

Help or get out of the way.

CINEMAD

Issue Five

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Cover image: Ed from BACK AGAINST THE WALL by James Fotopoulos. Front and back covers designed by Jason Willis (heyrupe.com).

Back cover: Ermey shows his war face in FULL METAL JACKET by Stanley Kubrick. *This page:* Bruce Brown and crew, ENDLESS SUMMER.

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Critics Are Human: They Lie

Recently I traveled to some film festivals and met some other magazine writers and newspaper critics. I don't think you should trust us. On top of a few chance meetings with some eccentric folks, I heard a ton of stories from filmmakers about their one-on-ones with various well-known critics and their various hang-ups. It makes sense, we're all just people, but I don't believe that I am the end-all opinion, not until I see every movie ever made and talk to everyone important involved. Fuck that anyway, so many of my heroes would probably come crashing down. I'm loud about what I think but you should give me your point-of-view coz I'm not always right.

Besides, even if those lottery numbers make it possible for me to see everything ever made, whatever happens in my personal life (yeah I got one) is surely going to taint it. One of the films I talk about in this issue reminded of a relationship when I watched it. How can that not affect my judgement? That's the great thing about cinema as well. It'll beat you down and lift you up.

I do my best, but when I get a crown on my tooth and then go to Mexico for a punk rock show and drag my ass home at 430 am (The Weird Lovemakers rule), the next morning's writing is probably gonna suffer. I try to infuse that experience in the whole pie without being too personal or boring. As many people like to tell me, "It's your zine."

But these critics I ran into were saying shit like, "You can't cross narrative with experimental." Only in your world, buddy. And you won't ever make a film, so the rest of us are okay. Just saying you can't make your film your own way is ridiculous. I don't like the way some films are made but that's got nothing to do with tradition. It's whatever the filmmaker thinks is right for the film. Maybe someone else could've done it the same way but better.

"I enjoyed the atavism of the picture." Dammit, where's the dictionary? If I even got the word right, it means to harken back to a previous age. Oh, so you mean it has a film stock that makes it look like it's from 1970? Why can't you just talk to me? Look me in the eyes.

And, yes, many writers are frustrated filmmakers, or worse, frustrated writers. Please do not tell me about the great things you got planned, you are just shooting yourself in the foot. Then, when your film is finally made, you can tell me all about how "they" messed it up. Hell, you can write a long review about yourself. Give yourself 4 stars at the end.

As always, there are exceptions. We all want to be Godard; be an intelligent critic and write at length for years then actually go out and make incredible films, putting your money where your mouth has been. 99% of us are nowhere near that.

And of course I am just self-pity steps away from these people I met and now lambaste. That's why I'm writing this; I always read my shit later. Usually I sit and laugh my ass off. Not "with" what I write, but also "at," going "agghh" all the time. Which is what all writers need.



John Schuster, copy editor

There are plenty of good, objective writers (or at least they use the same ruler all the time) who can laugh at themselves. But most remind me of my college teachers, showing their own projects in class right after an Orson Welles film.



Then there are the hundreds of writers who got the job just because they were on staff already. Is this what newspapers do for food recipes? Hey Joe, you got a stove? Write this food section! Is this what they do for car care? You know where the oil goes, Harry? Fuck dude, tell people how to buy cars! Is this what they do for the local news? Well, yeah.

But they sure fucking respect sports, where every little box score is listed. You have analysis but you also talk to the people involved. The bad part is they do relate sports to movies in following the stars and the money. That is not what cinema needs; an attentive display of numbers. You will always lose. People forget very fast.

Adding to the personal grudges is the odd relation of the tired terms: art vs. entertainment. I don't think I have to go on about how art is usually entertaining, entertainment can be art and entertainment is usually not entertaining. Sounds stupid all together, huh? Then drop it. Films off the mainstream seem to have to live up to the highest ruler, have a message, are crude because they aren't shot like a slick music video. Hollywood films simply have to look good. That's it. Millions of dollars for the worst film because "it's the only thing playing." You get what you deserve then.

"You just pick on Hollywood because you can't make it there." I pick on Hollywood because many won't even watch the films I suggest. Yeah, a lot of them are hard to find, but I know you're smart and if you want to find it, you will. And Hollywood is the center of the film world. I'm not going to argue about films coming out of New Orleans. No one sells their soul to try to make it in Boulder. The world does not spend billions of dollars and change their speech and style to mimic the magic of Phoenix.

All I'm asking is try something new. I'll watch something you tell me about.

Just for the record, I talk about films you've never heard of because I can't find them in other magazines and want to know more, forcing myself to search. If enough people are asking about a filmmaker or title, distributors will eventually get the picture that they can make a dime and it will come out.

"Help or get out of the way."

The quote on the first page is from a rad music magazine called *Sound Collector*. The saying came out of a discussion with Wayne Coyne from Flaming Lips, talking about how a lot of bands are technically great, stylish, and sound good, yet end up being retreads of so many other bands. He called them record collector bands. You end up with all these outer experiences, hiding emotions and ideas, instead of any push forward or inner experiences as influence.

You got it, there are tons of video collector film-

makers. There is a difference between being influenced and stealing, Scorsese having favorite themes and shots from films then using them with his own personal history and passion to create something new. New ideas can be fun. You don't have to set the world on fire, just try something new. Instead there are all the films that aren't just trying to fit inside a genre, they are stealing the exact same shots and dialogue, resulting in simple pop culture references.

Coyne makes the point that eventually he realized he didn't want to just be a fan, he wanted to add something to this damn thing, or get out of the way of the people who are trying. (He went on to do a series of parking lot experiments, playing multiple tapes in separate cars and recording it.)

You don't have to be Godard, but go see his films. Talk about them. If you don't like them, don't reject everything with subtitles. Take what a writer has to say in your own way. It has become pretty common for people to listen to a critic and continually do exactly the opposite. You don't have to like avant garde film (even from America), but your odds can't be any worse. People go to the multiplex over and over just to bitch and whine later. You still try.

For the critics, if you don't want to see or write about challenging films, you are in the way. Don't tell me they're bad or "amateur" when you're preoccupied with your own fame and fortune.

This issue is a mix of new and old. James Fotopoulos has been making films for years under the radar, until the New York Underground fest "discovered" him in 2000. We talked a lot and it gets wordy at times and very thoughtful, but he speaks completely down-to-earth. I always worry about that; words in print carry so much more weight and sound so different than spoken dialogue with inflection, speed, tone and accent. If it ever sounds condescending or academic, trust me, it's not. My "discovery" is Larry Foster. But that wasn't hard, he was an amazing film teacher I had and now he made a feature. His speak and manner is really easy-going and funny. He likes all kinds of films; on his shelf *CASABLANCA* is next to *CAGED WOMEN IN PURGATORY*. But you read the text on his website and you'd think he's never seen daylight.

Two interviews are reprints, requested by the interviewers. The Suzuki Seijun ran in the Korean mag *Bug* and the Caveh Zahedi piece ran in a Portland journal called *The Ox Quarterly*. I think these both needed more distribution, besides just being really great interviews.

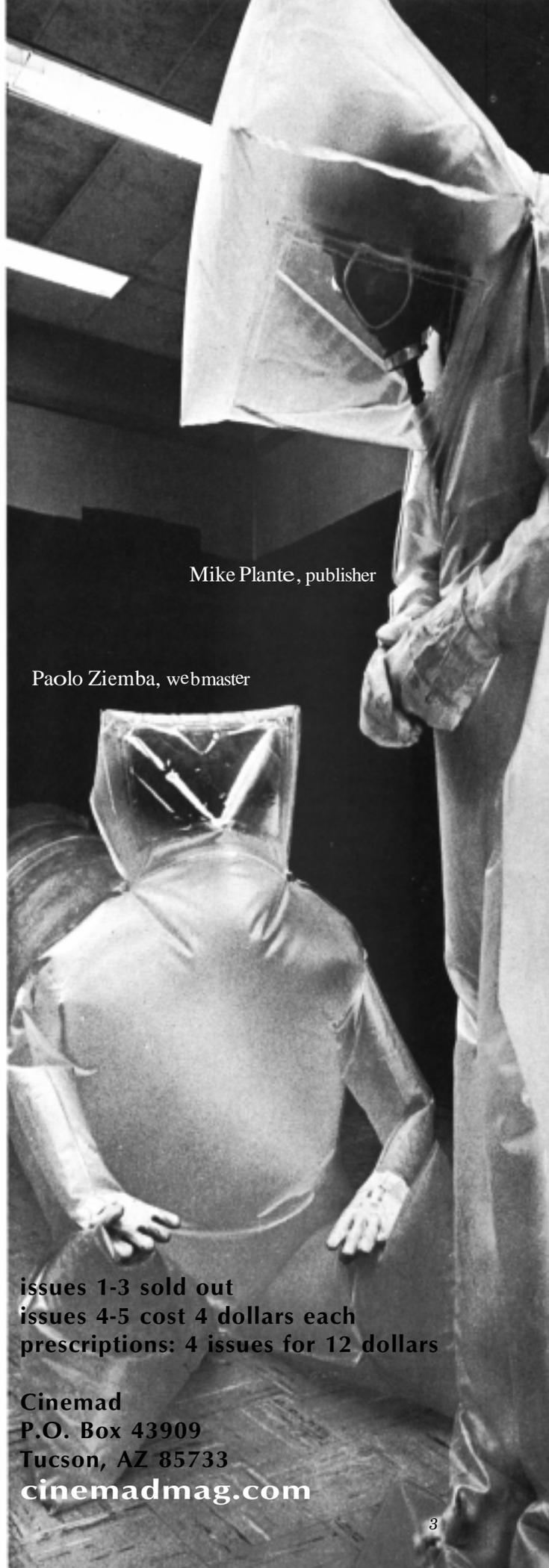
I love character actors, and one day I got R. Lee Erme's phone number. He was very funny and absolutely accommodating, probably knowing I was shaking as I dialed. Unfortunately, I found out a few more things about him I didn't get to ask about, so check the Cinemad website in the future.

More unfortunate is the exclusion of the planned ThatGuy Precinct. I just couldn't make it look good, and some names need more research. It'll be on the website instead, where I can always update and add to it.

But another addition will make up for it - San Francisco filmmaker Stom Sogo was unleashed upon the film festival there and delivered an article not clear but so crystal clear on the scene that it steals the show. Believe it, Stom's for real.

Then a puff piece about Bruce Brown that is deserved and been in me a while, another rant on the underground and an interview with the heads of the New York Underground fest, which has given me much inspiration for the future. And fuckfest. Thanks for reading.

Much thanks to everyone who contributed, sent videos, gave feedback, helped set up shows, gave me connections I never thought of. I'm out of space but you will get free copies. Extra special thanks to Mrs. C, Clark, Jason, all Bobs, The Screening Room, Stripe's Mom, Pal-o, Larry, Rush&Althea, advertisers, contributors, New Yorkers, LA drivers.



Mike Plante, publisher

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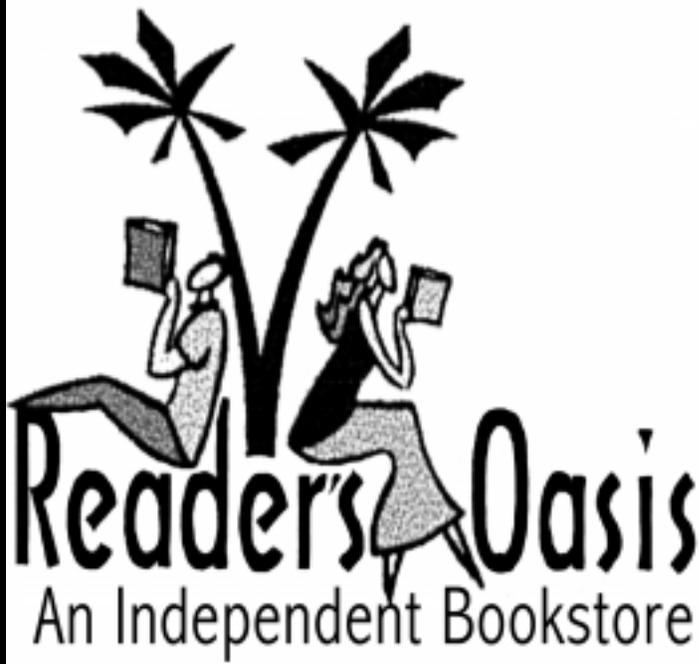
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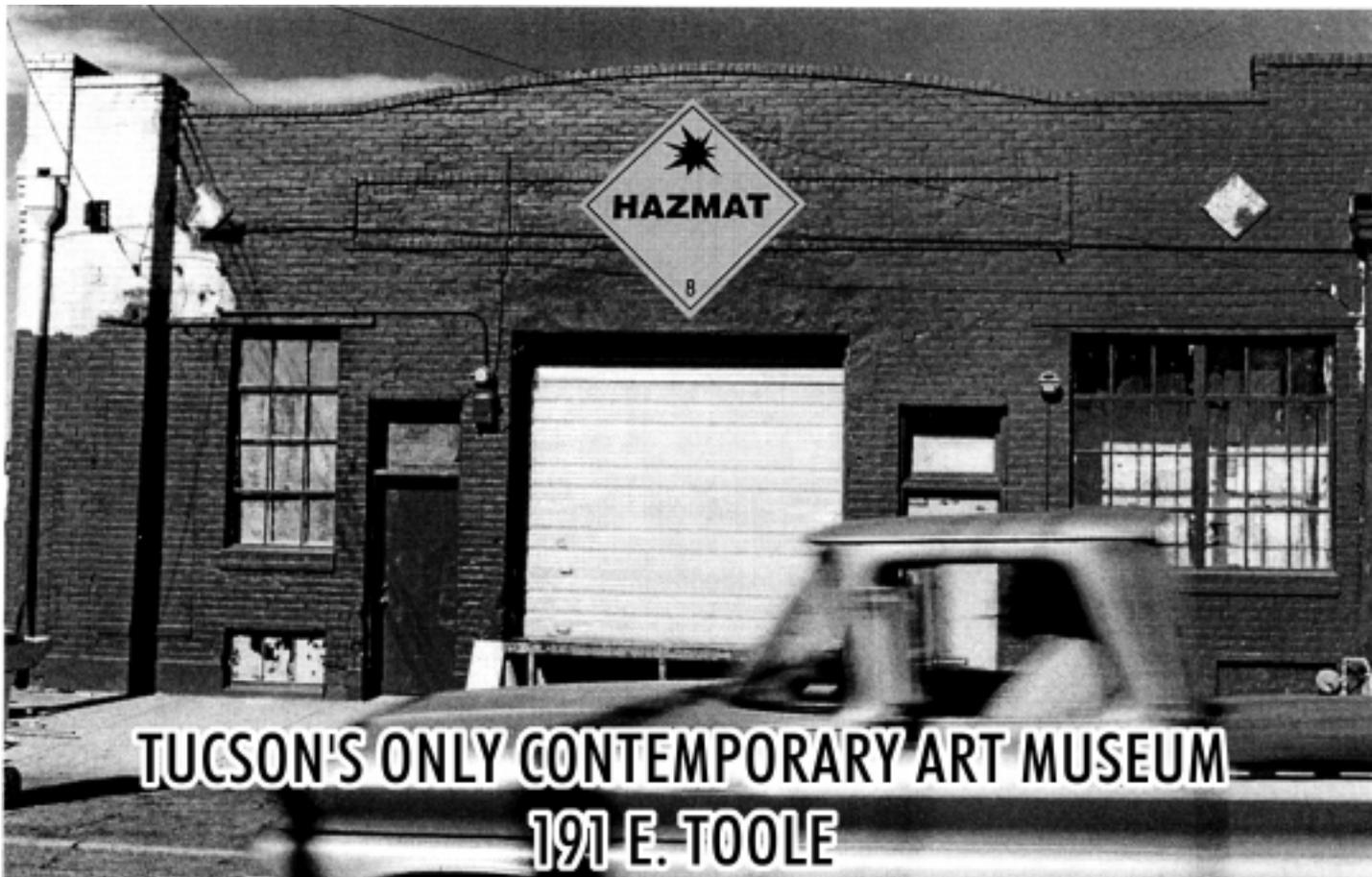
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JAMES FOTPOULOS

Takes A Stance

By Mike Plante *In two ways, James Fotopoulos' films remind me of Nina Menkes' work: if I describe the story or character's actions to someone who hasn't seen them, it sounds very straight ahead and narrative. If I describe the way it's presented on screen, it leads to the word experimental. Traditional storytelling taken through a unique approach, proving that you can combine certain film standards that are supposed to be unmeshable. Or, better yet, simply ignoring what film studios and critics and even other filmmakers tell you how you have to fit a mold. Rejecting the idea of, "You can't do that."*

The other way I introduce Fotopoulos' work is by giving the tale of the tape: Three feature-length films, twenty short films, two more features in post-production, all on 16mm film, made basically on his own (one grant, no film school support, small crews)... and he's only 24 years old.

All his films display strong atmosphere and deal with sexual and psychological power struggles. ZERO portrays one man on the way down in his sexual obsessions. MIGRATING FORMS is a hard ride in the middle of one couple's progressing sexual relationship. His newest, BACK AGAINST THE WALL, follows multiple characters in the various power struggles we all deal with, sometimes under the surface. Right now Fotopoulos is finishing CHRISTABEL and ESOPHAGUS, which takes place over 5 million years.

Since FORMS showed at the New York Underground Film Fest in March, 2000, Fotopoulos has been discovered with numerous festival screenings literally around the world and articles in major papers and magazines. If there is a new generation of American filmmakers, Fotopoulos is one of the anchors.

I met with Fotopoulos twice, first in New York City and then in a Mexican border town.

The introduction to this interview will talk about how your films mix film conventions. I just act impulsively, from what I saw when growing up, as we all do. I can't understand film as narrative or not. You can say it if it makes things clear. That's not how I think. It's simply audio and image. That's what it is. You work with a soundtrack and a visual track, that's the core of it. You have rhythm because you're editing. Those three things are how I perceive it. I do it on film, but it can be on video.

How is everything funded? You're not rich and you don't get a bunch of grants.

I pay for this like how someone goes on vacation every year. Or buys a used car.

It's priority. You sideline a lot of things, but you don't complain because it's what you do.

I read that ZERO came out of your first four short films. Not literally. They have the same themes, same actor, locations. Simple things, but it's not the same footage. The ideas weren't finished so they were expanded upon in ZERO. I was also learning how to do things. I don't think it's worth it for anyone to watch the early shorts. But I don't remove them from my filmography. To do that would be a lie.

How do you feel after you finished a film, is it all out of your system?

Usually I'm working on more than one thing at once. When it's done, it's done. You're doing this for a couple of years, by the end it's horrifying because you see everything wrong and you've realized you've sort of failed with it, so you have to make another one. Put it out there. Every film you make is in some way a failure. It's just a matter of how much you're gonna fail each time. So you realize that you're going down. But you're not going down without a fight, and you're going to fight it the best you can to win it, or to come close to that. Like boxing. You're not going to give up, you're not going to let someone else win you over. You're going to do the best you can and get it completed. By the time you're done with one you've got all these thoughts and ideas about another one. It's this giant thing.

So it's not an absolute obsession on one project until it's done?

I'm not necessarily obsessive about one film, but about all the films that are being done and even the ones that I want to try to get going. You have to be organized, otherwise the obsession can get out of control and crush you. Your mind is a great deal of obsessive chaos and you're trying to control it through organization and the film technology. While I was in post-production on ZERO I shot MIGRATING FORMS. I sent ZERO to tons of





“The technical is inseparable from everything else. I heard someone at a festival say, ‘This isn’t a technical question, this is an artistic question.’ As far as I’m concerned you can’t separate the two. “

souls. All within the framework of history as an organism that changes shape instead of moving forward. This great organism of energy. And like any other film, there is the struggle to translate these feeling and thoughts into a film. And use the atmosphere created with the tools you have to search and learn things. You only learn and discover anything through the process of making the film.

How did you come to your technical style? It’s different for each film. You try to do something that’s more comfortable, it feels right. You go into a place and you just know where the camera goes. It *has* to go there. The technical is inseparable from everything else. I heard someone at a festival say, “This isn’t a technical question, this is an artistic question.” As far as I’m concerned you can’t separate the two. That is what you are making it with. All of the pieces of this puzzle. When you start imagining the images and putting them all together, all of the film stock, the lenses, the lights... all of that is immediately part of that instinctive, intuitive thought.

You went to Columbia film school just two semesters before dropping out. Where did you learn how to use equipment? There’s books that aren’t hard to find. Watching a lot of films. Asking things like how do you get those skin tones in black and white? These filters might do that. In terms of ZERO it was just a massive undertaking of learning technical things. And you’re always learning. By making these films and taking a technical thing and putting it into something that counts, not running a bunch of tests, doing it in a way that builds up the danger threshold of what you’re doing. You have to force it and make it work more and by doing it you learn more. Pushing it technically and pushing your own understanding is all part of making the film. I learned a lot when I printed the film at the lab. It was this old lab and these 70-year-old guys ran it. I got to go in the back and work very closely with them for two years. I learned a lot with them, like cutting your own negative.

A lot of it, like ESOPHAGUS, I knew what I wanted and I had to find out how to get it done. You begin your research period with each film, photography and lenses. If you want to figure that stuff out, you’ll figure it out. I didn’t grow up as a film buff. I ended up seeing a lot of stuff to understand what I was doing. (Film) doesn’t just exist. You have to confront the fact that a history of this exists. Not just the medium and the changing technologies or different directors. But the time it took place in and why certain things were the way they were. It’s something you need to understand because every edit has that weight with it.

