

Issue One
40 pages

Cinemad



Nina Menkes

David Shea

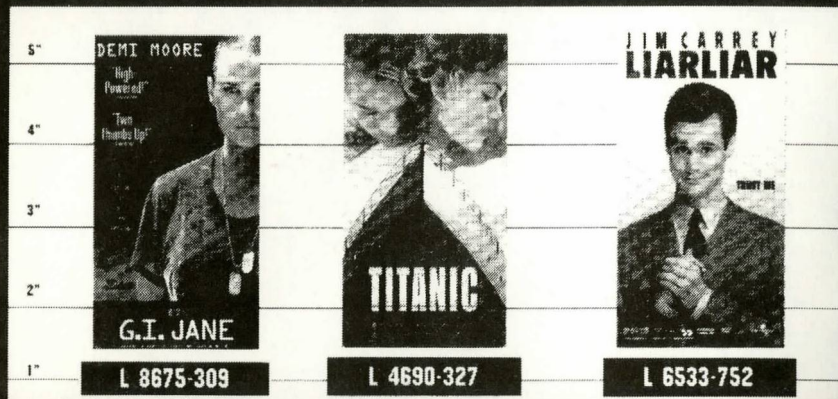
**Unholy
Tarahumara**

Kiarostami

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Interviews -- How To Find Films -- ThatGuys

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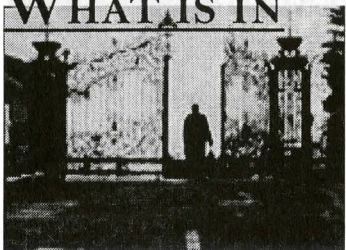
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WHAT IS IN



CINEMAD

"I'm almost not crazy now." — Gena Rowlands, *Love Streams*

ISSUE ONE

Please! Read the INTRODUCTION	2
The Abstract World of Nina Menkes Interview with America's Foremost Female Director	4
The Soundtrack Stylings of David Shea Interview with the Composer.....	10
The Unholy Tarahumara An unusual documentary Interview with Director Kathryn Ferguson	18
The "fiction" of Abbas Kiarostami	24
and our other items...	
IN CASE YOU MISSED IT	46
THATGUY (character actors) Elisha Cook Jr.	30
Warren Oates	32
THE SEARCH FOR FILMS	34
My Brush with the French by John Eidswick.....	38
F*CKFEST (all about the word).....	39
OTHER ZINES.....	40

CINEMAD

A film magazine blurring the borders.

published occasionally.

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written & layout by Plante unless noted

Front: Tinka Menkes, from *Bloody Child*

Back: Warren Oates, ThatGuy

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Introduction to CINEMAD

Painters aren't taken as seriously if they do billboards rather than personal, meaningful work. Writers aren't taken as seriously if they do Hallmark cards rather than deep character novels. Filmmakers ARE taken seriously if they do a shallow billboard Hallmark card rather than personal, meaningful work with deep characters. All films and filmmakers should have a place, but it is too one-sided in favor of mindless profit right now.

So in a small way this mag is going to help what I see as not getting enough coverage. It's not that everything out there in the mainstream sucks, it's just that many talented films and personalities don't get enough press because they don't fit a certain agenda or don't have enough money. Film is not a competition or the stock market.

And when I do see someone I like on a magazine's cover, their interview is still only two pages long. Since I spend a lot of time searching for stuff, maybe I can save someone else some time and help the filmmaker out, too.

While I think most everything in this mag is interesting, each reader will disagree with *something*. I do all the time. I own the *VideoHound* book for its genre lists, synopsis's (is that right?) and actor-director filmographies. Unfortunately, it limits itself to only what's available on video and the cinematographer filmographies need a lot of work. I don't always agree with their ratings (DOUBLE DRAGON is better than DOUBLE LIFE OF VERONIQUE??). I own the *Maltin* book for its listings of what is in scope format and it has a ton of stuff not available on video. But no filmographies and ratings I highly disagree with (TAXI DRIVER is trash?). Maltin's CD-Rom *Cinemanía* has incredible filmographies. But it can get only so obscure with foreign films. So all together they work pretty well, not to mention the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) and others. *Cinemad* is just another resource for films, hopefully one of the good ones.

I constantly went back and forth about my own language in writing about films and people. The way I talk is pretty slang, pretty bad English, too fast and too slurred. So when people see me (I dress slurred, also) talking about Kurosawa or Godard or Huston or Wyler and using "Man, that's fucking cool!", I wonder if they take me seriously, thinking I really mean Black Flag or the Circle Jerks (they rule, too). I can't help it.

So I wrote some stuff very serious, talking about film language. Then I felt I was being too "commental" and worried it would come off pretentious. I don't like having to keep a dictionary next to me when I read reviews.

I also worried about being too "zine". I love zines and their up-front modesty and I'm very inspired by them. There are some great ones out there that



Cinemad Issue One is a Nihilistic Production made possible by cool people:

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Nina Menkes

David Shea

Kathryn Ferguson

really care about what they're writing about on all kinds of subjects. But I don't want to write the same issue about the same films over and over again. Or simply saying "This film is awesome and everyone should like it," and give no reasoning other than the actor is cool. Or only liking stuff because it's obscure, then abandoning it when it hits the mainstream. I still like Jackie Chan and Jet Li, even though they're on the Howie Mandel show now (which is very surreal). I like old school Hollywood and it has always been mainstream. I don't like VAMPYROS LESBOS just because it's obscure. It's a shitty film. I like some trash and will recommend it for its own sake but I'm not gonna argue that Burt Reynolds is an underrated director.

So finally I realized I was thinking like a producer, worrying about what the TV audience will think. *Cinemad* is just trying to be different and fill in the holes. There's no agenda. It doesn't hinge on if it's 1 minute or 10 hours long, stylish or realistic, documentary or narrative or both or neither. There's a place for Werner Herzog, Sean Penn, Frederick Wiseman, Sylvia Sidney and Bruce Brown (ENDLESS SUMMER) in here, no matter how different they might seem. And it sucks that I even have to bring up how powerful a female director is because she also produces, writes, edits and shoots her own films. Unfortunately in today's film world, that is a pretty big deal. But that's not the reason why I'll talk about her films.

The mag was originally just gonna be **THATGUYS**. The research just overwhelmed me. Not to mention a lack of callbacks. So TGs are now just a part of the printed mag but will be a bigger part of the website where I've got tons of room and time. Maybe I can do an offshoot mag later.

Cinemad will come out as much as possible, not on a regular basis at the moment. As long as it's fun and pays for itself. Writing it took a long time but I learned a lot and want to do it again. Everyone interviewed was extremely nice even though this is an unknown, low-rent project.

I do plan on making **issue #2** this summer (1999). If it's successful I'll try to get a larger format so I can get even more info jammed in there.

Check out the website if you can. It's a preview of this issue but also has some stuff that we couldn't fit in, plus continual updates on the subjects, especially with various ThatGuys.

Thanks to fellow zinesters David Walker (**Bad Azz Mofo**), Matt Kaufman (**Exile Osaka**), Craig Ledbetter (**Euro Trash Cinema**) and Steve Puchalski (**Shock Cinema**) for their help and/or advice. Thanks to Big Joe, JohnE, Tony, Jeff, Schu, DaveB, Jason, MikeG, Noah, Minda, Phil, Tylka, Brett and Suzanne, Mrs. C, all for lots of different things.

Special thanks to the advertisers, making life so much easier. When in Tucson please frequent them, you won't be sorry. Thanks for reading!

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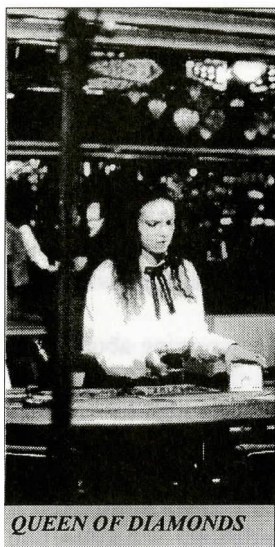
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NINA MENKES

Obsessions From LA

I contacted Nina through USC, where she teaches. She called me back and was very nice, easy-going, sounding surprised that I saw her films and wanted to interview her. Her work is as far from the mainstream as you can get. She answered my questions through email, so it doesn't sound like 'natural' conversation.

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

I've had an awkward time trying to describe Nina Menkes' films to others, usually relying on comparisons. "Uh, Tarkovsky -- Antonioni -- Brothers Quay." So let me step aside and give you what her bio says.

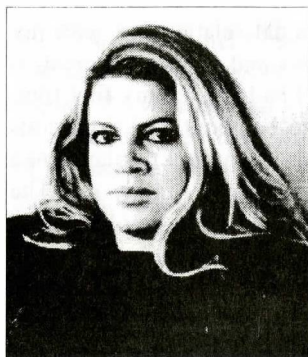
"Nina Menkes is recognized worldwide as one of America's most audacious and provocative directors. Called 'One of the most provocative artists in film today' by *The Los Angeles Times*, Menkes synthesizes inner dream worlds with harsh, outer realities, giving direct expression to shadow sides of contemporary consciousness. Menkes works closely with her sister, actress Tinka Menkes, who stars in each film. Together, the sisters Menkes have conceived and created a body of work that *Sight and Sound* has called 'Controversial, intense and visually stunning.'"

I generally start to fade out when people start bringing up inner worlds and consciousness. I mean, how many films are about nothing but use that same claim? With Menkes' films I feel the opposite. I completely agree with that description. They are minimalist portrayals of 'inner' worlds, as she sees them, often deeply structured and alienated. I've found the films both easier and harder than the filmmakers I mentioned above. Some images were hard to watch, but that has nothing to do with a film being *worth* watching. It's not casual viewing. Her style is abstract and demanding: long takes, metaphorical objects, spoken words rather than dialogue. But the subjects are not obscure to film plots: a hooker in trouble, a bored casino card dealer, a Marine Sergeant on a murder case. And we can relate to the emotions. I wondered if her characters are entirely made up or have something personal or of a friend in them.

"I've never been a dealer, but I understand unrewarded alienated labor in other ways," Menkes says. "I've never been a whore, but I've felt like one, and so on."

How Nina chooses to interpret these subjects is what makes her stand out. As Tinka walks through Herzog-ian worlds (you wouldn't know it was earth if it wasn't for the signposts), one comes away from her films *feeling* them.

Another important fact: Menkes is the only woman alive to produce, direct, shoot, and edit her 35mm features, maintaining complete creative control over



Nina Menkes

every aspect of her productions. Few filmmakers have control as writer - producer - director and even then, they don't usually run the camera and edit the film as well. All in a film system designed to crush this independence, from financiers to distributors to theaters. Even Spielberg had to fight hard just to shoot a film in black-and-white. And other 'successful' women in the film industry spend their time writing *INDECENT PROPOSAL* and directing *LITTLE RASCALS*. It hasn't been easy for Menkes, but she has received tons of granting agency awards, including biggies Guggenheim and Rockefeller. Her films have festival support, including Toronto and Sundance, and among her fans

you can count film personalities Allison Anders, Benicio Del Toro and Gus Van Sant.

An accomplished filmmaker for more than a decade now, Menkes had very little film background before she took up the process herself, growing up "without TV." Before going to UCLA film school, she had experience with photography, dancing and choreography.

While at UCLA in 1984, Nina and Tinka served as the entire cast and crew on *THE GREAT SADNESS OF ZOHARA*. The 40-minute, 16mm film (made for \$6,000) was shot on location in Israel and Morocco and follows a Jewish woman leaving Israel for Arab lands. The trip is more mental and spiritual than physical with eerie narration and schizo images. It won awards at San Francisco and Houston film festivals and is one of Allison Anders' favorites of the decade. It also started Menkes' abstract style of images and metaphor, spoken word over traditional dialogue, real sound over score.

ZOHARA is similar in style and themes to *BLOODY CHILD*, made 12 years later. It seems she knew from the start what stories she wanted to tell and how to do it. But as Cassavetes put it when a reviewer commended his raw, doc style: "You stupid bastard, I couldn't AFFORD a tripod."

"No--my style is not about money," Menkes says. "I hope to have a bigger budget next time, but I don't think my style will change that much. Maybe it will and I'll be surprised. My themes and so on -- these are lifetime obsessions, and have nothing to do with budget!!!!"

Menkes' films have little dialogue, and no traditional score, but are rich with narrated text from the Bible to Gertrude Stein to MacBeth.

"I hate 'normal' dialog, usually. I am not interested in re-creating regular life, but rather, in trying to express the aspects life wears in secret," Menkes says. "Most of our secret lives don't have regular dialog, at least mine don't."

The working relationship between Nina and Tinka doesn't seem forced. It appears more like the strong, unexplainable bond between siblings. They also edit the films together.

Tinka Menkes



"A central aspect of my work -- my professional relationship with my sister, Tinka Menkes, who plays the lead in all my films and is also my creative collaborator-- began almost by chance," Menkes says. "I had wanted my first film, a super-8 short (the 11-minute *A SOFT WARRIOR*), to be about Tinka's serious illness, from which she had recently recovered. I had cast two girls to play Tinka and myself, but one failed to appear. On a whim I asked Tinka to play me. The

results were stunning: Tinka as my 'alter-ego' seemed to allow unconscious material to surface. This was the beginning of a profound partnership, which has continued and evolved until the present."

