white-funk arty dance band. I had junk - metal pipes and cowbells and crap like that. Ken saw this and built a simpler, smaller version of the drum set that we use now, using that in rock bands around Boston. He became the real junk guy."

From trash, junkyards or somebody's basement, the Alloy has built up a storeroom of possible instruments, maybe even inventions.



above: the amazing Buster Keaton in ONE WEEK

opposite: the robot from METROPOLIS

"Oh, I'd call it junk!" Winokur says. "When we go through a film and compose stuff, we'll say, 'We really need a sound that sounds like a rhinoceros falling over a waterfall (laughs).' Oh, I know just what that is! Go into the backroom and pull a thing out."

What about a dinosaur? Alloy did a new score for *THE LOST WORLD* (1915).

"The dinosaur sound, more than anything, was the sound of our screeching on this, um, we call it 'the column.' A piece of tin ductwork, probably came out of a furnace or an air conditioner or something like that.

"Big and ridiculously heavy to carry around, but we started with it. It was our first film sound effect in *ME-TROPOLIS* — it was the robot and the sound of the blood dripping in the tower of Babel scene. Then we moved on to the *LOST WORLD* and it became the sound of dinosaurs. It's the sound of the train screeching around the corner in *LONESOME* (1929). It's the tension building element in *STRIKE* (1924). It's in virtually every film that we do."

Alloy has gotten real good at packing cases. One of their goals is to get as many sounds as possible out of existing equipment.

Winokur says, "Our one limitation now is we travel mostly by airplane and we're likely to perform two or three films on a trip. We have to keep the same setup because we've completely maxed out the airline allotment. If you add something you've got to take something away. But you can't usually take something away because you need it in a different film. Now we try to bring in little tiny stuff all the time. I started playing the clarinet last year. Terry started bringing the saw."

An instrument-collector friend showed Donahue how to get a sound out of a saw. He says, "Through a little trial and error I figured out how to work the thing and now its become my favorite instrument. I play with a violin bow.

"It's a special musical saw. You used to be able to use a standard saw. But they've gotten better so they don't work musically any more. They're too thick and don't bend like the old ones, they don't resonate. There's a company from Sweden that makes real saws and they make a few musical ones every year. Even though it does have teeth they're not crosscut, so it's not really meant for cutting wood. But what's a saw without teeth?"

Since Donahue also owned an accordion, he was enlisted to play that as well, another staple in a silent film soundtrack.

"When I was a kid I always dug that whole radio show thing," Donahue remembers. "But those had pretty much been gone, so I never thought there would be any way to do that.

"Next thing I know I'm in the Alloy Orchestra. I'm kind of doing the radio show in real life and playing music at the same time. The stairs, gunshots, all that foley sound effects stuff. Much more like the radio because we're doing it live."

Interestingly enough, the composing and performing have another equal in the band.

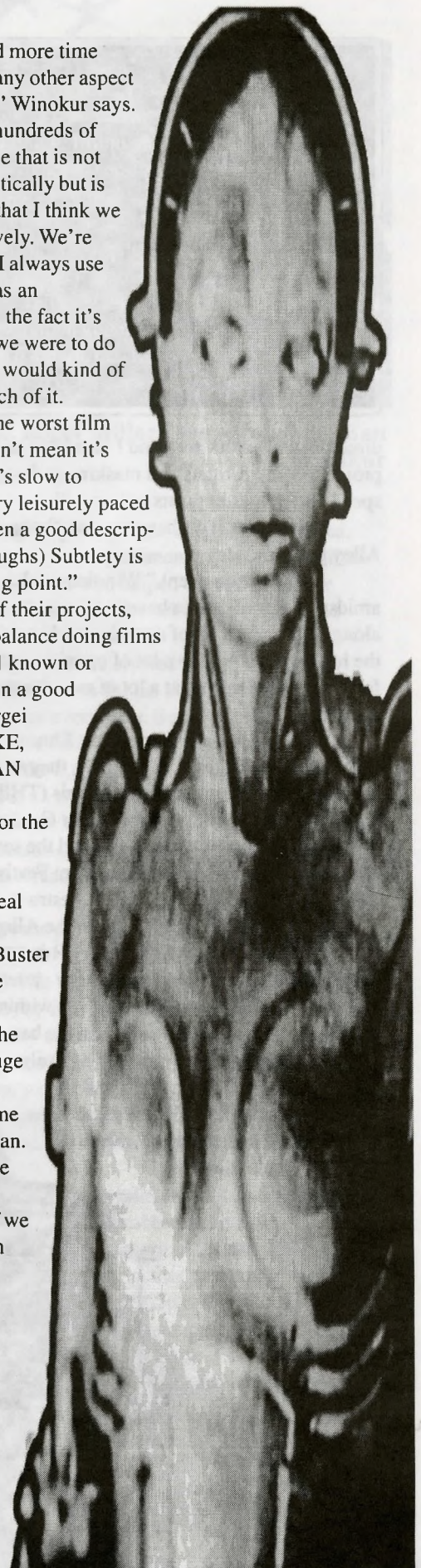
"We spend more time picking films than any other aspect of our whole band," Winokur says. "I just go through hundreds of films until I find one that is not only satisfying artistically but is also within a style that I think we can play for effectively. We're pretty flexible, but I always use *SUNRISE* (1927) as an example — despite the fact it's a fabulous film, if we were to do that, the drummers would kind of be idle through much of it.

"It's not the worst film we could pick. I don't mean it's slow in the sense it's slow to watch, but it's a very leisurely paced film. That's not even a good description. It's subtle. (laughs) Subtlety is not really our strong point."

Over all of their projects, Alloy also tries to balance doing films that are not as well known or haven't been seen in a good format, such as Sergei Eisenstein's *STRIKE*, Dziga Vertov's *MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA* (1929) or the rarely seen *LONESOME*, with more famous, wider-appeal films, like those of comedy directors Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin.

None of the members have a huge film background. Winokur has become the Alloy's front man.

"It became obvious almost immediately that if we were going to be in this business that somebody had to learn something (laughs). So I've made a real effort over the last ten years to very vigorously study the world of silent films. Try to know who the



THE PORDENONE SILENT FILM FESTIVAL

Alloy main man Ken Winokur describes the festival (which takes place in Italy) of exclusively silent films:

"We've performed at the yearly festival 3 times in the last 7 or so years. It's wild: eight consecutive days from basically 8 in the morning until 1 at night, silent films, back to back, hardly any breaks. A musician or a group of musicians accompanies every one (of the films). They virtually never repeat shows from year to year.

"So what they do is showcase every thing that has come out, that has been found, restored, reprinted, some things that might have a new soundtrack on them, etc.

"Then there are the special projects, like the D.W. Griffith series. In 3 years they are going to show everything Griffith ever made, everything they can get a hold of.

"It's this Mecca of silent film. And anybody who's professionally interested in silent film does anything they can to get to this thing. An amazing audience to play for. Consequentially they are a very tough audience, very hard to please. They've seen it all and are not happy just because they're getting to see a silent film with accompaniment, that's old news. They want to see a good film or a particularly good accompaniment."

directors and actors are. And I also have to know about film projection and formats and masking and aspect ratios and speed and polyester prints versus...."

Film festivals have become the main venues for the Alloy performances.

"We're an event," Winokur explains. "It's nice amidst all those films to have some actual people performing along. It attracts a lot of attention and people really enjoy it, the high energy. We do a lot of opening and closing of festivals. We also play at a lot of museums and general movie theaters."

Alloy has premiered their films at the last seven Telluride Film Festivals. Originally, they were recommended separately by filmmaker Errol Morris (*THE THIN BLUE LINE*) and Boston film programmer George Mansur to Telluride honcho Bill Pence. Around the same time, Paolo Cherchi of the Pordenone Silent Film Festival suggested that Pence find a percussion-based orchestra to do a film called *SYLVESTER* (1923). Pence hired the Alloy on the spot.

Winokur says *SYLVESTER* is "a German expressionist film, a super-depressing story about a tavern owner in Germany, his family and the conflicts within his family.

There's all this revelry going on in the bar and he's in the back room with his family most of the time. The mother and the wife continually fight. He eventually goes into the bathroom and kills himself. One of those happy films (laughs)."

The film is owned by a Japanese collector and was only released for the Pordenone and Telluride screenings. It has not been seen since.

One of the Telluride *SYLVESTER* screenings was

unique: "It was our first time at Telluride," Donahue says. "We were playing in the metal quonset hut building with a thunderstorm going on outside. You can hear the rain on the metal roof. There's a thunderstorm in the movie at the same time.

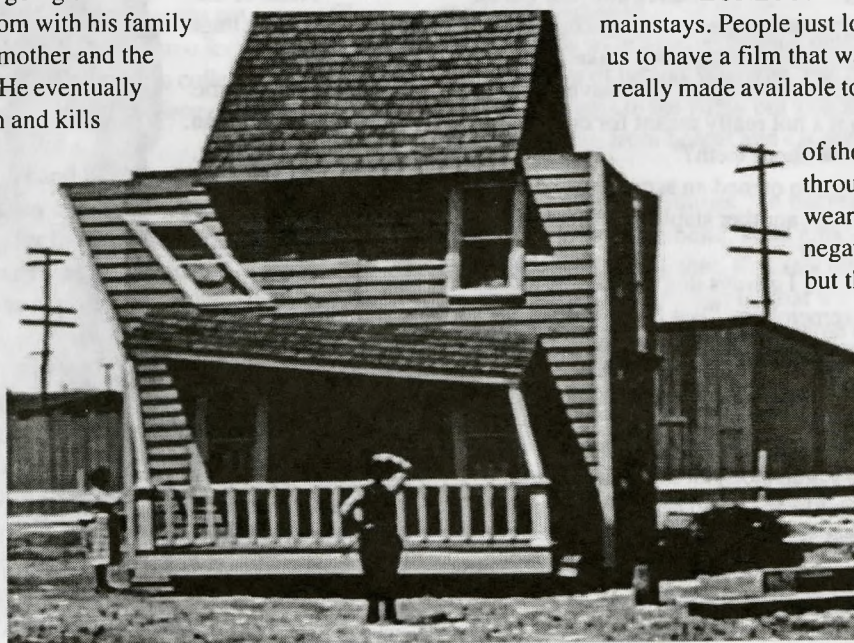
"All of a sudden the power goes out, film goes down, lights go out, keyboard goes out... drums keep going. (laughs) Drum solo! Thunderstorm - excellent! It's my favorite - there's no rules in a thunderstorm.

"So we did a little drum solo for a while and kept the thunderstorm going. The next thing you know the power comes back, the lights go on, the film comes back on, the keys are ready so he comes back in and we keep on playing." [The building has since been demolished to commemorate the screening.]

Another obscurity and Alloy favorite is *LONESOME*. Fairly forgotten, it came out right at the end of the silent era, "at a point when a movie like that could just barely, possibly succeed," Winokur explains. "It was an unknown director on one of the smallest of the film companies, Universal. So it was -roundly- ignored. It did well enough in reviews but people just didn't go to see it."

"*LONESOME* was one of our mainstays. People just loved it. It was great for us to have a film that was unknown, that we really made available to the public."

But the only print of the film has gone through too much general wear-and-tear. The negative is still available, but the Eastman House (home of Kodak in Rochester, NY) has a limited budget and



left: Buster Keaton in *ONE WEEK*
right background: *MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA*

making a film print is costly. So Alloy is looking for a backer in order to get the film into its lineup again.

On print sources, Winokur says, "We do a lot of work with the Eastman House and we also work with a private collector named David Shepard [see sidebar]. He's the one doing a lot of the silent video releases, hiring a lot of musicians and a wizard at transferring to video, making the most delicious looking films. A wonderful guy and easy to work with. The Eastman House we've had really good luck working with but they are somewhat tied by their own small budgets and regulations, so it's a little harder there."

With Buster Keaton's classic comedy STEAMBOAT BILL JR (1927), Alloy started doing children's matinees.

"Kids have always come to our shows and just love it. Even if they can't understand the film, it's sophisticated or complex, they sit there and just let the energy of the performance wash over them. They're always really into it.

"So when we started playing STEAMBOAT we started encouraging children to come. Because the children - they laugh their asses off! Adults I'm sure are amused but they laugh quietly to themselves. Kids jump up and scream back to the screen!"

Over their 11 years together, Alloy created and performed new compositions for 11 feature films.

Sadly, in 1998, keyboardist Caleb Sampson took his own life.

Winokur and Sampson were very close. "He worked out of my studio, doing a lot of soundtrack work for film and video. So he was like my roommate.

"But the upside was, Roger, who we had both played with and had known for a long time, and who had also done a lot of film scoring, was available when we needed him. He's brilliant, wonderful, creative to his fingertips. He was able to step into this void instantly so we could actually slip right into our existing touring schedule and fulfill all our obligations and move on ahead."

Originally from Michigan, Roger Miller moved to Boston in 1978. A year later he was the guitarist for the band Mission of Burma.

Of M.O.B., Miller says, "Our first gig was April Fool's Day, 1979. We ended the spring of '83. Slightly under 4 years. We were one of those bands that, over time, became bigger (than when actually together.)

"When our stuff was re-issued with bonus tracks a year and a half ago, in *Rolling Stone* there was a sidebar of reissues, and here they were: Jimi Hendrix, Miles Davis, Van Morrison — and Mission of Burma. When I looked at that I was like, where's the valium? (laughs)"

Various band projects followed. Winokur played on some of Miller's albums.

"I needed some odd percussion and Ken was the only person I knew who was not bothered in the slightest by playing a sampler with the sound of scissors, or an oil tank or something like that," Miller says.

Donahue was also in one of Miller's bands. But the connection goes further.

For Miller, composing for guitar was always



front to back: Roger Miller, Terry Donahue, Ken Winokur

alongside composing for piano. Right after M.O.B. folded, Miller started doing live accompaniment to many silent films for David Kwyler, the man who helped start Alloy. After many other bands and soundtrack work, Miller joined the Alloy.

"Mercifully, when Caleb died he had not started working on STRIKE. I had to fill his shoes, which was incredibly traumatic for everybody. But I had a film and I knew the Alloy style because I had seen them and loved the band. I kept some of the styles but gave it my own slant.