Some people like BACK AGAINST THE WALL because it’s more traditional than the earlier MIGRATING FORMS, in that it has more characters and a lot more dialogue. Was that done consciously? I didn’t think of it any differently than any of my other films. The dialogue, the voices, were treated just as formally as anything else. I have films that require tons of actors.

festivals, I didn’t know how things worked. ZERO was rejected by many festivals, exhibition sites, and video distributors. It showed a couple of places (while) I was editing FORMS and three shorts.

Then I went to a Fangoria convention and saw these insane videos - people getting drilled into floors and chopped up in bath tubs. These videos were on these labels out of Germany and Japan. I figured there had to be someone who would take ZERO. I got a list of video distributors and took a snippet of a review from a screening it had at the Welsh Film Festival and mailed out promo things. Joe Carducci (from SST Records fame) of Provisional Video said he wanted to see a copy and decided to distribute it. Then, when I was doing post-production on FORMS I shot BACK AGAINST THE WALL. After FORMS was completed I sent it out to the people that were interested in my work and that was in, I think in August of 1999. I didn’t hear anything for months. I just assumed no one wanted it either. I least I have this new film, WALL, shot (laughs). But then I got a fax from Ed (Halter, director of the New York Underground Fest), who showed and strongly supported the film and my other work. From then on FORMS has been going, as have the shorts and now WALL, which will be opening the Chicago Underground Film Festival.

The shoots for the two new features were different. They were shot so fast I don’t remember it - the core of ESOPHAGUS was shot in like five hours, CHRISTABEL in three.

How so fast - just a lot of planning? Yeah. And they are post-production heavy films. I knew that going in. The other films were the opposite. CHRISTABEL I shot the week after the last New York Underground. I shot ESOPHAGUS in August.

CHRISTABEL is based on the Samuel Taylor Coleridge poem. It’s not like an adaptation of this man’s poem. It is more along the lines — if you were to do a study of it. Or what you could learn from tackling this. It’s been one of the most difficult things I’ve ever done. I shot this about the same time I did WALL and I’m still doing it. I never really understood not only what it would be to take on someone else’s work but to take on a man of genius’ work. Perhaps I wasn’t ready for it. The more you get into it, the more things start unraveling about it. It’s just endless, you’re grappling with it. You’re abiding by this structure you set for yourself. So the film is a translation of the emotions of this thing, or of the period this poem was written in. It might be a total disaster, I don’t know.

ESOPHAGUS is of course different because it is my own source. It is about science, religion, myth, and the evolution of our

And some don't. When I made FORMS I was accused of being able to make it because so few people were involved. All these reasons why I was able to do it, instead of just doing what I wanted to do.

It's all a part of the veil that's been put upon filmmaking. Every aspect of filmmaking is difficult if you're striving for something and care about what you do. Just as in any profession. Loads of films are made up of a lot of cuts because that's easier. Shoot from two different angles and reverse that. And it's not in the way something like OTHELLO (1952) was being done, where it's pushed into another reality. That's the great thing about film — if people can elevate it into an otherly, inner-type world.

When a film doesn't follow standards and expectations, like giving the audience all the answers or having certain shots, it is assumed the filmmaker did something wrong.

This is true for both Hollywood and the underground.

I've read things written about FORMS like, "(The character) ignores the tumor." That doesn't matter, that doesn't mean anything. What if the character doesn't even know it's there? What has to make sense does in this purely atmospheric structure type way. Because that's where all the emotion and atmosphere is going to be communicated to people.

That type of behavior can reach a large amount of people. It can touch upon everyone's feelings. It doesn't have to make sense in this objective type way that most movies try to do.

The way you are taking things in is always changing, the way you see people. That's what I tried to do in WALL.

When you see somebody, then you don't see them for months, then you see them again, or you see them minutes apart but their appearance has changed, or your perception of them has been altered. Time doesn't mean anything. You are always trying to

control things.

What we do is create this very organized façade. Often we all break through it. The structure of films is what channels it, what goes over to that other side and pulls it back into a form that we can deal with. All the pieces of the puzzle in a film have to have this equal weight. You can't say the actors are more important than the light. That's not the case. They all have to be equal and they all have to function as an image.

That puzzle isn't just new and experimental. It's a part of classic genre filmmaking.

I don't see that many people who understand genre. Genre is relevant; it wasn't just like some people got together and said they were going to invent genre. And again, I am talking about this minority of film people: critics, intellectuals, students and so on, that believe they are the majority. These genres grew out of the experience of the country and the people in it. They are relevant that way and can be used because you are dealing with an image medium. You're dealing with images, you have to deal with action. You can use the iconography of genre. If you use that right it can lead to a lot of things under that. Sort of tentacles that can explore many things because it's created from what a large scope of people feel. It's seldomly used that way; at least now. I'm not too interested in the idea of revisionist filmmaking. You have to perceive the world as wholistically as you can. I don't buy that type of thinking that we know more now.

Experimental is such a limiting term. All these terms that get attached to my films; nothing in my movies comes from some thing I just dreamt up one night. It's all pulled from the surrounding world. It comes from the very concrete things you see around you. Then through this medium you are elevating them into a more internal type thing. You can be very specific about some of them, others less. But they're all there.

Critics write about your heavy use of nudity, even though it's not gratuitous.

For one, I don't sit there and think about it. It's no different than anything else. You're dealing with flesh rather than a nakedness, not a sexualized thing. It's more complicated because you are dealing with an image, you have to make it just a body. It's about the reality of being inside a body, which is what we deal with constantly,

“You don’t know more just because you make films. It’s become this rock star nonsense where if you’re the director, you’re something better.”

the ultimate reality. (Your body) is eventually going to turn on you. That always pulls it back... and you try to get that into the work. There is no nudity in WALL. And not consciously, there was just no place for it, it wasn’t about that. It would have been dishonest.

I complain about mainstream films, but that’s mostly with what Hollywood is making today and how they control distribution. People coming off World War II were a different generation. There was this idea of craft and mastery with the work that was being done. There perhaps was not as much opportunity to fall into laziness, unless you were wealthy. Even a lower or working class family today has enough technological distraction to allow themselves to fall into mental laziness. During the first half of the twentieth century’s filming a strong focus on the actual work itself still existed. This is the key: total mastery of craftsmanship. An exhaustion of what the tools you work with can do, filtering it into yourself and bringing back to the film. Trying to master working with the grammar, technology and history of the medium and use your craftsmanship to push into an inner place, tear down the wall that we throw up and get to the core of your own reality. The work that succeeds as at this, especially the earlier films that did, are at the same time very concrete and very abstract. Or should I say very artificial and very physically real. As opposed to this



confusion/exploration nonsense you see so much of today. This, “How do you know what you are until you experience all these things?” That’s weakness. That’s trying to avoid responsibility, to avoid taking on some type of a program or project in your own existence. This idea of working. So you have filmmakers hiding out from truth, reality, existence, God; they’re skirting around the issues. The breeding ground for much of this are “Cinema Studies” courses.

You can’t be nostalgic either, you can’t live in the past. There are going to be great artists from any time. I don’t want to come off like I don’t believe in the “now” or the “present” because that is not true. If film vanished tomorrow, I would continue to go on. A person cannot let that stop them, but to do it for some half baked ideological reason, or belief that they part of some revolution, or because they are lazy, is also wrong. Too much of the image/sound world is about everything else but the actual work. I find that people use video because they believe it is easy and that is just lazy. There is are elements of video that need to be explored and what it means, because it does exist, it just can’t be ignored as many film people like to do. Also, video art has been around very long time, so many people act like it is new.

So how do I take it into that inner understanding, how to make it represent my inner perception. I sometimes feel this can only be done in post-production, but I could be wrong. That is where I am currently at with it. I also don’t feel comfortable with the projection of video yet. But on a picture tube I feel it works.

Do you think filmmakers get trapped or change styles by using video? “Roll the camera and do 100 times her way and then 100 my way.” That’s ridiculous. You gotta take a stance and say it’s going to be this way. If those people aren’t on board from the beginning you lose them. I’ll give an actor a chance but if you’re being a flake I’ll lose you. You need to use your will power to push up against the job and get it done. These types of things taught in schools -all schools and especially colleges, not just film schools- create cowards and middle-of-the-roaders.

So you don’t offer the actor anything? Of course I do, you’re working with a human being. This is where it gets complicated. You wanna work with good people. You are going to deal with each actor differently. They can offer things and they might be instinctively great things to do. But in the end they have to realize they are only one little piece of a big puzzle. They’ve gotta fit as a piece to a giant puzzle. Zack, my sound guy, knows where I’m at and what I’m doing. The fact that we’re friends takes it even further.

You can explore things because you can relate, types of places where you like to hang out, the music you listen to. All that’s being channeled into the work. Most actors aren’t like that, they want to be famous and they think my film will put them in Sundance and on Jay Leno. Then they see my films and they’re all pissed and disgusted and don’t want to talk to me. It’s not that I think that’s cool or how I want it to be, it’s just how it is.

You have to deal with what the actors’ emotional things in the real world. They show up to work different each day. As much as you push films into one thing they come back to this reality of your body, what we talked about earlier. Your shell. That’s why you use actors in this way. Its not like you’re some inhuman type guy who doesn’t like people. Its because you are trying to communicate this idea of a physical body. Its difficult to make them understand that.

What would you do with a name actor? Try to integrate him as well as I could. I always see people “use” someone known all the time, on our level. I rarely see them use the person for what they are supposed to be, or what they represent to people. The thing about movies is name actors are always going to be that name



THE VANISHED

actor, because you're photographing them. That's the travesty of that. They must exist as objects. Drama is useless in audio/visual. De Niro can put on all the make-up in the world as Frankenstein, but he's still De Niro. Film is not the stage. You have less and less good casting. It means something to have John Wayne or Clint Eastwood as an image placed within a composition in a particular role. There's not as much of that now. Tom Hanks does not carry any weight as an image when in combat or as a soldier. There are a lot more anomaly type actors today that don't exist on that same level. Anyone can call themselves an actor, put an add in the paper and find out. I would love to use professionals that give it all they've got.

How did you choose your actors? I go on how they look, how they are going to photograph and exist as an object, how their voice sounds. I meet with them - I don't audition them, I sort of hang out. And you have to see if they're on board. We don't have money and we have to do it quick. They have to believe in it. You can sense when they aren't going to take it serious. Simple things like returning calls. For WALL I got everyone I wanted after I replaced the characters of June, Levey, and Vince a month into pre-production, because they were giving me problems. It was good to create that tapestry of people that are in the final film, the feel of it.

The character of Ed (played by Ernie E. Frantz), aka "Womanhands", is on the cover. He's great in WALL. A friend of mine had an audition for a film he was doing. He called me and said he found a guy who I would want to use. I met him and we got along. I realized I had to use him because he existed, you know, surrender myself to his physicality, as you would to a landscape or a certain type of architecture. He is the most encompassing of what he is in the movie, he embodied it in the most visual way. I knew the makeup would work on him, becoming a distorted cartoon, unreal sort of thing. And he took his acting very serious, gave it all he had!

I got the gun he's holding -through the mail- from the guy who did the guns for BONNIE AND CLYDE. I tried to get a fake one, but I needed it too fast. I got referred to Jack Bennett, weapons specialist, who lives someplace in Texas. The pin on the gun was pulled, but that wouldn't stop someone from making it operational if they wanted to. When I was done I mailed it back.

You make your films for yourself - not pandering to what will bring in the easiest audience. But distribution is still important. It's important as all hell. I don't make them for any elite group, not for art houses or institutes only. I don't look down at people and think they're not intelligent. People aren't going to know what they like until they see it. I think it's egotistical and very ignorant to assume that you know what the "common man" is going to do. You don't know any more just because you make films. It's become this rock star nonsense where if you're the director, you're something better.

Someone told me that I have contempt for the audience with my films. Contempt for the audience is when you make a film with the attitude that they can't get it, that they're too stupid.... I'm a human and I assume the audience is and some have the same emotions and feelings I do. I have great faith in the audience. I believe in that we are all existing as part of the same glue. I'm feeling these things and I'm trying to do it as honest as I can. Whatever critics say is fine, good or bad. A good review is wonderful and it makes you feel good and helps your career. But it's not going to affect how I make the next film, because the feelings and questions you keep asking yourself come from your own soul. And also many of these things form in you, without you knowing how it happens, it just pieces together fully formed in your heart and mind.

What is the found footage in your short film CIRCLE? That seems like a departure for you. (It's) from Okinawa, shot after the war. While I was editing ZERO I stole it from an editing room, I use it in the two CIRCLE short films. Can you imagine: if things were filmed hundreds and hundreds of thousands of years ago, up to today, how crippling that would be? You don't know that is 1945 until you see, like, a car. So you have to assume that is that type of "real thing." That is the perception. People from that time weren't thinking of it as a period. We are not thinking of ourselves in a period right now. If it was shot in 1920, it is this actual thing that is existing, it is *there*. That is a very hard thing to cope with.

At first the sound in your films made me think of a horror soundtrack, constant and setting the tone, but things also come and go in the middle of shots like a Godard style, and some parts are a new kind of abrasive ambient, like noise bands from Japan. Language becomes too complicated and



THE SUN

convoluted. You can use one word and eight of us can disagree on what that word is. But if you begin taking sound and putting it in a way that is, “What is sound like when I hear sound.” And then what is the sound of all the sounds I’ve ever heard. And what does that mean. Then you take the image and ask what does the image mean and what’s an image that will communicate all feelings to everyone. You fuse these things together and then you try to get to the truth of that. Dialogue doesn’t necessarily have to be understood, it just has to exist as a voice or sound that is part of the atmosphere. I won’t know if I’m good at it for a long time.

You have stopped doing Q&A’s [question and answer discussions after films at festivals], because everyone wants you to make it simple and bow all ideas down. But I would rather hear someone with ideas than the usual film students whine about how hard it is to make something. There’s no context in their film to talk about. That’s why they make films in the first place. Because it’s the “thing” to do, it’s the rock star syndrome. It’s everything else *but* the film. All the things that come with saying you are the filmmaker. That’s why a lot of people make films, they want to be up there doing Q&As.

You have take filmmaking down to the very basic reality, I want to do these films and I have to get it done. Those people are living in some handed-down idea of filmmaking. Their complaining about it is just part of what they think they should complain about. I’m sure a mechanic complains about working on a car, but that’s what he does. What are the guys at a film school complaining about? If you don’t like it, don’t do it.

The usual question: “What’s that mean?” You can’t explain what (your film) means. Why should I explain what that means?! You can make things very clear if you want to, light up the whole room, put a hotter light on someone in the middle, making it very specific. But that’s not the point. If it would have felt right to be that way, I would have done it that way initially. So why am I going to stand in front of you now and tell you that? And totally limit it and make it a little pinpoint. Now you’re not going to think of anything else because I said it. There’s no room for that. Everyone immediately wants to organize it and put it back into some way that makes them feel that they “got it.” And that “got it” can take place weeks later, months later.

After the NY Underground fest, I keep telling people the “underground” is not about shock value, it’s also about avant garde, small stories, forgotten classics, all kinds of films... just stuff that isn’t getting enough distribution. Do you think it will all start to break through now? There is something going on now. Some weird energy, if you want to label it underground, there are interesting filmmakers out there starting to get press and get noticed. That’s the history of art. You can about jazz, anything, they emerged from this underbelly. As long as the people involved want to stick through it. It seems different than before, maybe from technology. The gulf seems to be broken down. I’m very positive for the future of audio/visual. I never thought people would be interested in my films. I still need to give much more effort to the process and understand more of what these tools I work with mean in the world and for the future.

The whereabouts of Ernie E. Frantz, the actor on the cover, are unknown.



James FOTOPOULOS filmography

As director, producer, editor and writer:

- 2001 CONSUMED 1 (short, also photography)
- 2001 CONSUMED 2 (short, also photography)
- 2001 CONSUMED 3 (short, also photography)
- 2001 CONSUMED 4 (short, also photography)
- 2001 CONSUMED 5 (short, also photography)
- 2001 INSECT (short, also photography and make-up)
- 2001 THE CIRCLE 1 (short, also photography)
- 2000 BACK AGAINST THE WALL (feature, also make-up)
- 2000 THE VANISHED (short, also photography and make-up)
- 2000 THE SUN (short, also photography and make-up)
- 2000 ESCAPE (short, also photography, video recording and make-up)
- 2000 DROWNING (short, also photography and video recording)
- 2000 BREATHE (short, also photography)
- 1999 TWO CATS (short, also photography)
- 1999 A ROOM (short, also make-up)
- 1999 MIGRATING FORMS (feature, also sound editing and make-up)
- 1999 GROWTH (short, also make-up)
- 1997 ZERO (feature, also sound editing and make-up)
- 1995 TRANQUILITY (short, also photography, sound recording/editing and make-up)
- 1994 SUBSTITUTE (short, also photography)
- 1993 INURE (short, also photography)
- 1993 TREE (short, also photography)

(in post-production: two features, CHRISTABEL and ESOPHAGUS, and three shorts, THE CIRCLE 2, PLACES and THE HEMISPHERES)

official website: FantasmaInc.com

photo of Fotopoulos (pg 5) by Plante, all others courtesy Fantasma, Inc.

THE 8TH ANNUAL

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- California Museum of Science and Industry - see Los Angeles
- Descanso Gardens - see La Cañada Flintridge
- Disneyland - see Anaheim
- El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument - see Los Angeles
- Exposition Park - see Los Angeles
- Farmers Market - see Los Angeles
- Forest Lawn Memorial-Park - see Glendale
- Gatty Center - see Los Angeles
- Griffith Park - see Los Angeles
- Hollywood Bowl - see Hollywood
- Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens - see San Marino
- Knott's Berry Farm - see Buena Park
- Little Tokyo - see Los Angeles
- Los Angeles County Museum of Art - see Los Angeles
- Los Angeles Zoo - see Los Angeles
- Mann's Chinese Theatre - see Hollywood
- Movieland Max Museum - see Buena Park
- The Music Center - see Los Angeles
- Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County - see Los Angeles
- Norton Simon Museum - see Pasadena
- Olvera Street - see Los Angeles
- Queen Mary - see Long Beach
- Universal Studios Hollywood - see Universal City
- University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) - see Los Angeles
- Wells Fargo Historic Museum - see Los Angeles

CINE FILE

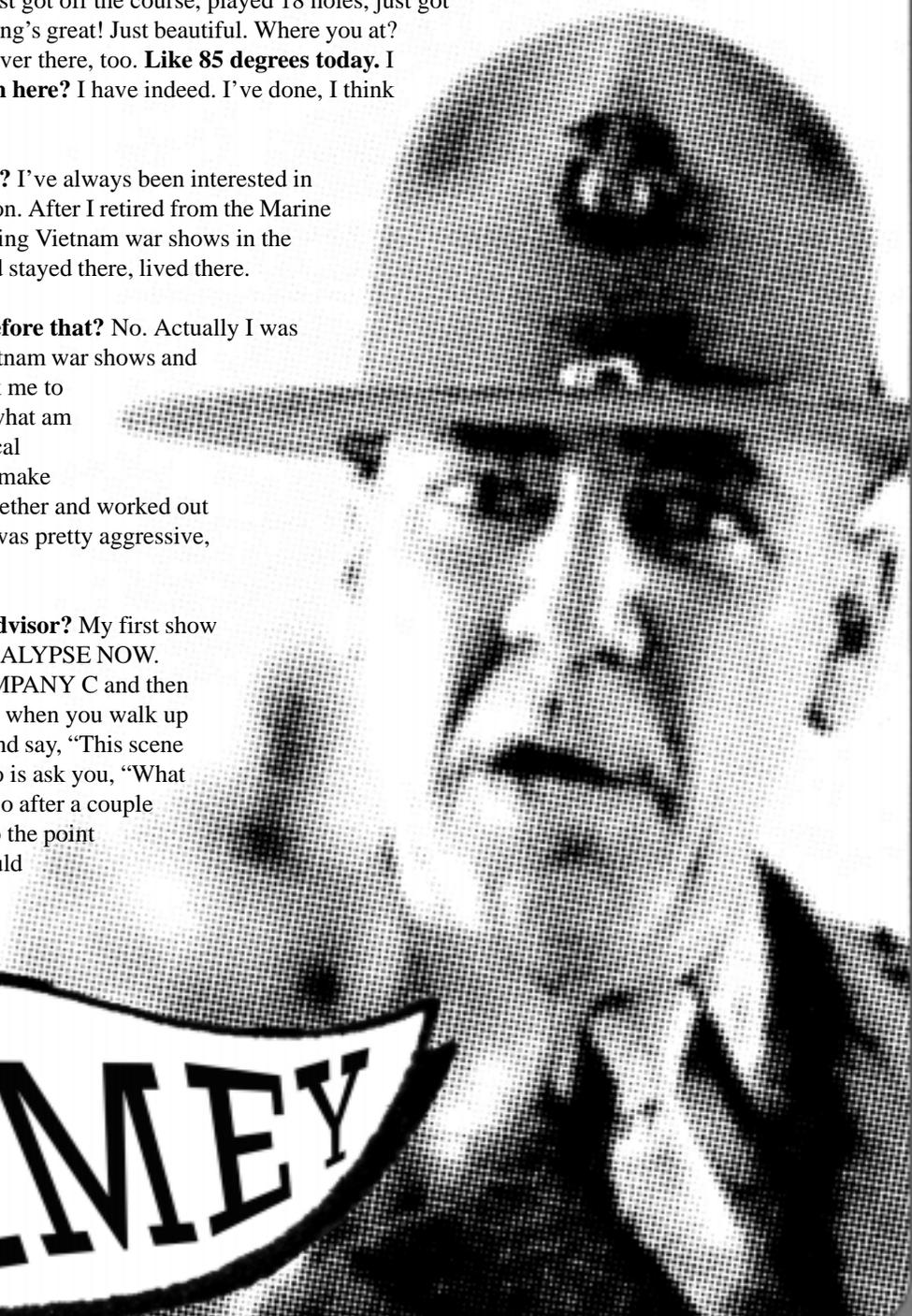
By Mike Plante *Character actor R. Lee Ermey is best known for his unforgettable in-your-face role as the drill instructor in FULL METAL JACKET. I made sure I didn't have a jelly doughnut when I called him on the phone. Ermey has gone on to play a variety of other characters from evangelist to a famous track coach. As is becoming a staple for character actors, Ermey is also getting his share of voice-over work. During the interview he was real laid-back, laughing a lot, in love with acting. Well, and golf.*

Mr. Ermey, how are you? Well I just got off the course, played 18 holes, just got home a few minutes ago, so everything's great! Just beautiful. Where you at?
I'm over in Tucson. It's very nice over there, too. **Like 85 degrees today.** I love Tucson. **Have you golfed down here?** I have indeed. I've done, I think three films down there.