Other actors are "found" on location, non-actors, friends, or in the rare case, through a casting agent.

Menkes' thesis film at UCLA was the feature *MAGDALENA VIRAGA* (1987), about the inner life of a prostitute imprisoned for killing her pimp. It won the Los Angeles Film Critics Association Award for Best Independent Film of the Year and was featured in the Whitney Museum of American Art's Bien-

MAGDALENA VIRAGA

ennial. It might be the most controversial of her films; five-minute *shots* of sex but without showing any fake emotion or nudity, the prostitute's hand covering her nose from the smell, and political overtones in the story.

I admit *VIRAGA* was a tough watch for me. It actually could be a Hollywood plot: hooker's life is tough, someone kills her pimp, who did it? But Menkes' style makes it completely different; the long takes rub the reality in your face. And I like it because it did that. A hooker's life shouldn't be comfortable to watch. Is it consciously an anti-*PRETTY WOMAN*?

"Never saw *Pretty Woman*. But it is consciously anti-the mentality that created *Pretty Woman* and 7 million trillion other films. It is consciously a statement about woman as object of sexual desire in cinema as well as my feeling about things--at that time--about my real life trying to deal with myself as a woman and men, etc."

Menkes' next film, *QUEEN OF DIAMONDS* (1991), premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in competi-

tion. Filmed on location in Las Vegas, *QUEEN* revolves around the life of an alienated black jack dealer and was named one of the 10 Best Films of 1991 by the *Los Angeles Times*, *Atlanta Art Papers*, and other periodicals. It played at Sundance, and although the fest was less mainstream then, it was a tough sell.

"People liked it, mainly," Nina says. "Industry types walked out, of course. Couldn't sell the film, of course."

Tinka plays the dealer, who alternates her time working, taking care of an old man, listening to the neighbors fight, all while her husband is missing. *QUEEN*

"I hate 'normal' dialog, usually. I am not interested in re-creating regular life, but rather, in trying to express the aspects life wears in secret."



seems at once a metaphor for larger problems and attitudes in the glut of America and all the odd things that seem to happen only when you're alone and then try to explain the weirdness to someone else later. Some of the images, such as a long take of a burning palm tree, three elephants standing and swaying, extended sequences of her dealing cards and, later, the improv-looking wedding, bring up questions of structure, script control and research/background.

"Everything is created, i.e. -- the seemingly documentary scenes in QUEEN are not documentary. They are all staged. There is very little research. I do most of my research inside my own head (inner journeys, etc.). Tinka and I went to Vegas for about a week, I think, over Thanksgiving and walked around. That was enough research, research being, in my case, absorbing the atmosphere. My films are all about real-life experiences, but by this I mean inner real-life experiences. But I like serendipitous events, things happening unexpectedly, and then I grab them for my film."

I should've known, but I was surprised the marriage scene in QUEEN was completely planned. The scene was structured in terms of the sequence of the wedding. The non-actors were just wandering about and then were told to dance, and so on. Does that mean the final product, everything in the frame, completely represents the script and/or storyboards?

"Yes. I have total creative control. I never use storyboards by the way, Menkes says. "And ZOHARA and BLOODY CHILD had no scripts. But the other films were scripted."



THE GREAT SADNESS OF ZOHARA

THE BLOODY CHILD (1996), shot in northwestern Africa and 29 Palms, California, combines Desert Storm Marines, text from Shakespeare's MacBeth and wife-murder into a harrowing hallucinatory journey. It is a mesmerizing look at the desolation of violence. Kevin Thomas of the *Los Angeles Times* called it "Brilliant...an awe-inspiring work of art on the highest level; one of the year's top five films."

No script for CHILD? That's insane! I think CHILD is the most advanced of her films: the long take feel is present but there is also much more editing. The story of a female Marine Sergeant (Tinka) who comes along a male Marine digging a grave in the desert for his murdered wife was inspired by a true event. In the film, the Sergeant is later "possessed" by the wife's spirit. What we see is a crime discovered and violence uncovered, how the violent act ripples, as Menkes puts it. The editing serves as detective, it covers every event and little fact about the murder and the criminal. As it should be, there are no answers for violence. The film goes forward, then backward, then introduces more information, then goes backward again, forming a circle. I am surprised. Most filmmakers try and script that out before shooting, and still fail. Yet CHILD came out coherent and stunning, I think Menkes' best yet.

"It was the hardest film for me to make," Menkes remembers. "For

emotional reasons, but also because there was no script, so I had to figure out the whole structure in editing -- (it was) groping in the dark!!"

CHILD, like her other films, could also be a Hollywood plot. But it concentrates on emotions rather than film genre expectations.



Tinka and Nina on the set of BLOODY CHILD

CHILD is the most mathematic of the films, an advancement in Menkes' style. The physical math that the editing takes tries to examine the emotional subject every possible way, in the way people are fascinated with violence. The utter lack of answers for the emotions that arise becomes a search for any hard facts you can

get. Especially as the American media has made violence as mundane and routine as stopping to fill up the car. Or is that just the human condition, a way of coping?

"No, I think the media worships violence," Menkes says. "My film tried to show violence without worship -- it's abstract -- an abstract film, in the sense of karmic, mystical, dissecting an event, looking for answers. But the answers are not on that level.... It takes a moment in time and turns it into a space."

The Marines in CHILD are portrayed by real Marines and served as consultants and even crew on the film. The actors are interesting because they are so trained and so desensitized. They intimidate the prisoner but then turn around and talk about how to get a home loan. Menkes left the performances up to them.

"(It was) quite relaxed with the Marines. They were just being themselves! And they follow orders well, they are physical, so it worked fine."

And what did the Marines think of the finished film?

"They loved it!," Menkes says. "(They) thought I had captured the nature of Marine life precisely!"

Of Menkes' films, CHILD rents at the local video store most often, but because of the box cover. It gives explanations or interpretations for the story on the back. I wondered if it explained too much.

"I don't know. It can help certain people understand the movie," Menkes says. "My sister is against any kind of explaining, I'm not."

If there is one thing to recognize Menkes' films by, besides Tinka, it might be the long takes. The shot starts to hypnotize; your eyes have so much time to look around the frame. Although it seems simple to shoot, I don't think I could go out and film just anything and make it interesting. What is the essential difference between something with context and just a long take?

"It's the emotional content--what is going on emotionally on the set, between the director and actors, mainly me and Tinka, the 'psychic world' that is evoked and filmed," Menkes says. "(The shot length is) determined, really, while shooting. Shooting determines editing."

All of her films deal with secret worlds: Arab lands, casinos, hookers, Marines, religious rituals in general. Is the film creating the world or

personally exploring one that already exists?

"Sort of both, it's a mix," Menkes describes. "I go places, but when I go there, it's different. It's a magical place. A psychic zone -- not just a 'casino', for example."

Locations, especially, are very important in the films. The credits in all her films have many grants listed, but that might be the only way to do abstract stuff. Besides, there's a lot of 'production' involved that regular producers would insist on doing easier or cheaper.

"Granting agencies usually support your vision as an artist, and do not interfere," Menkes says, but "It's always a fight to get what you want, especially when you have no money or very little money."

And though the evocative plots might be mainstream, the style is not.

For Menkes, distribution has been "a nightmare story. Basically my films have been distributed much less widely than I would have wanted, ...film fests, some theatrical runs here and there, cinemathèques and so on. I'm glad about the video release -- all the films are out on video -- this way they keep playing ...but it is hard, a nightmare, really."

Menkes' won a 1998 Film/Video Award from the Rockefeller Foundation for her new script HEATSTROKE; a mirage-like mystery set in Los Angeles and Cairo during the feverish heat of a contemporary summer. In pre-production, Menkes says, "I am currently looking for a producer, I want 1-2 million dollars this time--I'm too tired to do the films all alone."

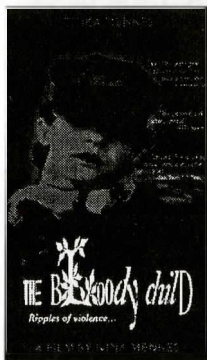
Her films are more Eastern. The minimalism and pacing could be Japanese or Russian. The structure and themes resemble Tarkovsky or Sokurov: the rejection of standard plot points in favor of studying emotion. The pure individuality (or eccentricity) of Nina and Tinka reminds me of the Brothers Quay at the very least.

"Well, I agree, with your associations," Menkes says. "I feel akin to Chantal Akerman's early work, Werner Herzog sometimes, Antonioni sometimes, David Lynch in a way. Eisenstein, too, in a way, only because he is so emotional. I agree, I am very Eastern, but at the same time, very Western, very LA, in the sense of alienation and deserts, loneliness."

Ironically, because the films comment more on America than any recent Hollywood creation.

All photos courtesy Nina Menkes

"On a whim I asked Tinka to play me. The results were stunning: Tinka as my 'alter-ego' seemed to allow unconscious material to surface. This was the beginning of a profound partnership, which has continued and evolved until the present."



The Sisters Menkes on video:

GREAT SADNESS OF ZOHARA (1984) 40 min.

MAGDALENA VIRAGA (1987) 90 min.

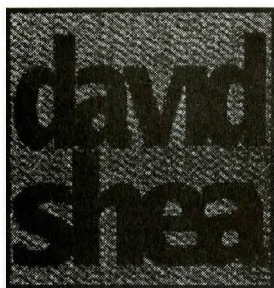
QUEEN OF DIAMONDS (1991) 77 min.

THE BLOODY CHILD (1996) 85 min.

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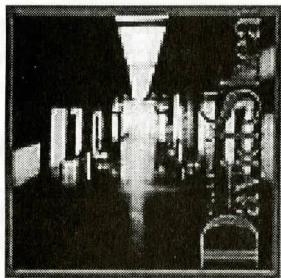


David Shea is a music composer using samplers and live musicians. He has done scores for new films, but has also done many pieces for existing cinematic works. They're not to be played while watching the films, rather as a tribute. But not limited to a simple rehash either. As his liner notes usually explain, they are "conceived as an independent whole and can be heard with or without knowledge of the film." In addition to those works he has done other material based on novels or simply new music.

"When somebody asks me: 'what kind of music do you write' -- question mark -- I almost always talk about film music," Shea says. "Because it's meaningless. When you say film music you mean 400,000 different styles."

And that's how many you get from Shea. But it's not confusing -- you can tell his style. A complex mix of samples, turntables and acoustic instruments, his soundtracks not only do justice to the inspiration, but seem to fill in the holes as well.

Shea grew up in Indianapolis watching films mostly from TV, including a lot of 70s exploitation, Saturday afternoon kung-fu theater and classics. But he also saw and was inspired by a lot of expressionistic TV shows like *Outer Limits*, *The Prisoner* and *Twilight Zone*.



SHOCK CORRIDOR

(1992) Avant

Tribute to the Sam Fuller film, incl. tribute to Tex Avery composer **Scott Bradley**.

Film and TV composers were big to Shea, especially "Morricone, Mancini, Herrmann -- those guys were superheroes to me." Shea didn't get formal training when young, but played in a lot of bands and was a record "fanatic." He admired those composers not just because they worked in film, but because they had a low budget, limited resources and cranked the product out fast.

"That matched up to the way I was living," Shea says. "I admired how much they could do with so little."

Contemporary composers like Stockhausen, Gyorgy Ligeti, Iannis Xenakis and Giacinto Scelsi also inspire him.

Today in many art scenes the style comes first and the work is pushed aside. Shea says he experiences that often with technology. He says someone will tell him, "Oh -- you made a piece with samplers and turntables and classical players -- incredible," and Shea will ask, "Did you hear it? Do you know what it is?" "Doesn't matter! You know, these samplers..." When faced with this, Shea

remembers a story about Scelsi.

"(Scelsi) apparently got very sick in the '50s and he was kind of a typical 12 tone serialist and he claims to have healed himself by sitting in the sanitarium playing one note on the piano over and over again. And when he got out he started writing all these string quartets on one note, symphony on one note. And they're unbelievable pieces -- really intense! ...He's somebody I talk about a lot when you get hit with the techno crew that think, 'Wow, isn't sampling unbelievable? You can use all of this information.' Scelsi did this with one note!"

This admiration shows in Shea's work, very elaborate pieces going different directions yet with limited resources of equipment and manpower.

"It's not a matter of what you have, it's what you do with it," Shea says.

While he went to a performing arts high school and spent one "miserable" year at the Overland Conservatory, Shea considers himself more self-taught:

"I spent a lot of time doing serious formal study. Not in institutions, educational or mental."

The conservatory experience didn't work for Shea because the professors would not take film music composing seriously, considering it commercial nonsense. And don't even mention cartoon composers.

Much of Shea's style developed in isolation until, after traveling around, he ended up in New York City at age 18. It was the mid-1980s and the art scenes were strong there; film, music, dance and so on. He met others who were into the same music, the same composers and the same films. Finally, people with whom to talk and collaborate. Working in that scene was another part of his education. He started doing solo vocal improvs. "My voice: that's all I had." (Some of which will appear on new records).

He met up with many improv people who still populate his records and vice-versa: John Zorn, Elliot Sharp, Jim Pugliese, Anthony Coleman and many more often found on Zorn's Tzadik label.