"STRIKE is a very physical film. My rock roots came out readily and it was a very natural way to cope with the angst of the situation of being in the band, replacing somebody who was already revered. It was a very good film for that."

Alloy's newest program consists of three slapstick shorts: EASY STREET (1916) by Charlie Chaplin, BIG BUSINESS (1929) with Laurel and Hardy and the amazing ONE WEEK (1920) by Buster Keaton.

"It's basically collaborative the way we compose," Miller says. "Any given individual may lead the way in any specific scene. Once we get it established I'll sometimes go home and make variations on it, because it's up to me to make the harmony, etc. It's very collective and I find that refreshing.

"There's plenty of discipline within the band but whatever works, works. We are rockers who have gone through incredibly diverse interests in music doing scores for silent films. Where as piano players that accompany films, there's a way you go about doing it. In orchestras there is kind of a mannerism. For us there is no mannerism, every so often we'll lapse into something that looks like it comes from the era you see on the screen but only occasionally do we really worry about time reference. Therefore I'm free to make whatever sounds work."

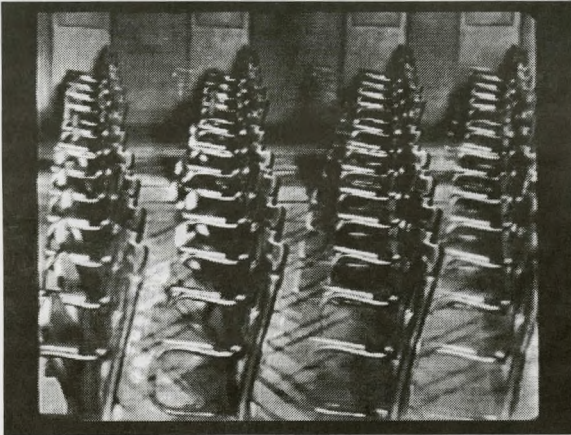
Winokur says STRIKE "is a very fun film for us to play. It's very active, takes a lot of concentration. It's our most difficult score, for me at least. ... Changing one groove

continued on page 32

Filmmaker/Historian

KEVIN BROWNLOW: Popular Misconceptions About Silent Film

British filmmaker Kevin Brownlow began collecting silent movies at age 11 and has since become a renowned historian and director. He has co-directed IT HAPPENED HERE (1961) and WINSTANLEY (1975) and many documentaries on film, including biographies of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and D.W. Griffith. His biggest project was HOLLYWOOD (1980), an amazing 13-hour documentary on the silent era alone.



That everyone walked at an accelerated pace. If they had moved at that speed, World War One would have been over in two weeks. This was due to projecting early silents, shot around 16 frames per second, on sound projectors fixed at 24 frames per second. Later silents are not so badly affected, as they were shot at anything from 19-24 fps.

That everyone in silent films overacted. Early silents – nearly a century old – employed stage actors, who continued with the emphasized representation of the theatre. But film actors had a whole repertoire. If they were appearing in melodrama – which was not supposed to be realistic – they acted in a melodramatic fashion. But in realistic stories, they played as naturalistically as Humphrey Bogart or Carole Lombard.

That the photography was crude and murky. This is the most irritating misconception, because right from the start – with Lumiere's first films – cinematography was on a very high level. They had to compete with the superlative quality of lantern slides – the lantern was called a stereopticon in the U.S., probably because of its quality. By the teens, the standard of cinematography became generally high in the studios and by the twenties, superlative. The reason we see so many silents looking so awful is entirely due to the laboratories that did the copying.

That the plots were naïve and innocent. Some of them were – but if you see something like WEST OF ZANZIBAR (1928) you see a picture about a man whose wife runs off with a friend. The man fights his friend – there is an accident, he falls over a balcony and breaks his back. His wife returns to him but dies, leaving him with her daughter. Knowing the father to be the friend, he brings the girl up in the worst brothels of Africa – and when she is a confirmed drunk and drug addict, returns her to her father. But the friend roars with laughter, informing him that the wife never ran away with him and the girl is his... Call that naïve and innocent?

That silent films were always accompanied by a piano. In the Broadway theatre called the Strand, there were 101 symphony musicians plus a Wurlitzer organ. Even in small towns, the theatres had small orchestras. There were far more musicians in those days, before radio and TV. The theatre that employed only a pianist, in the great days of the silent film, was likely to be a very cheap one. You would hardly get away with that in a picture palace seating 3,000! Many people came just for the music, and the silent movies introduced many Americans to classical music.

Film Restorer

DAVID SHEPARD: "A film is new to anybody who hasn't seen it."

If you've seen silent films on video, then you've come across David Shepard's name more than once. The collector/historian/teacher has produced numerous video versions of famous and obscure silent classics, supplying the prints and overseeing the restoration and video transfer.

For each video, the film print gets photomechanical work in a lab to improve its condition. Digital work on video includes lots of cleaning up, determining the correct running speed, splice/dirt/scratch removal and shortening long intertitles.

"I would say that what gets done, at least in my operation, on film is preservation," Shepard says. "What gets done on video is restoration. And then I simply have a lot of films that are in conservation, waiting for me to get around to them at all (laughs)."

With a collection now reaching 2,500 films, it actually started with a paper route. When Shepard was a kid (before television), every camera store had a 16mm film rental library. Parents would rent films to show at home for their kids or general movie parties.

When TV eliminated those kinds of screenings, the camera stores started selling them off. Shepard was already obsessed and started buying up prints with money from delivering papers. "I was interested in the kinds of things you couldn't see on television or in theaters," Shepard says.

Shepard continued the hobby through college. When the American Film Institute started in 1967 it needed someone within the film-collecting community to get them prints, as collectors had far more old films than the studios. By this time Shepard had a wide range of contacts and got the job. Over about 12 years, he brought an estimated 8,000 films into the AFI library.

Afterwards, he worked in the film industry a while and taught film history at USC for another 12 years. He has been doing the video productions for the last five years.

"I've had a wonderful time with this stuff," Shepard says. "I don't think of it as Sisyphus. I think of it as getting up every day and playing at my hobby."

Shepard is a fan of the Alloy, working with them on two video productions and supplying them with prints for live shows.

"First of all, I'm ready to cooperate with anyone who's trying to find new audiences for silent film. I don't see it as a competitive world. Anything that benefits any of us benefits all of us. I love the idea of Alloy as finding a contemporary way to reach out to new, young audiences, where they would come and hear them whereas they would not really come just to see a silent movie.

"I worked on the Moroder version of METROPOLIS. Some people think that's like doing a jive paraphrase of the Bible or something (laughs). I don't. I think it's like showing this film to millions of people who would have never seen it in their whole

lives, and who might be interested in looking at other silent films after that.

"Remember that films found their first audience in vaudeville. A series of short unrelated acts simply strung together would constitute a program.

"When films began to essentially find their own theaters, which is around 1905, they emulated vaudeville, but since they were going for a working-class audience at that time the movies were cheap. They would have films, but they would also have one or two acts of vaudeville, often including a song plugger, who after all came from the publisher and didn't cost the theater anything. They would have song slides that people would sing with. And, of course, in those days parlor pianos were much more prevalent than they are today. People could actually read music (laughs). It was a way of promoting the sale...

"Then in the late '20s, when the concept of a theme song for a film came in much as it still exists today, like *Charmaine* for *WHAT PRICE GLORY* or *Diane* for *SEVENTH HEAVEN*, there were, of course, tie-ins between the movies, the sheet music and phonograph records.

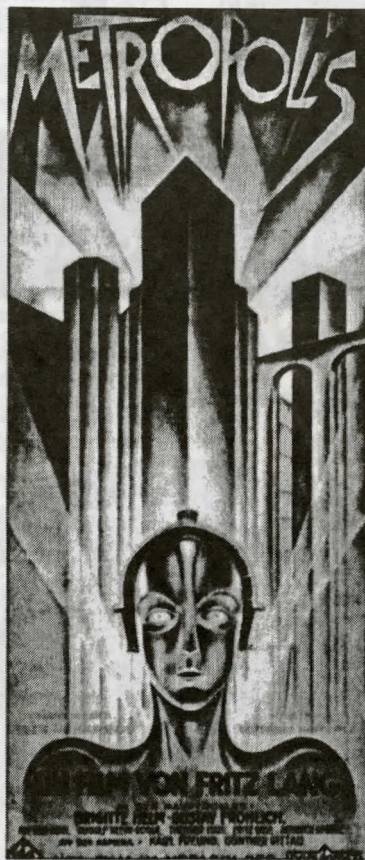
"Each theater was responsible for coming up with its own music for each film. Although the film companies did publish 'thematic music cue sheets,' they were simply suggestions. It would break the film down and suggest what points in the film music should change, what kind of music, suggest a piece and how long that section lasted. The really best theaters had big libraries of music and highly trained music directors (who) compiled their own scores."

Shepard does not think silent films are important only because they are a predecessor to newer films.

"They are highly sophisticated and different arts. That's like saying Mozart is interesting because he's a predecessor to

Schubert. Well, no, thank you. Mozart is quite well developed on his own. You can't say that a silent Lubitsch is like a modern comedy but without the sound and not as clever. It completely isn't true.

"Speaking historically, it is a reasonable thing to look at the past as a pathway to the present, and the present is the apogee. Personally, I happen to think there are a lot of good films made now, but they're absolutely no better than films made in the '30s. The good ones, of course. A film is new to anybody who hasn't seen it. As long as the cultural gap is not so broad as to be unintelligible, it is a valid intellectual and emotional experience. You wouldn't decide that you're going to read Charles Dickens only to find out what J.B. Salinger might have learned from him. He's valid by himself."



continued from page 29

to the next to a completely dissimilar group and a different time signature or a different speed or tempo.”

The Alloy always picks films that hold up under repeated viewings.

“I’m always moved at the scene in STRIKE,” Winokur says. “We call it ‘strike drags on’.

The strike has been going on and workers are at their home. One of the workers tries to get his wife to give up a piece of clothing and she won’t do it. They fight about it and ultimately she gives him the shawl. Just then as he’s going out the door she stops him and gives him a piece of jewelry.

“It’s a really moving thing because she’s giving her most valued possession to make the strike work. I

am continually affected by these things; you kind of replay the same emotional response over and over again!”

Winokur adds, “I think one of the things we do best that most other groups don’t do is spend a lot of time composing and then a huge amount of time rehearsing, to the point where we have a really polished, repeatable performance. Levels of complexity that you can only get by that much work.”

There are others in Alloy’s field: the Club Foot Orchestra, who preceded Alloy, Bill Frisell composed music for various Buster Keaton films, Timothy Brock composing for orchestra and Gillian Anderson re-orchestrating old scores. All are very talented and turn out good work. Winokur also mentions there are many similar groups popping up in New York and a favorite of his is Boston-based Sabana Blanca.

But the Alloy appear to be the only basically full-time, travelling silent film orchestra.

Winokur explains, “When you’re in a seven-piece instrumental band with four drummers, it’s not exactly a secret that it’s not a good business. As we started flying around it was re-enforced that the costs of moving a large band were so prohibitive that we just couldn’t get work if it were more than the three of us.”



Miller says it is completely different than being in a traditional band.

“First of all, you’re treated like royalty in general (laughs). Most bands, no matter who you are, you can take the Holiday Inn or meet people and sleep on their floor. But we

play film festivals and are put up in really really nice ritzy digs. People will take us out to dinner! This is unheard of for musicians.”

While Winokur does facets of Alloy year-round, Miller does a ton of film and TV soundtrack work (including for 7-11 Brain Freeze slurpees) and has

another band of piano and drums called Binary System.

Donahue plays in other Boston bands and is also a referee for three high school sports. Of the latter he says, with a laugh, “I get good exercise, plus I am God out there.”

Donahue says Alloy will keep composing and performing until they are too old to hit stuff. “Because it’s not like rock bands where your demographic is a three-year window. And you better hope you hit hard enough for them to carry you through the rest of your life. Otherwise, they’ve found somebody else and you’re gone. Then it’s: change band names, change styles, try to figure out how to make a living at it. Ugh.”

Then a reunion tour, “playing all the songs you hated before. Ten years later! What are you doing? Come on, man!

Everybody knows why! Not for the love of the music. (laughs)”

More info on Alloy Orchestra and Binary System at <http://rogermiller.home.mindspring.com/>

“Subtlety is not really our strong point.”



top from STRIKE; eyeball lens from MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

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Charles Napier

by Christopher Craig

He tried to kill Rambo, got sliced up by Hannibal Lector, his band "The Good Ole Boys" were bilked by the Blues Brothers and he's known to Trekkies as the only man to ever sing on *Star Trek*.

You name it — Charles Napier has just about seen and done it all. Chalking up roles in over ninety feature films spanning three decades and the new millennium, Napier fits the textbook description of a true ThatGuy. Though rarely recognized by name only, as soon as people see his trademark pronounced jaw and mischievous grin they smile and immediately know who he is. At any given time at least 20 of Napier's films are being shown on television around the globe.

A former art teacher, journalist, athlete and veteran of the armed forces, he has also held two of the greatest occupations a native Kentuckian can have: A bootlegger and a basketball coach. As a young scribe for the trucking magazine *Overdrive* Napier was to cover the trucker strike of '73 with friend Hunter S. Thompson, but after three days of heavy drinking with the gonzo journalist, Thompson bailed and Napier went it alone.

The longevity of Napier's career as a character actor is one most would dream of. He has worked steadily for the past three decades in every type of genre and budget size of film, from the early X-rated days of Russ Meyer films to the award-winning *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*. Napier has had the pleasure of working with just about everyone in Hollywood. Currently Napier is busy as a voice-over artist and just recently finished shooting the new N.W.A. video where he plays —surprise— a cop.

To sit across the table from Charles Napier and interview him is like talking to the coolest Uncle you've ever had. He works hard and plays hard. An incredibly intelligent man he will be happy to discuss the history of the Kentucky Aristocracy with you, but at the same time is loose free and fun enough to tell you some of the wildest party stories imaginable.

What brought you out to California to act? I loved Kentucky but I was bored with what there was to do there. I wanted to be free and experience life so I came out with the drift in the sixties.