Did you always think about acting? I've always been interested in films. But really, it was just a situation. After I retired from the Marine Corps I'd found out they were shooting Vietnam war shows in the Philippine Islands so I went over and stayed there, lived there.

Did you take any drama classes before that? No. Actually I was doing technical advice on all the Vietnam war shows and every one that I would do would ask me to do a role. After a while I said, hell, what am I doing? There's no money in technical advice. I was just trying to work, to make ends meet. Everything just came together and worked out real good for me. I got real lucky. I was pretty aggressive, too.

What would you do as technical advisor? My first show that I technically advised was APOCALYPSE NOW. Then I went and did BOYS OF COMPANY C and then PURPLE HEARTS. I found out that when you walk up to the director as technical advisor and say, "This scene doesn't work," the first thing they do is ask you, "What should we do." Well, hell (laughs). So after a couple embarrassing moments there I got to the point where when they ask me "What should we do" I whip out a damn bunch of



R. LEE
ERMHEY

THATGUY

papers and have everything re-written properly. Even dialogue. Invariably, they would take one of those and use it.



Although always in authoritative roles, Ermey gravitated from calling people maggots to supporting roles in comedies like *FLETCH LIVES* (middle two) and dramas like *DEAD MAN WALKING* (bottom).

Did you find the need to make things more realistic every time? A lot of writers don't really do the research or they listen to scuttlebutt. They do incorrect dialogue. You can always jargon it up. There are always places for military jargon. I don't know a writer in the world who knows the first thing about tactics. They don't know how to land the bird, the chopper. They don't know how to use a field phone. They get by, and they make it sound and look pretty good on paper.

But who's the one that reads it and decides to do the show? Some fucking producer that doesn't know his ass from a hole in the ground, right? He doesn't know if it's correct or incorrect either. All he knows is, "Hey, it's a great story." That's why we have technical advisors in military films. To clean it up. Hell, I think almost every film I've been on basically has had a technical advisor. If you're doing a show about doctors you need somebody there that knows the jargon and the procedures. So we don't look *stupid*.

I want to do a golf movie. (Laughs)

What do you think of war stuff from the 1950s? Pretty hokey. Basically I can't hardly stand to watch 'em. When I was a kid I loved them. It was like cowboys, you know? The same with westerns, I've always been a great western fan. But they're just corny as hell. They can't swear in those days, so they can't talk the way people talk. Black Bart doesn't say, "Heck." Gimme a break. (Laughs) You just have to know what you're watching. That was from that era. I love a feel good show, the heroes. They delivered the message, "You must honor the people who protect our country," and so forth. You don't have that message anymore. It's: Screw the military guy, see how screwed up they are, see what they did to us in this war. Nobody ever stops to think that it's totally the government that runs the show. Everything gets placed on the head of the soldier.

Had you seen Kubrick's World War I film *PATHS OF GLORY* before you worked with him? Absolutely, I loved it. The only Kubrick show I really couldn't get into (I've seen them all) is *EYES WIDE SHUT*. I just did not enjoy that film. I enjoyed the lighting and the sound, the picture was always perfect and interesting. The story matter didn't really interest me.

Did Kubrick first hire you as a technical advisor? Matter of fact, he watched all the Vietnam war shows when he got ready to gear up for *JACKET*. He said my name kept popping up. Stanley called me and asked if I had read the novel (that *JACKET* is based on) by Gustov Hasford, *The Short Timers*. I told him I had and I was actually going through it the second time. Very interesting, it's really a crazy novel. Stanley asked me what I thought of it. I said, "It's really very entertaining but it's laced with fictitious bullshit." That got Stanley's attention immediately. "What do you mean, fictitious bullshit?" (Laughs) I said I'll write something down and I'll send it to ya.

I ended up with 20 handwritten pages of what's wrong with this book and how to fix it. Stanley asked me to come over and do the technical advice on it. I agreed to do technical advice but my objective was to get my foot in the door. Because as far as I was concerned there was nobody in Hollywood that could even hold a candle to me doing the drill instructor. So I got over there and I made sure (Kubrick) was present when I was working with the background extras and the next thing I know I've got the job as Gunnery Sergeant Hartman.

Stanley and I totally rewrote the first half of the show. The dialogue wasn't jargon, it wasn't really good. The writer Gustov Hasford was in the Marine Corp but he was a shitbird.

(I laugh) Was does that mean? He wasn't a good Marine. He was a piece of shit. He spent more time in the fucking brig I think. Anyway, the way he wrote the novel, drill instructors torture people. The only reason they do anything is to inflict pain, to cause discomfort. In other words, no rhyme or reason for it, drill instructors just like to fuck with people. Which of course is totally insane. Everything a drill instructor does is for a purpose, for a reason. Hasford had it wrong. So we had to sit down and correct it. Drill instructors are the most honorable people I know. Hasford had them looking like they were a bunch of sadists, torturing people.

For instance, there was one scene in the first half of the boot camp portions of the show where Hasford had Gunnery Sgt. Hartman line up the squad leaders and had them piss in a commode. Then he dunked Private Pyle's head into the toilet. I never, in my entire life, in my wildest dreams, could imagine any drill instructor doing that. For any reason. Torture is what Hasford had in mind when he wrote it. We got that straightened out. I told Stanley it was fucked up and Stanley wanted it the way it really was and he wanted it right. We got it right.

How did you come up with the lines? I was laid up for three months. I got in a car accident. We shot the combat stuff first. Every day when I was mending, I'd go to Kubrick's house. We'd discuss a scene. Stanley would push the little button on the tape recorder. I'd stand up and do the scene the way a drill instructor would, the dialogue would be my dialogue. I'd go until I'd run out of gas and sit back down. We'd discuss the scene further and I'd stand up and do it again. Sometimes we'd do it three or four times like that. We would take just the juiciest lines out of each run-through. Incorporate that into the existing scene and that's how we got the dialogue. Stand up and go for it!

While you were in the Marines, what did you do? I was a staff sergeant when I got medically retired. I got hurt when getting in a bunker. Motherfucker came down on top of all of us.

Where was that? I was in Da Nang. We don't discuss that much. I don't talk about Vietnam very much. It's a pain in my ass is what it is. Everybody expects you to be a hero. I'm not a fucking hero. I was heading for the bunker, man. "Incoming" and I was heading for the bunker with everybody else.

That's reasonable. Fast as I could fucking go. (Laughs) Anyway, most of my time in the military was spent as an instructor. For me, the way I dealt, I conducted myself similar to a stand up comic. If it's funny it's interesting. If you aren't run of the mill, if you're strange and a little weird and do quirky things, people pay attention to you, they



The traditional free haircut scene.
THE BOYS OF COMPANY C

don't go to sleep. Because they're being entertained as well as being taught.

Were film directors always pretty open to suggestions, or was it case by case? APOCALYPSE NOW was a mess in the making.... Well, as far as I'm concerned APOCALYPSE NOW wasn't a good film. I thought it was Francis Ford Coppola's fantasy. There was nothing real about it.



What was your advising on that set then? Uniforms. All Coppola was really interested in was - are the helicopter markings correct, are we talking over the field phone properly, were the uniforms correct. That's about it for the technical advising. Of course you had to show these young people how to fire weapons, fake recoils while they fire.

Did you keep in contact with Kubrick after JACKET? Yes, we talked a lot. Matter of fact Stanley called me just a couple of weeks before he died. He wasn't happy with his show (EYES WIDE SHUT). Not happy at all. The words he told me: "The critics are going to have me for lunch."

I have heard Warner Brothers re-edited (and obviously masked some sex) after he died. I don't think Stanley edited that show. I think he may have had a rough cut but I think someone else edited it. I would have loved to work with him again. But that was it. As far as I'm concerned FULL METAL JACKET was the last good show Stanley put out.

**ERMEY HAS AN ACTION FIGURE COMING OUT:
"YOU PUSH THE BUTTON AND IT'LL GO SOMETHING LIKE, 'DID YOU
JUST PUSH MY FUCKING BUTTON AGAIN, ASSHOLE?! WHAT IS
YOUR MAJOR MALFUNCTION ANYWAY!?!'"**

On JACKET was it a weird relationship off-camera with the actors under you? It was pretty cool, we got along fine. I had to teach them about the rifles, firing positions, how to wear the uniforms and every damn thing they did. The thing is we did the second half first. They were all familiar with me. Except Private Pyle.

Vincent D'Onofrio has gone on to do a lot. I love his work. I think he's the best thing that came out of FULL METAL JACKET. Everybody was good. Stanley didn't except second best. If he didn't like the performance, you did it again. I asked Stanley, "How do you know when you got it in the can, Stan?" He says, "Well, when I enjoy it." (laughs) Okay, sounds good to me.

People make Kubrick sound like he was reclusive but it seems like he just wouldn't play the publicity game. That's exactly what it was. He had a little problem with interviewing, he was very camera shy. He told me the reason he doesn't do personal interviews, audio/video type situations, he gets real nervous in front of the camera and he might just blurt out the first thing that comes to mind. When they ask him a question, just answer it and it may not be very smart, make him look silly.

Finally after JACKET you started to get non-war roles. I haven't stopped working since. I think I've done pretty close to 60 or 70 feature films. Who knows how many television shows.... I love comedy. I prefer comedy over anything else. I'm the authoritative type individual, even in comedy. Let's face it, I'm certainly no threat to Pee-Wee Herman. He doesn't have to worry about me getting his jobs. (Laughs)

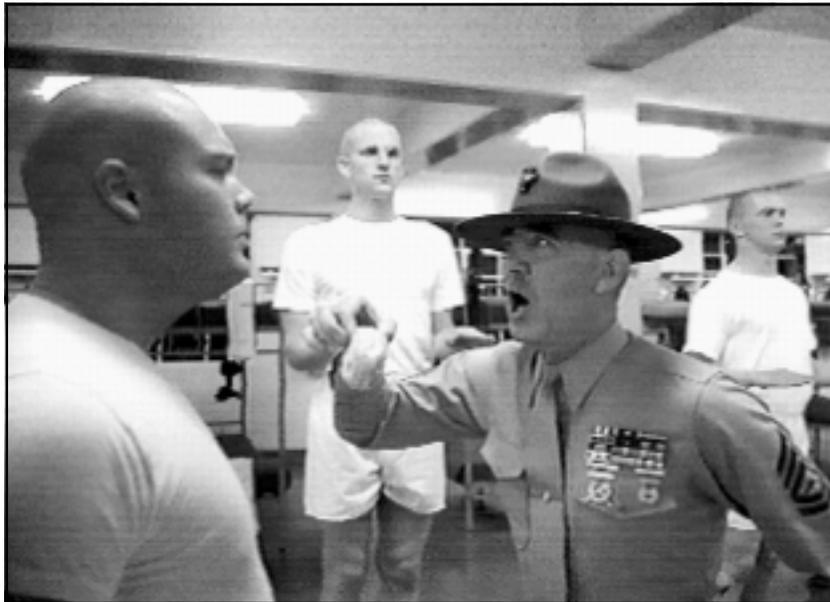
How's the voice work? I've had a lot, I was a regular on two cartoons last year (including the General on *Big Guy and Rusty the Boy Robot*) and I've had a lot of "walk-ons" (including *The Simpsons*). It's so easy and so rewarding. These people that do the cartoons are fun people to be around. I love it. I go down and spend two hours doing voice work. The hardest part of the entire day is the drive down and back. The work is simple. I'm about an hour and a half out of LA, up in the high desert. Me, Jack Palance and Paul Koslo are the only actors up here. Koslo's a dear friend of mine and Palance is like a father to me, I love him. Sweetest, grouchiest old fart I ever met. Still does one-arm push-ups. He's

hardcore. We just don't care for the city. We don't politic, we don't go down and schmooze anybody. Fuck those sonsabitches. They want to hire us, they hire us. If not, I'm not going to kiss anybody's ass to get a job. The young actors need to be down there where they can go to the dinners and have drinks and schmooze. We don't have to.

And you didn't have to grow up there. LA sucks. Big time.

Where did you grow up in the Midwest? I was raised until 11 years old west of Kansas City in the country. Then we moved to Washington State, I lived in the Yakima valley. Which is totally agriculture. We lived about 80 miles out of town. I've always lived out of town, except when I was in the military.

"THEY WANT TO HIRE US, THEY HIRE US. IF NOT I'M NOT GOING TO KISS ANYBODY'S ASS TO GET A JOB."



What did your parents do? My Dad was a machinist and a gentleman farmer. My Mother was a housewife. Later on in life she started working as a cashier in a grocery store. (Thinks about it, then laughs) I was groomed to be a character actor!

You play a father in DEAD MAN WALKING, which did a good job of showing everybody's point of view. I think that when you left the theater, you

then had to make your own decision. It wasn't loaded so that when you left the theater you weren't totally anti-death penalty, or all for the death penalty. Here's the way it really was, now you make your mind up. (Pauses) And I say hang em high. (Laughs) I'm a Republican.

Yeah, I was gonna ask if you got along with (DM WALKING director and presumably democrat) Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon. Yeah, we just don't talk politics!

What does the audience need to get out of war movies? Entertainment. Period. If they're going to be successful they need to be done where you can't sit there and pick them apart technically. ...I think that's why APOCALYPSE NOW wasn't successful. I had to go to the film twice before I sat all the way through it. And I'm in the goddamn thing! (Laughs) Made us all look like a bunch of drug addicts, like we went over and partied. The Vietnam Veterans of America, several million strong, awarded me the Veteran's Achievement Award for FULL METAL JACKET. They appreciated it. I didn't make them look like a bunch of fucking idiots! Bad enough we had to go through that stupid war,



FULL METAL JACKET (this page and opposite)

now we have to put up with the humiliation of all the damn movies making us look stupid on top of that. People get a little upset.

One of the coolest things about this industry, being an actor, is the simple fact, every show I go onto these days I know half the cast and crew. After about 27 years of this, it's like old home week! I know the grips, wardrobe, makeup people.... It's fun for me. I love shooting on location because when you finish shooting at the end of the day, when the director says wrap, everybody goes back to the hotel or bar, you all get together and socialize. You shoot in LA, the director says wrap, everyone jumps in their car and goes home. You don't bond, you don't get to enjoy one another's company or get to know one another.

You've got an action figure coming out! It's coming out in July. I'm on the cover of the phone book up here, too. My daughter came home from work and she got this stack of phone books people want me to sign. She told me, "Dad, you're finally famous! You've got an action figure coming out and you're on the phone book." (Laughs) Suits me! For the action figure, I wrote the dialogue for it. You push the button and it'll go something like, "Did you just push my fucking button again, asshole?!? What is your major malfunction anyway?" It goes off. It's the drill instructor.

It cusses? Oh, but of course. We were going for a PG and an X rating. I think they've decided on one and I don't know which one it is. They're supposed to send the tape up so I can make adjustments.

You know no one would buy the PG. That's right! They were looking at fucking Toys R Us. I said, "That's not your marketplace here. The novelty shops! The PXs! My website!" (Laughs) In the first month I had it on the website I presold something like 600 dolls. It's certainly a unique doll. He's 12 inches tall. He can play with Ken and Barbie! And who do you think will be in charge? He might be able to square Ken away. Who knows what he might be doing with Barbie. (Laughs)

*You can get whipped into shape at Erme's official site:
www.rleerme.com.*

R. Lee Erme

Partial acting filmography

THE COLORED STAR (2001) "Samson"
 MEGIDDO: OMEGA CODE 2 (2001) President
 RECESS: SCHOOL'S OUT (2001) Colonel (voice)
 TAKING SIDES (2001) General
 SAVING SILVERMAN (2001) Football Coach
 THE CHAOS FACTOR (2000) Colonel
 SKIPPED PARTS (2000) Dad
 THE APARTMENT COMPLEX (1999) Paranoid Ex-Gov't Agent
 AVALANCHE (1999) Search Party Leader
 LIFE (1999) Older Sheriff
 TOY STORY 2 (1999) "Sarge" (voice)
 YOU KNOW MY NAME (1999) Film Producer
 GUNSHY (1998) Magazine Editor
 DEAD MEN CAN'T DANCE (1997) Right-Wing Senator
 PREFONTAINE (1997) Running Coach Bill Bowerman
 ROUGH RIDERS (1997) Secretary of State John Hay
 SWITCHBACK (1997) Sheriff/"Buck"
 WEAPONS OF MASS DISTRACTION (1997) Millionaire Football Team Owner
 (of the Tucson Titans, who the hell would put a pro team here?)
 SOUL OF THE GAME (1996) Baseball Manager
 THE FRIGHTENERS (1996) Ghost Drill Instructor
 DEAD MAN WALKING (1995) Victim's Father
 THE FIGHTER (1995) Real Estate Tycoon
 LEAVING LAS VEGAS (1995) Married Conventioneer At Bar
 MURDER IN THE FIRST (1995) Judge
 SEVEN (1995) Police Captain
 TOY STORY (1995) Sergeant/Action Figure (voice)
 UNDER THE HULA MOON (1995) Lt. Colonel
 BODY SNATCHERS (1994) General
 LOVE IS A GUN (1994) Detective
 NAKED GUN 33 1/3 (1994) Mess Hall Guard
 ON DEADLY GROUND (1994) Bounty Hunter
 HEXED (1993) Detective
 SOMMERSBY (1993) Makes Wooden Legs
 KID (1991) Sheriff
 THE TERROR WITHIN II (1991) Leader of Post-Apocalyptic Underground
 Dwellers
 TOY SOLDIERS (1991) General
 TRUE IDENTITY (1991) Boss
 83 HOURS 'TIL DAWN (1990)
 DEMONSTONE (1990) Base Commander/Major
 I'M DANGEROUS TONIGHT (1990) Cop
 THE TAKE (1990) Ray Sharkey's Old Fishing Buddy/Cop
 ENDLESS DESCENT (1989) Captain
 FLETCH LIVES (1989) Crooked Televangelist
 MISSISSIPPI BURNING (1988) Mayor
 THE SIEGE OF FIREBASE GLORIA (1988) Sgt. Major
 FULL METAL JACKET (1987) Drill Instructor/Gunnery Sergeant Hartman
 PURPLE HEARTS (1984) Sgt. "Gunny"
 APOCALYPSE NOW (1979) Helicopter Pilot
 THE BOYS IN COMPANY C (1978) Drill Instructor/Sgt. Loyce

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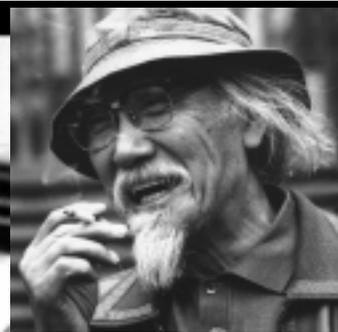
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SUZUKI SEIJUN



By J. Scott Burgeson Suzuki Seijun is the great enigma of Japanese cinema. I mean, the guy's a genius who directed at least a half-dozen timeless classics of world cinema, yet for a full decade in the late 60s and early 70s, he was completely blacklisted by the Japanese film industry. His crime? Creating one of the all-time masterpieces of Japanese film: *Koroshi no Rakuin* (BRANDED TO KILL), first unleashed on audiences in 1967. The first time I saw it, I swear, I nearly passed out from shock it was so good: it was like a surreal film noir, designed by Araki and directed by Godard; a self-implosioning yakuza film in whirling, endless freefall. My friend Ted, who was with me at the time, had to literally carry me out of the theater. The fresh air outside revived me, but I was still speaking gibberish a full week after. It was like the first time I ever saw BREATHLESS or TOUCH OF EVIL: it was pure cinema, pushed all the way to the edge and then finally over. Life just didn't get any better.

In the 50s and 60s, when for Western cineastes Japanese film was synonymous with the cool, refined aestheticism of Kurosawa and Ozu, Suzuki was an obscure B-movie madman cranking out as many as six pictures a year at Nikkatsu Studios. Looking back now at the dozens of films he made during that period, he seems as much the visionary genius as Kurosawa, Ozu, Mizoguchi and all the rest. At the time though, he was little more than an overworked studio grunt whose main task was to make entertaining genre pics that made money, not profound statements on the human condition. Indeed, even today, he says the same thing himself. But in the same way that Japanese woodblock prints were originally mass-produced commercial posters that only later were recognized as works of art, Suzuki's films are a triumph of style and form over impossibly restricted conditions.

Imagine a full-speed, head-on collision between Kabuki and film noir. Imagine the fractured, pop-art posters of Yokoo Tadanori suddenly sprung to life. Imagine wild sax solos, red-hot vixens and supersuave gangster-heroes staggering slowly into the existential night.