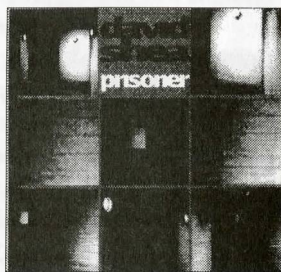
"It's really an amazing coincidence they all landed in the same spot, working on these similar things. I came kinda on the end of that."

While surviving as a DJ and with an undying love for composers the world over, it's not hard to understand his style of combining traditional film composing ideas with the use of samples and live musicians. A real arguing point of late is that DJs are not really being composers since they use existing sounds and recordings.

"It seems to matter to some people," Shea said. "It never really mattered to me."

"A composer is somebody who takes source material -- pitches, notes -- and then arranges them in some kind of form," Shea said.

The controversy would seem to be affected by writing something out for people to perform versus being the performer yourself with previously recorded material.



PRISONER

(1993) Sub Rosa

Tribute to the show, as well as *Outer Limits*, *Secret Agent*, *The Avengers*, etc.

"But that was the same story with early electronic music. With synthesizers. I don't think whether physical human beings are present or not jeopardizes your status as a person who works with sound. The process is different, ...but I think that just means it's a different type of composer. You're certainly arranging.

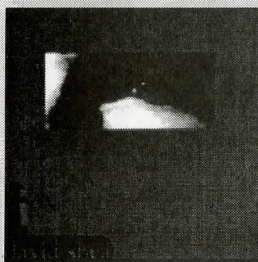
"It's been more of a question of having access to stuff (for me). If there were two or three people that I knew and I was working on this piece then that's what I would write for. ...Sampling and collage stuff in a lot of ways were practical decisions." You can still compose and perform without having the budget to hire 40 performers.

And then the question of sampled material: what about the copyrights? "Well, that's always the question," Shea says. "One of the reasons I never disguised my sources is because I wanted the reference to be clear. I haven't had too many problems. In general I'm not making a lot of money out of it and I'm not trying to. And it's usually more an issue about money than it is morality." Shea points out that many people take the appropriation issue more politically, fighting corporations. "For me it was always much more of a compositional issue."

Shea is lately moving away from the direct samples. SATYRICON, a recent work, is almost completely without.

"I'm now concentrating more on: what is that thing that turntable players, sample players, computer manipulators, how does that work in combination with live, intuitive players," Shea says.

He has a new record on Zorn's Tzadik label, CHAMBER ORCHESTRA PIECES, which explores this combination. The ensemble plays acoustically, has an electric foot pedal and all of the phrases of the score are sampled. The combination of those creates the orchestration of the piece. Shea also works with traditional folk musicians. He has two volumes on the MoreMusic label mixing traditional Northern and Southern Italian folk music with computers and samplers.



i
(1995) Sub Rosa
Includes tributes to
Tex Avery and
ALPHA, tribute to
Godard's Alphaville

You might imagine this makes it hard to look for Shea's works in traditionally sectioned-off record stores.

"I get calls from distributors saying, 'Where do you think we should put this?' What a question!"

Even experimental or avant-garde genre terms wouldn't necessarily work. "Each scene is designed like a film score. One could be purely jazz, another horrible noise, another scene could be clearly classical, another scene could be a layering of a couple different styles."

It makes for great listening, but could also be hit-and-miss with some, much like a film's score. Shea says, during concerts "people will come up to me and say 'Boy, that five minutes 35 minutes in was amazing.' That's part of the way it works with multi-style pieces, or with samples. People have very intense associations with pieces."

If you play the James Bond theme, people who have seen the films will immediately think of those images. Someone who hasn't seen them will listen to it as just music. That's what Shea loves. Everybody has a different experience. And if you don't like this part, wait five minutes. And five minutes after that, you may hear

something totally new that you will love.

Shea attributes the mix of styles to the way we grow up today. In the '50s and '60s, people spent a lot of time breaking down divisions and barriers in art forms. The post-baby boomers grew up believing we could combine anything. Shea

asks, "Why couldn't you listen to Grandmaster Flash and Xenakis?"

Now that there's so much bombardment of information in the world it's more just a natural way of

dealing with what's around us. Although many don't always realize it.

"Someone would claim to not listen to atonal music," Shea says. "Of course, if they ever watched a horror film in their life, they do. The context is shifted. It doesn't matter."

Context has become the big difference. Political and audience expectations have often prevented film composers from being taken seriously for some reason.

"I played a solo tour in Italy. Like 20 shows in 20 days. All in cinemas. I can mix Peruvian folk music with horrible noise and sound effects. Ordinary folks, no avant-garde anything. They say, 'Oh yeah, I see, it makes sense.' You do that in a classical hall they just think you're out of your mind."

Just like in all arts, some community will purport their own rules on the entire scene, judging everything in a vacuum.

Shea's 5th album, TOWER OF MIRRORS and its super-mix of styles, is largely due to the influence of the Chinese novels *Hsi-Yu Pu* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. The folk hero Monkey travels through a green tower full of thousands of mirrors, each a different world. Written by a Buddhist monk, the surreal books are the perfect backdrops for Shea's style, each track a different world. The influence is clear. Shea was exposed to Buddhism a lot when he was young. He also liked kung-fu movies and took some martial arts.

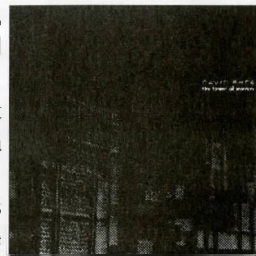
"The stories were a link between religious Buddhism, Hong Kong films, traditional Chinese Theater and music and fantastic, wild electronic stuff."

Thinking I'm being insightful, I bring up how I like listening to foreign languages just like listening to music. After seeing a lot of Chinese films, you can tell the difference between Mandarin (the mainland language) and Cantonese (Hong Kong). I get schooled!

"Cantonese uses seven tones and a couple extra tones, almost 10 tones, for the same word. So, the word 'ma' could be at 10 different pitch levels and have 10 different meanings. Mandarin is much easier, it's only four. ...Cantonese is all over the place, which is why it sounds so fantastic."

Shea studied Cantonese for awhile and found it easier to memorize than French or Italian. He says it is more melodic and doesn't have so many grammatical rules. TOWER includes samples of his previous work and text read in Mandarin, Cantonese, French (starring that -ugh- voice from ALPHAVILLE), Italian and English. Shea chose the texts for both meaning and sound, providing another double

This issue's motto is from Mr. Shea:
"It's not a matter of what you have,
it's what you do with it."



**TOWER OF
MIRRORS**
(1996) Sub Rosa

layer to the music depending on whether the listener knows the language.

Of course, Shea doesn't stay in one genre.

"Right after I did TOWER I did SATYRICON, totally Greek-Roman, based in the Western world. It's not so important where it's being done. I love to work in dance, in pure concert music, in club music, recordings -- and film is another thing I love to work in. If there are directors that care about what I'm doing in music and care about the combination that we can make together then I'm happy to work in film all the time."

Shea stays very busy with various projects and touring Europe with many things going on at the same time.

"Usually with the records I'm able to give them real time in the studio. Real time meaning maybe even a second rehearsal."

There are two ingenious projects on the docket. For a festival in Brussels in February, he is doing a piece similar to the Tex Avery tribute piece on his album I, "but for piano and a couple samplers with some ridiculous stuff; pouring ping pong balls into the piano, sitting on it, rolling your head around, that kinda stuff. It's Tex Avery, it's gotta be extreme! Then a couple of video pieces, then some live sound effects things with some of the older guys who used to do it for radio plays. Have them do that while on stage, project that, make some sort of collage out of it. Do one matinee for kids and then one performance for everybody else."

Shea is also working on a new project with Scanner, a.k.a. Robin Rimbaud. They had read that records that sell the most have the words chocolate, free and love in the title and the covers that sell best are of partially naked ladies. So their project will be an exotica album called I LOVE FREE CHOCOLATE with a picture of a partially naked lady on the cover. Shea describes it as "a real exotica album, not some kitsch." He's a big fan of Doris Day and may even sing *Que Sera Sera*.

Have any of the filmmakers heard the tributes?

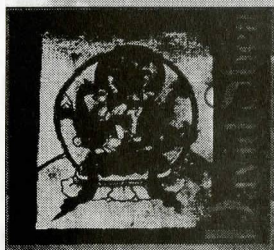
"I knew someone who was a friend of Sam Fuller who told him that I had made something. Fuller said, 'I don't understand anything about music! Beethoven is enough for me. He can send it to me, but I don't know....' That was the rumor I heard." Shea laughs about it.

Shea is interested in what Godard would think of the ALPHAVILLE piece, as Godard is reputedly supportive of delineating work.

A couple of years ago, Shea was asked to make a Russ Meyer piece for a festival in Brussels. Planning to make a collage of film clips and sounds from the films, Shea called up Meyer to talk to him about it.

"Meyer said, 'What the hell are you doing?!? You touch one goddamn frame and I'll....' He went berserk. He didn't want me to touch anything. That's him all over. He's amazing."

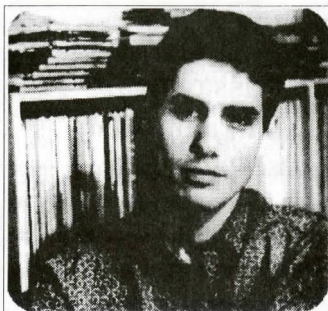
Instead, Shea made up a completely different piece consisting of exploitation trailers, burlesque reels, '50s go-go stuff and so on. Shea describes it as "a portrait of all the conditions that were around his films." Meyer attended the



HSI-YU CHI

(1995) Tzadik

Tribute to Hong Kong & Chinese music and film directors, like Tsui Hark, Ching Siu-Tung and the Shaw Bros



performance, enjoyed it and was very nice, according to Shea.

Shea very much likes writing scores for new films, if the conditions are right. He recently finished the score for DIAL HISTORY, a Belgian documentary about the history of airplane hijackings using a collage style like Shea's, and has done some live performances with the film. But Shea was allowed in on the editing of the film, something far and away from the Hollywood norm.

"I would love to work on a billion-dollar Hollywood film, if it were really like that. Or an experimental independent, just as well, if there was that kind of relationship, with a director that really cared about sound and what it could do."

Shea feels that, unfortunately, few directors are like that anymore, truly caring about the relationship between composer and director.

"It's a matter of a bad system as well. There are probably a lot of good people in Hollywood, and a lot of talented writers and composers," Shea says. "It's just that doing everything by committee -- having so much money involved and so many investors involved, I think a lot of good scores get written, they go through the music editing committee and then by the time they get to the end there's nothing left -- you've got a drone going through the entire soundtrack. So you could've written the greatest piece on Earth and it was never gonna make it into the film."

Shea points out that although you can do that and be successful he is much more interested in what makes it into the film and how close he is to the decisions being made.

"And if there are 15 directors and 25 music editors and, you know, 100 investors, ...the music is just something there to fill up the space. ...And some guys do that job really well. But they definitely don't need me for that."

However, that does not mean there has to be a score. I bring up Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni, who would use music sparingly.

"You don't need music to make a good film," Shea said. "But Antonioni is very conscious of how sound is used. That's what is interesting. He's deep into the connection between what the sound of the film is doing and what the image is doing. The fullness of the film. That's why (Japanese composer Toru) Takamitsu was always a genius. He would spend time figuring out what the film needed. And then he would start to write. And many times he would say the film doesn't need music. 'If we can take the sound of breaking sticks, that will be perfect.' And it works out that way. He was so deep into what a film composer does, which is to get inside of a film."

Shea was interviewed by phone at his

NYC home.

SATYRICON

(1997) Sub Rosa

More a tribute to the book than to the film.

- IN CASE YOU MISSED IT -



FACES (1968, John Cassavetes)

Starring John Marley, Lynn Carlin, Gena Rowlands, Seymour Cassel (129 min)

This rough and tumble film concerns one day in the life of Marley and Carlin, who finally decide to get divorced. Marley runs to hooker Rowlands and Carlin brings home young stud Cassel. Rough, not only in the pseudo-documentary style of Cassavetes, but in the raw, honest acting by all. You feel like you're in the room, uncomfortably observing private emotions. The amazing thing is that although the film appears completely improvised and natural, it is fully scripted, a trademark of Cassavetes' writing and directing. In a bold move by the mainstream, Academy Award nomi-

nations were given to Carlin, Cassel and Cassavetes (for story and screenplay). It took Cassavetes four years to make using his own money. Nowadays, people throw Cassavetes' name around left and right, but I wonder how many of them have actually watched all his films. *Why did you miss it?* Raw emotions for two hours makes people, critics, and distributors scared. You shouldn't be, though; *Faces* is a very positive, unique experience. Also, despite its success in theaters, it was finally released on home video for the first time last year.

(Available Buena Vista home video, in many video stores)

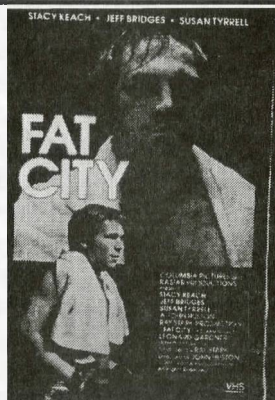
FAT CITY (1972, John Huston)

Starring Stacy Keach, Jeff Bridges, Susan Tyrrell (93 min)

A white-trash, small-time RAGING BULL, with all the drama and none of the glory. Keach gives his best performance ever as a wann-be boxer who's past his prime and can't get his life in order. Bridges is basically a younger version of him and Tyrrell won awards for her role as a professional drunk. Forget LEAVING LAS VEGAS. Amazing dialogue ("Don't kick Earl." "I didn't kick Earl -- I kicked his clothes!" "Clothes make the man."), direction and realistic images by legendary cinematographer Conrad Hall make FAT CITY one of the best "drunk" films, if not one of the best from the 1970's in all.