What led to that decision? I got out of the Army in 1957 and went to Western Kentucky University on the G.I. Bill. I got married moved to Florida. Got divorced. Taught some art classes in Junior High then got to hanging around with a Theatre Group and ended up living at the Clearwater Florida Little Theatre. There was a small apartment above the theatre and the job was to clean the place up for free rent. So I did and eventually I started watching these actors every night and decided "well I can do this" and I did a couple plays. Then I went back to Western Kentucky to begin work on a Masters Degree in Fine Arts around '65 and that's where I really got started. Dr. Russell Miller was head of the drama department and he talked me into doing some plays that summer and we did *Othello*. Then I got my first paid acting gig down in Florida doing historical drama. It was about then that I decided to give it a whirl. I went up to New York, then hit San Diego in '66. Auditioned down there and did a season at the Globe. Then moved to LA.

Did you hit it big right away? No. I struggled like everybody else does at first. I took the menial jobs, parked cars, worked for Shell Oil, and operated a cherry picker. I took jobs where I'd have time to go to auditions, but first I had to get an agent. I started hanging out in bars where actors hung out. In those days there was little place called the Rain Check Room in Santa

Monica. I ran into Dennis Hopper and Jack Nicholson, they were hot just coming off of EASY RIDER and they eventually helped me get an agent. The first money I ever earned was on a Lucite paint commercial and from there I went in the totally opposite direction doing X-rated films with Russ Meyer.



serious movie set and grueling work.

You produced SUPERVIXENS with Russ Meyer. What was that like?

Producing a Russ Meyer film basically means make sure the broads don't sneak out and take off on you. Sex, violence, hatred, savagery, his films

How did you get to be in the Russ Meyer films? In those days it was a huge deal for a film to show a woman topless. I was dating a stripper at the time and she went down to try out for a part in one of Russ's films. She asked me to go with her and make sure nothing happened. When Russ asked her to take her top off he looked over and asked me what in the hell I was doing there. I told him I was there to protect my girl. He liked that and asked if I'd be in one of his movies. My

never had any sense of love. After shooting was over he'd invite everybody that was still speaking to Las Vegas and would pay to let them indulge in whatever they wanted to indulge in. But by then everyone hated everyone so much because he would pit the actor's against each other during the filming.

For creative purposes? Oh yeah. He was very brilliant at that.

"Savalas was an unmitigated a-hole and treated us like amber duck shit."

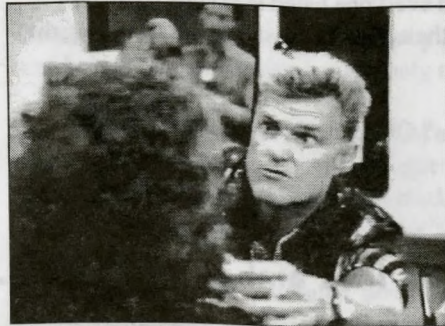
friends and people I knew said I'd never work again in this town. But I figured why not? I wasn't working much really anyway, so why not go with the broads with the big tits and grovel around in the sand? I did CHERRY, HARRY & RAQUEL in '69. Later, United Artists picked up all the Russ Meyer films. Normally those movies played in smut houses in LA and New York. All of a sudden they are being shown in 2000 theatres across the country. People called my mother in Kentucky. My parents never forgave for that one.

Tell me, was being on a Russ Meyer set as exciting as most off us imagine it to have been? It's like going to boot camp on Paris Island. He was a combat photographer in WWII. When he got out of the army and had made enough money working for skin magazines, he never looked back and did his own thing. Russ is from the old school. He was very good and inventive with the camera but working for him was like indentured servitude in the early days. He would practically capture these big-busted girls and hold them captive out in the desert until we were done shooting. Though his movies look as though they were very fun and wild, it was a very

For what role are you most recognized? I'm most recognized for my role as Murdock from the Rambo movies. But even how I got that part could only come about in Hollywood. I met Stallone on the set of *Kojak* pre-Rocky. We became sort of... well, not great pals, but he was playing a hood and I was playing a hood and we hated Telly Savalas. Savalas was an unmitigated a-hole and treated us like amber duck shit. So Stallone and I would set our sights on whatever we could do to get even with Telly and we did. Many years later RAMBO came along and the role of Murdock was already cast. Lee Marvin had the role, but something was wrong. I managed to sneak on the lot at Paramount. I saw Sly, he remembered me and gave me the role. They paid Lee off who didn't give a rat's ass because he was fishing in Australia.

Who has had the biggest impact on your career? Guys like Russ Meyer and Jonathan Demme. Oddly enough, Demme was a big fan of the Meyer films. When I first got out here I learned under the tutelage of Robert Mitchum. Lee Marvin, Strother Martin, Rory Calhoun and I fell under their





then have to kick and fight to make a comeback. It's got to be tough for them. As a character actor, there is no top to be knocked off of. You stay steady and if you're lucky the work keeps coming.

What has been the most rewarding moment of your career? This occupation has allowed me the opportunity to meet people I would have never had the chance to meet otherwise. I've ridden around on the tour bus with Merle Haggard, trekking across the country going from show to show. I've had the pleasure of meeting Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Dwight Yoakam, countless actors and celebrities. But still the biggest thrill of my life was playing in the Kentucky High School basketball tournament in 1953-54 for Allen County my junior and senior year. We never made it further than the first round, but what a thrill it was to play in the damn thing.

evil influence early on. As Hunter S. Thompson would say, "Those are the soiled hands I fell into." (laughs) But I'll tell you what. They had a great work ethic: you

will show up drunk or sober—preferably sober—but you better know your damn lines and not cause the company any trouble.

The Internet Movie Database describes you as a "Lively character

actor who usually plays hard-ass military types and menacing bad guys." Is that an accurate description of your work? Well sure. I mean, as an actor you go through stages. For awhile I was in the truck driver phase, then the cowboy phase, the mountain man phase, the outlaw phase, the police officer phase.... Now I'm really enjoying the five star general phase.

What are the advantages to being a character actor? As a character actor I've got nothing to lose. Guys like Burt Reynolds who blow up huge have a tremendous burden to carry because they have everything to lose

Are there ever roles you see in other features and you say to yourself, "Man I could have done that character so much better?" Not often. I really don't watch much TV and can't remember when I last saw a movie. I just built an addition onto the house and there's not a single TV in it. I'll go see a movie if I'm on location. I don't like to watch films on the small screen and I don't like to watch myself in particular.

You've seen and worked with a lot of people that have come and gone in Hollywood. What has been the secret to your longevity? This is a business about working. It's like bricklaying. If you don't show up to your job to lay bricks, then you're not a bricklayer very often. People asked me in the past why did I do some of the shitty movies that I did. I told them because I wanted to work. That's why I'm still around and others aren't. Some say, 'yeah but I wouldn't do the shit you're doing, I have too much pride.' But, see, that doesn't register with me because I like doing what I do, it's a helluvalotta fun. Even the shit movies are a lot of fun. This is a terrific business. What could be better than traveling around the world, meeting famous and interesting people and at the end of the day have someone else pay the bill? The key is to keep your face out there. You gotta work.

So I imagine your criteria for choosing a project is pretty loose? You got it. How much? When and where? The less I mess with (acting) the happier I am. I've never paid

much attention to the business as far as fame is concerned. But as I get older it is kind of nice to get some attention. Sometimes I'll get a role, sometimes I won't. The rewarding thing is I'm still here.



"In the old days (actors) would take care of each other. They'd say to the producer, 'Give some here and give some there. I'm not paying for it. It comes out of your pocket anyway.' But not one of (the new superstars) has done that."

What is your opinion of Hollywood today? When I first got my start, the older guys would hang out with you, go grab a few drinks, kind of take you under their wing. Today the young guys that I've worked with don't really go out as much. Or if they do I don't know it. Most of the younger superstars today have become more isolated from their fellow actors in a sense. I haven't had any great supporting roles to speak of so perhaps I'm speaking a little bit out of line. But in the old days they would include you because they depended on you more. The guys today get 22 million dollars and all they'd have to do to be a hero is say, "I want a million dollars of that to go to my co-stars." And they would be the greatest hero in town. But they don't do that. That's what's changed. In the old days (actors) would take care of each other. They'd say to the producer, "Give some here and give some there. I'm not paying for it. It comes out of your pocket anyway." But not one of (the new superstars) has done that.

As an actor how would you describe yourself to work with? Fun but professional. I never gave any shit, but I never took any either.

Sounds like there is a story there. I'm from Kentucky, man; I got a little pride. One time (some producers) got on me about my accent. They said I needed to speak properly. I said, 'Well, you know what, man,' —I was playing a Marine Colonel— and I said, 'Maybe there's one guy from Kentucky in the fucking Marine Corps.' I told them to talk it over with Hitchcock [who placed Napier under contract at Universal]. They came back and apologized.

You've had the pleasure of working on hundreds of sets.

What's the most fun you've ever had on a set? BLUES BROTHERS. Man, that set was like your wildest nights in a fraternity house. But we still got the work done and it was a hit. That was the most unorthodox star trip ride ever. Anybody screamed at you, you'd just tell John (Belushi). He took care of everybody. It was fun. Everybody was waiting to see if that picture was going to crash and burn. If it was heads were going to roll. But even after going over schedule and over budget it was a huge hit.

(Whew!) That's the loosest successful fiasco ever to be pulled off.

What is your ideal weekend when you have time off? I have a bass pond on my ranch. I enjoy spending time with my wife and kids. I like quail hunting, and skeet shooting. I also work with various charities where I live in Kern County.

If it weren't for acting, what would you have done for a living? Probably teach art class and coach basketball. The older I get and look back on it—I'm not a religious person in that particular sense—but I do feel there is something, some presence out there that guides us takes care of us. Most people nearly drive themselves crazy trying to control their every move. I let go. Try not to do anything and see where it takes you. I didn't plan on any of this. I just knew what I didn't want to do and that was to hang out in Kentucky and stay bored. I lived conventionally up until after college. I was teaching and coaching but I just realized that there had to be more out there and I had to go and find it.

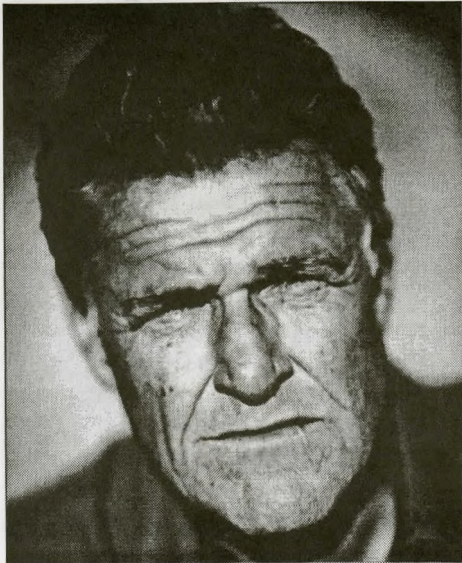
Amazing how it all worked out. Yeah. Out of getting my start in Russ Meyer's X-rated movies (people said I'd never work again) have come some of the best moves. The same wacky Kentucky accent I used to catch hell for now supplies me with my income. I'm a spokesman for Pontiac. "Life is more exciting in Montana." I do voice-overs for nearly a dozen cartoon characters as well. A lot of the work I get now is because other actors were fans of mine before they started. That's how the N.W.A. video came about. Ice Cube requested me. I mean, here's a guy from a little town called Scottsville. Never studied acting, never had any great dreams except to dream, and I ended up doing nothing great, but at least I ended up doing what I wanted to do and made a living doing it.

Whether he is cracking up his co-stars on a film set or entertaining millions of people around the world in his films, Charles Napier is a born entertainer, fun guy and good man. His next film, VERY MEAN MEN, premieres this year at the Cannes Film Festival.

Christopher Craig is a contributing writer and good friend of Cinemad.

Next Month:
ThatGuy Precinct





CHARLES NAPIER

Partial Filmography

The House Near the Prado (1969)
 The Hanging of Jake Ellis (1969)
 Cherry, Harry and Raquel! (1969) "HARRY"/SHERIFF
 Moonfire (1970) NAZI-FIGHTING TRUCKER
 Beyond the Valley of the Dolls (1970) AUNT'S NEW HUSBAND

The Seven Minutes (1971) COP
 Supervixens (1975) SADISTIC COP
 Alien Attack (1976) (TV) SHUTTLE CAPTAIN
 Thunder and Lightning (1977) MOONSHINE MOBSTER
 Citizen's Band (1977) "CHROME ANGEL"/TRUCKER
 Big Bob Johnson and His Fantastic Speed Circus (1977)(TV) "BIG BOB JOHNSON"
 Last Embrace (1979) GOVERNMENT AGENT
 Melvin and Howard (1980) DELIVERS HOWARD HUGHES'S WILL

The Blues Brothers (1980) LEAD SINGER AND DRIVER OF THE WINNEBAGO

The Blue and the Gray (1982)(mini-series) MAJOR
 Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985) "MURDOCK"/MARSHALL

Kidnapped (1986) LIEUTENANT
 Something Wild (1986) IRATE CHEF
 The Night Stalker (1987) SERGEANT
 Instant Justice (1987) MAJOR
 Deep Space (1987) COP
 Hit List (1988) FEDERAL AGENT
 The Incredible Hulk Returns (1988) (TV) VOICE/GRUNTS OF THE HULK!