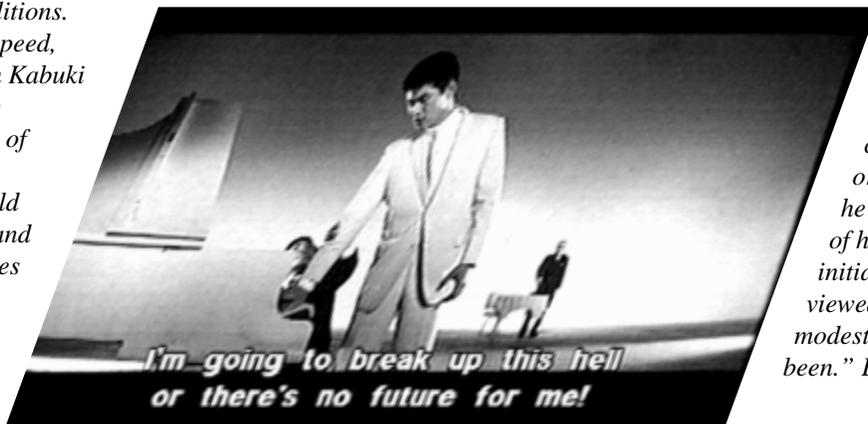
When he was

working for Nikkatsu, Suzuki never got to choose the scripts he was assigned to direct. But whatever he got, he transformed into something radically new. In his classic gangster pics like *Yaju no Seishun* (YOUTH OF THE BEAST, 1963), *Irezumi Ichidai* (ONE GENERATION OF TATTOOS, 1965) and *Tokyo Nagaremono* (TOKYO DRIFTER, 1966), his slack-jawed antiheroes do battle amidst vertigo-inducing settings that are almost psychedelic in their excesses of color, composition and framing: Tsui Hark or John Woo have never been this avant-garde. Even in more straightforward dramas like *Kawachi Karumen* (CARMEN FROM KAWACHI, 1966) and *Kenka Ereji* (FIGHTING ELEGY, 1966), he probes subjects like female sexual liberation and budding fascism with truly perverse, captivating humor; the aggro young hero of FIGHTING ELEGY, for example, has a penchant for jerking off onto the keyboard of his loved one's piano. But that's not nearly as bizarre as Shishido Jo in BRANDED TO KILL, who plays an assassin on the run with a decidedly warped fetish: he only gets turned on after immersing his face in the steamy aroma of just boiled rice.

Nikkatsu originally intended BRANDED to be a straight-firing yakuza flick. Instead, Suzuki gave them an apocalyptic fever dream that's both unbelievably cool and coolly unbelievable. Suzuki killed off the yakuza genre once and for all. Which is, of course, exactly why Nikkatsu axed him. It also foretold his own personal fate: one lone man struggling valiantly against the unseen forces of the world, who must finally relent and succumb to destiny in the very end.

I met with Suzuki at a cafe in Ginza. Although he was born about a half-century before I was (1923, to be exact) he looked like he was in better shape than I am even now. He

survived being shipwrecked twice during the war; he survived the indignity of having to direct TV commercials in the 70s in order to make a living, and he's survived the recent death of his beloved wife. He was initially reluctant to be interviewed, saying with no little modesty that he was just a "has-been." But that's not true at all,



*I'm going to break up this hell
or there's no future for me!*

considering that the films he's made in the 80s and 90s, like *ZIGEUNERWEISEN* (1980) and *YUMEJI* (1991) are as mind-blowingly inventive and original as his earlier works. Suzuki's simply a dyed-in-the-wool gentleman of the old school type—indeed, his modesty is a great part of both his charm and his own personal integrity. I have no doubt that one day soon, he'll take his rightful place among the greats of Japanese cinema. Matsushita Yumi interpreted, and Morishita Kimi translated this interview.

You were voted “Best Dressed Man” by the Japan Fashion Society in 1985. What’s the key to being a stylishly dressed man? (Laughs). It's a matter of kikonashi [how one wears clothes]. There's nothing else apart from that. I don't see how someone like me could win such a prize. (Laughs) Anyway, when we work on films, we usually wear jamba [an old word for jumper or a loose, casual jacket]—that's



when we look more stylish or, should I say, “cool.” So it all depends on what field you work in, it varies.

You were born here in Tokyo just a while back—what does it mean for you to be an “Edokko” [lit., child of Edo or old Tokyo]? Oh yes, that's very important to me. As for what it means to me, it's hard to answer... A so-called Edokko has his own pride in being an Edokko. He looks down on Osaka, for example. (Hearty laughter)

So what's the difference between Edokko and Osakans? The best thing about Edokko is that they're kippugaii [they have a kind, generous disposition]. Apart from that, Edokko have the ability to accept their fate, whatever it may be. It's easy for them to give up things. Osakans, on the other hand, are persistent, aren't they? They'll talk forever if you let them. (Laughs)

You served in the war, and have written about how it was an essentially comic experience for you. Do you see a basic connection between violence and absurdity? Oh, that's difficult, isn't it? As far as such a connection goes, it's something

that can only really be understood by those who were in that situation. As for us, we actually went to war and directly experienced life-or-death situations. Still, even in such extreme situations, it's possible to see human absurdity....

I was just wondering if you thought there was any connection between your war experiences and your movies later on... Ah, yes. That could be, but it's not something that happens consciously. It's simply something you acquire through experience. Just before, I was talking about being in Tokyo—all those things are a part of me. But when I make a film, it's not as if I try to shoot such things consciously.

After the war, you worked at Shochiku for six years before joining Nikkatsu. What was it like working there right after the war, and why did you decide eventually to leave? Well, Shochiku had an entrance exam for assistant directors. It was just like applying for a company job. Later on, I left for Nikkatsu



because they offered me three times what I was earning at Shochiku. That's why I switched.



And how was it working for Shochiku? I was only an assistant director, so what can I really say? (Laughs) I just did whatever an assistant director had to do.

When you were directing at Nikkatsu, what was the average time you'd spend on a film from start to finish? I heard you'd sometimes edit a film in just a couple of days. Oh, that was normal for just about everyone. What we were doing was nothing special. That's how the Nikkatsu system was set up in those days—it was all based on mass production.

And about how long would shooting last? From about 27 or 28 to 30 days.

What was the average crew size you usually worked with?

About 50 to 60 people. That doesn't include actors—only staff.

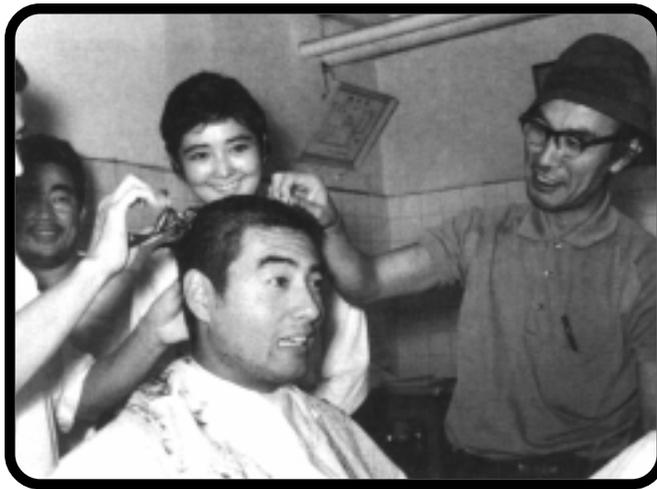
I know you had problems with Nikkatsu later on, but at least in the beginning, as long as you finished on time, did you have relative freedom to do what you wanted, or did you have problems with the producers telling you what to do and so on? (Laughs) Freedom? The so-

called Program Picture was something that was ready-made by the company. The company would come up with a script, and then tell the director, "Here—shoot this." The stories and everything else were fixed by the company....

So did you ever change the scripts? Yes, I did. I'd revise it during filming. That's how I got into trouble with the company.

Your first big breakthrough film was Yaju no Seishun (YOUTH OF THE BEAST), although you've said that Akutaro (THE BASTARD) was the turning point for you, since it was your first film working with designer Kimura Takeo. But the Suzuki style had already matured before you teamed up with Kimura. How important, for example, was your relationship with long-time cameraman Mine Shigeyoshi? Mine-san? Well... there was one man called Nagatsuka-san before him. He was a cameraman known as Nagatsuka. In the beginning, I used to work with him often. Mine-san was an apprentice of Nagatsuka's. Technically, he was an "ototodeshi" [literally, younger brother apprentice or fellow apprentices working under another director, with, in this case, Nagatsuka being the more senior apprentice]. When Nagatsuka-san was away, I'd ask for Mine-san. How should I explain...? Both Nagatsuka-san and Mine-san had subtle differences in their use of camera angles. In any case, being able to get along was the most important thing. Cameramen can't work well together if they don't get along. In that respect, I was able to get along with those two, so naturally, I often asked for them.

And what about your relationship with Kimura? I don't think my style changed after Kimura-san came in. But of course, Kimura-san is an ideas man.... If I suggested doing some-



On the set of FIGHTING ELEGY

presented as utterly evil, then it would be a problem.

But you made them so cool—you must like them. Of course they're cool. What else should a director do, besides make them look cool? (Laughs)

"Of course they're cool. What else should a director do, besides make them look cool? (Laughs)"

the same year. Things were working out for the other three, but with me, people were always complaining. So I went to see a fortune-teller, and was told that my name was the source of my trouble. It was easy to change my name, so I did. After some time, I could see no positive effects, so I went back to the fortune-teller to complain. I was told, "You have to wait for 10 years before it will work." When the tenth year finally came, that's when I was fired. (Laughs)



On the set of GATE OF FLESH

thing in a certain way, he'd add his own ideas as well and create something new.

You seem to have a perverse affection for your lead characters. Do you have a special affinity with drop-outs and trouble-makers? (Laughs) First of all, that was all a result of company policy. It was company policy to use drop-outs as the main character. Since they were the main character, I couldn't make them look completely bad. Of course, by the end of the movie, I'd have to portray them as good men—if they were

I was wondering, why did you change your name to Suzuki "Seijun" for Ankokugai no Bijo (BEAUTY OF THE UNDERWORLD) in 1958? Is there a story behind that? I was one of four directors who started working for Nikkatsu in

You worked with some pretty cool actors, like Kobayashi Akira and Watari Tetsuya, but Shishido Jo was just about the coolest. Is he the archetypal Suzuki anti-hero or man? Well, you know... Shishido Jo is the kind of actor who can't do yakuza movies. The others mainly acted in yakuza movies, but Shishido Jo is more of an action-movie-type actor. He was just suited to action movies. With the action movies, other actors might've been just as good in the part, but, on the other hand, if you had Shishido Jo star in a yakuza film, then it probably wouldn't work out. That's my own feeling. [Note: early in his career, Shishido Jo had his cheeks surgically enlarged, since he thought

he looked too pretty to be a convincing action-movie actor. He thought it would make him look more rugged and macho, but in fact, he wound up looking vaguely absurd—like a gangster crossed with Bazooka Joe. Actually though, that's one reason why he's so perfect for Suzuki's frequently absurdist films.]

But is he the closest to the archetypal Suzuki man? I wouldn't say that... The company always did the casting itself.

You did a number of films with Nogawa Yumiko, who's especially good in Kawachi Karumen (CARMEN FROM KAWACHI). Were there any qualities about her that you particularly liked? No matter what, she always put her all into whatever she had to do. As for her good points, I can't really say what they are. (Laughs) As you can see, the results are good, but during shooting, I was always worried about how it was going to turn out. (Laughs)

You got your first big warning from the higher-ups at Nikkatsu for Irezumi Ichidai (ONE GENERATION OF TATTOOS). What exactly did they say to you? That happened every time. What should I say? Everything I did strayed from the script. So it wasn't only Irezumi Ichidai—I got complaints from the company every time.

But you didn't listen to them... Well, it wasn't exactly like that. Among the executives at Nikkatsu, there was one who thought what I was doing was interesting. That's how I managed to survive. Whenever he saw my movies, he'd say, "What've you done this time? Don't go any further next time." That was his advice to me. "This is the limit!" That's what I was always told. But I don't think I was doing anything too strange.

You were just trying to make the movie better... It wasn't that. I was just trying to make it more interesting.

In your last dozen or so movies for Nikkatsu, you seem to alternate between doing one film in black and white, and one film in color. You even alternate between B&W and color within a few films. Were you afraid you'd get too carried away if you shot only in color? The ones that were shot in B&W were done that way because that's what the company wanted. There's a big difference in the cost of B&W and color, so in order to cut down costs, the



On the set of STORY OF A PROSTITUTE

questions like that.

BRANDED TO KILL is the film that got you fired. It's so over-the-top—what was the basic thing you were trying to achieve in that film? The only thing I ever think about is how to make the movie more interesting. If I'd asked what my intention was or something like that, I'm at a loss as to how to answer.

What's with Hanada Goro's boiled rice fetish? Was that in Guryu Hachiro's original script? It happened on the spot, during shooting.

How did you come up with the idea? I wonder where it came from. (Laughs) It's because he's a Japanese assassin. If he were Italian, he'd get turned on by macaroni, right?

What about in Kenka Erejii (ELEGY TO VIOLENCE), when Takahashi Hideki masturbates on the piano keyboard? Was that in the script, or was it inspiration as well? It happened on the spot.

Where did the inspiration come from? Back then, you couldn't show nudity in Japanese movies. So I always had to think of something else as a substitute. (Laughs)

On the set of CARMEN FROM KAWACHI



company would decide to shoot in B&W. When the company could afford to shoot in color, they'd tell me to go ahead and use color. For the films that use both color and B&W, well... that could've been my own intention. But in general, it was always the company's decision—it was a question of the budget.

You said the company complained about your changing the scripts. Did they complain about your use of color as well? (Laughs) "Why did you use a red background?" I was often asked

Was Takahashi embarrassed to do it? Since he was told to do it, he had no reason to be embarrassed. (Laughs)

What did Nikkatsu have to gain by having you blacklisted from the entire Japanese film industry? Of course, all the presidents of the film companies had to save face amongst each other. They're all connected by some kind of association of company presidents. There was no reason for the other companies to hire someone who'd been fired by Nikkatsu, since there were already plenty of directors

in those companies. They didn't dare hire me.

Did any real yakuza ever tell you what they thought of your films? No, that's never happened. I'm sure some have seen my films though. Of course, there's a big difference between yakuza in the movies and real yakuza. (Laughs)

What do you personally think of yakuza? You mean, are they good or bad? The yakuza in our films are based on giri [duty or obligation] and ninjo [human emotion or feeling]. Real yakuza nowadays seem to have no sense of giri or ninjo. I once made a documentary about yakuza. Someone told me, "Today's yakuza are not what you show in your films—what counts now is not giri-ninjo, but money." With the yakuza in our films though, if one of them kills someone for his oyabun [boss], then being sent to jail is his badge of pride, isn't it? But real yakuza, on the other hand, will be in big trouble in a world like this if they have to go to jail, since they won't be able to make money. So they try to make money in ways that keep them from going to jail. That's how real yakuza are today.

Nikkatsu's just started up again after having gone bankrupt a few years back. If they gave you money to do whatever you wanted, would you work for them again? They'd never make such an offer—absolutely not. (Laughs) I can tell just by looking at the kind of movies they're making now. They're making films about incurable diseases now—the first relaunched Nikkatsu movie is about an incurable disease. [Note: the movie in question is called *TO LOVE*, which is about a boy who falls for a girl who suddenly develops leprosy.] It's some kind of love story—for me, personally, I'm no longer interested in love, if you know what I mean (Laughs)

In the 70s, you shot a lot of commercials. What kind did you do? What were some of the more interesting ones you did? I've made commercials using Japanese kids, or cars—I've done a variety. The craziest one I ever did was never shown—it was sent straight to storage. It was a mayonnaise commercial. This kid was a real brat—I'd had all I could take of him. So I forced him to keep eating mayonnaise take after take after take, and shot him until he started to gag. (Laughing) That commercial went straight to the warehouse. (Laughs)

Did you ever make any boiled rice commercials with Shishido Jo? Back then, there were no commercials made for rice. Actually though, I do remember seeing a pickled cucumber commercial with Shishido Jo's son—he eats a lot of rice in that one. (Laughs)



How did you get hooked up with Arato Genjiro? [Note: Arato Genjiro produced *ZIGEUNERWEISEN*, *Kagero-za* (*HEAT-HAZE THEATER*, 1981) and *YUMEJI*, which together comprise Suzuki's brilliant, dream-like *Taisho Trilogy*.] He used to lead a drama troupe. A friend of mine used to go to his shows all the time, since he was friends with Arato-kun. That's how I met him—I got to know him through my friend.

No distributors would handle ZIGEUNERWEISEN, so you and Arato showed it in an inflatable mobile dome. Was it only shown in Tokyo, or was it shown anywhere else? Showing it in a tent was our plan from the start. That was one of the producer's conditions.

Was it only shown in Tokyo? That's right—it was shown under Tokyo Tower.

How long did it play? It was shown for about a month, or maybe longer—I've forgotten.

Your Taisho Trilogy films are basically ghost stories. In some of your Nikkatsu-period films, you also show strange natural phenomena, such as the sudden dust storm in *YAJU NO SEISHUN*. Do you believe in spirits? (Laughs) Do you mean, do I believe in ghosts? What you're talking about is a very Japanese way of viewing the spiritual world. Rather than trying to decide if I believed in it or not, I merely thought it would be interesting to show some of the more intriguing aspects of that world. It's not a question of whether I believe in it or not, if you know what I mean.

What is it about the Taisho period that interests you so much? [Note: The Taisho era lasted from 1912-1926, when Emperor Yoshihito held the throne]. It's the period of ero-guro-nansensu [a period of eroticism, grotesqueness and nonsense]. (Laughs)

Do you have any future projects with Arato planned? I heard about two... There's no money—it's impossible.

Did you make money on the Taisho films? We haven't made any profits on them.

Did you break even? ZIGEUNERWEISEN made money. As for the other two, we didn't show them in the tent. We gave them to a distributor instead. But leaving a film to a distributor here is no good—definitely not.

What's your best film? My next one.

Next? That's right—my next film.

OK—how about your second best film? The ones I enjoyed making the most are the best, I suppose.

And of those... As far as my Nikkatsu films are concerned, I'd say Toge o Wataru Wakai Kaze (THE WIND-OF-YOUTH GROUP CROSSES THE MOUNTAIN PASS). A young actor called Wada Koji starred in it. And almost everything I did with Arato was enjoyable—that's because we stayed and ate and lived together on all those films.

Which is your least favorite film? (Laughs) If I answer that, I might... (Laughs) (Asking himself) One I don't like...? Which one could it be? Well, for example, a film like TOKYO NAGAREMONO, since the company made me change the ending. They didn't like what I'd shot... that kind of thing bothers me. Under company orders, I had to reshoot the entire last scene—I was forced to redo it.

What was the original ending? Originally, in the last scene, the entire background was white, and there was a green moon in it. In the foreground, a large tree was lying on the ground—this big tree was also painted white, except for where it had been cut, which was painted red. On that spot, by the tree, the two main characters appear and then say good-bye. The company didn't like a background like that. (Imitating the company executives) "Green moon?! That's impossible—you can't have a green moon!" (Laughs)

What's your most underrated film? Underrated? (Laughs) Of course, my first one. (Minato no Kanpai: Shori o Wagate ni (HARBOUR TOAST: VICTORY IS IN OUR GRASP)). Yeah, the first two or three... Kaiyo Eiga [a genre of movies based on or inspired by popular songs of the time], for example, were never reviewed back then. Those kind of movies were basically just stories that were tacked onto pop songs, almost as an afterthought.

Do you have any advice for young filmmakers, especially young Japanese filmmakers? My way of making films is fundamentally different from that of young filmmakers, not to mention my way of thinking. So whatever I say will be of no use to anybody.

How about spiritual advice? Spiritual advice? I haven't seen very many films by young people, so I'm really in no position to say anything. I prefer just concentrating on what I have to do and minding my own business, rather than worrying about other people.

Some people have called you a nihilist. Are you a nihilist or a romantic? (Long, slow laughter) I'm not a romantic... But I'm not exactly a nihilist either... (Laughs)

Maybe a style-ist? Style-ist?! (Laughs) That could be....

J. Scott Burgeson is based in Seoul, South Korea, and is the publisher of Bug magazine. Bug #5, the Woeguggin Issue, will be out early July 2001.

For enquires contact: secretagentbug@yahoo.com

(This article originally appeared in Bug #3 and has been shortened for space.)

SUZUKI SEIJUN filmography

(possibly missing a few titles, since various sources have different translations we combined what was very similar)

1956: Cheers at the Harbour: Triumph in Our Hands

Pure Emotions of the Sea

Town of Satan

1957: Eight Hours of Terror

Inn of Floating Weeds

Nude Girl with a Gun

1958: Beauty of the Underworld

Spring Never Came

Voice Without a Shadow

Young Breasts

1959: Age of Nudity

Love Letter

Passport to Darkness

1960: Everything Goes Wrong

Fighting Delinquents

Sleep of the Beast

Take Aim at the Police Van

Undercover Zero Line

1961: The Big Boss Who Needs No Gun

Bloody Channel

Go to Hell, Hoodlums!

Man with the Machine Gun

Million Dollar Match

Tokyo Knights

Wind of Youth Crosses the Mountain

1962: Teen Yakuza

Those Who Bet on Me

1963: The Bastard

Detective Bureau 23: Go to Hell, Bastards!