Why did you miss it? There's not a "name" actor, overboard action fights or sex to associate it with. Studios usually dump these films without promotion to help it. It doesn't tell you what to think and video distributors don't know how to market that. The video box doesn't even give it respect: Keach's character is listed as "Jimmy Tully" on the back when it's really "Billy Tully." Check it out, you'll feel better about your own life.

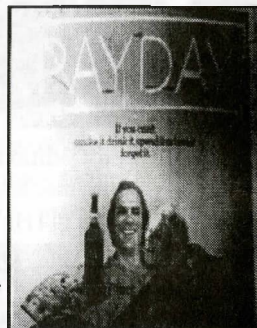
(Previously Available, now probably out-of-print, check video stores for older copies)



PAYDAY (1973, Daryl Duke)

Starring Rip Torn, Ahna Capri, Elayne Heilveil (103 min)

The poster tag line says it all: "If you can't smoke it, drink it, spend it or love it . . . forget it." A great but forgotten film from the director of SILENT PARTNER. Torn gives his best performance ever, a mix of swagger and sarcasm, playing country singer superstar Maury Dann. The imaginary singer gives even Hank Williams a run for his money in excess. Covering a 24-hour period, Dann washes down pills with soda and alcohol, traveling on the road fueled by sex, fighting and general insanity. His insistence at pushing every second to the extreme gets him in trouble with everyone he touches. While the film starts off slow, it's soon off and going crazy with a perfect ending. There's a great sense of realism from small touches throughout, maybe due to its overseeing by a former record label producer.



Why did you miss it? There's about one thousand films like this, but not like this. It got limited distribution in theaters and it's out-of-print on video now. I saw an EP copy recorded off an old Beta tape. And don't be turned off by the country music, it's anarchy all the way. (*check older video stores*)

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**ISSUE TWO
SUMMER 1999**



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The Unholy Tarahumara and what that means...

"A non-traditional film about people losing their traditions" is the tagline, the underlying theme, and the source for some controversy and the best thing about Kathryn Ferguson's *THE UNHOLY TARAHUMARA*. But it's just as much about the traditions of white views of Indians and the conventional documentary film style. The multi-layered film (shot and edited on video) goes into two separate communities in the Mexico-based Indian tribe and observes their people, traditions and life today. The subject sounds like routine doc fare, but Ferguson's approach and beliefs are significantly different.

Ferguson watched many films growing up, and took advantage of a long leash to explore on her own. Her parents taught her how to ride the bus by herself around age 11. One hot, dry Tucson afternoon, she stumbled across a future influence.

"I'd start going for titles. I would go to whatever sounded good and I would go by myself. And then -- I saw Sam Peckinpah. I love Sam Peckinpah. We picked the worst title (we saw) -- *THE WILD BUNCH*. We thought, 'It's gotta be hokey,'" says Ferguson, because of similar '60s schlock films, often with biker gangs. But she was blown away and has been a fan ever since. "You're gonna think this is so stupid -- he has a smell to his films."

In her own film, Ferguson admits, "There are about four dog shots in there and they are all homages to Peckinpah. I don't know why, I just saw these dogs and thought about Peckinpah."

However, Ferguson's real background is in dancing, writing and "a little anthropology." Filmmaking is a relatively new passion.

"(About 8 to 9 years ago) I got a divorce, I hurt my back, I couldn't dance or walk -- I just couldn't find a job. I was broke, totally broke, so I wrote down things I liked, (thinking) maybe that would help me get a job. I wrote down things like color, movement, sound, etc. I said, 'Oh, this is a movie. That's what my next job will be.'"

She applied at the local PBS station, based on the University of Arizona campus, for any job. At first they said she would have to be a student, there's nothing open, you have to hang around until something opens, etc. They didn't expect to see her again.

"Within an hour I was enrolled," Ferguson says. "I came back and hung around the rest of the afternoon! I went there every day and just hung around. I had never hung around anywhere my whole life before." After a while they finally gave her a job. "Isn't that weird?"

At the station she learned video technician work, grip work, how to do audio on location, running a studio camera, but unfortunately not editing or

using film, both of which she loves.

She wanted to do this project on film, but didn't have the money. An advantage for using video is that they could let the camera roll without stopping. Longtime local PBS cameraman Dan Duncan served as Ferguson's cinematographer. She did use super-8 film for a few sequences that didn't require sync-sound.

Getting to the area also made using video more accessible. With film, it would be much more grueling for the extra equipment and crew needed. It is a trip that takes three days from Tucson into Mexico. A good portion of that journey is through difficult, rugged terrain, on horse or foot. She visited the area on about 25 occasions over a period of five years, staying two to four weeks at a time.

Five or six years ago she and some friends went down to the area to see an Easter ceremony. They got really lost and came across an old man and a child while they were walking. They asked him if they could put a tent on his land. He didn't say anything. He looked into the car, waved her over and got in. They went to his cabin and he invited them in. That's how she met Ventura, the 'main character' of the film.



*Dan Duncan films
the ceremony*

As she got to know Ventura, she studied more Spanish and continually went back and talked with him. She made the film just because she liked him. She would spend some time with him, come back and work for a few months, then return to Mexico. (She also mentions: "Thanks to everyone who took care of my dogs and my stuff.")

"This guy -- Ventura -- sometimes you meet someone you just connect with, for who-knows-what reason, and we had a ball. He was a great guy. Not because he was an Indian and not because he lived in Mexico -- if he would have lived next door, I still would've fallen in love with this old guy."

She describes Ventura as cagey, a man who wanted things for himself, wanted what he considered the good life. "He was pretty sophisticated and had been around to many areas, a very smart guy."

The Tarahumara moved into canyon areas to get away from the Spaniards 500 years ago. The tribe makes seasonal migrations from the bottom to the top of the canyon. Today, they meet the rest of the world through the tourists that go there. The whole area is called Copper Canyon, but the Copper is just one of five canyons in the vicinity. Outsiders run the huge tourism in the area. The Indians are put on parade, but they get to sell their own stuff to make money. Tarahumara is actually the Mexican word for the tribe; they call themselves "Raramuri".

The nearest town is an interesting-sounding place called Creel.

"Creel is like a frontier town of 100 years ago," Ferguson explains. "It's funky, it's not attractive, it's sort of the jumping-off point to go into these remote areas. What you'll have (there) are horses, cars, Mexicans, Indians and Germans in full black leather on BMX motorcycles. Really, you'll have everything in there."



Ventura and family

One shot in the film shows a Tarahumara woman with duct tape on her fingers to protect them while shucking corn. Not the usual *look at how primitive they are* Indian documentary. Ferguson described their society as a “very weird little world.” When she went to the canyon’s caves, Indians there always asked for batteries for their flashlights! Afterwards she would regularly bring AAs on her trips.

She also brought hand lotion. In the film there are interesting close-up shots of lotion being applied to the sun-wrinkled hands and feet of the native women. She filmed and used those shots unconsciously.

“You’re down there for so long, it’s so exhausting, you’re not aware of the camera after awhile. Dan has a wonderful eye. He captured a lot of great images. We were just shooting and shooting...”

“Everybody wants (the Tarahumara) to change in their religious image. They think (the Tarahumara) are unholy. And they want them to be Christian, they want them to be Evangelist, they want them to be Capitalists....”

The lotion shots might suggest the idea of bringing our technology to the Indians, or...

“It has absolutely no meaning. I chose (the shots) because I adore hands and feet, as much as Sam Peckinpah’s

dogs, and when I was looking through footage during editing, it looked so cool (temperature-wise) and soothing and I loved all the skin texture, so I used it. It signifies nothing.”

The Tarahumara women are the most important part of the scenes.

“I really wanted to have that long section with the women. It’s the very, very, very first time the Tarahumara women are presented as people. In every book I ever read about them, (the women) are dismissed as shy, taken care of, ...and weavers. Shy weavers! (But) they sit around like women everywhere in the world -- and men everywhere in the world -- and they all talk about each other.”

Some beautiful (and documentary-traditional) scenes show the Tarahumara putting on the paint for a ceremony.

“I liked how they were painting and laughing. It’s very matter-of-fact for them,” Ferguson says.

She did pay the community and get permission from various leaders to film in the area, and to capture the ceremonies. She took food and other items for them and bought the goats and cows for the ceremony. When making the ‘deal’ to buy the cows, it was very official, so they were drinking tequila. Ferguson quietly faked drinking and passed it around because after a few, she can’t conjugate the Spanish verbs.

They wanted to know how they were going to be presented. She told them, “I’m going to present you the way you present yourselves to me. The way you are and what you tell me -- that’s what people will see.” She wants to show “how they are in transition” from their past to the future.

The film is populated with myth scenes, where various stories are acted out

and explained with narration. They are a mixture: things told to Ferguson by people she knew well, myths and her observations.

“(The Tarahumara) tell a lot of stories,” she relates. “And their stories change. They’ll tell you the same story, but it’s got a different ending every time.” Ferguson wants to show how memories change -- everyone remembers things differently, for better or for worse, regardless of culture

The one thing the Tarahumara are known for, thanks to many books and other documentaries, is their running. Many in the tribe can run for long periods of time over enormous distances. This is usually portrayed as a spiritual and mysterious event.

However, Ferguson doesn’t agree.

“I didn’t even want to put (the running) in the movie because everything you’ve ever seen or ever read -- the only thing you’ll know about them is that they’re some of the fastest runners on Earth.”

After spending years with the Tarahumara, Ferguson likes to dispel the run myths.

“You know what the running is for? The running is to make bets. There’s this film I saw that so disgusted me, that I thought, ‘I can’t even put it in that they’re runners.’ It’s from Brigham Young University. They sent these scientists down there and they measured their urine, their fecal matter. They studied what they ate before and after. The film says, ‘Oh, aren’t they just wonderful and lovely people, they run so fast because they eat this and they do this and can outchase a deer,’ and they show a guy chasing a deer. And other people say, ‘Oh, the running is spiritual, it’s because they (came) from the Aztecs.’ It’s bullshit.”

During one trip to the area, Ferguson met up with a woman from National Public Radio. Ferguson described the woman as being very nice, but wanting desperately to have a powerful, spiritual event with the runners. So they talked to two famous runners and asked them why they ran. At first, the runners just shrugged their shoulders and snickered and laughed at the questions.

“They didn’t give any reason because it’s so ordinary,” Ferguson says. Someone else will want to make a bet to make some money so they get some runners and make bets with others on who will win.

“Why do people think it’s such a mystery?” Ferguson says they run so fast and long probably because they walk up and down canyons daily, she guesses at least 10 miles a day. “There are all these white people who want to believe this stuff. And I went down there wanting to believe all these wonderful little things -- I want my life to have an ultimate answer. Well -- they ain’t got it!”

For her film, Ferguson always wanted a mix of narrative and documentary. There was no script, but lots of notes and ideas. She definitely never wanted a voice-of-God narrator.



*Tarahumara
women;
the filmmaker*

"I cannot go into another culture and ever, ever, ever, ever make a true film that's just about that culture. Because I'm taking myself there. Number one: all things transfer through my thinking, which is in my culture. No matter how hard I try to be accurate, it transfers through my brain. Number two: I set down this tape recorder and you're a Tarahumara and I'm an American and we're going to be natural? We're not. Here's this little black box sitting there."

So she never made an attempt to make or imply an "accurate, historical, anthropological — anything —" film. She instead asked herself: "If I lived down there, what would I talk about? And here's this little movie."

The free form made the editing a "nightmare". She had never met editor Sean Sandefur before and her ideas for the style were admittedly hard to describe. So little by little they hacked it out. They used a linear editing system, so rather than

"I did have to consider — is it documentary or narrative or what? Then I just decided it is a creation."

adding or removing shots anywhere in the film, they had to edit it in order from start to finish. If they went to an earlier part and changed it, everything after that shot had

to be re-done as well. They had boards up around the room with notes for the scenes, constantly moving them around looking for connections. The finished product is something toward Godard's editing style of multi-layering and abstract connections.

"I think he is such an intuitive, wonderful editor and he pours his heart into a project," Ferguson says of Sandefur. "Truly, without him, the piece wouldn't be so special, I think."

Most negative comments about the film are against that editing form. One distributor liked it but told her they wouldn't buy it because "it's not our way."

Ferguson showed rough-cuts of the film to various people as a way to garner feedback. In their defense, she says the film is far too layered to watch easily in a rough version. The comments usually were negative toward the untraditional documentary style. They told her: it needs a map to tell people where they are, the story doesn't go anywhere, not anthropological enough, names need to be labeled over faces, etc.

"I want people to leave with an overall feeling of this thing rather than getting down into (it)," Ferguson says. "When I watch TV and there's a name of a person and their job, it stops my imagination of that person. I don't want people to know a million things about Ventura. I want them only to know what he says in this film. I don't want them to stop their thinking, to put him in a category. I wanted a little roller-coaster ride in the film."