Married to the Mob (1988) ANGELA'S HAIRDRESSER
 Alien from the Deep (1989) COMMANDER
 "War and Remembrance" (1989) (mini-series) LIEUTENANT GENERAL

Miami Blues (1990) SERGEANT

The Grifters (1990) RICH COWBOY WHO GETS CONNED

Ernest Goes to Jail (1990) WARDEN
 Maniac Cop 2 (1990) TV HOST
 Homicidal Impulse (1991) D.A.
 Indio 2 - The Revolt (1991) EVIL CEO
 The Silence of the Lambs (1991) UNLUCKY GUARD

Soldier's Fortune (1992) COLONEL
 Eyes of the Beholder (1992) DETECTIVE
 Skeeter (1993) SHERIFF
 Philadelphia (1993) JUDGE
 Hell Comes to Frogtown II (1993) POLICE CAPTAIN
 Body Bags (1993) (TV) MANAGER
 Loaded Weapon 1 (1993) INTERROGATOR
 Silk Degrees (1994) FEDERAL SUPERVISOR
 Raw Justice (1994) MAYOR
 "The Critic" (1994) TV (voice) "DUKE PHILLIPS"/CRITIC'S BOSS

3 Ninjas Knuckle Up (1995) EVIL CEO
 Hard Justice (1995) WARDEN
 Jury Duty (1995) STEPDAD
 Original Gangstas (1996) MAYOR
 The Cable Guy (1996) ARRESTING OFFICER
 Macon County Jail (1997) SHERIFF
 Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery (1997) "COMMANDER GILMOUR"

Steel (1997) COLONEL
 "Men in Black: The Series" (1997) voice) "ZED"
 Beloved (1998) ANGRY CARNY
 The Hunter's Moon(1999) FEDERAL AGENT
 Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me (1999) "GENERAL HAWK"

Pirates of the Plain (1999) GRANDPA
 The Big Tease (1999)
 Very Mean Men (2000) DETECTIVE

photos:

page 35: BLUES BROTHERS.
 36: CHERRY, HARRY & RAQUEL,
 MARRIED TO THE MOB,
 STAR TREK,
 SUPERVIXENS .



ASIA
ARGENTO

WHERE DID SHE COME FROM?

According to reports, she is the daughter of Italian horror film director Dario Argento, even appearing



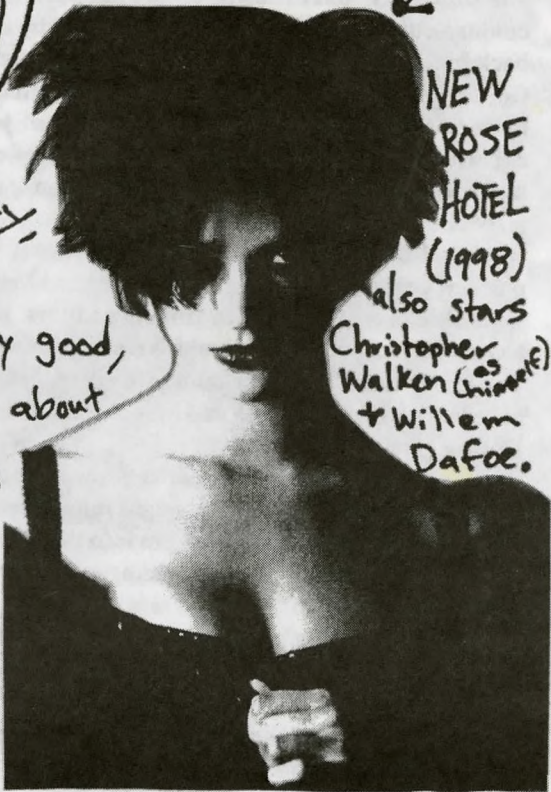
in some of his films (TRAUMA, THE STENDHAL SYNDROME). But - come on! Just take a look at her!

his over-the-top mention

Dad? Not to look at

So sweet and nice, little tattoo of an angel!

Well, I rented the new Rose Hotel, directed by Abel Ferrara (BAD LT.). Sure enough, Asia is Italian. But she speaks English pretty good, even the cuss words. The film is about something or other, and I guess Asia is a "bad-guy" in it. Maybe she is related to Dario. But watch it, everyone needs a bad film once in a while.



NEW ROSE HOTEL (1998) also stars Christopher Walken (as Chiastote) + Willem Dafoe.



“I’m drawn to cinema that can theoretically change the world—and me.”



A conversation with film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum by Paolo Ziemba

This being the first article that I’ve written for Cinemad I thought it was more than appropriate to delve back to a time where films changed my way of thinking of the world. Rosenbaum was key in this new beginning. Cinemad continues this process. While reading Rosenbaum’s books for research I experienced a sort of nostalgia for the days back when I was broadening my knowledge of cinema. Rosenbaum had opened many doors to a world of cinema that I had never experienced before. With this in mind I would like this article, at the least, to stir the curiosity of the readers to explore what Rosenbaum, and the world of cinema, is more than willing to offer.

Now imagine a film critic who travels the world and experiences all cinema. Imagine a critic who is not only moved by cinema because of its beauty, but also because of its importance in the world. Imagine a critic who takes all of this in and then serves it to anyone willing to read.

His name is Jonathan Rosenbaum, film critic for *The Chicago Reader*. I came across his work in the counter-cultural alternative newspaper just by chance back in the early '90s as a film student at Columbia College in Chicago. His essays, whether I agreed with them or not, always showed me an opinion of years of experience which gave me more knowledge of cinema’s history and politics than any class I ever took, with no restrictions.

He has worked for *The Chicago Reader* for the past ten years, writing short synopsis and long reviews with little or no interference from the editors. Rosenbaum has also contributed to several film magazines including *Trafic*, *Written By*, *Scenario* and *Cineaste*, and several of his essays have been reprinted in such Italian magazines as *Close-Up* and *Bianco y Nero*.

Rosenbaum has also written several powerful books that not only give you insight into the world of cinema and its politics, but insight into the life of a man who is passionate about experiencing everything with open arms.

Rosenbaum says his book *Moving Places: A Life at the Movies* is “a project that had a personal urgency for me because I wanted to forge the links between two mainly disconnected portions of my life—my childhood in Alabama, and my career as a critic in New York, Paris,

London, and San Diego.”

Placing Movies, considered as a companion and sequel to *Moving Places*, contains a collection of previously published essays for such publications as *Sight and Sound*, *Film Comment*, *The Chicago Reader* and the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, with a dash of previously unpublished personal stories. *Movies as Politics* is another collection of essays, “looking not just at the political implications of many different kinds of films as ‘statements’ and processes in themselves, but also at the political aspects of what might be called the challenge of cinema—its aesthetic forms, its narrative tactics, and its patterns of production, promotion, distribution, exhibition and reception.”

Although Rosenbaum grew up watching almost every film released in the 1950s at the Rosenbaum Theaters (which his father managed and his grandfather owned in Florence, Alabama), he did not start out wanting to write film criticism. His original idea was to be a novelist and to write short stories. As a kid he had written a guest column for the Florence Times, “reviewing” the major releases that came to the family-owned theatres, but he was more dedicated to writing his stories and poetry. It wasn’t until he was in graduate school at NYU that the opportunity to write about films presented itself.

“When I decided I wanted to get out of graduate school and since I didn’t want to get drafted,” Rosenbaum says, “I waited until I was old enough and then I left. This is when somebody offered me a job of editing a collection of film criticism which was perfect only because I wanted a job and I wanted something other to do than

graduate school.

"I found that when I started trying to write about film that I was getting that work published," where as earlier short novels did not.

Getting to spend about one fourth of his time traveling all across the world as a critic, Rosenbaum experiences almost no distinction between what's work and what's play. Not having the pressures that most critics have from their editors, Rosenbaum can write as long as he likes about any film that moves him.

"I feel that I'm lucky in the sense that I know very few people that have lives like mine," Rosenbaum says.

When talking to Rosenbaum about today's market of reviews, dedicated to focusing on what's opening this week and telling us what films to avoid and what films are worth seeing, he says he prefers to write critical essays.

"If there's a will there is a way and if you start writing about films that you can't see maybe people will start finding ways that you can."

"One way to make the distinction (between a review and a critical essay) is how long one has to think about a film and to test certain things out," Rosenbaum thinks. "I have a friend who is a Dutch film critic who reviewed movies as politics some time ago. He said that he thought there was an advantage for me having a lot of time between when I saw a film at a film festival and when it finally came to Chicago.

"I think he might be right in that respect and from that point of view its like when you're writing a review there is more of an element of a gamble. Of course there's still a gamble even when you're writing a critique."

Jacques Rivette once said in a roundtable discussion in *Cashier du Cinema* in the 50's that "it's impossible to really know the ultimate value of something when it comes out."

Rosenbaum says, "You only find that out over time. So I really think that that's part of the distinction...that when you're in a category of reviewing, which is to give consumer advice, that's a temporary thing. But it also might change. I know my tastes change over certain periods of time. What I might like under certain circumstances I might not like under other circumstances."

To understand a little bit better as to why people don't flock to see films by artists pushing the envelope of their medium, Rosenbaum explains why he writes about

films that are hard to come by in the United States if available at all.

"Part of it becomes something like the chicken and the egg problem. How could you ever see certain films that people can't see if you don't write about them? Desire is very important. What motivates me as a filmgoer and as a reader is that there are things that I haven't seen, that I want to see, things that I haven't read that I want to read and sometimes you have to go to great lengths to get there."

To give an example of this idea Rosenbaum talks about a project that he's currently working on dealing with Japanese director Yazuso Masumura.

"I wrote about Masumura in the *Reader* after seeing about five of a dozen of his films screened at his retrospective at the Facets Theatre in Chicago," Rosenbaum says. "After seeing these films I got much more interested in him and decided as best I could to try and see more and more of his work. Well, different things happened.

"I met this really brilliant Japanese grad student at the University of Chicago who happened to have three of his films. The films were without subtitles, but she offered to write these very detailed synopsis of them so I could follow the story. Then, through people I swap videos with in different parts of the world, I put the word out that I was looking for Masumura. A video, subtitled in English, came to me from Israel. I don't know why it was in Israel, but that's where I got it.

"So the point is, if there's a will there is a way and if you start writing about films that you can't see maybe people will start finding ways that you can."

Rosenbaum goes on to state that one of the most important aspects about being a journalist is to draw the public's attention to things that they might normally miss.

"I admit that it's hard at times to read about things that you can't see, but if people have enough interest in really seeing something eventually they'll get to see it," Rosenbaum says. "In the space of one week a sort of cult had built up for the films of Masumura at the Facets Retrospective. I can guarantee you that there are plenty of people in Chicago now that would flock to see any of his films that came to town."

While giving more attention to these types of 'uncommercial' films in his writings, it only makes sense when Rosenbaum says that he rarely finds it necessary to give a big Hollywood film the 'Critic's Choice' of the week.

"If I did then I just become part of the flow of that promotion that they're already spending millions of dollars on, so why should I be part of that?"

Another way, suggests Rosenbaum, to continue spreading the word for films that lack the press they deserve is to have a film society.

"This was an important thing that went on in the sixties," Rosenbaum says. "People would actually project films in their living rooms, invite people over, smoke a little dope and maybe charge a little bit for admissions. There are all types of ways in which culture can get transmitted officially and unofficially and it seems to me that there could be much more unofficial stuff going on then there is."

In comparing the differences between American films and films outside the U.S., Rosenbaum takes an interesting angle towards their similarities: "I've been thinking more and more over the last few years that nationality is becoming less and less significant. It's been significant mostly because there are so many films we can't see that happen to be films from other countries."

There's a lot of debate about Iranian cinema, and though director Abbas Kiarostami is Iranian it is the least interesting or important thing about him. This also works with commercial films.

"There was a piece I wrote for the Chicago Reader and it's arguing that a film like STARSHIP TROOPERS, which everybody calls American, is not really American," Rosenbaum says. "It's just the way it's marketed. It's not directed by an American, it doesn't tell you anything about American life in particular."

"To give another example of what I mean, I was recently in Japan and you can go into one of the McDonald's or Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets in Tokyo and order corn soup. You can't go into a McDonald's in the U.S. and order corn soup, but that's what they like in Japan."

situation involving an Italian brand of espresso that you get in heated cans from vending machines in Japan called Pokka Espresso. It's brewed in California yet the only way that it can be bought in the states is to go to an Asian grocer.

"How is that Italian? This really gets you thinking about nationalities. Is that American, is that Japanese, is that Italian? It doesn't really matter. It's just the labels slapped on them. When people think that McDonald's is the American way of life, it's actually not. Not if they're selling corn soup. This is selling the Japanese way of life."

"It's as if the real unity that one has in the world is not between groups of one nation, it's the fact that

"People talk about the '60s as if it were the Golden Age, but they don't remember that people would wait around for months or even years to see such legendary films by Godard or Resnais,"

we're all subject to the same things that multi-national Capitalism is doing all over the world. So we have a lot of things in common with people in Taiwan, parts in South America, everywhere! Just because they're doing the same things in all these places and you find that there are people who like all the same films in all these places. With the addition of the Internet there are now ways to actually access these people now, and that's very exciting!"

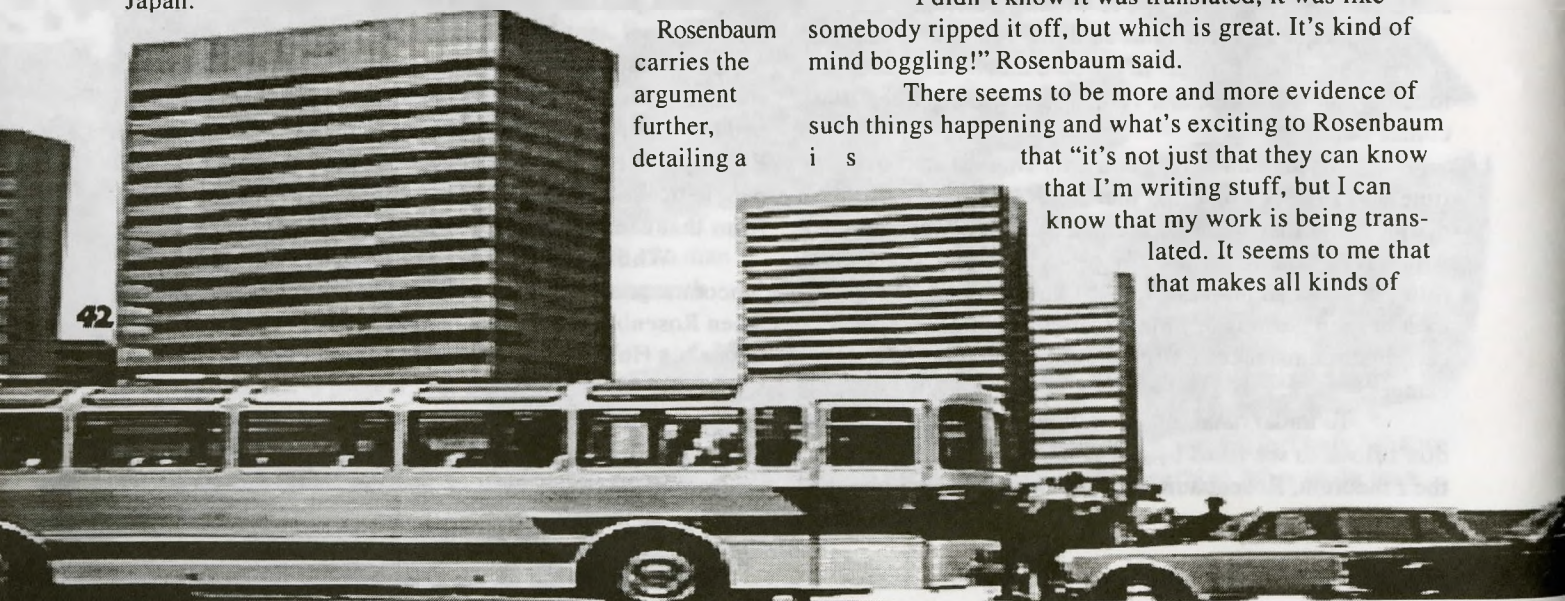
A recent development in Rosenbaum's work, the immediate response he gets via email from countless countries outside of the U.S., stresses this point of similarity across the world.