Kanto Wanderer

Youth of the Beast

1964: Gate of Flesh

Flowers and the Angry Waves

Our Blood Won't Allow It

1965: One Generation of Tattoos

Story of Bastards: Born Under a Bad Star

The Story of a Prostitute

1966: Carmen from Kawachi

Fighting Elegy

Tokyo Drifter

1967: Branded to Kill

1977: A Tale of Sorrow and Sadness

1980: Zigeunerweisen

1981: Heat-Haze Theatre

1985: Capone's Flood of Tears

Lupin III: The Golden Legend of Babylon

1991: Yumeji

Photos of Suzuki Seijun courtesy John Zorn.

Caveh Zahedi *'s possessed*

By Christopher Chase *Caveh Zahedi was born in Washington D.C. in 1960. From 1977 to 1981 he attended Yale and studied philosophy. In 1983 he moved to Paris where for three years he worked as an English teacher, translator, sub-titler, and film critic. While in Paris he watched and absorbed hundreds of films, many of which are not available in the U.S. In 1986 he returned to the US and enrolled in film school at UCLA, where he completed the black and white feature A LITTLE STIFF as his senior thesis project (with co-director Greg Watkins). After the very modest success (breaking even after a sale to German television) he lived off various and sundry grants while tutoring minority students, and editing and script doctoring for other projects.*

In 1994 he completed I DON'T HATE LAS VEGAS ANYMORE, a family pseudo-documentary which was bankrolled by an erstwhile Jon Jost and Jon Moritsugu producer, Henry S.



Rosenthal. When VEGAS failed to break even, Rosenthal backed away from supporting Zahedi's future projects, including his "I Am A Sex Addict" (still in production). In 1998 he attempted to repeat and record a religious drug experience, I WAS POSSESSED BY GOD, which was made for \$300. Zahedi's cash troubles are dramatized in his latest collaborative effort with Watkins, A SIGN FROM GOD (2000). A new feature-length project, IN THE BATHTUB OF THE WORLD, is Zahedi's autobiographical journey through 1999. His short film, WORM was made late 2000 with Jay Rosenblatt and has been sold to the Sundance channel and is touring with the Ann Arbor Film Shorts program. His main source of income until 1997 came from writing academic papers for college students; presently he works as a freelance writer and film reviewer for Seattle's The Stranger. In 2000 he interviewed his hero, Abbas Kiarostami.

How does cinema inspire religious feelings? For me, reality is "of God," and insofar as film documents reality, it's basically documenting God. In that sense it's religious.

And how does it seem to inspire religious feelings in both the

viewers and makers? I think reality tends to be overwhelming, and I think by framing reality and reducing it, it enables one to see. I think this is really clear with documentaries. If you're there it's actually not that interesting, but then when you see it on film, it's actually fascinating and funny and profound, and there's something there that elevates common experience. It's not that experience is common, but we don't really see it. Film allows us to see it, by putting us into a position where we're not implicated. Where we're not seen and we can just be open and vulnerable in a way that we usually can't when we're in the world and being seen, and having to respond and feeling like having to defend oneself in that situation. Film helps bring down our defenses.



I've noticed that in A LITTLE STIFF you've emphasized the physicality of life and the movement of bodies. It was more a question of another way of revealing character than drama. Normally character is revealed by situation, dramatic situation, that sort of brings things to a head. But it seems to me that the body is like a fingerprint. It is a unique expression of an individual, and everything about everything signifies that thing. That tends to get short-shifted sometimes in the more Hollywood notion of what character is, for example.

In your interviews you've talked about experimentation with drugs and how that can affect one spiritually, as a sort of spiritual quest. That clearly plays a role in both of your films. Taking drugs is scary, certainly, and there's always the fear of death in one's mind when one takes an especially large dose of drugs, which is what I tend to do in my films. I could also bungee-jump if I wanted to be scared or come close to dying. I don't know why, but I've found that drugs take me to a place that I've never been able to access without, which is a profoundly religious place — more wise, more awakened than any place I've ever

photos of Zahedi from A LITTLE STIFF

“The films, among other things, are a kind of spiritual practice of being vulnerable and learning that one can afford to be vulnerable, and nothing terrible will happen.”

been. I find that space very valuable and instructive, and I’ve been fascinated by how that looks to the naked eye, to the human eye. There is definitely a disparity between how that looks and how that feels. I’ve been interested in exploring that.

Falling in love and making oneself vulnerable, like your character in *A LITTLE STIFF* or in *I DON’T HATE LAS VEGAS ANYMORE*. To open channels of communication with loved ones that are strained, that’s certainly putting oneself in danger, at least your ego. I really believe in process



art. I like art that is about process as much as the final product. To me if the product isn’t interesting or fun or valuable, then it’s just less interesting. I’m always trying to make films that, in the making of the film itself, it somehow improves my life or relationships. In that sense I’m always putting myself on the line. I’m not interested in a prefab kind of experience. It’s about testing and challenging and growing and seeing where something will take one. The films all have that element. When they don’t I just get bored.

And how about the danger of making oneself vulnerable? I guess that no one is really vulnerable, that in the cosmic scheme of things we’re all safe and the truth can’t hurt us, because it’s benign. Of course I’m afraid of lots of things and I do feel vulnerable, but I’m always trying to learn not to be. The films, among other things, are a kind of spiritual practice of being vulnerable and learning that one can afford to be vulnerable, and nothing terrible will happen. The worst thing that happens is that people will hate you. That hurts. But it doesn’t seem to really matter in the end. I think I’ve learned a lot about letting go of approval from making the films, making films that are more vulnerable than most films. (The films) are terrifying to show

people because of that. David Lynch once said that he likes films in which there’s something really embarrassing, and I really like that idea. All my films really embarrass me a lot. I can sort of tell how good it is by how embarrassing it is to me.

I’d like to read two different statements on the topic of how cinema ‘creates’ memory. The first is by Jean-Luc Godard. “One could say television has ‘un-taught’ us to see. Television manufactures a few memories, but cinema—as it should have been—creates memory, i.e. the possibility of memory. “ I quote this because *A LITTLE STIFF* is a remembered vision of an unrequited act of love. How does cinema ‘create’ memory—or a virtual memory—and how, in the filmmaker, does it create a sense of nostalgia? I don’t understand why television would differ from film in this regard. It seems to me that whether it’s film or video, it doesn’t seem like it’s about that, but more about the quality or content of television. But I just think that photographic reproduction of movement—whether its film or video—captures time. This is what Tarkovsky says is the essence of cinema. I think he’s right: it’s really capturing time, or



reality, that’s no longer present. In that sense it’s a nostalgia-machine, it’s always capturing the past as a continual presence. It’s what really happened at that moment, but it repeats itself forever in a sort of Nietzschean ‘eternal return’ kind of experience. It gives it an aesthetic gravity that unrecorded time doesn’t have. Almost like it’s denser, or the fact that it can repeat makes it more memorable —like an emulsion, but it’s a thicker emulsion.

So, yeah, it creates a totally different relationship to that moment than one has to unrecorded moments. That’s why I’m trying to record as much of my life as possible, so that I can have a relationship to it that is profounder.

Something that’s being talked about and written about a lot lately is Digital Video. What are the possibilities of filmmaking in this newer medium? There’s nothing really philosophical for me about this. It’s just a very practical thing. It frees you from all of the constraints of film. Just practically speaking, you don’t have to bend over backwards and kiss a hundred people’s asses to be able to make a film and have to dilute your vision the way [film] requires when dealing with other people’s money....and having done both of these things, it seems to me to be very clear that art ultimately isn’t about pleasing other people, it’s about

left: *A LITTLE STIFF*; right: *I DON’T HATE LAS VEGAS ANYMORE*

doing something new that other people don't know how to see yet but will eventually learn to see. But if you are ahead, people aren't going to get it, and things are always financed if they're *not* ahead. It's not possible to make art and get much support for it if it's truly cutting-edge. And just in that sense, it frees you up. It doesn't have to be digital or analog video—just cheap, cheap filmmaking means free you up. The great thing about digital video is you can edit without generation loss at home on your computer. So it's just much more radical freedom, people can express themselves more individually, and in just my own work I've been so much more prolific and productive in myself ever since I've gone video and have stopped trying to make it in the film world.

I have a friend—you know him, too—who is not of the school that 'more is better,' but that if it takes 10 years in a labor of



love to put together a film (as long as it's in celluloid) then it will have greater integrity than anything shot on video, because of the flatness of the image and the poor quality that video provides. What would you say to this counter-argument? I'm less interested in the integrity of the image than the integrity of the artist. Hollywood movies are shot on film and they have no integrity whatsoever. Any Pixelvision film shot by an artist has more integrity than almost any 35mm Hollywood production. It's not about the medium—it's about the thought. I just saw a film last night called DON FROM LAKEWOOD by Erik Saks. It's beautiful, shot on Pixelvision, astonishingly simple, and it's art. And it has no integrity of image quality [laughs].

What is the state of film distribution in the U.S.? It's not great. [laughs] It's really quite simple. Movie theaters require a certain number of people per night to make a film viable, so it requires a certain critical mass that, say, making a record doesn't. You could just make records and send them to people, or have them in stores, and people could just buy them when they feel like it. Movie theaters just sort of cater to a lower denominator because they require a lot of people, more so than alternative music, say. So it just seems to me that as long as that's the case, people who watch movies in theaters won't see anything too fantastic, and the system will be against really great, innovative

“... If you are ahead, people aren't going to get it, and things are always financed if they're *not* ahead. It's not possible to make art and get much support for it if it's truly cutting-edge. And just in that sense, it frees you up.”

work. It happens occasionally, but it's just a real uphill battle. I think that video has been fantastic in this way, because work can be seen without 300 people having to see it on the same day in the same place, and I think the Internet is a great thing too. And I see no hope really for old-fashioned film distribution to be viable for film or video art.

So you have hopes for the Internet? I do. I don't even try to get my films shown in theaters anymore. I just show it to



friends, make videotapes and send them out, and let them find their way—the way that people do with records and tapes. I think video has really helped people become more aware of film history, and therefore much more sophisticated as viewers, and I think that's a really good thing. People are going to become increasingly dissatisfied with low-consciousness cinema. I also think that the whole personal documentary movement has been pretty much a 90s phenomenon and that's a great advance and people are really turning toward the 'personal' in a good way. I think documentary has really made the most progress, and fictional filmmaking has become more or less bloated by the financial constraints.

Does I WAS POSSESSED BY GOD follow any tradition of filmmaking (spiritual documentary, experimental)? POSSESSED fits into the “trying to capture God on film” tradition. And while “God” or “the divine” is obviously, and by definition, invisible, nevertheless there are points of contact in which “God” or “the divine” can be seen. On a simple level, “God” and “the divine” are present in everything, and can be seen simply by

both: I WAS POSSESSED BY GOD

turning a camera on and pointing it in any direction whatsoever. But seeing “God” or “the divine” in everything is something that one has to be fairly advanced spiritually to be able to do. So there is a cinematic tradition (with very few films in it) of people trying to capture a glimpse of other realms, supernatural realms, non-ordinary states of consciousness in which “God” or “the divine” is more palpably and more visibly present than by just randomly pointing a camera at reality, and the reason for the existence of this (decidedly small) tradition is that most of us have a hard time seeing the existence of “God” or “the divine” in all things and at all times, and so it can be helpful to see more visible evidence.

Maya Deren’s film of voodoo initiates in trance, Jean Rouch’s film of African ritual participants in trance, and Peter Adair’s film about church-going Christians being possessed by the “Holy Ghost” all attempt to capture this striking interface of the divine with the “human” by trying to capture the look and film of “possession” experiences. The way *I WAS POSSESSED BY GOD* differs from these films is: 1) the possession experience is drug-induced (with all of the various implications of that) and 2) it is not an ethnographic film by somebody else but a film in which the filmmaker and the subject are one (with all of the various implications of that). These two differences complicate the filmic (and viewing) situation to a much greater degree than in the other films mentioned, and seeing the film brings up all kinds of other issues and prejudices and questions. I do not claim to answer any of these questions, only to pose them, and I believe that they are worth posing and have wide-reaching implications.

I would also like to add that there is a long-tradition of drug-induced trance, from the Delphic oracle to the Shamans of the Amazon, and that the idea that the reality experienced while on hallucinogens is less valid than ordinary reality is a Western prejudice based on ignorance of what these drugs are and do, as well as the extent to which they have been central to the spiritual and philosophical development of a wide variety of world cultures.

Someone who watched POSSESSED told me they thought anyone could take mushrooms and film themselves and that that is not interesting filmmaking. A filmed mushroom trip might or might not be interesting, but that it depends entirely 1) on the specific trip being filmed and 2) on the filmmaking itself (both the shooting and the editing). Every trip is different and every film is different. No trip and no film is inherently interesting or uninteresting. Although I would argue that any trip, simply because tripping is something rarely seen in our culture, has a certain visual interest above and beyond the visual interest of something more commonly seen in our culture. I do agree, of course, that not every filmed trip is going to be terribly interesting, as the recently released unedited super-8 footage of Syd Barrett’s first trip amply demonstrates.

I am still planning to make it a feature length film involving footage from several trips, and to go more deeply into the whole drug question. I simply haven’t had time.

Where do you spend most of your time nowadays? On my couch. Is that what you mean? I like lying down on my couch.

And what do you do when you’re on your couch? I meditate a lot. I like to meditate reclining and I try to tune into my body and try to listen for inner guidance about what I should be doing at that moment, and I try to do what I’m told. And just sort of take each day and moment and not pre-plan things or have an agenda, but be ‘in the now’. That’s what I try to do; of course I fail miserably most of the time: I’m constantly trying to control my day and my life, but I find when I don’t, everything is much better, I’m happier.



How old are you now? I’m 39.

And you made A LITTLE STIFF ten years ago? Yeah, pretty much

How would you describe the past ten years...have they all been spent on the couch? [laughs] Some of them were spent on the floor. The last ten years have been incredibly hard. I would say an incredible amount of frustration, but also a real humbling has happened, which I think is invaluable. That’s the way it all looks from here: Just a big, frustrating lesson in humility.

Do you ever wonder if you’ve chosen the right path? Yeah, all the time. Everyday.

I’d like to close with this comment Coleridge said about choosing, which is you choose what most challenges you. “You choose,” he said, “what finds you.” Do you think that you’ve chosen what has found you? Yeah. Definitely.

And what is most challenging? Yes! [laughs] Definitely.

Christopher Chase is the film curator at Consolidated Works in Seattle, WA and a programmer for the Olympia Film Festival.

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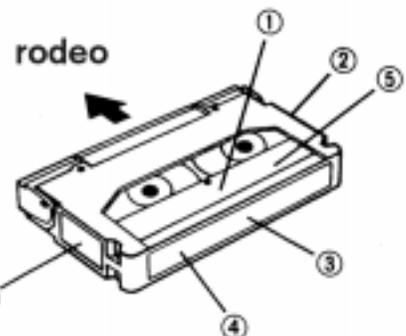
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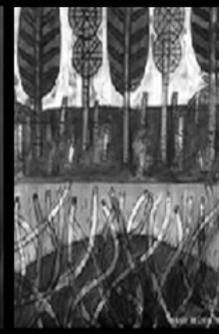
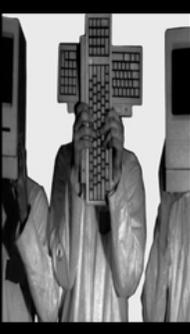
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WORMWOOD



By Mike Plante *Larry Foster grew up in Tucson, Arizona and north of Fresno, California. He attended Fresno City College for film studies, then UCLA from 1974 to 1977, where his short film THE HARVESTER won the Jim Morrison Award (about \$250). After school he worked for television producers and an agent, which resulted in various weirdo Hollywood encounters. These have made it into his first feature, WORMWOOD.*

After moving to Tucson I went to the University of Arizona media arts (damn that term is vague) department where I took film production classes under Larry. We could make any type of film about any subject we wanted, except for two things - no shooting on campus and no suicide. Foster finally started telling Hollywood stories. Besides the idea of: that's the town we are supposed to be in to make films, the completely lurid tales were funny and shocking.

WORMWOOD is a 105-minute feature made on digital video. It follows Christina (played by Foster's wife, Lourdes) as she searches Hollywood for her missing sister, who last seen entering the fictional, babylonesque Wormwood studios. Foster shot almost the whole thing in his living room with various fake walls and Caligari-inspired drawings. Surreal and funny, gross out and political, with cannibalism and raging against the Hollywood system, WORMWOOD might give the impression Foster is unhinged. Ironically, few people I know are as grounded and light-humored.

Was it hard to get into film school when you went, or did you just have to say, "I'm a director," like today? It was hard to get into UCLA's film school. I went as an English major. But I took every film class that I could - not production - mostly film history and screenwriting classes. I got into the film school a year later after going through an interview process. You went in and you talked to about four or five people, which was kind of intimidating. I told them I loved films and I had made several little shorts. The head of department asked where I made them. I said, "I lived up near Bass Lake up in the Sierra Mountains." He said, "I have a cabin at Bass Lake!" and that was it. I was in. That was my first instance in Hollywood where: it is all who you know.

How did it compare to the community college you went to? UCLA was a very negative atmosphere. The film teacher I had when I made THE HARVESTER was a bitter alcoholic and frustrated jerk. The first day of class he

said, "A monkey could make a super-8 film.

Because super-8 cameras are like squirt guns." That pissed me off. I had already made several films and was raring to go. The atmosphere at Fresno City College was a bunch of people getting together and helping each other out. No egos, a lot of fun. I go to UCLA and it's all cutthroat. A bunch of rich little white bastards. Everybody was looking over their shoulders.

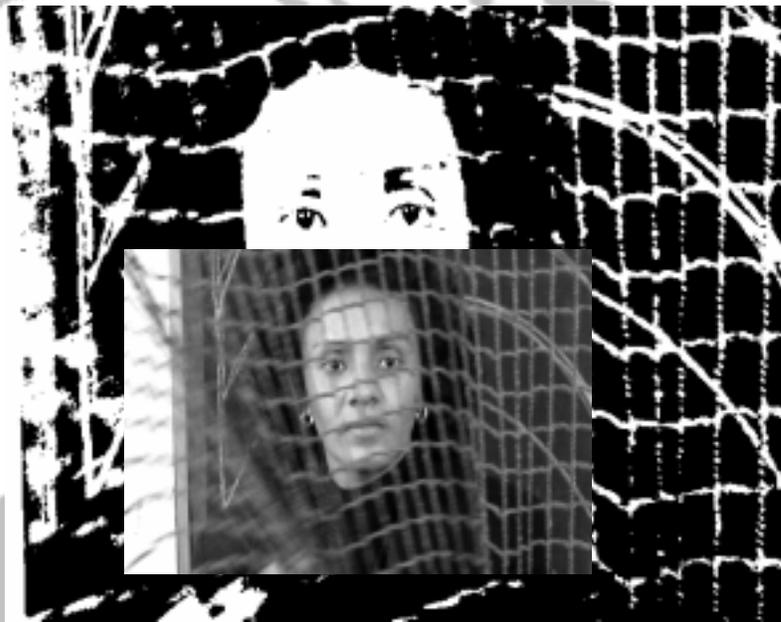
Did winning the Jim Morrison award do anything for you? (What an odd question....) After they screened THE HARVESTER, people started coming up to me and asking me to shoot their films. They were 16mm films and I had only done super 8. I just wanted to do my own thing. Also, I was intimidated and scared by the whole thing. That's why later, when I started teaching, I told students, "Don't be afraid." I wish I had just plowed into cinematography with no fear.

There was also a teacher named Rosen. I never took his classes but I sat in on them. He talked about psychological and political stuff. He talked about JAWS (1975) being about the proletariat and the military and the scientist. The Proletariat (the Working Man) is Robert Shaw and the policeman (military) was Roy Scheider. The proletariat is sacrificed to the shark and the military man, with the gun, saves the day. A lot of people would argue with him. He talked about KING KONG (1933) and the giant black ape horny for a blonde white woman. Also, the homosexuality of GUNGA DIN (1939). He basically said all films are political. I didn't really appreciate his ideas until after I lived in Hollywood a few more years.

Your classes were fun, we were allowed to do anything. But the majority of students expected not to learn about filmmaking as much as achieving respect. Directing has become the art world CEO. If they want to go to Hollywood, then they want

to go to Hollywood. They might as well have not gone to college. Or they should have more appropriate classes. The most helpful film classes would be "How To Get Groceries For Your Bosses," or how to get drugs for them, or "How To Kiss Up To People."

What did you do right after school? A friend from UCLA called me up and said he got a job at Paramount Studios.



"People kept telling me, 'You can't do that.' ... But this may be the only film I ever make, so I'm going to go for broke."

He said he's getting promoted and asked if I would like to come and work there. I said sure. That simple. Like I said before, it's all who you know. At UCLA and USC you meet a lot of people. Most of those people are going to go on to work in the industry in some petty jobs. The more people you know, the more jobs you can get. I only made three friends at UCLA. Out of those three, I got two jobs.

What was that first job? I was assistant to all the big shots that produced the series *Taxi*. So I learned how to get groceries for these people, to get their gasoline, to deposit their checks, to take their kids to school. Total bullshit job.

How old were their kids? 35. (laughs) No, no - they were little kids, like 7. One guy's kid I took everywhere; picked her up at her mother's house and took her to his house because they were divorced. Picked her up at the airport. I was even her surrogate



dad at a Father's Day school baseball game. In a later job I took a big shot agent's little ten year old son to a shrink.

The goal in Hollywood is to get rich enough and powerful enough so you can have an assistant to do all your work for you so you don't have to do anything. None of the big shots really do anything. They are on the phone all day. They sit there in their office and then at the end of the day they say, "Oh man... I am so tired." Fuck you asshole, you don't do any work. They don't know what work is.