This is ample reasoning for the film's form and I think she made the best choice.

At one of the rough cut screenings, an anthropologist who had lived in the area for years liked it and thought it captured life there as it really is.

"The truth is, a lot of the final result just came from unconscious decisions," Ferguson says. "I knew that many of the choices I made, such as voice-overs, were going to be blasted by critical people. I knew as I was doing it that teachers in film would say 'That's wrong,' but I decided that I don't make many films and I would just do it anyway because it seemed appropriate to this piece."

teenage girl. Over the still is narration presented as her thoughts, consisting of words Ferguson created to form another small narrative to the film.

"They said, 'You can't put words in people's mouths in a documentary.' I actually thought about that for awhile and decided, 'Yes, I can do whatever I want because this is an original creation and as long as it works as a whole, I'm okay.' I did have to consider — is it documentary or narrative or what? Then I just decided it is a creation."

Even the title has garnered some controversy. Ferguson turned down one distributor because they would buy it only if they could change the title. The 'Unholy' seems to be the trouble. It comes from various reasons. One: the tagline of the film and a concern of the area. Many Tarahumara (and outsiders) are worried that the younger generation will not carry on their traditions. But, many Tarahumara also want the technological enhancements of cleaner water, electricity, television and medicine.

Reason two is more literal.

"Everybody wants (the Tarahumara) to change in their religious image," Ferguson observes. "They think (the Tarahumara) are unholy. And they want them to be Christian, they want them to be Evangelist, they want them to be Capitalists.... (They say) 'Oh, I'm gonna go help these people.'"

Reason three for the title is Ventura himself. He didn't like the Catholics, he liked the Evangelists at first but then they had a falling out. And he wasn't exactly a traditional Tarahumara either. He wanted to lose the traditions, he wanted progress, he wanted a TV set.

But the title mostly conveys the true theme. It seems what upsets people the most is that Ferguson's film is not in their usual form, telling the same old myths. She's trying to break down the oxymoronic anglo image of noble savages.

"These are not holy Indians with a spiritual existence, in that they live spiritually in nature," Ferguson says. "These guys don't. They get sick, they laugh, they tell sexy jokes about women. These are real people like you and me. I try to bring them down from the holy pedestal that white people put them on."

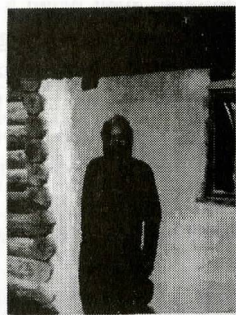
Ferguson's 'creation' is a film that deserves to be seen just as much as any other documentary on native people and lands. Does every doc to make it to PBS and theaters have to look the same way? In that case film is only propaganda and not an art. UNHOLY TARAHUMARA is as passionate and down-to-earth as Ferguson suggests. I feel a loss when she reveals that she doesn't go down to the area anymore, as Ventura passed away from diabetes in the winter of 1997 and no one knows where the rest of his family has moved.

Now, after screenings at 10 film festivals in five countries, most of the viewers are positive and enjoy Ferguson's film. It appears that the problems some people have stem from the Tarahumara portrayed with respect as real, normal human beings.

"That's fine with me," Ferguson says.

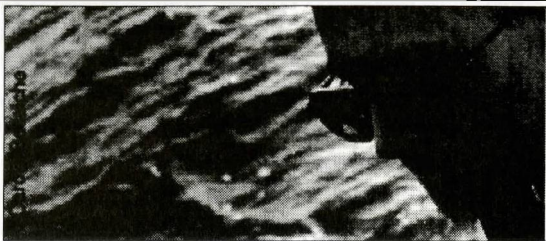
UNHOLY TARAHUMARA has distribution for TV in Mexico and Latin America.

Ferguson is searching for further U.S. and World distribution.



Truth and Consequences

The Films of ABBAS KIAROSTAMI



Abbas Kiarostami has been making films since the late 1960s. Nine features later, AK is getting his due, thanks to various film festivals and co-winning (for *TASTE OF CHERRY*) the top prize at Cannes 1997. Most articles talk about his Iranian background and the unknown nature of that country's cinema. True enough, but AK makes films that transcend any border or timeline. They even blur the borders of documentary and fiction. Viewers from anywhere, with various ethnic and religious backgrounds, can relate to AK's poetry in film.

Born in 1940, he started making films for a government center for children and young adults. He had already been a successful painter, designer and illustrator and also made commercials and credit sequences for films. Iran experienced a New Wave of filmmaking beginning with Dariush Mehrjui's *THE COW* (1969). Bucking both the previous mainstream cinema and harsh censorship, the filmmakers became more subtle and poetic in order to get things across while still maintaining a sense of entertainment. Apparently, there is a whole Iranian genre of films about and starring children that are far more advanced under the surface than the average kid's fare. AK's films have a simplicity and poetry that transcends fiction and non-fiction.

If we can tell what a documentary is, and be forced to confine it, then it is surely from the technical jerkiness. In the usual doc, the camerawork is hand-held, dialogue starts and stops with interruptions, objects go in and out of the camera frame at will. But it's also jerky to doc's storytelling counterpart, narrative film. If the camera is still, then the subject is usually being interviewed, looking slightly off-camera. The impression is given that the person is "real." Any editing is obvious, even using a cutaway of someone not talking conveys a jump in time. If there's any such thing as watching reality as it happens then it is the newscaster standing at a location talking to the single camera, and that is heavily scripted. Some documentarians take the word very literally. D.A. Pennebaker (*DON'T LOOK BACK*) provided a document of what he saw with his camera. Other directors give you a point-of-view, inserting their personal style, as Errol Morris (*THIN BLUE LINE*) controls every image through his camera angles, lighting and editing. Not that observing and not interfering with subjects is not a style, just a style more adopted than created. Both are very appealing, informative and humanist: human interests, values and dignity are taken to be of primary importance. Perhaps the big difference with documentaries is that you are aware that you are learning.

One of AK's literal documentaries, *HOMEWORK*, studies the problems of children in elementary school. Every child is asked the same questions; primarily exploring what is punishment and what is encouragement. The concentration is completely on the examined subject. The only images ever seen (after a few

introductory shots) is that of the various children answering the questions against a brick wall and AK and his camera. The children are allowed to speak for themselves, offering a wide range of emotions, from curiosity to actual fear. What seems like a lack of editing, going from each straight-on interview to the next, is actually unexpectedly rhythmic as to the answers that keep coming and which ones that don't. As usual for a Kiarostami film, you don't realize where it's going until the last 10 minutes, then you are duly blown away. As simple as it appears, a wide world forms around the answers, the repetition and the viewer's expectations. And for the best possible reason, AK made *HOMEWORK* to investigate the problems and questions of school society that his own children would bring home.

Assuming a narrative film is the opposite of documentary, as many filmmakers and audience members categorize, then it is identifiable by being slick. Obvious camera movement and editing, ironically, so to be not obvious. Narrative films most often come from that place with the big sign, have an expected amount of time duration in the story and always -- always! -- the heightened level of acting. The subject becomes the names on a poster. You don't talk about Travis Bickle and Rupert Pupkin, you talk about Robert DeNiro. Some filmmakers are very good at telling a story, maybe even based on a true one, with other people enacting it, recording it and all on schedule. There's money to be made here!

Seriously, if a storyteller truly understands the components of film, that person can also be a painter. Style is the prevailing factor in a narrative. You remember documentaries from their subjects; you remember certain gangster films from how they were done.

Now what if you have the best possibilities of both documentary and narrative elements in a single film? Satyajit Ray and Akira Kurosawa made slick, beautiful portraits of humanism, focusing on the smallest emotion and allowing it to become of the biggest importance. But I don't think it is ever hard to believe their films are narratives.

John Cassavetes made whirlwind emotional narratives with documentary skills and acting so realistic everyone thinks it was improvisation. His coverage of humanism was more volatile but just as honest as any other portrayal. But again, you recognize the actors, at least Columbo, and are impressed because you know it's a narrative.

What sets Kiarostami apart is his fusion of both worlds, sometimes a documentary with narrative approaches to the filming and editing, other times a narrative version of real life but portrayed without ultra-slickness. Sometimes you're not sure which and sometimes you see both in the same film.

The epitomy of AK's truth in fiction is in 1990's *CLOSE-UP*. In the first scene of the film, a man on a bus tells the



When asked about Kiarostami's films, legendary Japanese director Akira Kurosawa said: "Words cannot describe my feelings about them and I simply advise you to see his films... When Satyajit Ray passed on, I was very depressed. But after seeing Kiarostami's films, I thanked God for giving us just the right person to take his place."



CLOSE-UP: the imposter in court and the final image



old woman next to him that he is the well-known film director Mohsen Makhmalbaf (like AK, a member of the Iranian New Wave). In the second scene we watch as a newspaper reporter goes with a driver and two soldiers to the woman's house. He explains that the man might be an imposter trying to rob them and they are on their way to arrest him. Everything in these sequences is shot in a narrative form with various angles edited

together, planned camera moves and so-forth.

The opening credits explain that the film is written by AK, but is based on a true incident. The people play themselves. After the credits, we watch as Kiarostami, who is always off-screen, is talking to the woman's family about the possible swindle, briefly talking to the imposter in jail and trying to convince a government official to let him and his camera crew film the upcoming trial. The subjects and interviews are very real, staccato sentences, a single camera, very documentary.

Now it appears the start was a re-enactment. But the same actors from the first sequences are now talking to AK and into the camera, not 'acting' as before. As the trial starts, AK and his camera film in the courtroom. Now it definitely looks like the real world. No planned camera shots. People interrupt each other. The family is emotional, showing their embarrassment although saying they knew he was a fraud all along. The imposter defends himself emotionally, trying to explain his position and convince the court that he is not a criminal. He always wanted to be a director and simply took advantage of the opportunity.

As the trial goes on, we learn more about the imposter and his motivations. He wanted cinema to be his life. He was inspired by the work of Makhmalbaf and AK. And while no one is hostile about the situation, many questions have to be answered about why he lied and the reasons for his motivations. Was it simply to be like an actor in a movie? The incredible irony is now he plays himself in a film, a role which may give him jail time, in what has to be a documentary at this point.

Partway into the film we see a re-creation of what was going on inside the house as the soldiers were on their way to arrest the fake Makhmalbaf. The people play themselves. It seems very realistic, but the camera and editing are all narrative in nature. After the arrest is acted out, the film returns to the trial footage.

At the end of the trial everyone realizes the imposter's level of poverty and his sincerity to live out a dream, to live out a movie, just to be wanted by someone. A crime everyone the world over is guilty of, although most don't try to act it out to that extreme. The family admires Makhmalbaf as well. As a result, the family and the court forgive these misdirected intentions.

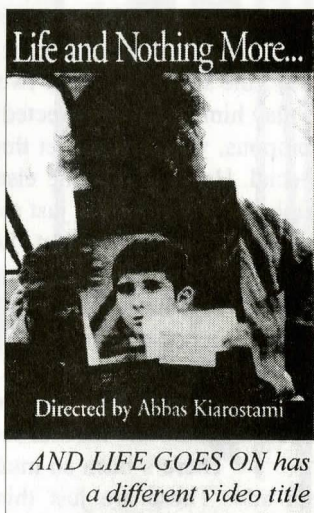
The last 10 minutes are even more documentary, complete with detached, hidden camera. As we watch from across the street, the imposter is set free and the real Makhmalbaf is there to greet him. Recognizing the director, the imposter starts to cry and apologize. The director doesn't allow that and offers him a ride to the

family's house on his motorcycle, which the imposter accepts. And if it wasn't poetic enough, a technical accident of all things makes it even more so. The microphone on Makhmalbaf cuts in and out. AK can be heard saying nothing can be done, just keep filming. So we follow the two men without hearing their conversation! The few lines we do get are "When you saw the woman on the bus" and "Now I know what it is all about." Then back to silence. We watch the document of a real event, yet are forcibly detached from it as a narrative. Which works so poetically. We want explanation, but what words could make us really understand? Maybe it is the other way, we have been watching a narrative film, forcing our expectations and questions, then in the end realize we are watching real life and have to deal with it on our own terms. The complete silence is one of the loudest things I've ever heard. Music finally comes in as the two Makhmalbafs travel down the road.

The film ends as they greet the family. The imposter talks into the gate intercom and introduces himself. Not recognizing the name, he then says "Makhmalbaf." As they come out, the real Makhmalbaf introduces himself and the imposter, offering him as a new acquaintance. The family head says, "I am sure we can now be proud of having met him." Once again, Kiarostami's ending is all Kiarostami.

In AK's "trilogy" of *WHERE IS THE FRIEND'S HOUSE*, *AND LIFE GOES ON* and *THROUGH THE OLIVE TREES*, he completely explores what you can do with cinema and real life. In *HOUSE* we follow a young boy as he tries to find his friend's house to return a notebook. That's it. But over the 87 minutes of unquestionable narrative, AK's subtle touches make it come alive. The people, places and cultures the boy meets are rich and interesting. Again, you only realize it in the end. The last shot punches it in your face. *LIFE* follows up as the real Kiarostami plays a film director looking for two young actors after a (real-life) earthquake destroyed much of Iran. The actors he hopes are okay are, of course, the main ones from *HOUSE*. As AK, who never identifies himself, travels with his (real) son, he pulls up to strangers asking directions, holding up a poster of the film with the boy's face. As in *HOUSE*, AK gives you a plot and search that is just a film device; the real story he's telling is about the people and culture the characters come in contact with, how they are affected by disaster and how life just goes on. You care about the various characters, even if you only meet them for 10 minutes.