"A while back I got an email from somebody in Tehran who said, 'I just read your review of TASTE OF CHERRY that was translated into Persian in an Iranian newspaper that was closed down by the Fundamentalists back in May.'

"I didn't know it was translated, it was like somebody ripped it off, but which is great. It's kind of mind boggling!" Rosenbaum said.

There seems to be more and more evidence of such things happening and what's exciting to Rosenbaum is that "it's not just that they can know that I'm writing stuff, but I can know that my work is being translated. It seems to me that that makes all kinds of

Rosenbaum carries the argument further, detailing a



things possible, things that people never even dreamed of before.

“What 20th Century Fox decides to dish out this month in America starts becoming less relevant if people who have these common interests around the world can do something about it. That’s what I like to think. Maybe it’s being a little utopian, but it seems to me there are ways around these situations.”

If we have these similar tastes in films across the world then why do we not get more foreign films distributed in America? For one reason or another, usually an issue of profit, they might never find an American distributor. This leads to the impossibility of ever seeing them here in the States. The only other option we have, if we keep our fingers crossed, is the possibility of these films getting picked up for video distribution.

Rosenbaum says things were the same, with the exception of not having video, back in his early days as a cinephile.

“People talk about the ’60s as if it were the Golden Age, but they don’t remember that people would wait around for months or even years to see such legendary films by Godard or Resnais,” Rosenbaum says. “They don’t remember that it didn’t go the way everybody wanted it to go then in terms of finding and seeing films.”

With the option of having video as a way to view films that may be hard to see, Rosenbaum looks upon it mostly as a reference material and a way to stay in touch with the world when no other option is available.

“I’ve never owned a laser disc player and I don’t know if I’ll ever own a DVD player,” Rosenbaum says. “The next purchase that I want to make is a tri-standard VCR. In other words I’m more concerned about ways in which I’m able to play PAL and SECAM video tapes [a different video system than the U.S.] This allows access to all videos from around the world. That’s what’s important to me.”

Rosenbaum wants easy access to the world of cinema and he believes most people feel the same way. There is the idea that the average American hates foreign films and subtitles.

“I’ve been thinking more and more that this is crap!” Rosenbaum says. “Most Americans haven’t even seen a subtitled film. How can you hate something that you haven’t seen?”

“I also tend to believe that audiences are more open to things than critics are. This is not a lot of people’s perception because they have a way of doctoring the results they get. A lot of self-fulfilling

prophecies go on in the business where you can point to demanding films losing money as if that proves something. Publicity determines so much.”

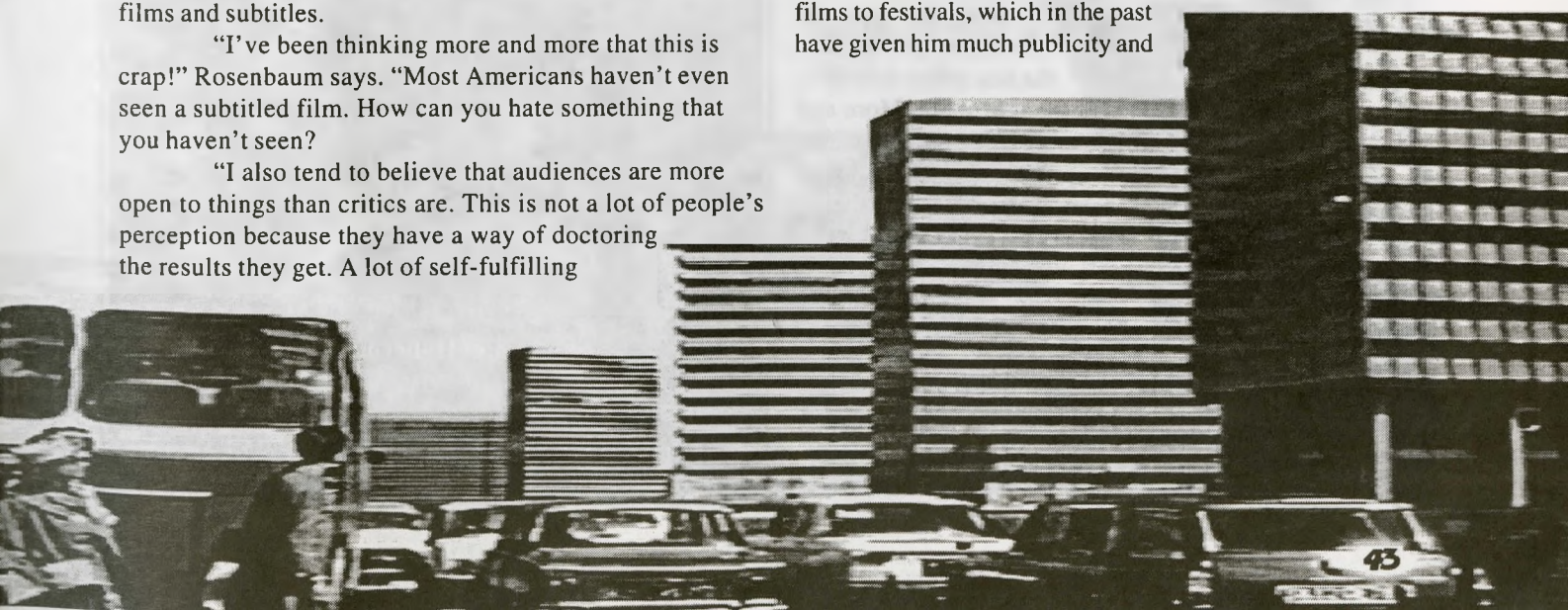
If people haven’t seen a film it doesn’t mean that they made a decision against seeing it, it’s most likely they never even heard of it.

“I wish there was more sophistication about this because a lot of people seem to think just because you hear much more or you read much more in the press about an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie that necessarily means that everybody likes Arnold’s films more than these other kinds,” Rosenbaum says. “It’s like saying that advertising is accurate, is the truth, which people wouldn’t say about other things. It becomes very hard to actually know what the audience likes and what the audience wants and people act as if there’s a way of knowing. There has been a certain kind of way in which bottom-line-thinking businesses have limited the choices everywhere, and in that sense I think that’s one of the many downsides of Capitalism.”

As festivals get more attention from the press they seem to sometimes lose grasp of their initial vision, that they began with becoming a sort of a business convention for agents. There are many festivals out there today that find it more important to celebrate film as an art, and one that Rosenbaum can’t speak more highly about is the Rotterdam International Film Festival that began in 1972 and takes place for one week starting late January.

Rosenbaum remarks, “This is the one festival that I have been attending most frequently. They have a few small prizes, but that’s a very minor part of it. Rotterdam basically shows much more edgy stuff than most festivals. What makes things really exciting is that it’s gotten to the point now where every person in Holland, who’s a film buff and in their twenties, goes to this festival to see these really difficult hardcore experimental films. There’s a real audience for it.”

On the subject of festivals, a while back Kiarostami made a rather bold statement: he would no longer submit his films to festivals, which in the past have given him much publicity and



awards.

Rosenbaum thinks, "What he said was completely reasonable. A lot of people interpret that as 'Oh, he must be upset because he didn't get the top prize,' or, 'He must of hated the fact that it was so nerve-racking to wait and see how he did.'

"What it meant to me was that he's gotten an awful lot of awards before and he doesn't need to do that anymore. He can basically get his films financed. He can pretty much do what he wants to do without having to worry. Kiarostami was also generous enough to say that he thought there was a tendency to give awards to people who were names already and therefore it was time that they started giving prizes to people who weren't so well known. It's also sort of a way for Kiarostami to step out of this publicity thing, which seems to rule so much that happens in movies."

To finish things up I asked Rosenbaum to give an opinion about the critical writings on the films of today.

"I miss (critical film magazines) relative to what we used to have," Rosenbaum says. "The ones that I remember the most, which came out during the '60s and '70s, are *Film Culture* and *Moviegoer* from New York, *The New York Film Bulletin* that had long translations from the *Cashiers du Cinema* (which also had about 12 translated issues released in the U.S.). You do have similar 'publications' that exist on the Internet today, but that's the only place you can seem to find them. Everything else is commercialized and not really about criticism, but much more about promotion."

One of the many things that have sort of filled the void of critical film magazines are the lists that come out in every shape and form.

"When you get interested in something you want to know what to read next, what to see next," Rosenbaum says. "The usual kinds of

lists that are dished out are not always the interesting ones. The main things that you can count on getting are the box office hits of the past week. More and more evidence is coming up that these are doctored, false figures. It's as if the studios are lying about how well a film is doing in its ranking. So lists as these are just a form of advertising.

"Then you get

something like the AFI's list of 100 great American films, and that's just another kind of advertising. There's a need for better lists. When I first started seriously and systematically trying to educate myself about film, I was a freshman at NYU. There was an issue of *Sight and Sound* (in 1961) that had a list of the best movies made according to this international poll of critics. They had individual people's lists and I just started going through and checking off the ones I hadn't seen and looking for them. It was a very basic way that I taught myself and I think it's a very natural thing to do. I think (these types of things) are very important in teaching oneself about an art form."

And an art form is what Rosenbaum teaches. No matter how insignificant you may believe that your desires for seeing films that challenge you are, remain strong and let up on some of your bitterness against the "Man." For there are people across this small planet of ours that have the exact same desires as you. Spend that extra energy toward finding other ways in which to see these films, such as letting Jonathan Rosenbaum be the voice on the headphones as he guides you through the gallery of cinema.

Paolo Ziemba was let out of his Cinemad web cage to interview Rosenbaum, but only by phone.

**Rosenbaum is currently working on several other book projects including *Movie Wars: How Hollywood and the Media Conspire to Limit the Films We Can See*, a book on Jim Jarmusch's *DEAD MAN*, a short book in collaboration with Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa on Abbas Kiarostami and co-editing, with New York film critic Kent Jones, *Movie Mutations*, a lengthy correspondence with four younger film critics, scholars, programmers and writers to explore their views of cinema and to see if their passions were comparable in intensity to the New Wave era cinephiles.*

Rosenbaum's reviews can be found at

www.chireader.com/film

Film Books Recommended by Rosenbaum:

Film Follies

by Stuart Klawans

The Material Ghost

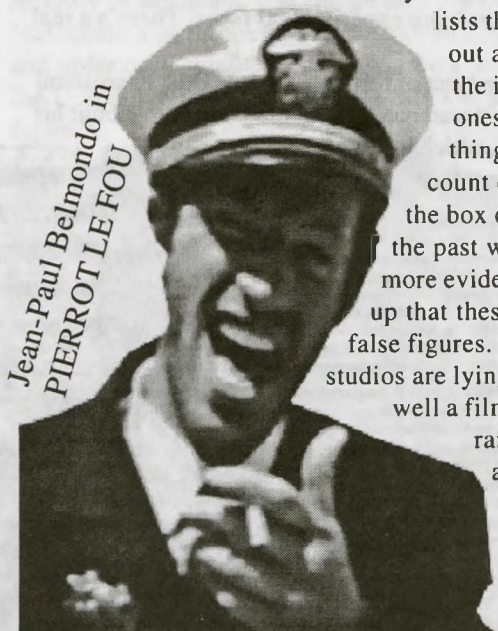
by Gilberto Perez

Red Atlantis

by Jim Hoberman

More Than Night: Film Noir in its Context

by James Naremore



Living in a Movie Theater



Skater/theater manager/projectionist-extraordinaire David Tiss (aka Mr. T) was in between places for a few months in the early 90s. You can guess by now the solution.

Tiss had just lived in a warehouse with other skaters. They all moved and Tiss had a place to live but not for a couple of months. He had a van and could crash at friends' houses on occasion. It was late Fall in Arizona, it doesn't get that cold but a van is only so warm. Plus you still need a bathroom and a place to cook. You also don't want to feel like you are always imposing on people.

The theater was Tiss' only job and he was getting lots of hours, so it was easy enough to stay overnight.

"I'd get done projecting at 11 or 12 at night, close, lock up and hang out, watch stuff," Tiss remembers. "Most of the things I owned were in the van, and some things I kept in the theater. But I didn't have a lot. Because in the skate warehouse, all my money went to plywood and 2x4s."

It wasn't the point in life to move back in with the parents. Tiss would skate during the day, work at night, then sometimes go out and party. He could sleep it off in the van then go to the theater in the morning and sleep some more.

"The theater is nice. It has a hot plate, a fridge



and I kept my sleeping bag there. Of course the running water and bathrooms were good.

"It would get nice and warm during the day so I'd take a shower on the roof. I had a couple of 2 liter soda bottles, fill them up with water, and with the proper sprinkling it's a nice shower. No other tall buildings are around and no one on the street could see me. I didn't worry about aircraft."