HOLLYWOOD STORIES

I like hearing about how you were an amateur drug runner. One of the most important ingredients to being an assistant is that you get drugs for your boss. Everybody does it but nobody ever talks about it and it's always been this way, it will always be that way. If you refuse to get drugs for your boss you are doomed.

The first week I was at Paramount studios, the secretary gave me an envelope and told me to take it to a really high-class

hair salon on Sunset Boulevard. Usually you don't ask any questions. So I go to the office and I give the envelope to a guy and he gives me a box and I bring it back. All the way back I am getting madder and madder because I knew what it was. I was pissed off. I don't care what anybody does with their personal life but I don't get drugs for anybody.

When I walked in the office I was kind of shaking. I put the box on the desk and said, "I know this is drugs." The secretary literally said, "Well, you know that is a part of your job. Everybody does it." I said, "Well, not me. You want me to go talk to him?" She said, "No, no, no. I'll handle it from now on." So then I went over to my office to my immediate boss - the friend from UCLA. He said, "Don't worry about it! If you get caught, you'll get the best lawyer in town." Big comfort. From that point on I knew I was doomed there.

The idea being, you must want to be like your boss, so you have to suffer like they did, "climbing the ladder" nonsense. I hated being alone in the same room with the executives because I never knew what to say. So these guys were very confused by me because I wasn't kissing their ass. I wasn't belligerent - I was very nice, smiling, laughing. I just wouldn't do 'extras.'

Readers of this will say is - you didn't fit in, so now you're mad and saying producers suck. But why do you have to fit in to succeed? Shouldn't you be judged by your talent? Maybe in a perfect world. I knew I could make films. I have never met a person in Hollywood that loves films as much as I do. No one! When people with no talent start succeeding, you're thinking, "Why are they succeeding and I'm not? I'm not doing a bad job." Like Clint Eastwood says at the end of *UNFORGIVEN* (1992), "Deserve's got nothing to with it." That sums up Hollywood.

But there definitely seems to be a huge layer of the people working in Hollywood are pretty normal, like you and me. If they don't want to make a film, it's one thing. But many do, or want to be an actor. They are low end and a lot of them will barely get by. It's like (John Schlesinger's 1975 film) *THE DAY OF THE LOCUST*. You have all these people on the outside. Thousands of them. Most of them live in a fantasy world like they are an important part of it. An ex-student emailed me recently and said, "We are about to release *THE PERFECT STORM* (2000), and we are doing this and this." I am thinking, what is this "we" bullshit? He was just some lowly assistant. Then a few weeks later he emails me and says, "Well, they released it and my name isn't in the credits! Motherfuckers, so much for being a part of it...."

You did say there were a few cool people. Danny DeVito was the nicest, most natural guy. He wasn't phony, didn't have any airs about him. He was the only one that was great to be around.

What can you say about Andy Kaufman? The rest of the cast hated him. One day the cast went, en masse except for Danny DeVito, into the executive producers' office and demanded they

fire Andy Kaufman or they would walk. The producer laughed and said, "Walk, we don't care." They would sue the cast, Kaufman is more important than the rest put together, etc. So they all walked out with their tails between their legs. The first two years, while I was there anyway, the cast hated Kaufman.

So how did you hear about them going in to complain to the producers? My boss (the friend from UCLA) heard about everything and would tell me everything.

Tell me about when you first met Kaufman. Before the first episode, I was supposed to go to the whole cast and get biographies from them. They wanted the warm-up guy, a comedian who warms up the live audience before the show, to read bios of the cast.

So I went around and they all gave me their bios. All very short and very simple. I went to Kaufman's dressing room. He starts giving me this long, ridiculous story about how he was born, and, I'll never forget this because it was so stupid: He was born on the wrong side of the tracks, in a little town called Chilicadava. I was writing it all down. He stopped and said, "Are you getting all this?" He was so serious and so nice and so sweet. Just a real long rambling story about his life. All these weird clichés. I said, "You know – they're really going to say this. It's going to be printed out and the warm-up guy is going to read this to the audience before the show." He says okay. So I wrote it all down and I showed it to my boss and he started laughing and said if Andy wants it, go ahead.

On the night of the show I gave it to the warm-up guy. He had already told some jokes and given some bios. He tells the audience, "You gotta hear this next biography because it's hilarious. Andy Kaufman was born in the little town of Chilicadava...." He read half of the story and not a single person in the audience was laughing. Suddenly the door banged opened and Kaufman came running in yelling, "Who wrote that!?! I didn't write that! I'm getting my lawyer! I'm gonna sue whoever wrote that shit!"

I got scared to death. My boss said don't worry about it and one of the executives said the same thing. They thought it was funny, but I hated Andy Kaufman from then on. To play a vicious game on someone who deserves it is one thing, but doing it to the lowest person on the totem pole sucks. I thought I was going to lose my job. From then on I stayed clear of Andy.

You will look more bitter in print than you really come off in person. I know! I laugh about it, I tell stories. I'm bitter about humans, basically. (Laughs) About how human nature is that way. When you go into a place, any place, if you don't conform, you're fucked.

If I was real bitter when I was teaching my classes at U of A, I would've said "Don't go to Hollywood! None of you are going to make it in Hollywood!!" But I didn't. I told them to go if they wanted to. You need to find out for yourself. But I wouldn't sugarcoat the Hollywood stories.... Some of the students didn't want to work with assholes in the class. I told them they should, because you will work with a lot of them in Hollywood.

Like the girl in the bathtub story. That story is in WORMWOOD. It is the foundation for the entire film. One of my three friends from UCLA went into a field even worse than directing or



producing: talent agent. (Laughs) He was a nice guy but he was pretty sleazy, a perfect requirement for being an agent. After I left Paramount this friend got me a job at the talent agency.

One day he told me he was at a party the night before. He went into a bathroom and there was a guy screwing a woman in the bathtub. She was passed out. The guy finished and left. So my "friend," who was geeky and probably never had sex before, screwed her, in the bathtub, while she was still passed out. It was one of the most disgusting stories I had ever heard... Not that I'm real moral, but come on! I would tell my students, "If you don't think that story is bad, then you should rush to Hollywood. You will fit right in. However, if you think that's disgusting, then you will have some problems there."

WORMWOOD

You made almost the entire movie in your living room! (With fake walls.) I did that because a bunch of office locations fell through. It ended up better that way. If I shot in real offices it would have been real boring. This way I was forced to make it more interesting, with drawings and weird sets. For months I was trying to find locations and places in Tucson, but no one wanted to help, everyone wanted money. You're making a "movie" and suddenly everyone expects you to have money. The idea becomes — if you don't have money then you shouldn't be making a film.

Why did you shoot on video? Purely 100% financial. I used to





be a film snob. Wouldn't touch video. When I started thinking of WORMWOOD, I thought about shooting it in super-8 or 16mm. I wanted Hollywood to look as ugly as possible. Then digital video came out and prices were very low. I could still make WORMWOOD look ugly with video. One reason I shot the film so conservatively was because I wanted to blow it up to 35mm eventually and video looks better transferred to film if it is shot with as little movement as possible, and with as little contrast. (Some) 'exterior' scenes were shot in our house with a green chroma key background. I liked the chroma key, even though it looks fake, because I think it fits with Hollywood's phoniness.

I wanted WORMWOOD to look like John Huston or William Wyler could have made it. Except for the budget and subject matter. I only used dolly shots when I really needed them. I would dolly into two people and then back out, instead of cutting. If it is successful no one will notice most of the camera movements. That's the way movies like THE HEIRESS (1949, by Wyler) were shot. Now, cameras have to fly through bodies and follow the bullet and all this crap. It's all flash. When people hear this, they're just going to say I'm an old fart. "The good old days." But if they see WORMWOOD, I don't think anyone would ever think an 'old fart' made it. The technical style and subject matter are worlds apart and somewhat schizophrenic. I like that.

To play devil's advocate for a moment, Hollywood used to make a large variety of films, but they also made many more films in studios back then. Maybe if they made 1000 films a year now, instead of 150, there would be more good ones. And plenty of so-called 'classics' don't hold up. GRAND HOTEL (1932) is terribly dated. I've never liked GONE WITH THE WIND (1939). It's phony with atrocious, overdone acting. The plot is pure afternoon soap opera. I do like recent films. BABE (1995) I liked a lot. THE LIMEY (1999). LA PROMESSE (1996). FARGO (1996) is very powerful, funny and depressing.

Would you shoot on video again? You bet. I like the look. And I especially like the cheapness, simplicity and speed. Hey, if people can afford film, then all the power to them. I'm not going to say digital video will ever look better than film, but then I really don't care about a slick look. And that is one of the main problems with film all over the world. The distributors, audiences and theaters want and expect films to look 'sharp' and slick like all the Hollywood films.

But, let's face it, I used to be this way, that film people are generally extremely snobbish about film, like Mac people are Nazi-like about anything Macintosh. I own a PC and a Macintosh and I like them both (and at times I hate them both). It's just technology, it's the equipment you use.

On the other hand, people who learn video and never learn film tend to be lazy and amateurish. I think it is important to learn the basics of film, then go to video. At least you'll know what f-stops and color temperature are.

How did you finance WORMWOOD? My wife Lourdes and I saved for years. We bought a house a few years ago and got an equity loan, and we had accumulated several credit cards over the years. Lourdes is a structural engineer and makes a lot more money than I do. We used all those resources to make the film.

It can still add up. Even though it's video you have to get the equipment. We spent \$45,000 dollars to make WORMWOOD. We shot over a year with over 100 roles, 30 sets (which I built and painted myself), with no help from any group or organization or club. Most of the budget comes from buying all the equipment (cameras, lights, audio, edit system, etc.). We rented nothing, it cost way too much to rent, especially here in Tucson. If you

*"The most helpful film classes would be:
or How to Get Drugs for them,*

subtract all the equipment, then the film cost only what it took to buy food for everyone and to build the sets, a total of around \$7000.

Although your house wasn't in total danger, it is scary to use all your own money. It is, but, (that is also) the problem: From Hollywood and film schools people are brainwashed that the only way to make a film is to get financing from either grants or from distributors or studios. Everyone must tow the line and beg for a shot at the brass ring. They write their screenplay and hope someone will give them the money to make it. The odds are more than a million to one that anyone will ever give you money to make your film. Now, for the first time in history, anyone can do it on their own, if they are willing to spend their own money and to take a big risk.

This way, we didn't have to kiss anyone's ass to make WORMWOOD. We had complete freedom to do what we wanted. It was the single most satisfying experience in my life. I finally got to do what I dreamed of doing for 30 years. Lourdes loved the whole experience so much, she can't wait to make another film, even though she sees it is a total gamble.

Overall everything went very smoothly. It would be completely stupid for me to bitch too much about any part of the production because the whole experience was *heaven*, to finally get to do what you love more than anything else....

How long did it take to write? There's a lot of dialogue. I wrote it pretty fast, in 3 or 4 weeks. Actually I wrote 50 pages

then started all over again when I realized I wanted Lourdes to play the lead. I thought it would be more logical because it would take over a year to shoot everything. I needed the actor to be here all the time. After that I sat down and wrote the whole script without stopping. *Then* I went back and changed things here and there. You've got to finish, not to do 30 or 40 pages then go back and redo things and not move forward.

When I thought it was getting to be too much, I just piled on more. I was going to say what I wanted to say. The film is a theory, that Hollywood is an evil place, it is like most places, with humans as slime. But since it's so ultra low budget, I couldn't make it realistic. People kept telling me, "You can't do that." Hey, this is my film. I was advised to make it much smaller, like three people in a room talking. But this may be the only film I ever make, so I'm going to go for broke.

So that way, it is still "based on a true story," just made more surreal. Yeah. Almost every scene is something that happened to me, or things to friends. Brown on people's noses, that's obvious. I literalized that, which people will probably not like, not know how to react to it. To me WORMWOOD is a comedy. Today, if you make a comedy its got to have funny music and funny "stuff." Where WORMWOOD is understated. There really is no action, nobody's yelling, nothing real wild, although things you see are

How to Get Groceries for Your Bosses, or How to Kiss Up to People."

extremely shocking and crazy. But its very, very, very low-key.

I mentioned Wyler, I also wanted WORMWOOD to be in the spirit of Luis Bunuel. His films are so conservatively shot but filled with nonconformity and bizarre stuff. But they're subtle. Some I don't think are surreal enough. He not only made fun of religion, but also of the upper middle class and also, more disturbingly, the poor [in VIRIDIANA (1961)]. Today you could not possibly do that. You cannot show the poor people to be rotten scum. (Laughs)

I've gotten criticism: "Why drudge this all up?" Well, why make commentary on anything? I think it's a valid argument about why people are the way they are. It all has to do with tradition, with human nature. The point is people will never change. I think its important for people to realize that. So liberals won't like it because it is very ugly, nasty and disgusting. "The poor people, the women, are treated badly. No one cares...." Why don't we care? Because they deserve it. I show everyone, straight, gay, men, women, to be awful in Hollywood. Everyone's the same in Hollywood. But it's like you are not supposed to say these things.

Do some of the scenes have too much shock value, that what you're saying won't be heard? A good test was when my parents saw the film. Yeah, they were disgusted and some of that got in the way of what was being said. People ignore the dialogue in the scene with the naked guy jumping up and down. Its one of the biggest laughs in the film, yet I wrote this

important dialogue. It's like the director subverting the writer, but they're both me.

I think WORMWOOD has an important message and provocative themes. It is there to make people think and to make people mad. There is something to offend everyone. At a recent local screening, people walked out right after scenes that bashed smoking and tobacco companies. Not the shit-eating or cannibalism. Other people get pissed off when they see a "young republican" button on [serial killer] Ted Bundy's lapel. "Are you saying they are the same?" Yes, I am!

College students were also disturbed by the nudity. Go figure. A lot of older people really enjoyed it. It's interesting. Young people were more easily shocked.

Do you think the film exists more for the audience more than for the filmmaker? If a film is made totally for the filmmaker then it's just jacking off. Having said that, everyone told me I was crazy to make WORMWOOD because no one would want to see it. But I had something to say and I was gonna say it my way. If I offend people I don't care but if they are bored and walk out then you fail. I want people to watch it, I want them to laugh, and hopefully think a little. I don't think I'm compromising anything.

This film is "personal" but I imagine you want to make more films, other things? Definitely. Now we have all this equipment, so, the next one should be much easier and cheaper to make. I have several ideas. Whatever the next film is, it will be much more simple and we'll shoot it in a short amount of time.

We are still in the throes of trying to distribute WORMWOOD. If you do want to enter your film into film festivals, keep it short. When WORMWOOD was 118 minutes long, we tried to enter several festivals. I've been told festivals don't like any film from a new filmmaker to be over 90 minutes long. We wasted over \$500 trying to enter several festivals. They didn't like the length of the film and they didn't like the unsavory nature of WORMWOOD. Maybe my next one will be very nice and cute and safe and cuddly.

Screenings, background, and stories are available at wormwoodfilm.com. Photos courtesy L. Foster.



By Mike Plante A crew from Film Four in England was doing a documentary on the New York Underground Film Festival and underground films in general. I was one of many interviewed, but I don't think my answers came off very good. They definitely weren't sound bites. Let me try again.

What does underground film mean to you? A film is underground if you can't find it by normal distribution means. This could be for a ton of reasons. There aren't as many theaters in America as you might think, by one count around 30,000. Most of these are part of nationwide chains. The chains buy films that make money easy and can play in many cities at once, so nationwide advertising can be properly utilized.

Who can afford to play by these rules? Not small distributors. Only Hollywood-sized studios can afford the costs of nationwide advertising and thousands of posters and film prints. If your film isn't already known across America, if you don't have enough prints to play it simultaneously in 50 states, chain theaters don't want it. (There are some exceptions with some smaller films and foreign titles hitting a wide variety of places. And smaller distributors can hit it big like *Artisan* - albeit with *BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*, not a Hal Hartley film.)

What do big distributors want? Money. In entertainment, you make money by selling people things they already know. You make a lot of money from families buying toys of cartoon characters their kids already love. Now just insert Will Smith and Matt Damon as the cartoons. Then remake a sequel.

So if your film doesn't fit with a major distributors' output, you are out. If the content is deemed too sexual or violent, you are out. (Unless, of course, it is dumbed down to a simple level or a famous celebrity is doing the unspeakable acts. Universal just dropped the new Rob Zombie film because of it's gore level, yet stated it was different than their release of *HANNIBAL*, because in that film you "recognized" Sir Anthony Hopkins eating the brains.) And never mind having a sexual orientation to your film that isn't currently popular, or at least comedic.

You better have a very slick technical look to get on board with distributors, too. It's not hand-held schlock or thoughtful static long takes in every theater; it's dolly shots, trick shots, special effects, quick edits, etc etc. Films with big budgets don't just go out and get that look. They shoot test

rolls of locations, different lighting, costumes and makeup with the actors. They have time to practice and good equipment. And even if you mess up an exposure on film, the lab can save you from huge mistakes. If you can afford to have shots printed up many ways, and then can actually go back and recreate a scene if really necessary, you're gonna have a slick film. Combine slickness with any recognizable star and your film is gonna make some money.

Yes, there is talent involved in making the image, there are some amazing cameramen working in Hollywood, but there is also just as amazing work from no-budget and foreign films. Meanwhile, plenty of people in LA are making a living from painting by numbers.

There are always exceptions to these rules. But you can count those film titles on one hand yearly. Ask people about *BLAIR WITCH* and they feel cheated. Mainstream audiences want to see something they think they couldn't make themselves. It's ironic, because I bet anyone off the street corner has a more complex and interesting story than what is being shown in a shopping mall. And their plot is just as fascinating and lucid in their own mind.

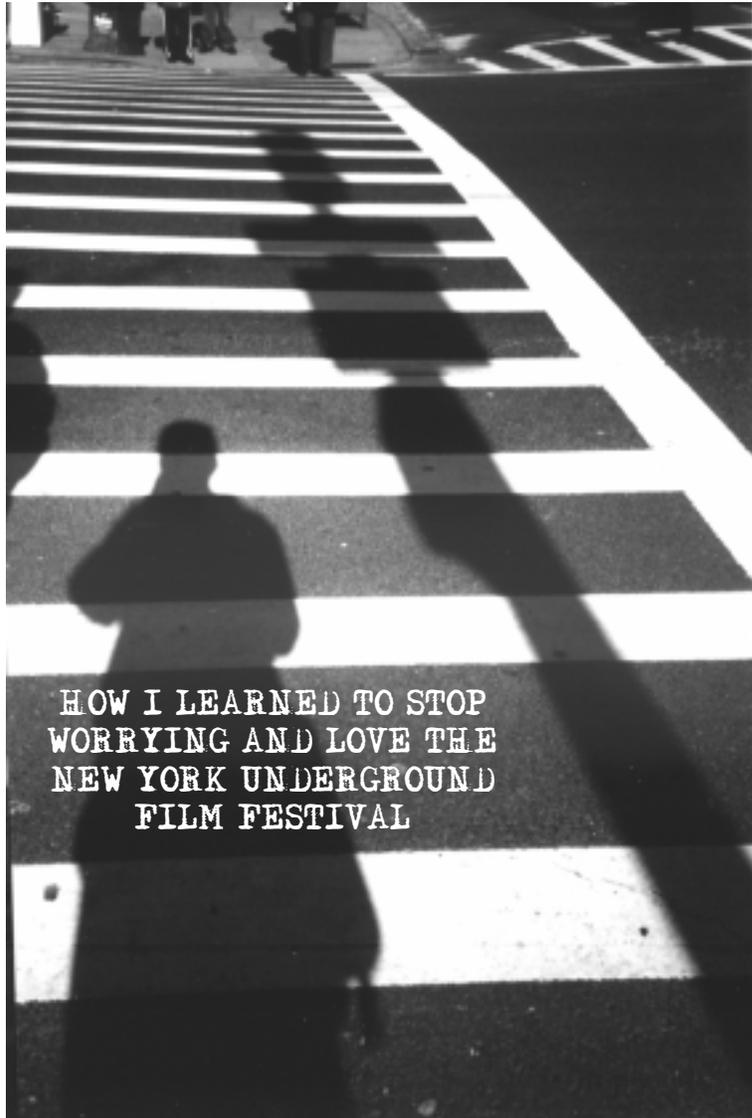
As for foreign films, I really would prefer it if *LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL* or *CROUCHING TIGER* do not go down in history as prime examples of films made outside America. But simply because they made a lot of money in this country, they will be discussed in mass media and schools much more than any of the profound films of Abbas Kiarostami or Theo Angelopoulos. (Maybe it's all about the syllables.)

So, for me, an underground film is one that can't be found easily. Sometimes that translates to being rough technically. Or

it's not on 35mm film, the only format chain theaters have. Or no one recognizable is involved with it. Or it can't be written about in one sentence. Or it's in another language. Obviously, all this has nothing to do with whether the film is important or even enjoyable.

And sometimes - an underground film is in English, on 35mm, with someone you know in it, showing in one theater in a big city for one week. You just have to get off your ass to be rewarded.

Do the technical aesthetics of underground film need to be shocking? Underground film does not mean technically crude. Any of the directors in NYUFF's show



of SONIC GENETICS (Gerald van der Kaap, Ian Kerkhof, Frank Scheffer, Dick Tuinder and Philipp Virus) can technically dance around anything being shown on MTV today short of Chris Cunningham (videos for Aphex Twin and others).

Stom Sogo's beauty PERIOD didn't settle for a simple music soundtrack but a heavily constructed mix of answering machine messages, recorded dialogue and some music. Combine with private imagery on private super-8 film to create a unique, personal mix.

Animation in the fest, particularly the hilarious REJECTED (nominated for an Oscar, a NYUFF first), the Czech film SUB! and Bill Plympton's latest insanity MUTANT ALIENS, was more stylish and just as proficient as any recent Disney one-trick pony.