Whether *LIFE* is a documentary or a narrative, or a mix, I couldn't tell. By the time I saw it, I had heard a little about AK's style: it was similar to Italian Neo-Realism (a post-WWII style emphasizing the use of real locations, real people and humanist stories) and he used non-professional actors. *LIFE*'s actors all appear non-professional and completely believable -- that is, I believed these were real people playing themselves. The events are doc-like: people repairing houses, searching for loved ones, some confusion, a lot of sadness but also a lot of strength. Every time AK's car stops, we peek out the window into someone's life.



But the style is all narrative. Controlled camerawork and editing, back and forth dialogue. Nobody talks to the camera. I just can't believe he created the emotions. It's very beautiful. Not necessarily complete realism, yet I feel fortunate to have listened in on the conversations.

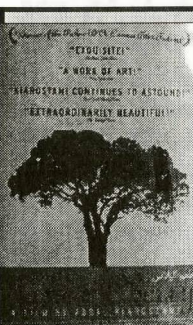
AK's *THROUGH THE OLIVE TREES* answers part of my doc-narrative question. The first shot plays with the notion: an actor looks into the camera and says he is playing the director of a film. The rest of the film is strictly narrative. Although the film portrays a real event: the filming of a scene that you see in *LIFE*. The plot centers on two actors in a scene from *LIFE*, a man and a woman, and his unrequited love for her. The actor in the first scene in *TREES* plays the director of the scene from *LIFE*, and, of course, AK plays the same role in *LIFE*, the searcher for the two boys (who also play themselves). So AK finally gets to play himself being directed by himself all in a film he directed. That would sound pompous, yet AK is quiet through almost the entire film. That is what makes him special. He lets everyone else do the talking, be the heroes and the villains, and I think, learns from it all just as we do.



AND LIFE GOES ON...

AK's newest film, *TASTE OF CHERRY*, is my favorite alongside *LIFE*. It doesn't tread the doc-narrative line as the others, but it has been reported that censors, who have much power in Iran, refused the original script ending. So AK opted for a documentary style ending to replace the narrative one, which resulted in something much more poetic, even confusing (and isn't real life?). To top it all off, I learned that another version of *TASTE* has been shown at festivals, one shot on video with AK and his real son acting out the parts.

There's been so much written about Kiarostami that I don't know what I can add. These are just things I've noticed. His films are simple, human and therefore perplexing. My use of Kiarostami's initials is in the sincere hope that he can help replace the late director, Akira Kurosawa. Replace is the wrong word, for that is surely impossible, but the Iranian AK is definitely a worthy successor.



Kiarostami Filmography:

- THE TRAVELLER (1974) 74 min**
- THE REPORT (1977) 112 min**
- FIRST GRADERS (1984) 84 min**
- WHERE IS THE FRIEND'S HOUSE? (1987) 87 min**
- HOMEWORK (1989) 85 min**
- CLOSE-UP (1990) 100 min**
- AND LIFE GOES ON (1992) 91 min**
- THROUGH THE OLIVE TREES (1994) 103 min**
- TASTE OF CHERRY (1997) 95 min**

AK also made 14 short films, between 4 and 60 min long each, from 1970 to 1982, and wrote screenplays for *THE KEY* (1987), *THE JOURNEY* (1995) and *THE WHITE BALLOON* (1995). Most of his films are hard-to-find, but try Facets (see page 9) and ETC (page 35) and look for festival screenings. More AK info is available at www.zeitgeistfilm.com.

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THAT GUY

Elisha Cook Jr.

born 1903 (although this is sketchy)

died 1995

As I went to research Cook's career, I found exactly what I expected: very little. No biographical novels, no TV shows about him, some things on the internet but nothing too deep. No respect. This is the result of being not only a ThatGuy, but being THE THATGUY. ThatGuys get some respect from fans and the film industry but not like 'stars'

do. Yet the films they're in wouldn't be the same without them.

After starting in vaudeville at age 14, Cook worked regularly on Broadway before going to LA and movies in 1936. He soon took off as a great character actor.

Cook is the prototype ThatGuy. Most people recognize the face but don't know the name. MALTESE FALCON, SHANE and THE KILLING would suffer without Cook. He's appeared in over 100 films over an incredible seven decades of work. He also made over 50 appearances on TV. His credit was probably never higher than fourth behind the stars.

Cook's bread-and-butter was playing the meek chump who gets played by a girl or just a two-bit hood in film noirs. But he was always memorable with the cool lines ("The jerk's right here!", then gunfire). It takes a certain talent to get slapped around by everyone yet still steal the scenes.

And, of course, Cook played numerous clerks in hotels, banks, roadhouses and an elevator boy twice. Who needs top billing when you can play characters named "Crackel" or "Candymouth," or a morgue worker with a hook for a hand?

Partial(!) Filmography

Her Unborn Child (1929) 1st appearance

Pigskin Parade (1936) MILITANT INTELLECTUAL STUDENT (who sings)

Danger - Love at Work (1937) CHEMIST

Submarine Patrol (1938) SAILOR

My Lucky Star (1938) "WALDO"

Stranger on the Third Floor (1940) INNOCENT MAN IN JAIL

Tin Pan Alley (1940) SONGWRITER

Sergeant York (1941) PIANO PLAYER

Man at Large (1941) HOTEL CLERK

The Maltese Falcon (1941) "WILMER"/GUNMAN

Love Crazy (1941) ELEVATOR BOY

I Wake Up Screaming (1941) HOTEL CLERK

Hellzapoppin (1941) TIMID SCREENWRITER

Ball of Fire (1941) WAITER

Wildcat (1942) "CHICOPEE"

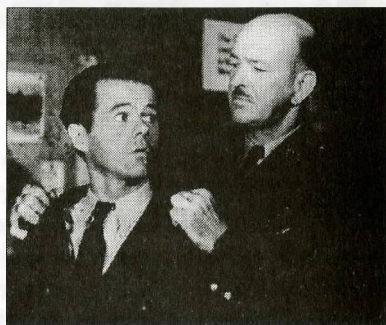
Gentleman at Heart, A (1942) WISEASS STARVING ARTIST

In This Our Life (1942) ROADHOUSE CUSTOMER
 Phantom Lady (1942) JAZZ DRUMMER
 Up in Arms (1944) SAILOR
 Dark Waters (1944) RUNS THE PLANTATION
 Dillinger (1945) DILLINGER GANGSTER
 Two Smart People (1946) "FLY FELETTI"
 Falcon's Alibi, The (1946) CRAZY DJ
 Big Sleep, The (1946) GUNMAN
 Gangster, The (1947) GUNMAN
 Great Gatsby (1949) GANGSTER
 Don't Bother to Knock (1952)

ELEVATOR MAN

I, the Jury (1953) (3-D) "BOBO"
 Shane (1953) WANNA-BE GUNFIGHTER
 Drum Beat (1954) "CRACKEL"
 Timberjack (1955) "PUNKY"
 Killing, The (1956) TICKET TELLER/ROBBER/CHUMP
 Lonely Man, The (1957) "WILLIE" THE INFORMER
 Baby Face Nelson (1957)
 Chicago Confidential (1957) "CANDY MOUTH"
 Plunder Road (1957) ROBBER WHO WANTS TO GO TO RIO
 House on Haunted Hill (1958) HAUNTED HOUSE OWNER
 Day of the Outlaw (1959) BARBER
 One-Eyed Jacks (1961) BANK TELLER
 Papa's Delicate Condition (1963) CIRCUS CO-OWNER (w/Murray Hamilton)
 Johnny Cool (1963) MOBSTER
 Haunted Palace, The (1963) VILLAGER (then and now)
 Glass Cage, The (1964) DREAM MAN WITH CANE
 Welcome to Hard Times (1967)
 Rosemary's Baby (1968) "MR. NICKLAS"
 El Condor (1970) OLD CONVICT
 Great Northfield, Minnesota Raid, The (1972) BANK EMPLOYEE
 Blacula (1972) MORGUE WORKER WITH A HOOK FOR A HAND
 Electra Glida in Blue (1973) CRAZY OLD GUY
 Emperor of the North (1973) "GREY CAT"
 Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid (1973) "CODY"
 Outfit, The (1974) CASHIER (doesn't even have lines)
 Black Bird, The (1975) "WILMER" again
 St. Ives (1976) HOTEL CLERK
 Tom Horn (1979) STABLEHAND
 Salem's Lot (1979) CRAZY OLD GUY
 Champ, The (1979) KEPT CHAMP'S LOCKER FOR HIM
 1941 (1979) PATRON
 Carny (1980) "ON-YOUR-MARK"/CARNIVAL WORKER/DAD
 Nat'l Lampoon Goes to the Movies (1981) "MOUSY"
 Hammett (1983) TAXI DRIVER
 Man Who Broke 1,000 Chains (1987)(TV) "PAPPY GLUE" (last appearance)

*due to space and quality,
 TV appearances are
 usually not listed for
 ThatGuys*



THATGUY Warren Oates

born 1928

died 1982



Oates shouldn't be a ThatGuy; he was a character actor but had many leading roles from guys who took a vow of silence to John Dillinger. But the more people I told his name to the more blank stares I got. Or that squinty eye look, signifying either they recognize the name and can't place the face or they just want to look like they know what you're talking about. After naming a film Oates was in or a role he played (usually STRIPES, unfortunately) or showing them a picture their faces would light up, though. "Oh! That guy!"

Oates started very far away from Hollywood in more ways than one. Born in a mining town in Western Kentucky, Oates attended a one-room schoolhouse. After being in the Marines, he took theater classes at the University of Louisville. He was given comedy roles because of his deep accent.

In the late 1950s and early '60s, Oates got many television roles on series such as *Gunsmoke*, *Wanted: Dead or Alive* and *Wagon Train*. He also got his first (and uncredited) part in a film, UP PERISCOPE.

Oates told his brother that he was giving himself five years to make a living at being an actor, otherwise he would get a real job. Three years later he reminded his brother that he hadn't forgotten the deal, as he moved out to Los Angeles to find more TV work. Luckily for us, three months later he became Jack Lord's sidekick on the series *Stoney Burke* and never had to look for a normal job.

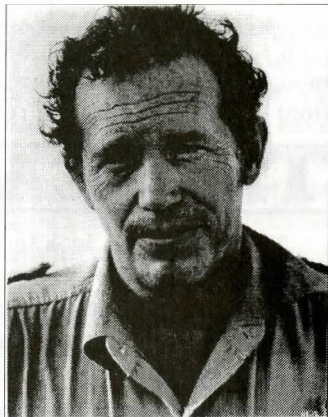
Westerns and outsiders seemed to be home for Oates, so it's no surprise that he became a friend and regular for director Sam Peckinpah with healthy supporting roles in three of his films and the lead in the director's ALFREDO GARCIA. Oates plays an eerie imitation of the maverick director in the film, which people seem to love or hate. Few others seem to fit that role, though, of an American piano player in Mexico so down-and-out that he'll bring back someone's head for money. What's great about Oates in this and other roles is that he's not pitiful, just a man trying to survive with his excesses, his ups and downs.

Monte Hellman also used Oates to great extent, featuring him in four films. For Hellman, Oates would play the noble character against smart-alec Jack Nicholson in THE SHOOTING, against young stud James Taylor in TWO-LANE BLACKTOP and against everyone as a COCKFIGHTER who refuses to talk.

Oates might not be recognized as a leading actor because of his subtleness. But he also stole many films in subtle supporting roles. Whether comedic or dramatic, Oates is always the character you remember from the side.

A good documentary about Oates, ACROSS THE BORDER (1993), was made by Tom Thurman, who later made THIRD COWBOY ON THE RIGHT (1996) about actor Ben Johnson.

Filmography



Up Periscope (1959) SAILOR

Yellowstone Kelly (1959) CORPORAL

Private Property (1960) GAY FRIEND

Rise & Fall of Legs Diamond (1960)

“EDDIE DIAMOND”/ALCOHOLIC BROTHER

Hero's Island (1962) PIRATE-FIGHTER

Ride the High Country (1962) SOUTHERN TRASH

Mail Order Bride (1964) COWBOY

Major Dundee (1965) CAVALRY SOLDIER

Shenandoah (1965)

Return of the Seven (1966) WOMANIZING GUN-
FIGHTER

In the Heat of the Night (1967) DEPUTY

Shooting, The (1967) UNWILLING BOUNTY HUNTER

Welcome to Hard Times (1967)

Split, The (1968) SAFECRACKER

Crooks and Coronets (1969) CROOK

Smith! (1969) DOUBLE-CROSSING INDIAN INTERPRETER

Wild Bunch, The (1969) “LYLE GORCH”, Ben Johnson's brother

Barquero (1970) OUTLAW ON THE RUN

There Was a Crooked Man (1970) PRISONER

Hired Hand, The (1971) DRIFTER

Two-Lane Blacktop (1971) CAR DRIVER/“G.T.O.”