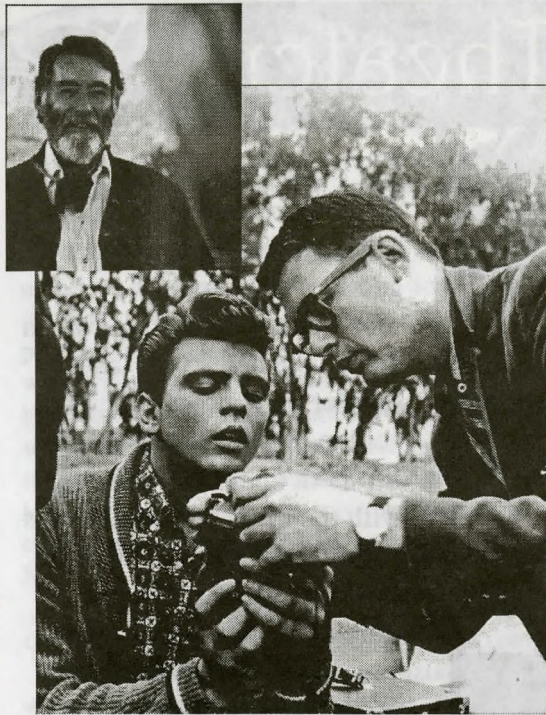
Most of the heat goes into the theater, not in the office where Tiss would stay and sleep. So he put a cup of ice on the thermostat for better equilibrium for the office.

Although Tiss was 'living' at the theater for only a short period, it's always been a second home. You get off late and you're on your bike, or you don't want to go home to roommates' partying, a theater is a nice quiet place to crash. [The publisher admits to a night or two there himself.]

Besides, Tiss adds, "All the tools are here and I can fix my bike or van in the parking lot during the day."



PROS I just listed about 50. CONS No place to keep your towel. Can't leave stuff in the bathroom. Sometimes no toilet paper and you'd notice too late. Everyone's got access to your stuff. If you got nothing to do and want to hang out, too bad, you're open for business.



UNKNOWN PAINTERS

Robert
Coburn
Jr.
and
Hollywood
still
photography

top: Coburn Jr talking to Cinemad;
showing Fabian a camera

photos by Coburn, Jr:
opposite: Gary Cooper
49: James Stewart
50: Jack Lemmon

photos by Coburn, Sr:
48: Rita Hayworth
48: William Holden & Kim Novak
from PICNIC

Small world #784: One of the two guys who works at the printer where Cinemad is done is reading the mag and says, "Hey, you should talk to my Dad. He was a still photographer for a long time." That's cool, what did he work on? "All kinds of stuff, like VERTIGO. In fact, his Dad started in the '20s and helped create glamour photography." It didn't take us long to head out to a modest house in the desert just West of the Tucson Mountains to talk to the now-retired Robert Coburn Jr.

The first thing Robert Coburn Sr. did was stunts. Of all things, he held the pole vault record for years at Hollywood High School; somehow he translated that into a job as stuntman for one of the production companies at the time.

Coburn Sr. also delivered film, by motorcycle, to the theaters. One day the brakes crystallized on the motorcycle and his leg shattered in multiple fractures. Of course, after that his career as a stuntman was finished.

Someone asked if he could shoot any stills, and coincidentally it happened that Coburn had a little photo studio in North Hollywood. His long photography career started in the mid-20s working for Columbia Studios. In those days, all the major studios had photo galleries and their own still lab. They had actors and actresses under contract and had big gallery sittings right away after shooting, replete with drama coaches and bit parts to flesh it out.

Coburn Sr. became one of the best and most notable photographers in Hollywood. He shot more photos of Rita Hayworth than anyone else did and worked on a myriad of projects, including KING KONG and CITIZEN KANE. His use of light and expression is beautiful, and many of his photos are easily recognizable. One of his photos of a young Robert Stack was found on Anne Frank's wall.

It's no secret, then, how Robert Coburn Jr. got into the stills business. "I would watch my father in awe. He had a way with people; he could get them to do what looked good.

"When they did the gallery setting for SOME LIKE IT HOT, it was at another studio and Jack Lemmon made them go to Columbia to do the stills. The whole cast came over. Lemmon said, 'If you want really good stuff that's where you go.'"

Coburn Jr.'s sort of introduction was tagging along with Dad on the film FORWHOM THE BELL TOLLS with Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman. He just kept going to sets until he started working on them.

"I took pictures in high school for the yearbook and photography classes," Coburn remembers. "In the summer times I worked in the photo lab at Columbia Pictures as the helper. Dad gave me a dollar a day for going in and polishing tins to dry prints and doing whatever anybody asked me to do. I think that was a very important thing: To see the work of other photographers."

The first thing Coburn Jr. worked on was a new version of an old serial. Columbia had some footage of a serial done 10 or 20 years earlier.

"The studio wanted to use all that to save money, but re-do the movie. So they hired this guy because he looked like the guy that was in the one before" laughs Coburn today. "He played a Royal Mounted Policeman. They hired other guys who looked like the heavies in the film." The studio wasn't exactly interested in creating art.

"They'd make 80 setups a day. It was incredible. They'd shoot something and hardly ever do a retake. Just, 'Okay now over here. Now over to the cave. Now over to the field.' We were just going like crazy. I

was having a ball. I would be taking an actor's still, I didn't even know what they did!"

The cameras used for stills in the beginning were huge. "At that time still photographers who were working on some sort of production at Columbia would be assigned a locker," Coburn recalls. "In there would be the cameras you would use. They would assign everybody an 8x10 View camera, a 4x5 Speedgraphic and a Graphlex. That's the camera you'd hold by the side and look down. And a Rolleiflex. Later on I went to small formats. I just found that I could work so much easier with a Rolleiflex or a 35mm.

"What happened in those days, you'd take that 8x10 and set it up on the soundstage of the production, on a tripod. At the end of a scene, they would say 'Stills!' You'd run in there and set it down. 'Remember when you looked this way and held the gun?' They would do it and you'd pop off a couple of 8x10s.

The cameras eventually moved to a smaller size as productions didn't want to give the photographer any time. "The smaller format cameras became extremely important because you were able to do good things during rehearsals, behind the camera or over the director's shoulder, in between the producer's legs if you had to.

"It's ridiculous nowadays. You can picture a motion picture camera sitting there with actors in front of it with a whole forest of lights and grips and electricians and the director. You're jockeying for space. Not just to be able to see through there somehow, but to be able to make some decent shots. If you got a cameraman or camera operator who's a good friend of yours they'll often let you stand right next to the motion picture camera."

The still lab made 8x10s to go to the theaters, but magazines were very important for publicity. *Photoplay*, the movie magazines of the day and *Life* magazine all wanted to introduce a movie before the others. And the photographers needed magazine credit.

"Credits have been sort of a sore point with photographers over the years," Coburn says. "One thing we did at Columbia - and my father was responsible for that - on the back of every photograph that went out of there was the photographer's name. Sometimes when it was printed in a newspaper or a magazine they would honor that credit. You would hope they would.

"Nowadays credits are still extremely important to photographers. You'll see a picture in a magazine and it'll say Warner Brothers or Paramount. I'll think, boy that's a beautiful photograph, I wonder who took that? Of course, nobody knows because there's no credit. There are so many collections of photographs now they just use the name of the collection. That's a shame."

While the pay was generally good for photographers within the unions and studios, especially in the 50s and 60s, it was always much harder to get a reputation there than working outside the Hollywood system.

"My father was one of the first to get screen credit. For Rita Hayworth's *COVER GIRL* (1944) he did magazine covers and art that appeared in the movie itself.



"Ordinarily photographers never [got screen credit]. [The lack of credit] made it hard to move from place to place because you needed a reputation. You had to be known somehow. So sometimes the reason you were hired was because of a director or an actor or your reputation. But the magazine photographers who came from New York, they had established a reputation through *Life* or wherever and were extremely well-known."

Coburn makes a good analogy between film photography and another art: "Photographs and paintings — sometimes I think of the old masters that painted pictures of kings and princes and their families. What they remember now is the name of the painter. They say, 'Isn't that beautiful, how could someone do that?' You see the name of the painter and you forget what the name of the king or prince was.

"If in 200 years they look back, I'm hoping that they'll say, 'Gee that's a marvelous photograph, I wonder who took that?' It isn't that way now, it's 'That's a marvelous photo, what actor is that?'"

One day Coburn was called over to Paramount to discuss working on *VERTIGO*. "I never wondered why they would call me to Paramount when they never had before. They told me what kind of stills they did and they wanted me to be the set photographer, which meant I would be going back to shooting Rollies and 4x5s, wardrobe and set stills. That's not what I had been used to, but I thought, heck, I'm working with Hitchcock and I'm not going to turn the job

continued on page 49



Gallery Owner DAVID FAHEY on
ROBERT COBURN SR.



David Fahey has been exhibiting and selling glamour photography in Los Angeles for the past 25 years with the Fahey/Klein gallery. Fahey edited the book *Masters of Starlight* (1987) in accordance with a show at the LA County Museum of Art of the best early Hollywood glamour photographers. In February 2000 his gallery did a show solely of Robert Coburn Sr.'s work.

"If Alfred Eisenstaedt lived in Los Angeles, he would have made Hollywood photographs," Fahey says. "Or any famous photographer... So it was really about showcasing and bringing to the attention of the photographic excellence of this group of photographers, of which Coburn Sr. is a member.

"They all have distinctive styles, as he does. And they were all very competitive. As a consequence, that competition made them all reach into unique territory. So we have this broad spectrum of very distinctive, stylistically different photographs.

"I would point out that Coburn Sr. was one of the best photographers and Hollywood just happened to be his subject matter. It's typically thought of as

Hollywood, the subject matter being the issue here. But really you have to be a great photographer to make great pictures. It's that simple. Of that '40s golden era, George Hurrell, Coburn and Clarence Sinclair Bull stood out."

While Hollywood's photographers weren't household names, famous photographers looked to their California counterparts' work in magazines like *Life*, *Photoplay*, *Modern Screen* and *Collier's* for inspiration.

"The magazines were an important part not only in creating an aristocracy for America, movie stars becoming kings and queens," Fahey explains. "They were the inspirational role model that people looked up to, they represented this ideal. That was personified by these luscious, beautiful, gorgeous photographs."

That whole phenomenon of celebrity has run motion pictures since the start.

"There's a tremendous amount of emphasis put on the importance of these people. It's not that they are unimportant, they're individuals that have achieved a certain amount of recognition based on their talent and ability. So, in other words, if it was a successful lawyer and he was in a field where he had to be photographed all the time, you'd know about lawyers more.

"Fame and what that represents is an interesting topic to discuss. People want to be close to fame. Being able to buy a magazine with your favorite star in it is a way of gaining access to behind the scenes. Or being privy to more information about these people. In a way it brings the viewer closer. If people are inspirational to other people, then so be it. Harmless, I think, unless you get caught up in it. It just is what it is.

"What I've always felt that was one of the hindrances, for lack of a better word, was the fact that the subject matter was Hollywood and these personalities which can be very overpowering. People tend not to look and examine the importance of these as individual photographic images. (Instead it's) how great Clark Gable looked or what not.

"But if you look at it the way you judge the excellence of anything in any capacity is you tend to compare them with their peers at the time that they worked. And if you examine Hollywood photography relative to other photography that was being done at that time, you'll see unique, original, fresh, inventive photographs being made. That really what it's about. Sometimes it just takes time for that to get its proper due."

"One way that I can always identify a great photographer, any great photographer, is if someone lays out 50 pictures on the floor and they're all by different people. You can point without looking at the back and identify that photographer. That's the real test. His byliner, his signature, is his work and the style.

"And that's kind of the case with Coburn Sr. You mix him in with 50 other Hollywood photographers and lay them all out and try to test me on this, I can tell you what's the Hurrell, what's the Coburn.... He's being compared to the real greats."

The studios were never (and are not now) interested in the art of it's still photography, and needn't be, other than the people working for them were at the top of their field and great photos resulted.

"Their primary interests were marketing and salability. It isn't like all of a sudden the power base in Hollywood has now recognized how important these are. It's small potatoes for them. But individuals today - directors and actors and producers - recognize the beauty, importance and rarity of these iconic images."



continued from page 47

down.

"I was walking out of the lot and ran into Kim Novak on the street. She says, 'Oh, hi Bob! I'm glad to see you here, I asked for you on this movie.' And I thought, oh man, if I knew that a half-an-hour ago, I would've pushed for the job I usually did."

Coburn worked with Novak on five movies. "She liked the photographs I got. A very nice lady. I wouldn't say insecure, but at the time she was a young up-and-coming actress trying to find her spot. She liked familiar faces around her, especially when she would move into a new production or studio."

The longtime photographer says Hitchcock was a character.

"We were shooting on the street near Nob Hill. A woman came by wheeling a baby carriage. It took a moment but she recognized him. 'Oh, Mr. Hitchcock — oh Mr. Hitchcock! Can I have your autograph?' He turned to her and said, 'Ah, yes, you may, and I see that you've given up whoring.'" Coburn laughs. "She just looked and didn't say anything."

"Same day I think, we were coming out of the hotel, and another woman sees him and says, 'Oh Mr. Hitchcock, what's the name of the movie you're making?' He said, 'To Lay A Ghost.' I thought, 'Can you say that?'"

"For one scene in VERTIGO, Hitchcock wasn't terribly happy with an actor. Rather than put him down as many directors would, Hitch was sort of cruel in a different way.

"After shooting the master of the scene with one camera, Hitch said they were done. The actor asked if he wanted any close-ups or over-the-shoulder shots. Hitch said no and everyone left.

I heard Hitchcock didn't like the guy, but he wasn't gonna tell him. After lunch they had a new fella and re-shot the scenes. I often wonder if that first actor went to see the movie and then he wasn't there!"

Working for Disney, however, was very different.

"About half of the time I was there Walt Disney was still alive. He had control over everything. It was fantastic.

"I hadn't been over there too long, and they called me up: 'Bob, will you go up to Walt Disney's office and take a picture.' An Army general was up there. So I had them

stand in front of the desk and took a couple of shots. I said, 'Thank you very much, Mr. Disney,' and left. In the middle of the afternoon a phone call came down to the lab. It was from Walt's office: 'Tell that young photographer to call him Walt, never Mr. Disney!'" chuckles Coburn. "Everybody called him Walt."