While they don't look as slick as a PBS documentary, both RECEIVER (about teenagers mimicking pro wrestling in their backyards) and DIRTY GIRLS (about a group of socially outcast high school girls) are made with intelligence and honesty, without making simple generalizations about their subjects.

Two of my favorite short films in the fest were on 16mm film, which might be completely forgotten soon due to the cheap alternative of digital video. AMERICAN GRAFFITY is a freeform portrait of two men in a small town and their Midwest surroundings, capturing that odd, addictive 1970's film feel; it hit me like a science fiction cigarette ad. THE SUNSHINE is an easy favorite: a short portrait of the Sunshine Hotel, one of the last remaining skid row flophouses on Bowery in New York, and it's colorful inhabitants. This film is so pure: the opening credits are that kind printed onto the film that slightly crack, so the image underneath peeks through.

My favorite film of the fest IS shocking, but far from crude. Made on 16mm film, BACK AGAINST THE WALL by James Fotopoulos is the complete antithesis of supposed-underground aesthetics. Fotopoulos has beautiful black-and-white grain rather than lurid color. In what is a brave tactic these days - shots in WALL last longer than 30 seconds. The camerawork and acting is precise and Fotopoulos has enough faith to hold the shot, even turning the actors' faces away from the audience, rather than the usual pretty close-up of clenched teeth and bare knuckles. While each character has their own theme music (Ed's "Welcome to your Death"



a high point) and you can even buy the soundtrack, it's not songs with post-hippy angry lyrics.

WALL isn't my favorite just for the technical. In fact, it's the content that dictates the filmmaking. The various characters are struggling for power. Their sexual and violent means to get control are played out psychologically, something that harms audiences much more than a regular gangster flick. Fotopoulos brings up many tactics we all sooner or later stoop to: little name games, macho posturing, how we dress for reaction, how we place ourselves in corners. As one character is stronger than another, there is always another to reverse the roles, and so on.

Fotopoulos is an American filmmaker that might slip through the cracks. He makes films for himself but believes audiences can take his work without being pandered to. Like the great work of Nina Menkes, Fotopoulos' films are worlds inside our own and do not give easy answers. Also like Menkes, this will prevent major distribution for his films. It will suck hard if his films do not get seen.

Someone is watching an underground film and, halfway through, they just don't like it. What can they do to watch the rest of it? If you don't like a film, don't like it. I dislike a lot of films that are grouped as underground or experimental. Some stuff just tries to shock and instead ends up as boring as Ben Affleck teaching trigonometry.

Other underground films are technically good, intriguing to look at, but stop there, coming across more as a technical project (the beautiful WIRED ANGEL, the two-screen projected GONE, the free jazz documentary DOWN TO THE CRUX). In comparison, hand-held, shaky short videos made by kids about kids are more fascinating to me (PIXADOR from Brazil and the previously mentioned DIRTY GIRLS).

But also remember that the baggage you bring into a theater today is ridiculous. You hear a million things about a film before seeing it. Unfortunately most people just want to see the same old superheroes fight the same old battles. I have the same thrill seeing Lee Marvin beat the hell outta people. But how about something new, too?

So if you are watching an "underground" film and can't get through it, come back to it later with a clear head and less expectations.



Ed Halter, festival director

The very first NYUFF was started simply to get shows for the documentary CHICKENHAWK, a film about the North American Man Boy Love Association. So you can imagine the reputation made for the festival. The word underground already has connotations of "illegal." The 2001 version (8th annual) still has films to offend most every sensibility, but that is definitely not the prevailing attitude.

You can still get shocked - or laugh out loud, depending on what part of the city you hail from. The opening night film HEY HAPPY followed DJ Sabu in his quest for rave and sex with 2000 men before the apocalypse comes. While the story and acting is overboard in a John Waters fashion, technically HAPPY is superior to what you'd expect from the content; beautiful widescreen cinematography and vivid colors rather than blown-out handheld consumer camerawork.

Don't worry, any good taste you had left after HAPPY would be properly turned bad by the new film from Doris Wishman, SATAN WAS A LADY. Speaking of John Waters (who came to see the show), Wishman is a legendary wiz of the b-movie genre and she did it her way: producing and directing over 25 feature films of nudist and lurid content, unique in her shooting and editing of melodrama. LADY follows Cleo in her quest for a mink, a man and money backed up by some of the most film-noirish songwriting in recent days.

Besides the more traditional cult film selections, the NYUFF has shown more and more avant-garde work over the past years. Just as shocking, harder to find and even more on the fringe of cinema than cult movies, films that get labeled avant or experimental have an incredibly hard time finding shows.

The crowds for the fest surprised me. Programs of short films sold out every time, with extra people sitting on the floor. As did the screening of Fotopoulos' WALL, described in the program notes as "brutally real."

Maybe audiences are ready to take some chances. At least in lower East Side New York. The location for all NYUFF shows, the Anthology Film Archives, was voted best place to pick up a date by one paper. Not the standard for the scummy underground. The amount of women coming to shows was unique for these films, graciously breathing life into the usual world of four guys sitting in a tiny converted garage with a projector, trying to figure out how the filmmaker did a shot.

Even if this type of festival only happens in New York, it should serve as a lesson. I was happy to see people just plain

excited about film. As the fest went on, I seriously got the feeling that I had known the fest workers and filmmakers for years instead of days. It wasn't déjà vu; it was more like finding your old grade school classmates after decades of separation. We like all kinds of film, from exploitation to strict genre to abstract imagery. We've had the mixed up diet of Godzilla, Fonzie and Brakhage. It isn't that we have the same memories, we have the same reference points, especially growing up in such an information age. And we are all sick of how Hollywood has forgotten how to

tell a story. And we are all sick of hearing about how avant-garde films were only available for the 1960s.

For me, the NYUFF wasn't about liking every single film, it was about finding interest for what you bring to it, getting exposed to other areas of filmmaking, and meeting people who give a shit about what's going on with unseen cinema.

Some NYUFF History:

Festival director Ed Halter moved to New York in 1994 from San Francisco. He had worked the fest Frameline: The International San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, which had booked CHICKEN HAWK (1994), the controversial documentary about NAMBLA (North American Man-Boy Love Association). Months previous to that SF showing, the first New York Underground Film Festival was created, simply in order to show that same film in New York City.

Halter thought the NY fest sounded pretty cool, so when he moved out he volunteered for the second year as an usher. Hitting it off with the guys who started the festival, Todd Phillips and Andrew Gurland, Halter was quickly recruited for programming the festival.

"It just went from there," Halter says. "Really quickly they realized they didn't want to do both the festival and their own feature filmmaking. I was in charge of the programming, they were in charge of other things. After a while, we didn't get along."

"They were assholes," explains Andrew Lampert, the current programming director of the Underground fest.

Halter adds, "Part of their frustration was not being able to let go of the festival as quickly and as easily as they thought. Because it actually got very big very fast. When they started it, according to them, they never intended it to go past one year."

"They were masters of publicity stunts," Lampert says, "but they didn't know how to actually curate a festival." Nor did they want to. Often the two creators wouldn't



photos previous and this page by Plante.

“We had to change the image of the festival in the presses’ minds that we were not the shock and schlock festival run by these exploitive hucksters.”



even go to the screenings. After year four they had no involvement at all.

Lampert came in the third year of the fest, after moving to New York from St. Louis. “When I went in to interview there were two posters up in the office. One was for the New York Underground Film Festival year two. The other poster was for HATED (the 1994 G.G. Allin doc made by Phillips). I didn’t know who those guys were. I said, who the hell puts that up in their office? I remember me and my friends having a party when G.G. Allin died, to celebrate, and we showed that movie. They were impressed with that and I got hired. Ed and I worked together in one room and those two screamed at each other all day in the other room.”

After starting at the Anthology Film Archives, the lower East Side haven run by avant Godfather Jonas Mekas, the Underground fest got kicked out.

“The people at Anthology say that the operations of the festival were a mess,” Halter says. “And there was some kind of dispute over money, but I never knew the whole details.”

For two years the fest moved to the New York Film Academy. “Which sucked,” according to Halter. It only had one screening room and there were regular projection problems.

“So when we came back to the Anthology one of the clauses was that Todd and Andrew were not allowed on the premises of the festival,” Lampert says.

“I made that up,” Halter adds and laughs. “I just told everyone that. But I did get the clear word from Jonas that they were not welcome in the building. They could not appear on the premises.”

Halter and Lampert haven’t talked to the creators in a long time. Although, on Lampert’s birthday, he called Todd Phillips to tell him that ROAD TRIP (starring Tom Greene, directed by Phillips) sucked.

To the creators of the fest, the underground was as schlocky as possible. Since taking over, Halter and Lampert are tying the word to a long history of avant garde work as well.

“Todd legitimately had ties to the Cinema of Transgression people,” Halter says. “Like Nick Zedd and Richard Kern. Once the festival got bigger there was no way to stretch the concept beyond that. They would veto down so many good people.”

In 1998, for the fifth fest, Halter took all the way over.

“A lot of things changed. We went back to Anthology, we hired a different publicist, which is actually a huge deal. We had to change the image of the festival in the presses’ minds that we were not the shock and schlock festival run by these exploitive hucksters. We are a legitimate festival that does legitimate programming and is an actual, artistic event.

“We also had new graphic designers that year, Smayvision. They really helped create the new identity. On a professional level we brought in a new team of people that took it more seriously.”

The Underground fest was also part of a larger atmosphere emerging in New York in 1998.

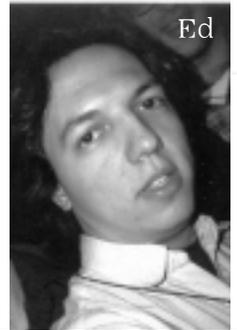
“That year there became more interest in avant garde and experimental stuff in general,” Halter explains. “Anthology began picking up a younger crowd. After that the Robert Beck Cinema started and Astria Suparak started programming. Ocularis (in Brooklyn) was just getting started. Jane Gang had some good programming. She curated Pink Pony film nights, that was the first time I saw a lot of stuff.”

The Underground fest got bigger, going from around 500 submissions, all watched by Halter, to four times that. “To this point, there’s so much to do it’s about me finding people to do spin off jobs. It’s become a huge operation but you have to keep it very personal.”

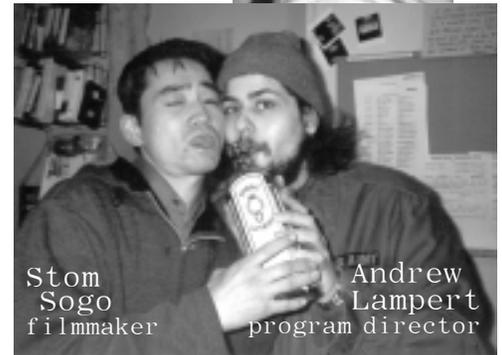
The fest also went from five to seven days and started getting better press coverage. “(Critics) used to say, ‘Do we need to see another erotic enema film?’ and ‘You are going to see bizarre fucked-up shit at the festival.’ It helped but you have to progress past that. Some filmmakers love that abject attention. But for others its not appropriate and they won’t submit their work.”

Now the feel in New York is that new people are making and supporting avant work, as opposed to it only being a museum show from the 1960s. “That’s how avant or underground scenes have always developed: groups of people from the same generation that have gotten older together,” Halter says.

“As they all got older, some of them got into curatorial positions, or got power or money, or some became more famous and helped other people. It progresses together. It’s also about writing about the work, it has to come from the inside. Because people on the outside are not going to get it. Even today, (some writers) don’t take it fully seriously. But, three or four years ago we put out a release to highlight the avant garde stuff and no one would write about it. Now they notice that.”



Ed



Stom Sogo
filmmaker

Andrew Lampert
program director



Andreas Drohler
and Philipp
Virus @ the
Sonic Genetics
event

photos this page courtesy Ed Halter.

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By sTom soGo



“So, what was the original attitude like? You Poopy face!” A few years ago, I said some shit like that to the evil festival director of the New York Underground Film Festival (NYUFF), Mr. Ed H (Kiddy porn from Ams. Vs Shitty porn from Germany) Though I didn't seriously care about such a conceptual promise nor to know if there were any types of philosophy that constructed the festival's selection and identity, but hey! Ed: “Well, it got to have lots of hard core sex and drug, and I guess the fastest car!” ...Yep, he didn't exactly say this, (Godard might have...) but I got to add “nice ass” in the list. “No hair please!” Butt seriously, if there were any sorts of political agenda in the independently organized film festivals such as the NYUFF and Mix, it would be to fuck against the conservative diapers who had been dominating and ignoring the cultural, sexual and intellectual diversities! Wee, not that. “No

more condoms, Poop ass!” Butt still, in the high school year, I couldn't help saying nasty shit about people that sincerely told me to go see ‘Like Water for fucking Chocolate’ crap. I got a huge trouble by showing John Walter's movie for Christ sake. Friends and I then just got more drunk and stoned, watched movies that we liked in our own set up. A familiar story, right? Later on, in the exactly same way, we started to make our own movies and did more drugs, then made better movies that worked and shit. Bullshit. But we did. And you did. Ed Halter did. This sort of attitude had gathered the similar heads together and became the original motive that eventually formed as a festival, I guess. So, don't let those diapers ask the suicidal=existential question about the purpose of having the festivals. Let them be self-conscious about their own diapers full of dark puddle...

Butt, anyway, the 44th San Francisco International Film Festival (SFIFF) was a completely different story. Those kids didn't even smoke pot. They didn't even play Bruce Lee music in the theatre. (Two big reasons that got me move into San Fran.) Instead, everyone was grabbing each other's cunt, shaking it and getting their ass loose during the movie. Yap, every screen shined with come, such a beautiful time was still here, so come on by next year and clutch the cluck next you!!! I wish... (However, if you ever want to dance with Bruce Lee, buy this CD ‘DANCE WITH DRAGON’ SXCD-0001 or ask me. It has quite sick songs like ‘The Waltz of Death’ and ‘My Way Cha Cha’. They will make U less important for sure.) But why the fuck do you wanna come to movies if you can jerk off by yourself at home? Why don't cha go to Baltimore with Martha Colburn (who makes the sick-fetish animation freak out) and experience the nasty old porn shop where you pay 25c and watch the 30sec of S-8mm kiddy porn projected? Well, we like that too, but we also want to get really mind fucked by movies for sure. So, you go. But most of time, you don't get fucked but see the old filmmakers jerking off for long time and pisses you really off. But no problem, the 44th SFIFF offered you more than massive 113 programs (Wow!) to choose from. Films were screened at five venues including hot sexy rainbow of Castro Theatre, so you wouldn't have to wait too long for the slow ass MUNI bus to come in the freezing cold streets at night. (I hated the fact.) And most of the programs were repeated up to three, four times!!! Especially, at the multiplex movie house, Kabuki theatre (Can't they think of better name?) in Japan town, they had screened at least 80 % of shows and had three theatres, so that even if you were ultra stoned and had no idea of which movies to watch, like I'd always been, you would still have a big chance of getting the same day ticket. Moreover, if you had a fake student ID or had a look of 65 year old, you pay only seven bucks. Good deal, right? And if you really hated the movie you saw, you could still give a piss to filmmakers after the show. Don't worry they like it a lot.

So once I got in the Kabuki house, it was not much different than being at the usual Cineplex. I was of course wasted, got a bag of popcorn and huge coke and was waiting for some mind fucker flick like FACE OFF to blast the screen off, but no! I was there to see the festival friendly movies, well, cinema. And that was the coolest thing of all, co's I got to see the once serious (and big deal) film presentation by the goofy festival organizer and discussions with big time filmmakers and actors on the lower level stage, well no stage, but just in front of the middle sized screen. It was not even close to the opera house or any fancy places that this kind of shitting usually takes place at, but it was at Cineplex!!! Seeing such a serious talk in my eye level was just like a sports car, made me want to hit them and run. And there was no special seating, either. Everyone, even filmmakers and rich producers, sits anywhere they wanted. No window and the second floor seats. This set up hopefully damaged the intellectual high-art freaks forever. Well, I was thinking of what once Lee Ellickson had said about the ideal film theatre, Anthology Film Archives, New York in 1997. They had PULP FICTION on the big theatre, and the experimental art movies in the small theatre, then S-8 home movies shown in its trashy basement and you could walk in and out any time you wanted co's you know, who cares about the value of the movie anyway, right?

And the art house cinema is truly dead now... I guess some shit happened after the Avant-Popism of late 80's; John Walters got art fame and John Woo got high art claim. (Watching MISSION IMPOSSIBLE Part 2” with ton of special K in the theatre was probably the best K-hole experience that Haiku Master Andy L. and I ever had.) Anyway, it's tricky these days; everything sort of became a parody of something previous. I can't tell if something is just seriously sentimental in the old fashion way or just secretly mind fucking us or what anymore. Still, I noticed that there were a lot of Human Watch type movies in the conservative selection of the fest, talking about various socio-political issues all over the world. But hey, it's San Fran. We got to play with politically (in) collect assholes. I grew up with music by the media dada funk Negativeland and Residents and the skin-head missile of communication technology Bob Ostertag, movies by the maniac film legend Craig B. (Other Cinema guru), read many cool stuff from Re-search Magazine and by a guts-out punk Kathy Acker, saw a video by Mark Pauline's crashcarl SRL. and was taught by Mexican Goddess Guillermo Gomez-Pena. And now Matmos, Lesser and Kid 606 are fucking with DJ and stuff. Wow! I got to say one totally nuts thing about San Francisco; people can't live without speed for

real! One psycho teen who was supposedly having this bi-monthly off dope period gave me a shitty twenty minutes speech about how wasting it is to buy a bag of coke even it's a pure Colombian snow. She was badly pissed by her regular morning vodka. Under the gorgeous blue sky, some people here can get really serious about other people's waste I thought. And I'm totally becoming the one of them...

Shit, I didn't say anything about the fest...Do ya care?

One of long jerking-offs I saw was WERCKMEISTER HARMONIES, a new film by this hairy ironical Hungarian, Bela Tarr. I used like his early social drama movies a lot though this one seemed a sort of annoying new Euro-trash. "Movie isn't just to tell story." He said. Ya, but then, the movie's extremely long shots got so technically controlled and closed its reality from ours, I guess the sentimental music killed it. Moreover, another hairy Mexican Arturo Ripstein who makes mean mind fuck movies, came up to the discussion, did some speech about Tarr's filmmaking and dead. Still, I loved the long close up shot of two heads walking without talking co's somehow I couldn't tell where the movie was actually going to and I thought that was like my reality and stuff... Skip that.

There was a program of recent experimental shorts entitled *Camera Obscure*. It seems that in every year, SFIFF gives a program for this traditional event of avant-garde acid eating ceremony which had been organized by the guru Steve Anker (SFCinematheque) and Kathy Geritz (PFA). Long live avant trip! The eye candy of the show was SF long run avanty, Scott Stark's new trip, ANGEL BEACH. Putting the double eye images of 3-D photograph into a single eye film space, it produced flicker that fucked us well. And the tacky color from the 70's bikini boobs got us hot. And he started to jerk off with it for 17 min. In the discussion, Stark came up to the audiences along with M. Jang (who went on a trip to the camera obscure, shot his movie there and questionably entitled it as THE DARK ROOM. Why not 'Camera Obscure?') and C. Bursell (who went to the heavy hand-scratch optical-print trip in her SKATE). Wearing this intellectual eye glasses, Scott was asking the audiences for more hard core questions to challenge his film in which he obviously tripped out for a long time in the optical printing land, and made this over long trip that we couldn't reach without drug. But I did! Haah! Don't forget to take drug before the avanty film shows! (Especially Mr. KJ's three hours NERVOUS BREAK DOWN SYSTEM GHETTO!) If you forget, you'll have a nasty headache, and later killed by the serious film theory peepoo, so watch out!) Over all, I had an impression that many of avant-garde filmmakers might just make avanty films for the sake of it. That's super dope!

In another program of shorts, Guy Maddin's THE HEART OF THE WORLD (a circus madness) stole the show. Yap, did it again! (King of Structuralism, M. Snow also came back with add kool shorts but weren't shown here.) I don't really know where these Canadians got the wackiest crack out of the bizarre nowhere land. Also, too bad that there wasn't a film by a devil, Ian Kerkhof who could be one of a few Europeans that can dig 'motivationless' wasted soul out of the real Eupo trash in now days... He will be back with some bloody digital cunts. Also a program called *AudioVisions: New Video and Music from Austria* which recently presented at Pandaemonium fest @ the Lux Center in London (a coolest venue to check out recent wave!) and at the NYUFF (They

also showed the digital re-mix dynamite *Sonic Genetics*) in this spring, was totally missing from this festival. Maybe they didn't wanna go into the Digital K hole land, though a new digital auto-doc. THE GLEANERS AND I by A. Varda was shown... They like it sweet. *Audio-Vision* was deadly pushing the next possibility of image making which doesn't depend on the camera at all. The makers must be the lap-top freaks around Mego label, sorta like digital computer noise video. As video killed the radio star, digital will kill the film star. And soon, SFIFF will only show digital video work on line... But before that, please check out this mini CD *Telefunken* made by NOTO from Raster Noton: CDR032. (It was made for the Noton's 20 to 2000 series.) This 20 min of 3 sin wave signs is also another killer audio-visual stuff. You basically plug one of stereo out-puts from your CD player into the video in-input on TV and the other out-put into the audio in-input on TV. Then, you will see the image created by the signal, it's a CD that makes image on TV. And Bye Bye recorded images! Well, bullshit... It's a futuristic retro trip. So, don't let the scientific arty panty telling you to look for the new, co's we don't wanna live in their past any more.