Chandler (1972) PRIVATE EYE

Badlands (1973) DAD

Dillinger (1973) JOHN DILLINGER

Kid Blue (1973) DENNIS HOPPER'S BATHTUB PARTNER

Thief Who Came to Dinner, The (1973) INSURANCE INVESTIGATOR

Tom Sawyer (1973) “MUFF POTTER”

Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia (1974) PIANO PLAYER/BOUNTY
HUNTER

Cockfighter (1974) SILENT COCKFIGHTER

White Dawn, The (1974) STRANDED SAILOR

92 in the Shade (1975) PSYCHOTIC FISHERMAN

Race with the Devil (1975) VACATIONER CHASED BY SATANISTS

Dixie Dynamite (1976) CAR RACER

Drum (1976) PLANTATION OWNER

Sleeping Dogs (1977) SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

Brink's Job, The (1978) BANK ROBBER/EX-MILITARY

China 9, Liberty 37 (1978) FARMER WITH A PRICE ON HIS HEAD

1941 (1979) CRAZY COLONEL IN BARSTOW

Prime Time (1980) CELEBRITY SPORTSMAN

Stripes (1981) DRILL SERGEANT

Border, The (1982) BORDER PATROLMAN

Blue Thunder (1983) POLICE CAPTAIN

Tough Enough (1983) RUNS THE TOUGH MAN COMPETITION

*Thanks to Steve
Puchalski for
add'l info*

It's not hard to get lost in conflicting reports of scenes missing, proper letterbox ratio, the elusive subtitled version, and ten titles for the same film. But it is really not (too) hard to find what you're looking for.

The SEARCH For Films

The first place to look for stuff and the only way films should be seen is in the theater. What's better: seeing something 25-inches or 40 feet tall? You can watch a film 20 times on video and then see it on the big screen and still see something new. Besides seeing the entire frame, the projected film image is remarkably better than a monitor can ever hope to be.

As for finding the hard-to-get titles in a film print, you'd be surprised at what's out there. Besides the high profile re-releases, many retrospectives travel around the country. That might be the only way to see Seijin Suzuki's or Werner Herzog's lesser-known films, just two recent retros. Museums and colleges have many screenings, even free at times. Keep up on what's in your area, most have flyers or are listed in small print in the newspapers. And just plain look at what's around you; there are always surprises. In Berkeley, the Pacific Film Archive will screen any one of their prints for you if you rent the theater. After going to a University for five years I discovered that the school library had 16mm prints for FACES and VIVRE SA VIE, both unavailable at the time. A simple free checkout and we got to see what we had heard about for years. No classes even showed them! The most surprising source I found was a trader's journal for serious film collectors that were selling or trading prints of all kinds of films, albeit with varying quality. In future issues I'll profile some of the better theaters and resources around the country.

If you can't find a film playing anywhere in a theater environment, or more commonly, you don't live in or near a big city, you're forced to turn toward film's half-breed descendant: the videotape. Sometimes it's the only way to see a film, particularly a foreign or classic one. It's still kind of tricky to find titles, but with patience, a car and cold, hard cash you can find some ridiculous stuff. Many titles were released in the 1980s but were taken "out of print", meaning no new videotape copies are currently being made of the title, so you can't order it. You'll need to find an old video copy to see it. Unfortunately, many stores rotate the stock and only have new things. If it's a particular title you're looking for, call every place in the phone book. But it's often better to just drive around and peruse all the titles in town. Find mom-and-pop stores first. Besides giving your money to someone small, they often have very old titles to keep up with bigger stores who throw stuff away. Privately owned places will listen to customer suggestions. Many will order titles if the video is currently available from somewhere. After I heard about Nina Menkes and Abbas Kiarostami (read their respective articles), I found that a large distributor, Facets, had all of Menkes' films and two of Kiarostami's. Another Kiarostami was available through European Trash Cinema of all places. Simple requests at the video store and now they're available for everyone. But hurry, the small stores are being pushed out by sicko chain stores that carry 50 copies of the latest Mel Gibson crap rather than having a variety. Some chain stores have a handful of oddities, still in their oversized old boxes, now long out-of print. A little research about the title you're looking for also helps. I've found a few things under completely different

titles, especially horror and kung-fu items. *Video Watchdog* mag regularly keeps up on re-titled stuff and video guides often list A.K.A.'s. I swear some films are under five different titles in video release. I've got a copy of ONE-ARMED BOXER VS FLYING GUILLOTINE that is a good print, letterboxed and subtitled. I also have the exact same version in a bad, scratched-up print that is dubbed and not letterboxed, titled MASTER OF THE FLYING GUILLOTINE. Same film. Stores that rhyme with Schlock Hustler often sell off their unknown and old stuff because people that frequent there only rent Chuck Norris in Vietnam films. I've gotten good copies of THE KILLING and CHAMELEON STREET with the color boxes for a lousy \$5 each. In future issues I'll also profile some of the powerhouse video stores; like Casa Video (Tucson), Eddie Brandt's (LA), Kim's (NYC), Le Video (San Francisco), Movie Madness and More (Portland) and many others.

Non-video stores that have videos can occasionally be a good source. While many used bookstores now do used videos as well, this doesn't seem to be very fruitful. Of course, there's the occasional out-of-print find, or the real oddity, like when I saw an underground copy of TWO-LANE BLACKTOP for \$9 (although it's a cut version). When I first got into Hong Kong cinema, I frequented the Chinese market that had around 500 videos, all letterboxed and most subtitled.

Now the hard part: titles that have never been on mainstream video. The first and easiest place to check is television. Many cable channels do good jobs showing obscure stuff. Sit, watch and wonder why kick-ass films don't make it to re-releases or video. One afternoon I turned the TV on to the Discovery Channel and flipped out when I saw Werner Herzog's Kuwaiti fire doc, LESSONS OF DARKNESS. Forgotten classics turn up all the time on AMC and TCM. Before they recently came out on video, I saw THE KILLERS and FIVE GRAVES TO CAIRO on TV more than once. Classics are good to get off TV because they don't have the same problems as later films. Cinemascope, a rectangular widescreen process, came out in 1953 with THE ROBE. Many films thereafter used this or a similar rival process and need to be seen letterboxed in a 1.85 or 2.35 or similar ratio. Channels are getting better at presenting letterboxed versions, but you might have to deal with pan-and-scan being the only type shown. At least you see the film, I guess. Another problem with later films is objectionable content that would be edited on some channels.

As usual, there are a few titles that get confusing. The only way I found THE CONFORMIST letterboxed and subtitled was off the Bravo network. A good copy, but edited for content. THE PRESIDENT'S ANALYST with James Coburn is a great and somewhat forgotten comedy, overshadowed by his similar FLINT films. The ANALYST home video says "special video version." That means it's crappy pan-and-scan and a particular scene is re-edited. They couldn't or didn't get the rights for a song that is sung while a group of spies try to attack Coburn. The scene is really less effective without the song, one of the high points in the film. When shown on TV, it is occasionally letterboxed and has the correct song playing, but is edited for a quick shot of nudity. Not a huge loss, but still makes for awkward edits.

If a film has never been on video and doesn't seem to show on television, then it's time to look at mail-order catalogs. These are the primary places for foreign titles and alternate versions of popular titles. It's amazing what's not available on mainstream video. INVESTIGATION OF A CITIZEN ABOVE SUSPICION won the 1970 Best Foreign Film Oscar© but doesn't

have a mainstream release, while you can find crapbound winners BELLE EPOQUE and MEDITERRANEO anywhere. Amused but tired by the non-accent re-dubbing of the first MAD MAX? The original version with Australian dialogue is only available "underground." Apparently, if something is not officially in print by a distributor in America, it is almost a public domain item and is sold by a variety of places, from the very professional to the homegrown. This includes not only obscure titles, but also different versions of what is already available, like in letterboxed form or with additional footage. Prices vary from \$15 to \$25 plus shipping and quality really varies. But you can find some seriously obscure items. Herzog's EVEN DWARVES STARTED SMALL, Chuck Barris' THE GONG SHOW MOVIE, Groucho Marx, Jackie Gleason and Frankie Avalon as part of the all-star cast in SKIDOO. You always think you know everything about an actor or director and then five more films they did in Italy turn up. It's always Italy. These catalogs will have those films.

Quickly, a few of the mail-order catalogs: Video Search of Miami is the most revered and the most despised. They have 20,000+ titles and some really whacked-out stuff from every country, genre and era. The Japanese titles are usually good quality and often subtitled by VSoM themselves. They also publish the zine Asian Cult Cinema. Complaints stem from the prices (\$10 to "join", \$25 per video plus shipping), terrible video quality and an unwillingness to work with customers. One friend ordered a 126-minute film and it came on a 120-minute tape sans ending. Luminous Film & Video Wurks is a popular place, the higher price of \$25 a tape at least includes a full-color hard box. They have a great variety of titles from trash to award winners and are generally good quality. The only complaint I've heard is occasionally being super-slow in responding. The man that knows his stuff is Craig Ledbetter and his European Trash Cinema. ETC was a longtime magazine that seems to be more defunct now in favor of the ETC mail-order videos. The prices are very fair, \$15 for something without a color box, \$20 for ones with a box. His updates are very regular and informative. A friend who orders stuff from all over, and from everyone, says ETC is the one place that hasn't burned him. A minor complaint I would have is the limitation of only European titles. There are many more companies: Something Weird and its endless supply of trash and hilarious trailers, Shocking Videos has some real obscurities like TRICK BABY, Video Yesteryear carries loads of classics and TV stuff, Far East Flix, Tai Seng and a ton more Hong Kong distrib. Some video stores will deal with these places, in case you can't afford all the titles you want.

The last resource, and potentially the most fruitful, is the big old Internet. With an email account and extra time you can use newsgroups to post what you have, what you are looking for and check out other trader lists. After some haggling you work out what titles to trade, make dubs and mail them to another person somewhere else and wait for stuff you asked for to arrive. It's weird because there's so much stuff available, and it's easy. The trading exists on a "collector" basis; you are trading videotapes between collectors, no rights are implied or given. It probably drives distributors crazy, but I think the majority of trading is with titles that are seriously hard-to-find. Why would you go to the trouble of dubbing and mailing something to a person you don't really know in order to get a tape that's down the street? While there seems to be a lot of traders on the net, it still appears to be a very small minority of video renting America.

The good thing about net trading: it's pretty cheap. The cost of blank videos plus the cost of shipping for five videos is under \$20. The availability of titles is huge. Collectors are reachable from all over the U.S. and Canada with their own connections to distributors, video stores, TV, etc., all at your fingertips.

The Internet is not without its hassles. The video quality ranges wildly from good to hideous. Something could show up with a dark image or no sound. You could send stuff out and never get anything in return. You can't go to the Better Business Bureau about that one. The haggling is different with everybody; they may want only similar running lengths, certain brand videos, a 126-minute film on two separate tapes, etc.. The hardest thing about trading is actually having something to trade. You want 20 things but only have two things to trade.

Put all these sources together and you discover the most important thing to finding films: connections. Friends in big cities send me flyers and programs of film series so I find new stuff I've never heard of. Another person records TV films all the time and trades over the net. A friend with a real job mail orders from the underground catalogs. The video store buys requested titles. Take all these titles and trade with other people, and it gets maddening. And as you're looking for a film, you find ten more you want to see. Slowly and surely, all your time is wasted away and you don't even watch any of them.



A few places to find videos:

(call for catalogs during office hours or email)

Critics' Choice (800-367-7765) www.ccvideo.com

European Trash Cinema (281-251-0637)
www.diabolik.demon.co.uk

Kino Int'l (800-562-3330) www.kino.com

Luminous (516-289-1644) www.lfvw.com

Movies Unlimited (800-4-MOVIES)
www.moviesunlimited.com

Sinister Cinema (541-773-6860) www.cinemaweb.com/sinister/

Something Weird Video (206-361-3759) www.somethingweird.com

Tai Seng Video (888-668-8338) www.taiseng.com

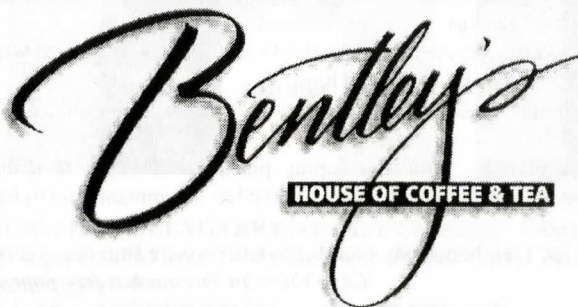
Video Search of Miami (888-279-9773) www.vsom.com

Video Vault (800-VAULT-66) www.videovault.com

Video Yesteryear (800-243-0987) www.yesteryear.com

also see page 9: **Facets Video & World Artists**

...more next issue



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CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE

Daniel Auteil's visit to video store spawns guilt trip in clerk

by John Eidswick

I used to have strong moral convictions about movie stars. I loathed the way people demeaned themselves in the presence of a "celebrity," clamoring pathetically for autographs, locks of hair and pieces of clothing. Movie stars are *people*, just like you and I. They put their pants on one leg at a time. As a child, I was forced to attend a local "celebrity tennis

match." I acquired two autographs there; one from Wayne Rogers (Trapper John on TV's *MASH*), the other from Burt Bacharach. I wasn't sure why it was important to get their autographs, but it had to be; everyone was lining up like lemmings for them and, heck, these guys were stars. I'd never heard of Bacharach.