Another Disney project Coburn worked on was the Dean Jones movie MONKEYS GO HOME. "They had all these chimpanzees. It was really crazy; they were all over the place. One of the trainers had this glove with buckshot in it. The way they disciplined the chimps was to whap them in the back of the head if the chimp didn't do what they wanted. The chimp would scream out.

"One day, just as the fella whapped the chimp with this glove and the chimp screamed, Walt Disney walked in the door. He said 'don't ever hit the chimp like that.' The trainer said that's the only way they made them do things. Disney said, 'Listen to what I'm saying, -don't- ever hit the chimp when you're on my lot.' And they didn't after that."

Like every job, Coburn's wasn't without its bad situations. While working on a movie with John Barrymore Jr., son of the famous and alcoholic actor, a scene came up where Barrymore Jr. was carrying around a drink. In no uncertain terms he made it known to Coburn that no photos should be taken of him with alcohol around.

But when the actor was having a fight with the director, Coburn took a shot of them talking. "[Barrymore] stomped over to me and accused me of working for a scandal sheet magazine. He wanted the film.

The publicity man came up and told me to develop the photo and then give him the one photo."

But the bad actor seemed to be more of the exception than the rule according to Coburn.

"People like Jack Lemmon were always fun to be around. Most of the things at Disney were a lot of fun. Jimmy Stewart was one of the nicest guys. Sort of reclusive, sat off by himself, talked to a few people.

"My experience was that the really big stars, Cooper, Stewart, Hayworth, all treated you really well. There were only a few people with temperaments and usually they were actors who weren't of that caliber.

"If there's a pecking order in the motion picture business, photographers would probably be considered pretty low down the line. But you still have to deal with them.



Television was sometimes kind of dicey. You come in for a day or two. The production people were behind schedule; they didn't want to see you at all. You'd try to jockey position for a shot.

"Maybe there was someone who gave them a hard time the day before. Maybe you represented the network to them and they didn't want that. Even though the next day I might be working for Lorimar or CBS. You've got to be part-psychologist and part-photographer. There wasn't time for chit-chat. Tom Selleck was really great about that [during *Magnum, P.I.*]. He'd always remember I would need to get a shot."

Later, Coburn Jr. did receive credit on a film - *MOTEL HELL*. "It was completely exploitative! We shot it out at a ranch in California and then an old soundstage in Hollywood. They had this slaughterhouse on the set. This pig was hanging there for days; it was really starting to smell pretty bad, we couldn't even work in there! It was fun and funny."

Coburn decided to retire in 1992. "I was working on television. I had been away from movies so long that it would've been very hard for me to get back again. They look at your credits or portfolio and want to know what you've done recently. There was always that sort of prejudice between television and movies. It wasn't so easy to move from one to the other. I did both at Disney. But later on it wasn't so easy.

"Quite frankly, the people change so fast that pretty soon you don't know anybody in the studio at all. And then, the classic thing, as you grow older you find out that the publicity people are young. They like to have people around their own age. A whole new group of people come in. I can understand that because the same thing happened to me when I was younger. The energy level is there. So I decided it was time to throw in the towel. I still miss it, sometimes.

"All through film history everybody had a job on a movie set and there was always time to do that job. Camera operator - there was nothing in the world more essential. The actors and the grips and the electricians - everybody had their job to do. [But] the still photographer was on the fringe. The

movie would get done just fine without him. But nobody else. So the still photographer had to fit in and do an important job. I often wondered where people thought these pictures came from. Did they associate them with someone on the set?"

On the other hand, a set photographer has the unique position being on the fringe — the ultimate observer of filmmaking, a process in itself about being a voyeur, observing, recreating.

"In a sense, in a movie production you're not a necessary part of the production so you're almost invisible. And yet you're still there and you're still observing everything. You would never be at a great cocktail party with

famous people unless you were there to photograph it. So if the occasion arose that that were your job, you get to see these people as they really are. Or as you perceive them to be."

Unfortunately, many old photos are not around anymore.

"At Columbia, once every six months, they would take a huge bunch of photos and negatives and burn them. So a lot of their history is just burned up and gone. I assume the other studios had a similar policy. But then I guess the things that do exist are more valuable."

Coburn Sr. retired in 1965 and passed away in 1990. The younger Coburn now lives modestly outside Tucson.

The majority of Coburn Jr.'s work is more candid,

without the stars posing as they usually would for publicity shots. "I didn't realize it at the time, but that's some of the best stuff I did. Off to the side, spontaneous. I don't know if at the time you think of it, you just see something interesting and try to take a good picture. Try to compose it in a certain way if you can.

"Almost always when I look at the work I've done the next day or the next week, I wish I had done something different. Later on, I look at it again and say, yeah, it's pretty good. Especially if you can take a certain part of it and make an enlargement. I did get it, this is something."



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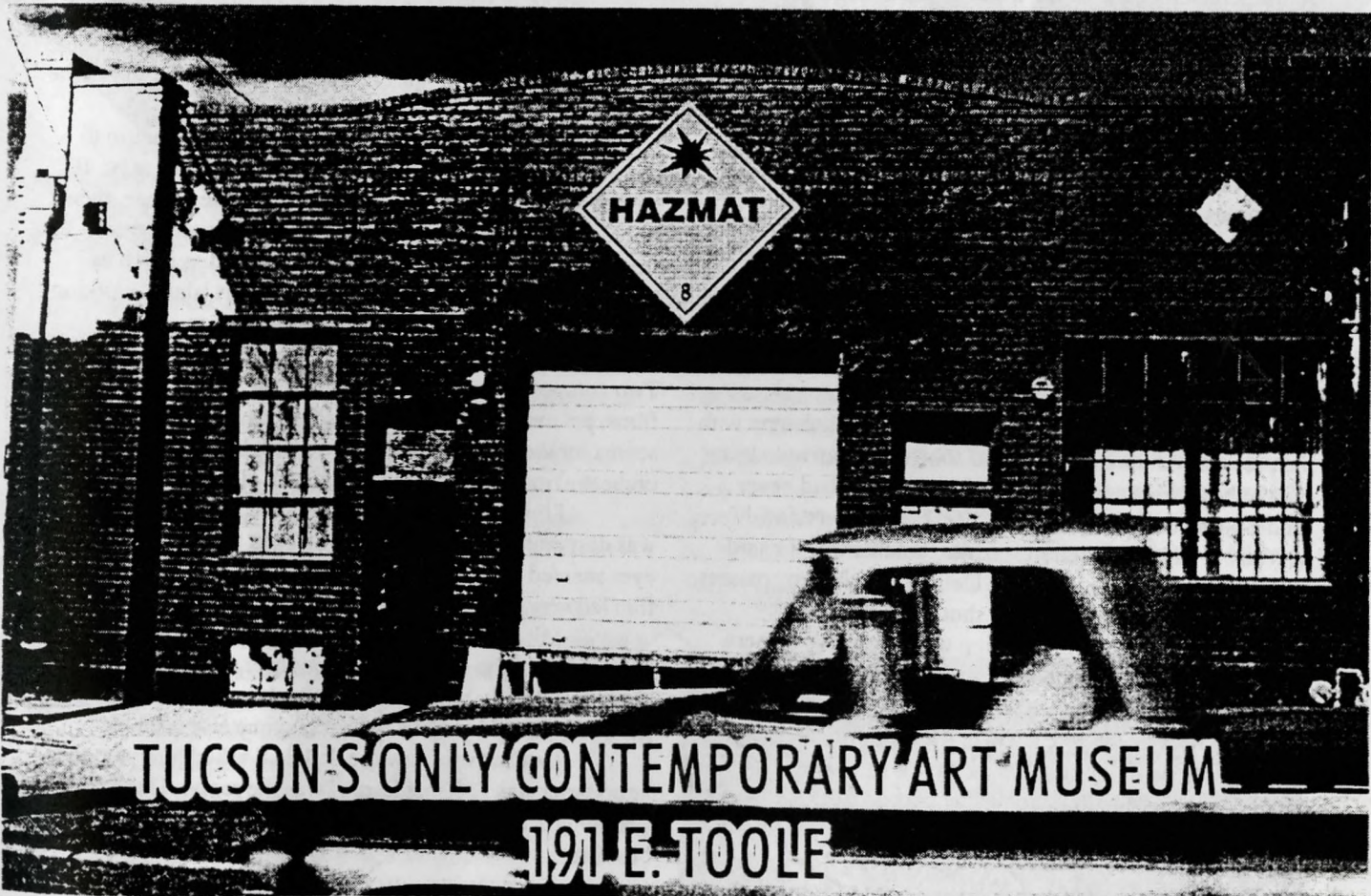
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I Was A PORN Editor

by IAN

No one ever said that being a free-lance film & video editor in Hollywood would be easy and boy, they weren't kidding.

Once I graduated from an artsy film school, it was time for me to move into L.A. and start getting real work. This was harder than I thought, considering I had no experience or connections.

My first job in L.A. was editing a low-budget horror film – real low-budget. The budget was so low in fact that I probably could have made more money working in a shoe store. But hey, it was work, or so I told myself. Still, it was hard to get around the fact that this “epic of modern horror” was yet another rehash of “The Exorcist” – only this time with a Jewish family in Sherman Oaks who call in a Rabbi once their son becomes possessed by the devil. Of course, no one had bothered to tell the (gentile) writer/director that the Jewish faith doesn't believe in demonic possessions and Rabbis don't do exorcisms. At any rate the project played on the screen like one of Ed Wood's worst efforts and once the horrified backers got a look at just what kind of product they had on their hands, we were all out of a job.

However, I had some luck (?) waiting in the wings for me when my assistant editor (who had jumped ship weeks earlier) called to tell me I should come over right away – he was working at a place that needed editors and the pay was three times what I had been making.

Of course – it was editing porn.

Once I had passed the initial interview with the director/producer, which consisted mainly of him showing me his new Ferrari and then advising me that all women were bitches, I was tossed into a small room filled to the ceiling with thousands of feet of film footage.

Now, I had a challenge – this guy was unhappy with the previous editor and he wanted someone creative to bring out the best in his newest masterpiece. Since I had never seen a porno movie before in my life, I was understandably nervous. I had seen adult magazines, but this was the mid-80's before the luxury of home video had reached my masses, and when even adult films were shot on 35mm.

Their method of shooting was to use two camera set-ups during the sex scenes, in order to get as many angles as possible as quickly as possible, while the dialogue scenes were shot with only one camera. Often the two camera crews would be shooting different scenes simultaneously on two different sets and just rotate the cast in order to cover as many scenes as possible. The shooting schedule on the average film was between two and three days.

Ultimately, the director/producer told me that I

passed the creativity test with his footage. I think that it actually helped that I hadn't seen what other adult films were like. With a film school background of Antonioni and Bergman, rather than Holmes and Jeremy, I made my own style up as I went along, even throwing some avant-garde techniques from school like using flash cuts and multiple montages superimposed on one another.

The director/producer seriously thought of himself as the “Spielberg of porn” and approached his projects as real movies that just “happened” to have hard-core sex in them. Still, this was a matter of debate.

The whole operation was handled like a mini studio. Its structure was similar to the golden days of MGM. There was a story department (!), a soundstage, editing rooms, a recording studio, an art department, a shipping & receiving department, a video duplication department, and sales reps all under one roof.

The main staff writer was the first person I had ever met with perpetually green teeth. He lived in a derelict area of Hollywood. His comments to me after a screening would always be along the lines of “the director hasn't done justice to my screenplay”, or “they missed the core of the story – he didn't even pull off the third act.”

There really wasn't a typical story of scenario to these films – the formula existed mainly in the sex acts: BJ with this couple, they swap, later a straight sex scene, then lesbian, and on and on. But to give those writers credit – the stories invented around the sex acts changed as much as humanly possible: ship wrecked on a desert island, working on a farm, long lost cousins, haunted mansions...

The music department was rather ambitious, as well. Two composers, waiting for their big break into mainstream films, put everything that they had into wall-to-wall music scores for these films: theme songs with bouncy lyrics, orchestral music, Hawaiian, country or classical, you name it.

I think that just about everyone behind the scenes was desperate not to become a “lifer” in porn. Everyone's eyes seemed to look towards bigger and better things in the film industry.

My (minor) claim to fame in the porn industry came one day when the director/producer breezed in all excited about this “really hot girl” that he had heard about and had to get into some of his films before “anyone else used her.”

Later when I saw the dailies, I asked him who this new starlet was – “Traci Lords” was the reply. Thankfully, I was long out of there when the Traci Lords scandal hit the business.

Since my employer liked what I was doing, he

approached me several times to direct some of his projects. But I was in a safer position – no name or face recognition – just a made-up editorial credit, or nom de porn.

I did have contact with the actors, though. Often they wanted to see their scenes in the editing room as I worked on the footage.

I wasn't sure what to expect: I imagined the actresses would swing into the room on a vine dressed in bondage gear, or actors would rip the door off the hinges as they walked in. But overall, they were very polite -shy almost- with a very direct "thank you for showing me that scene." One actress wanted to see some of her footage, but didn't want to see any sex stuff. Since I didn't have much else, I showed her a reel of slates – the outtakes with the clapperboard before she went into action.

The actors were a little different. They always wanted to see everything and usually were pretty proud of themselves. I used to feel a little strange sitting next to the guy, while he's looking at close-ups of his cock. How do you small talk? "Wait, wait, here's an even better angle..."

Sometimes it was difficult to sound professional and discuss editorial decisions. I remember having a phone conversation with the director/producer while he was on location and trying to describe his scene.

He asks, "Well, how hard was his dick?"

"On a scale of 1 to 10...?"

"Does he get it in?"

"Well, he kind of folds it in two and puts it in."

"Okay we can use that."

Yes, after a while you could start to recognize actors and actresses by their private parts alone. This put a new spin on the idea of knowing someone intimately without really knowing him or her.

One morning I walked in to find that my editing room had been used as a film set. (Probably made to look like the inside of a van.—*ed.*) Over the weekend, the planned location had become "hot" (police were in the area) and the crew didn't have anywhere else to film as the soundstages in the building were already in use.

Unfortunately, everything in the room looked like it had been touched by dozens of greasy hands. Greezy tissues were all over the floor. Handprints on all the walls and chairs, and a stack of empty KY tubes in the corner. Even our lunch table in the room was slimy.

According to the crew, there were four people fucking on it. That changed the atmosphere in the room for a while. My editorial assistant cleaned it up and we ate lunch out for quite a while afterwards.

In retrospect, this job taught me a lot about using editing to cheat a performance. Most of the dialogue performances were so poor, I had to come up with tricks to help them out. I often played someone's dialogue off camera, or over his or her shoulder, or took dialogue from a previous take and cut it to fit in the mouth of an actor in a later take.

Anything to boost the performance.

The main concern with the sex scenes was to eliminate anything that wasn't "sexy". This was usually the inevitable awkwardness of limbs getting tangled in clothing, grimaces because of painful positions, actors flopping around because they were confused as to which position to assume next, and what we called "NVE" (no visible erection).

One outtake that was pretty funny to my assistants and me was where a couple was starting foreplay in a barn on a pile of straw and the guy's zipper got stuck. Finally he was hopping up and down to try to pull his pants down while cameras kept rolling.

The learning curve with this type of material is limited and after months it became frustrating and felt like a dead end. I was toiling night and day over something that I could never really show in public (with the exception of a few friends). I told most of my other friends and family that I was working on "low-budget movies, nothing you'd want to see".

In retrospect, I don't think that I could have worked in later mainstream projects without my year of porn experience. It comes down to the same thing – you gotta work fast, you gotta know how to do stuff right the first time and be efficient with problem solving. I certainly leaned that on adult films. And in that arena, if you made a mistake, it wasn't the end of the world - fix it and move on.

It's also a revolving door. People work a few days of months and then move on. One time I overheard a cameraman's voice on the audio and recognized it as a person I went to school with. I called him up –

"Hey, are you working in porn?"

"Uhhh.... Yeah. How the hell did you know?"

"Because I'm editing it!"

Also, the carrot that our porn director/producer had in front of all our noses was that someday he'd move into mainstream films and take us all with him.

But that never worked out – once shooting and editing video took over the adult film world and the market was flooded, this guy's business went down the tubes.

It was time for me to move on to real projects. I got a job through another friend at — Cannon films. Once there, I was dealing with incredibly long work-weeks (85 hours and up!), incredibly short deadlines, incredibly trashy films, and bomb threats from Palestinian terrorists – but that's another story.

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Our returning champion is **STATE OF GRACE** with an amazing 189 fucks for 1.41 per minute. I don't remember anything else about the film. Sean Penn is cool.

First Contestant: **GOODFELLAS**

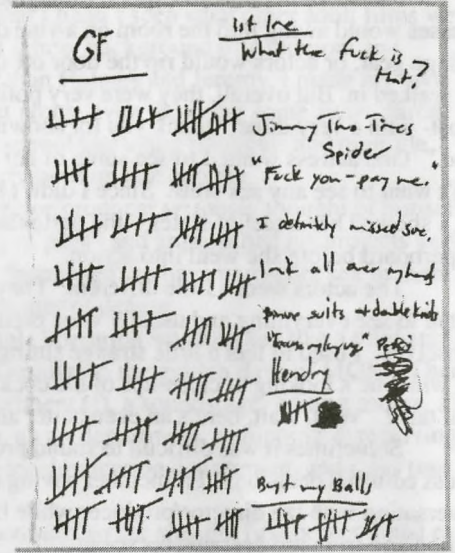
(1990) Directed by Martin Scorsese.

Written by Nicholas Pileggi and Scorsese.

Starring Ray Liotta, Robert DeNiro, Joe Pesci, Lorraine Bracco, Frank Vincent (ThatGuy), Debi Mazar (ThatGirl).

In my opinion, the best mainstream film of the 1990s. Every technical and storytelling part is well-made and entertaining. Especially the language. Liotta plays the apparently good-looking and suave real-life mobster Henry Hill; narrating his rise and fall through the ranks of a powerful, violent and self-destructive group of gangsters. The very first line in the film is "What the fuck is that?"

Extra credit: Jimmy Two-Times, Spider, "Fuck you - pay me" three times in a row, "Bust my balls" a bunch of times, and I definitely missed a few.



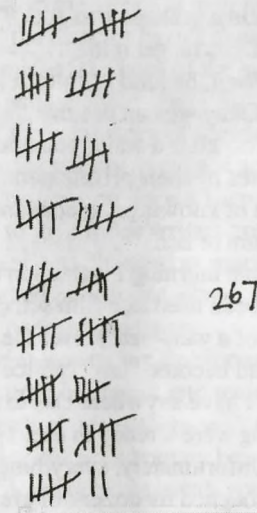
Second Contestant: **SCARFACE**

(1983) Directed by Brian DePalma, Written by Oliver Stone.

Starring Al Pacino, Michelle Pfeiffer, Steven Bauer (ThatGuy), Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Robert Loggia (ThatGuy).

Disappointing.

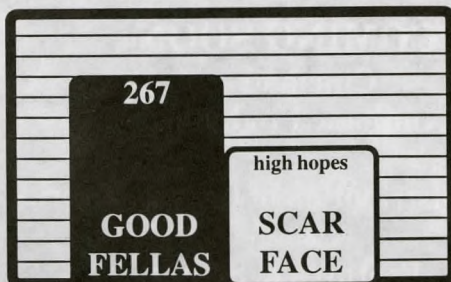
Extra Credit: Say hello to my ThatGuys.



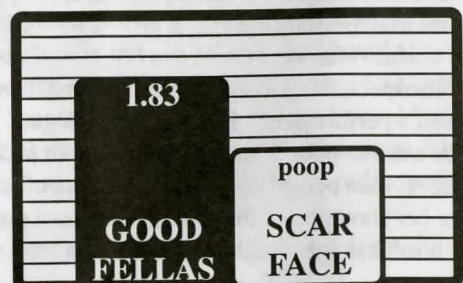
THE RESULT: Whaddya expect? **GOODFELLAS** sets records.

Next Issue: **POPE OF GREENWICH VILLAGE** vs. Tommy Lasorda.

SAYING THE WORD



AVG PER MINUTE



OTHER READS

Small press sticks together

BadAzz Mofo

-Full size/Five bucks/David Walker, PO Box 40649,
-Portland, OR 97240-0649 www.badazzmofo.com
-BadAzz Mofo Zodiac Calendar 2000/Six bucks
Unfortunately, Issue 5 is going to be the last BAMF for a while. But since Walker's own writing is hilarious, informative and makes the mag, it is best that he's not just turning it over to someone else. Hopefully this voice will return to print soon. #5 features foot-to-ass chicks like kingpin Pam Grier.

Cashiers du Cinemart

-Full size/Three bucks/PO Box 2401,
-Riverview MI 48192 www.cashiersducinemart.com
If we didn't come up with ThatGuy, he might have. This is from Mike White, who made a couple of videos illustrating what Tarantino ripped off for his films. CdC covers more things with 'star' in the title than I'm into but it is always good to have a different point of view of Hollywood from the outside.

Cinema Scope

-Full Size/Five Bucks/ 465 Lytton Blvd, Toronto,
-Ontario M5N 1S5 Canada
-cinema_scope@hotmail.com
Canada has many good things and this is one of them. With writings from tons of professional critics - not the "I'm on the staff and like movies" kind - Scope will give you insight and a deep film list of what to see. Although they highlight films that don't show everywhere, this will give ammo to those who demand to see fresh and unusual stuff. Maybe then distributors will wake up and listen.

The Diplomat

-Digest/Two and a half bucks/SEND CASH/
-Chris Cilla, 542 N.E. San Rafael, Portland OR 97212
Cilla is crazy. Just say his name like a monster - ChrisCilla. More damning evidence can be found in his comics, obviously formed from hallucagenetic dreams and funny true stories. Kind of 'Archie' in purgatory.

Farm Pulp

-Tall Sized/Three bucks/PO Box 2151,
-Seattle WA 98111-2151
I've got a yen for Acme Novelty Library-style humor, writing and design: ass-whippingly funny but not simple smartass cleverness, a slick layered design that is also original, all in all a clean lesson of harsh sunlight in publishing. So I really like FARM PULP. Not as image heavy as Acme, but a rad design with some half-pages and other fold-out doo-dads. If every zine was this thought-out I would quit and read for a living.

Loud Paper

-Digest/Three Bucks/Mimi Zeigler, 1521 LeRoy Ave,
-Berkeley, CA 94708 loudpaper@excite.com
A solid zine dedicated to "architectural discourse." I like the writing a lot and the look is stylish without being overloaded with design, very nice.

Multiball

-Full size with a 7" record/Four bucks fifty cents/
-PO Box 40005, Portland OR 97240 www.multiballmag.com
God I love pinball. Nothing against other electronic forms of entertainment, but pinball is real. So I'm liking Multiball a lot, with down-to-earth writing on everything pinball and music. 72 pages and a seven inch!

Shock Cinema

-Full Size/Five bucks/Steve Puchalski, PO Box 518,
-Peter Stuyvesant St., New York, NY 10009
<http://members.aol.com/shockcin/> Too many cult film mags out there, poorly made, usually with a monster on the cover. Borders carries every friggin' one. Get Shock instead.

Snackbar Confidential

-Digest/Two bucks and 95 cents/SEND CASH/
-PO Box 895 Saratoga Springs NY 12866
"An itchy trigger on your memory finger." The tagline on the cover describes it best: a crazy collection of ads from the 60s and 70s, ranging from the movie Earthquake to various foods to the Land O Lakes breast trick to Modell's Shoppers World. Yeah, it sounds easy, but the products in here are amazing, either completely taking me back to stuff I had forgotten about or weird things I had never heard of. Also, good writing explaining the products or things like the Lucy/Quisp Connection.

Stay Free!

-Full Size/ Four bucks/PO Box 306, Prince Street Station,
-New York, NY 10012 <http://metalab.unc.edu/stayfree/>
A great nonprofit zine covering commercialism and American culture, along the lines of *Adbusters*. The nice layout emphasizes the writing, which is informative and humorous. Readers can learn without getting out the dictionary or getting browbeat. This issue has both sides on ads, good or bad, and info on pHARMaceuticals. Like the Noam Chomsky doc, some of the info gets you down, but FREE is also very funny.

Zine Guide

-Full Size/Six bucks/PO Box 5467, Evanston IL 60204
zineguide@interaccess.com
Indispensable. No matter what you're into -music, film, poetry, bowel movements- you can find something about it in here. Indexes by topics and people; recommendations and quotes about titles.

ALSO CHECK OUT: Acme Novelty Library, Adbusters, Beer Frame, Cometbus, Dishwasher, Exile Osaka, Eye, Heinous, Infiltration, Juxtapoz, McSweeney's (fantastic), Psychotronic, Psychoholics Unanimous.



ROBERT KRAMER

1939 - 1999

by Tom Vick

A few years ago, when I was a graduate film student at CalArts, a filmmaker named Robert Kramer came to spend a few weeks as a visiting artist. I was unfamiliar with his work before he came, but over an intense couple of weeks of workshops my respect for him grew immensely. Here was a man with an uncompromising commitment to the creative life; a man who refused to abandon the artistic and political convictions he developed during the volatile 1960's, and who now conveyed

those convictions to younger generations with the same fervor that obviously continued to fire his work.

Kramer's workshops were an inspirational experience for all of us. He pushed us to challenge ourselves in our work, and offered incisive commentary on everything we did. I kept in touch with him via email for a while afterwards (he even took the time to offer some carefully considered and very constructive commentary on a tape I sent him of a film I was working on), but eventually we fell out of touch. So I was shocked and saddened when I found out, last November, that he had died in a hospital in Rouen, France, of meningitis, at the age of 60.

Kramer began his film career in the 1960's with *Newsreel*, where he first made a splash with the controversial documentary *IN COUNTRY* (1966). To make it, Kramer and his crew traveled to Vietnam and interviewed the peasants and villagers whose homeland was being destroyed by the American military campaign. It's a stunning anti-war document, and was instrumental in galvanizing the American political left against the war. Kramer probably could easily have gone on making documentaries, but his creative energies soon moved him in a new direction. *THE EDGE* (1967), *ICE* (1969), and *PEOPLE'S WAR* (1969) simultaneously documented the radical community of which he was a part, and speculated on what could happen if the tensions of the times ever reached the breaking point.

He continued making politically engaged, aesthetically challenging films throughout the 1970's, but the political and artistic climate in America was becoming more and more conservative. Unable to find financing for his films, he moved to Paris in 1980, where his career flourished. He continued to make films right up to the end of his life. As his career progressed, he moved gradually away from the stridency of his *Newsreel* work to a more contemplative style reflecting the conflicting feelings of an expatriate equally alien to the country in which he was living and the constricting political climate of a world being led by the United States further and further into both consumerism and conservatism. He returned to his native country to make the monumental *ROUTE ONE/USA* (1989), inserting a fictional character (Doc) into actual places and situations. A profound longing pervades *ROUTE ONE*, as if both Kramer, along with Doc, is somehow lost, barely able to recognize the land he left only nine years before.

He also returned to Vietnam in 1993 to make *STARTING PLACE*, a gorgeous and lyrical document of his attempts to reconnect with the people he met when he made *IN COUNTRY*. Like most of his work, *STARTING PLACE* refuses to let itself be a simple documentary. It is also an investigation of Kramer's own sense of loss, his realization that the hopes he and his radical comrades had for the world have almost all been dashed.

Unlike a lot of artists who came of age in the 1960s, Robert Kramer never let go of his political beliefs, and he never lost faith in the idea that people could change the world for the better. He was almost entirely unique in his ability to articulate the condition of the post '60s radical without lapsing into useless nostalgia for the glory days. And he never lost his love for the very process of filmmaking, or his commitment to it as both a means of communication and an art form. In an interview at the 1997 Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, he said, "When people talk about filmmaking and they start to talk about their agent and the script, I don't know what they're talking about. That has nothing to do with the filmmaking that I feel like I'm involved in. It's all about that adventure which is in the framework of an almost constant application of filmmaking on a daily basis. Which is really a kick, it's wonderful."

He will be missed.

**BOB'S COUNTRY
BUNKER**
TONIGHT ONLY
THAT GUY
CINEMAID