This memory contributed to my convictions that star-worship was the concern of those with tenuous scruples and weak minds. And my conviction held firm until the other day when the little French guy walked into Casa Video.

He asked me, in a sharp French accent, where we kept the laser discs. Some faint air of recognition struck me; he looked so *familiar*. Two customers standing nearby felt it too. One asked me, "Is that who I think it is?" A name jumped to my lips at the same moment. "Daniel Auteil?" (pronounced "O-toy", I'm told *-ed*.) My heart began pounding, and sweat jumped to my face.

The customers followed him to the laser discs, and I was startled further when they began shaking his hand uttering exclamations of wonder. My knees went weak. Before I could stop myself, I jumped to the phone and called a friend, in whose mind Auteil resides as a salient sex symbol. "You're kidding!" she cried over the line. Minutes later, she rode up on her bike, armed with a book about French cinema. She had her finger stuck in the page where Auteil had an entry. We both galloped up the stairs, frantic, perspiring like people having coronaries, and found him looking through the action films. What followed was an hour of horrible self-abasement. The other staff, each of whom had scarcely heard of Auteil, got his autograph. When Auteil finished bringing down the huge stacks of lasers he wanted to rent and heaped them on the counter, someone confronted him with a camera. Without thinking, I lurched like a starving man after meat into the photograph. I barely stopped myself from putting my arm around his shoulder.

It turned out Auteil wanted to *buy* all those lasers, not rent them. My flesh turned to ice. I explained to him, stuttering, that out of fifty or so movies he picked, only one was for sale. "I'm so very sorry, sir," I kept saying over and over. Auteil took it all graciously; no explosions of rage, no smashed camera, no broken bones. But if he'd punched me squarely in the mouth at that moment, I couldn't have blamed him.

After he'd left, my conscious haunted me for the rest of the day. Each time I thought about the photograph, the grim, shattered visage of Princess Diana appeared with it. I shuddered. My opinion of myself was low.

The next morning, just after we opened, Tom Hanks came to me and asked where we kept ANNE OF THE GREEN GABLES. I slapped him.

He stared at me as though I were mad and rubbed his cheek. "Do you... do you know who I am?" he asked.

"Yeah," I responded, glaring. "You're a lisping pipsqueak and you're spilling popcorn on our carpet. I, on the other hand, am the King of Sweden. I command you to leave my Kingdom *now*."

After throwing him out, I felt better. My moral convictions were firm once more.

Casa Video in Tucson has free popcorn.

Reprinted from their newsletter Film Frenzy, April '98.

FUCKFEST

For no other reason than we were interested in which film says it the most. The contest excludes concert films, esp. by Eddie Murphy.

Posing the idea to friends, everyone had a different suggestion, from POPE OF GREENWICH VILLAGE to GOODFELLAS to 48 HRS. Anytime I catch something heavily censored on TV (my favorite is REPO MAN: "Flip you!" "Don't you ever say flip you to me! 'Coz you haven't earned the right!"), I watch the real version to investigate.

For reference, the dictionary says: 1. to have sexual intercourse with. 2. to treat unfairly or harshly. 3. to bungler or botch (used with *up*). 4. to meddle (used with *with*). 5. to damn (used with *you*).

First Contestant: **GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS**

(1992) Directed by James Foley, Written by David Mamet

Starring Jack Lemmon, Al Pacino, Ed Harris, Alan Arkin, Kevin Spacey, Jonathan Pryce

If you weren't sure about whether or not you wanted to go into selling real estate (the hard, cold call way), be sure after this. Grueling scenes of Lemmon going into peoples' homes and trying to sell them land. Harder to watch than violence. Excellent acting by all, especially swarmy Pacino (his last good role) and the always getting-dumped-on Harris.

extra credit: Baldwin says it 8 times in his 7 onscreen minutes, and the phrase "Fuck the machine!" is uttered 4 times in a row, thrice by Ed Harris, of course

Second Contestant: **SLAP SHOT**

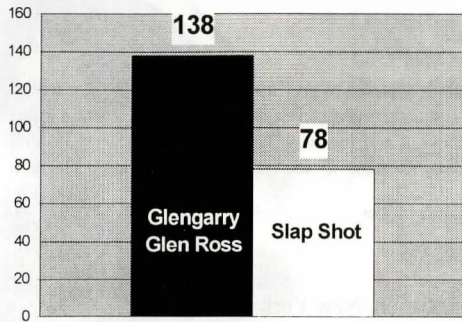
(1977) Directed by George Roy Hill, Written by Nancy Dowd

Starring Paul Newman, Michael Ontkean, Strother Martin and other ThatGuys

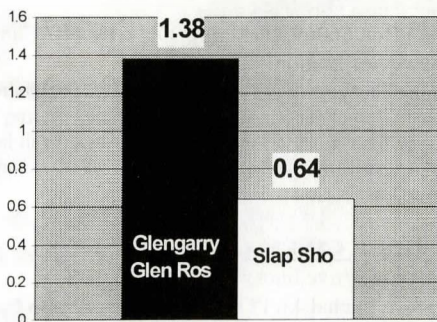
I'm not a sports-film fan, but I love this film. Must be for the anarchy. It's not made real well, the technical aspects are completely devoid of any sense, but it's got a 'heart'. Unlike real sports, this film doesn't take itself too seriously and has a great payoff at the end. The actors know that they're in a guilty pleasure and push it for all that it's worth.

extra credit: The Hanson Brothers, it's written by a woman, and that guy with the big mouth who keeps saying "snatch" makes me kinda sick.

SAYING THE WORD



AVG. PER MINUTE



THE RESULT: **GLENGARRY** is our first Champion! I thought SLAP could keep up, but it got doubled over. Looks like the 1970s just couldn't keep up with the technological '90s.

Next Issue: MIDNIGHT RUN and STATE OF GRACE.

OTHER ZINES

not necessarily about film (small mags have to stick together)

BAD AZZ MOFO

52 pages/four bucks

Angziety Produkschunz; PO Box 40649, Portland, OR 97240-0649

The blaxploitation zine with much more than that. Issue one is stuff from earlier smaller issues and new stuff; defining blaxploitation, interview with the hard-to-find Jim Kelly, the serious Walter Matthau films and more. Mastermind David Walker is also doing a documentary on the subject, can't wait to see it. The main crux are reviews, from the popular black-x stuff to the seriously obscure. Great photos and great ratings: 1 to 4 afros, and if it sucks -- a jeri curl.

EXILE OSAKA

80 pages/Four bucks

Back issues: Matt Kaufman, 3115 Brighton 6th St #6B, Brooklyn, NY 11235

osakamm@gol.com

If you like Japanese noise and garage music (I do) then get this mag. Matt Exile has lived in Osaka for years and has great interviews and articles on the Boredoms, Melt-Banana, Masonna, Guitar Wolf and other biggies, as well as lesser-known bands that should be known and US bands touring there. BUT this is just half of it, the mag also has cool stories about living in Japan, i.e., the bars, clubs, food, society and even haircuts. Anyone who likes Giant Robot mag should read this, too.

GIANT ROBOT

88 pages/Four bucks

PO Box 642053, LA, CA 90064

www.giantrobot.com

These guys don't need my help but in case you missed it, grab any of their issues. Concentrates on Asian culture, written with a skate attitude. Funny, down-to-earth and informative. Printed well, but still a cool zerox in heart. Issue 12 features Jet Li interviewed, walks thru various Chinatowns and one sick vacation story. Available even at Border's, if all the employees didn't get them first.

HEINOUS

Made by Steve Mandich in Portland. I found three old issues used for 50 cents each. I was immediately grabbed by the Evel Knievel covers and insightful articles, which cover everything from his stunts to music about him. Other articles covers bands and Chick publications. Also, each digest-sized issue is bound by a piece of cassette tape with the cover of said cassette shown on the inside. Since the dates are 94/95, this might be old news, but I just found them and they're damn cool.

INFILTRATION

24 pages/One buck

PO Box 66069, Pickering, ON L1V 6P7 Canada

www.infiltration.org

Small but effective zine "about going places you're not supposed to go." #9 goes in subterranean tunnels of Milan and Glasgow and in-depth about scoping out the Paris catacombs closed by Police. This is what zines should all be about, subverting the system in an intelligent and fun way. As a friend put it when he saw this, "Just like skating other peoples' pools." Anybody wanting to see true adventure should check it out. First person writing with lots of photos.

SHOCK CINEMA

40 pages/five bucks

Steve Puchalski, PO Box 518, Peter Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009

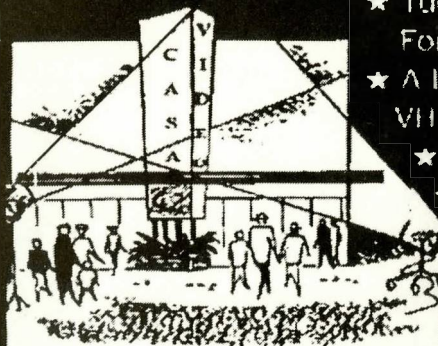
members.aol.com/shockcin/index.html

I'll admit it -- I earlier dismissed this as another horror/cult mag that reviewed crap and insisted you should see it because "its cool." Man, I was way wrong. Puchalski has wasted more time than even me watching films and every type of film. When I saw reviews of Sokurov's *STONE* and Ben Gazzara in *THE STRANGE ONE*, I knew this was different. Mostly reviews, very well-informed and fun to read. Does have the trash but doesn't pretend it's art. Most importantly, Steve worships Timothy Carey.

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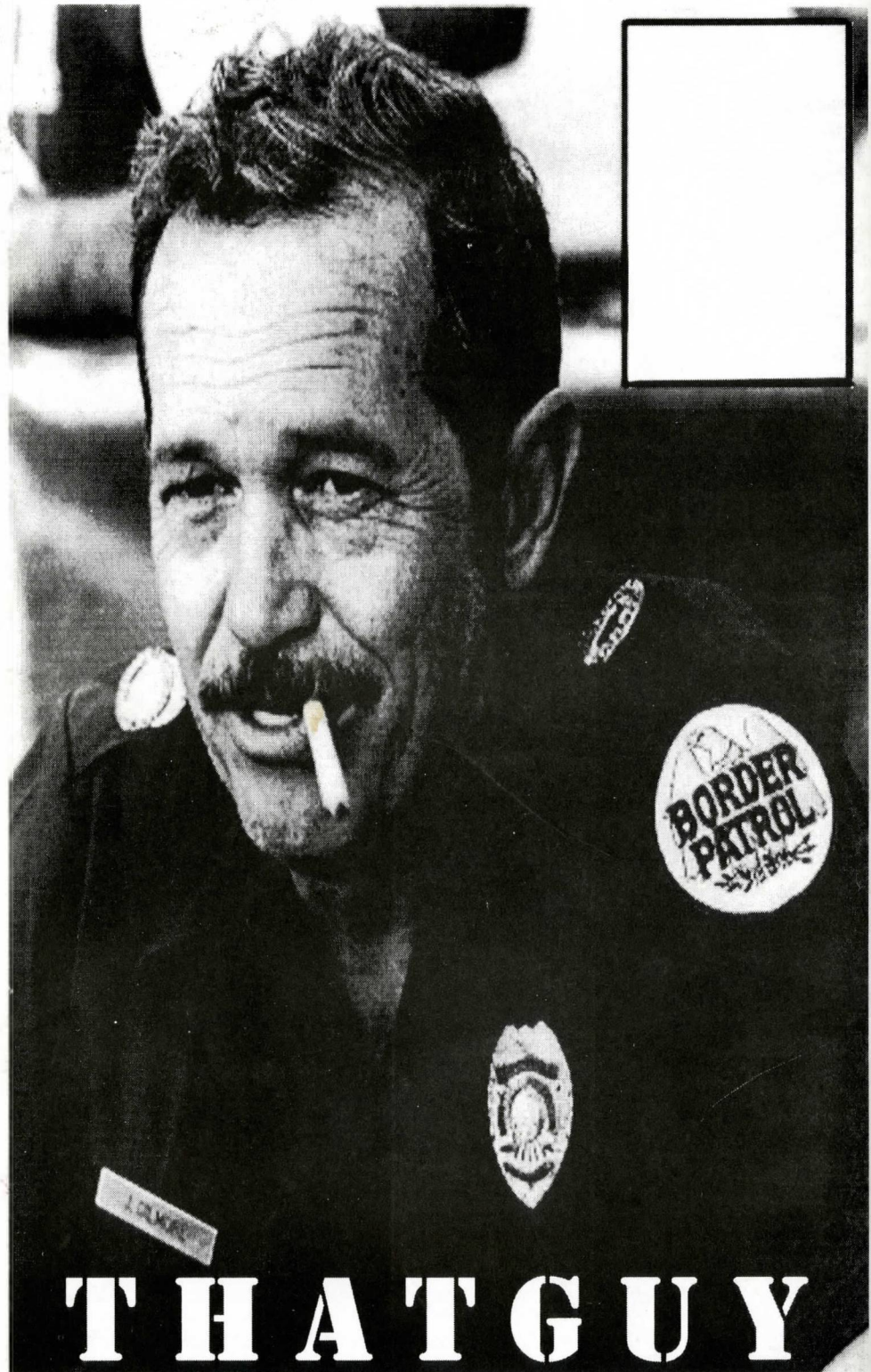
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