There were a few more goodies, too, like the new films by homo-grotica F. Ozon, never-mind-escapism A. Ripstein, don't-say-nothing-about-my-shit-eating J. Svankmajer, try-new-drug-and-run T. Tykwer to name a few. And as a special event, there was a program of Magick Lantern Cycle by the true cult Kenneth Anger who is now making his only '35mm feature' sicker and got the Golden-Gate Persistence of Vision Award from the fest. Ok, sure, it's fun seeing him gossiping for a long time on a stage with shiny black hair and the specially made Anger jacket. However, after the presentation, he grabbed his knife and killed Matthew Bampy who got the same award with Anger but for video. Matthew got so pissed that he sued Anger for messing up his bloody white trash jacket... And then the truth, nobody really cared about the award bullshit that this festival was giving to. Akira Kurosawa award? What a silly crap. And they would give a cash prize for the best film in various categories on the last day as if they were 'I give you one more chance to fuck me' awards.

During the two weeks of this festival, I often went down to Mission and 16th street where you can get the nastiest crap from the real psycho nuts on the street. At many nights, I was sniffing dope with them all the time. And I knew for sure, those people never give a damn about me being also homeless walking back and forth between the ghetto and the festival. And at one night, I got my head kicked by the street gang of zero brain co's they gave me crack instead of heroin. I remembered the song *Crack Attack* by the legendary Band Big Stick! "Mama is White, Papa is Black (or Philippino or whatever) is a Most Acceptable to the Crack Attack, Give Me A Money Back!" I always had this song with me at the fest, played on my walkman and unconsciously lip singing the song and then saying the ward out loud to get the big headed asshole in front to walk away. And it worked. And how many times I did? A few. Co's I somehow stopped going to this fest and looking at this west cost, black-tar dope melting down in a spoon of water and imagined the ass-hole zero brains swimming on the surface. I sniffed it up to my brain, then it said, "Welcome to San Fran. The real place to get your mind fucked." No shit for crack.

May something, 2001
Stom Sogo

ELISHA COOK JR.
by Rush Kress





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“Theron Patterson’s first feature, HEINOUS, is not just influenced by the work of John Cassavetes (and other actor-oriented directors), it looks like a film made by someone who has actually SEEN Cassavetes’ films, as opposed to just riding on the current bandwagon.

Two disillusioned workers commute from Phoenix to Tucson. On the way, they talk about their job and relationships, including the driver’s girlfriend. When the car breaks down, a stranger offers help and they go back to his house. When the stranger’s girlfriend comes home, there is an odd confrontation and the driver must call his own girlfriend to come get him, which doesn’t sit well, either.

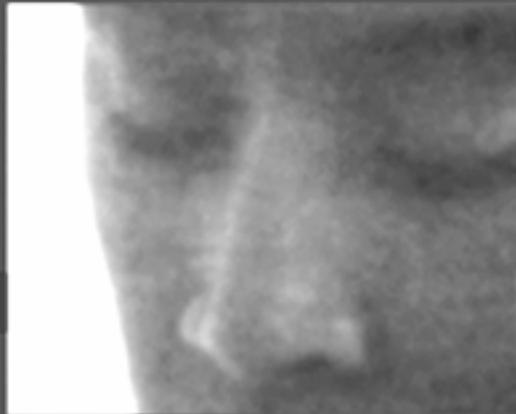
The actors and direction are solid -the best scenes making you uncomfortable to be around, the feeling of meeting a total stranger in their environment. It’s nice to see characters under the age of 30 talk about something, not just drink coffee and try to fuck their roommates.

By being made on video, HEINOUS gets into the small, dark spaces of the car and the characters. It emphasizes the little moments when you are driving, staring out in a daze. Or the immense conflict between people that can arise simply by talking. The plot is Cassavetes --troubled relationships, breaking out of frustrating, mundane life-- but the dialogue is David Mamet. The men in the car can’t finalize their thoughts, convinced they are on the same wavelength, but really just talking over each other. It’s unsettling - not because of any simple surface level fighting, but what we all feel under the skin in conflicts, the blows being silent.”

—Mike Plante

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The Endless Summer

Revisited

By Mike Plante

“Just watch it,” my friend would constantly tell me.

He was talking about one of the two ENDLESS SUMMER films, from what I knew, a couple of surf documentaries. I expected them to be egotistic highlight tapes; boring to someone who doesn't even swim.

“No, no, no. None of that matters,” he'd say. Right, whatever.

Sometimes I like to be wrong.

I came home late one night and a cable channel was playing ENDLESS SUMMER 2. What the hell, MG has been bugging me to look at this film. So I sat down and started watching with the idea I'd just go to bed in a minute.

So what happens? I'm glued to the set the whole way through. The beach, the innocence, the freedom, I'm blown away. The simple sounding line of two guys travelling around the world to surf in unexplored waters is both exact and misleading.

Travelling to incredible places, famous cities or the middle of nowhere, is surely seductive. And the retro aesthetic: it was made back when you would wear a suit for a plane ride. On top of that, you can see good surfing, beautiful water, perfect weather, and as a result, live vicariously through the action on-screen.

But it's the feel of the film that makes it transcend the usual highlight reel. It's not just hitting the beach and looking good, they check out the local culture and people everywhere they go (or maybe the other way around). Brown's humor keeps the film modest and fun through the nice, simple ending.

Sure enough, I'm hooked. The next day I can't wait to pick up the first ENDLESS SUMMER film, made in 1964. It's even better. “Filmed in the actual locations around the world,” the summer films are genuine and contagious.

Now, much later, I'm actually struggling to remember what reasons I had for blowing these movies off. They've become so engrained in my mind as to what innocence is. They cheer me up endlessly. Feel sick? Watch an Endless Summer. Can't sleep at 4 am? Take an Endless Summer. At least you'll forget where you are.

I also found out that I am far from the first to discover these films. The first SUMMER had an incredible impact on surfing, helping to take it (for better or worse) from “a lifestyle to a sport to an industry.”

That line is from the video/DVD release THE ENDLESS SUMMER REVISITED (2000). The new documentary is not only on the two Endless films, but on the life of director Bruce Brown. Directed by his son Dana, ESR follows Bruce Brown's life from his early surf days through current updates with plenty of previously unseen film footage.

It all started pretty simple for Bruce Brown: in the mid-1950s, after being in the service in Hawaii, and being a surfer himself, he shot some “action” surf footage on 8mm film. Later in California, he edited it together and had a screening at Dale Velzy's surfboard shop. They charged a quarter and ended up with ten bucks. After a few more films and successful screenings, Velzy thought if they could make money without trying, why not give the real thing a go?

Velzy bought Brown a 16mm camera and gave him five grand to make a longer movie. The money would pay for a plane ticket, all the film and equipment, and living expenses while Brown made the film.

Just 20 years old, Brown took the budget and a plane back to Hawaii. He bought a book on how to make films, got some friends to surf and act a little - and ended up naming famous surf spots in the process (Pipeline, Velzyland).

The resulting film was Brown's first feature - SLIPPERY WHEN WET - and the start of a very down-to-earth filmmaking style that he kept through all his work. The highlights of the surfing are shot beautifully. Brown may have been “learning” to make a film, but he had a knack of framing things well, and the light and color are always vivid. Brown is smart with his editing, never unnecessary or too long. The endings of his films are so quick and modest; he knows he's not making a documentary to change the world, just to entertain it. In the process, he made interesting documents of his own world.

In between surfing are quick scenes of the surfers out of the water, usually screwing around, showing where they slept, what to do when the surf wasn't up, acting out skits. Never aggressive - but funny, you get the idea that everyone inside the film knew how lucky they were.

The visuals are alongside Brown's constant narration, which is basically stand-up comedy cut-downs to keep you interested and keep them humble. The result is so much fun it's personal, like sitting in a room with a buddy, hearing all the stories while seeing their vacation home movies. (Of course, it doesn't hurt to have the retro value, and seeing talented and pretty people playing a sport for a whole summer).





Brown shot without any sync sound or formal experience, which helps the innocence of his films. He realized how important the image and tone were. No matter how pretty the picture, he could easily bore the audience, especially a non-surfing one. He stayed honest to what he knew about surfing and that lifestyle. With only narration and music, Brown keeps you involved with humor and tries to impress you only when something unique happens: an injury, interaction with different cultures, or an impressive athletic move. For all the posturing he could have done, Brown never gets condescending.

What you find out from a newer video version of *SLIPPERY* and *ES REVISITED* is that the screenings were both a family and a celebrity event. All the popular surfers in and out of the film were there, along with locals and friends. Brown's wife would run the projector, he would turn a music tape on and narrate live as the film ran. The crowd would comment by throwing bottle caps. (Australians threw bottles.)

Brown's life soon became more filmmaking than surfing. With his first four films, he got into a groove. He would spend six months making a film, then the rest of the year showing it so he could earn money to make another one.

For his fifth film, *WATERLOGGED*, Brown used footage from his earlier films and outtakes. This way he had the extra six months and money to spend two years making the first *SUMMER*.

You should see *ES REVISITED* after the two films to get the rest of the story and cool home movie/behind-the-scenes footage, most of which is shown for the first time. It includes on-camera interviews with Robert August (one of the two surfers in the first *SUMMER*), filmmaker Greg MacGillivray, surfer/filmmaker Greg Noll, Steve Pezman from *Surfers Journal*, clothesman Hobie Alter, board maker Dale Velzy, and the "stars" of the second film, Pat O'Connell and Wingnut Weaver. I'll save the stories - how they decided to go around the world, the surfers' backgrounds, the second film, how surfing exploded as a competitive and pop culture sport, and where the people involved are now.

top, L to R: Brown and August in Africa for the first ENDLESS SUMMER; Mike Hynson surfs Africa; Brown and son Dana (next to camera) film SUMMER 2. bottom: the crew in Japan (1963). previous page: Brown surfs and films.

The most insight from ESR might be from Brown assistant R. Paul Allen, who, after convincing Brown he needed an assistant and offering to work only for a percentage of whatever he made, became one of the most important players in the success story, helping Brown take the first *SUMMER* across the country to theaters.

As the early surf films were huge successes among their own surf community, Brown and Allen wanted to take it elsewhere. Some of the most popular films in the ten years before the first *SUMMER* were the quick product beach movies, like *GIDGET* (1959), and beach-whatever with Frankie and Annette, resulting in seven nationwide-popular beach party movies from only 1963-1966. While cute and funny, they were a stylized, misleading image of surfers for America when *SUMMER* was released in 1965. Brown wanted to show the real lifestyle of surfers without the melodrama.

Attempting to get a distributor for *SUMMER*, Brown and Allen were told the film wouldn't make money "ten minutes from the water." So they rented a theater in Wichita, Kansas. And as the city was hit with the worst snowstorm in their history, the film sold out shows for two weeks. After more shows and fighting with distributors, they finally sold the film for how much they were in debt.

The voice of real surfers also attracted millions to the sport. As seen in the second *SUMMER*, surfing went from about four counties to everywhere in the world, with specific spots in the first film overcrowded with beach condos today.

After the first *SUMMER*, Brown went on to make the equally fun and influential *ON ANY SUNDAY*. An in-depth documentary on the various professional motorcycle races through out the world, Brown continued his narration and innocence as he followed champion racer Mert Lawwill, the incredible, multi-talented and smiley Malcolm Smith, and some amateur riding guy named Steve McQueen.

Just as with his surf films, Brown made *SUNDAY* to show what riding was really like, showing the real class of people involved. Prior to that motorcycle movies were about born losers or dropout hippies. Here champion racer Lawwill drives all night to arrive at the track at 8am.



Half an hour later he's going sideways on the track at 80 mph. Here Smith competes in a week-long race, going 200 miles every day, meeting a specific time schedule, changing his own parts, never revving too loud, challenging only himself. The prize? Not cash, just a medal.

SUNDAY is more dramatic in parts than the surf films. Following circuit track racers, motorcycle racing has dangerous wrecks and tight competition, unlike the surf films. Brown shows crashes the right way - not just to shock, which it does, but to examine the skill of the riders and the true risks they take in a serious light.

One rider gets in a terrible crash. He gets up and says he's okay. At the hospital he learned he broke his back. He later soaks the cast off and puts a brace on instead, and in six weeks he's racing again. In fact, many of the riders were known to soak off casts early so they could get back to the track.

The photography in SUNDAY is inventive. In order to give the audience the feeling of being in the race, Brown used helmet cameras to great effect. Close-ups from telephoto lenses and slow motion help analyze the incredible physical action of riding. This is all before what we're used to in special cameras that weigh nothing.

The seriousness of the sport is offset by the fun of riding and Smith's amazing antics. Smith is a rider who not only competes in every type of motorcycle race possible - cross-country baja, time trials, racing up a steep hill - he just about wins them, all while displaying an infectious grin.

As with the SUMMER films, SUNDAY won me over. A sport I've never participated in or even care to follow is made so interesting that I feel left out. Covering every variety of race from pro time trials to ones where Grandma walks across the track to go to the store, SUNDAY's innocence lets the various characters come through, especially as actor Steve McQueen shows up as just another amateur rider.

And for those of us born in the 1970s, it's an amazing trip back through clothes, hair and vans.

ON ANY SUNDAY REVISITED is as fun as the surf update, with tons of unseen footage, info on what happened to all the racers with new interviews with them reminiscing. It captures the feeling of all of Brown's films and



Brown accepts the Motorcycle Industry Council's award for "Outstanding Contribution" for SUNDAY, with M.I.C. President E.W. Colman and some cat named Steve McQueen (1971).



Brown whispers instructions to an early helmet cam.

gives more insight into the breed of people who make this odd type of living.

Back to the start - the innocence of Brown's work. There is a kinship in all these pursuits. It looks easy to get on a board and hit the water. It looks easy to hop on a bike and race around a circle. It looks

easy to grab a camera, make an image and communicate ideas. It's not. Some people can do these things, most people can't.

Unfortunately, if you have an unusual pursuit - art, sport, whatever - people think you are just fooling around, some kind of fringing amateur, until you make a living and/or it becomes part of pop culture. Well - sometimes it is a natural, true thing.

With all his films, Brown gives a close-up to the athlete as interesting and talented human being. But always as a human, refuting the cock-rock superstar status most annoying pro jocks love to bask in these days. Brown's heroes have fun and know they're lucky - talented enough to make a fun hobby a living.



ON ANY SUNDAY

ENDLESS SUMMER REVISITED is 70 minutes, ON ANY SUNDAY REVISITED is 60 minutes. The respective DVDs include bios of all the athletes in each one, photo scrapbooks and (different) interviews with Bruce and Dana Brown. ON ANY SUNDAY is 96 minutes. That DVD is remastered and includes the original trailer, a short tribute to Steve McQueen and an interview with Bruce Brown. I can't wait for the next "revisited" doc by Dana Brown, ON ANY SUNDAY: MALCOLM, MOTORCROSS AND MORE, which focuses on superhero motorcycle rider Malcolm Smith, due out summer 2001. All are released by Monterey Video (montereymedia.com).

BRUCE BROWN filmography

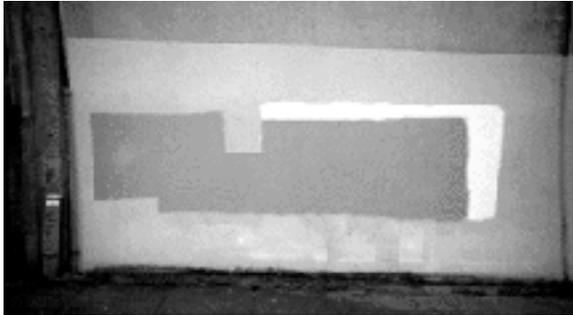
- SLIPPERY WHEN WET (1958)
- SURF CRAZY (1959)
- BAREFOOT ADVENTURE (1960)
- SURFING HOLLOW DAYS (1961)
- WATERLOGGED (1962)
- ENDLESS SUMMER (1964)
- ON ANY SUNDAY (1971)
- ENDLESS SUMMER II (1994)



The video *Surfin' Shorts* has three short films by Brown from 1960-64: THE WET SET on surfing and clothing, AMERICA'S NEWEST SPORT on skateboarding, and the Japan sequence shot but not used for the first ENDLESS SUMMER.

Films by Matt McCormick: After moving from Santa Fe, New Mexico, McCormick created and runs Peripheral Produce out of Portland, OR. Besides making films, he puts on shows and distributes his own work as well as work by experimental makers Craig Baldwin, Animal Charm, Miranda July and others.

The following titles have shown in various film festivals and are now available on video, collected as “The Subconscious Decisions of Polar Bears,” from McCormick’s website: rodeofilmco.com.



THE SUBCONSCIOUS ART OF GRAFFITI REMOVAL (2001, 16 minutes) A documentary creating an art movement: the covering up of graffiti as a form of modern art. While modest and tongue-in-cheek at times, *SUB ART* brings up very valid points of an unrecognized form of painting. There’s even an interview with a city official. Portland is particularly committed to “cleaning up” graffiti, that is, to cover it up with paint. Using a roller, a variety of blocks are created in the coverage, sometimes over previous blocks, often not matching the original color of the wall. This unintentional art project garners more funding than the traditional arts do. It can be compared to very famous works of modern art pretty easily, and, (as what happens a lot in film, too) the unintentional can be just as fascinating. Add on the cultural and social factors

and it’s quite an interesting subject. As Seth Price does in his *American Graffiti* (also reviewed this issue), McCormick raises the question of how who makes the art dictates whether or not it is accepted as art in different circles. Put it on the side of a building, it is the product of a group culture. Put it in a gallery, it is individualistic, or from a “school.”

Filed in a beautiful, flowing style, McCormick highlights the structural - literally and artistically - in walls, freeways and factory areas. The drab settings are affected in a weird way by the “art,” the original graffiti probably would’ve livened up the place. Good, ambient sound design by McCormick and narration by Miranda July fill out the educational feel that’s too experimental for PBS and too thought-out for MTV.



THE VYROTONIN DECISION (1999, 7 minutes) Billed as “a disaster epic constructed from 1970s television commercials,” *VD* won the Best Experimental film prize at the New York Underground Fest 2000. As I knew it would, the end of everything begins with Jack LaLane teaching me to work out for \$5, then quickly descends into instructional film madness. Some hardcore splicing and editing later and you’re on a fun trip of advertising conspiracy.

SINCERELY, JOE P. BEAR (1999, 5 minutes) Where McCormick went into Craig *Tribulation 99* Baldwin madman found footage territory with *Vyrotinin Decision*, he pulls back for a sad story in *BEAR*. A beautifully ancient 1950s-looking film of a man in a polar bear suit and an ice queen at some promo event is transformed into a home movie with the cute bear reading a post-break-up letter to his lost love. The sob story is infectious, I have a place in the zoo in my heart for that fuzzy guy.



DESTINY (2000, 5 minutes) One Sunday morning I woke up at 5(a.m., you slacker), turned on the TV and watched one of those blasted infomercials. They are always funny and strangely appealing, as it is one long commercial there are no breaks, yet it is “hosted” by some boobs who are too damn excited by the product, particularly at that early in the morning. It’s usually a chuckle for 5 minutes and then it’s time to move on.

But this day it wasn’t for oldies or car care, it was for those Dean Martin Celebrity Roasts - now available on video! I remember them with a glossed over, fanboy love, all the stars lambasting one another with the best comebacks a kid could dream of. The suits were hot and the insight was fresh. But this was fucking surreal. Now 145 years old, in came Rich Little to “host” the infomercial, each time doing a creepypass faded impression of the next sucker to get roasted, from Sinatra to Reagan. It’s like Vegas in your house.



Then cut in clips from the videos to reach the heights of Bunuel or Dali. Those jokes I remember so fondly really blew now. But it’s worth any price to see the fake doubled-over laughing by the whole panel at each and every jab, from Dean Martin’s fake(?) drunk antics to Nipsey Russell’s rhymes to Slappy White’s I-don’t-know-what. The only things still tearing it up were the

hard-hitting reality of Don Rickles, and Ruth Buzzi wielding carnage with her purse.

Anyway, McCormick’s *DESTINY* wasn’t as good without Rich Little, but he knew to keep it short and sweet, resulting in a great experimental film designed for bugs.



Handcranked Films is a group of four guys who met while at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in one capacity or another, making their own films and helping out on the others' projects. While each has a distinct style, all four show a great technical aptitude of filmmaking and should continue to make refreshing, solid work.



EGYPT HOLLOW (1996, 25 minutes, 16mm) Jake Mahaffy's mysterious short film takes place somewhere in the Midwest of our brains, as a young boy gets ideas of his family's past from remnants of a burn barrel. Sharp, spooky narration guides us through some amazing looking farm locations, atmospheric vaudevillian characters and the philosophy of wood. And, yes, Mahaffy actually handcranked the footage (for the tech guys: with a Bolex camera), creating incredible images that match the feel of looking into the past. This is describing it pretty literally; the film is much more than a technical exercise. **HOLLOW** is, as if all the things in the past got pissed that they were forgotten, that they were solved, that they were shoved aside, and, sometimes in the middle of a field, you could hear them talking.



LOST AND FOUND (1996, 10 minutes, 16mm) Jeff Sias' animated film is made up of found object constructions, full of bruised character. As the film follows a timid boy (puppet) into a distorted nightmare of various fears, I was reminded of many scares I had as a kid, especially as the surreal images hint at how unreal the world starts off for us. Especially with the magic of a pencil sharpener.



MET STATE (2001, 10 minutes, 16mm) Bryan Papciak's film is a guided tour through a fucking incredible location: an abandoned mental hospital. A cross of an Ivy League college campus and Alcatraz, the overgrown buildings are full of smashed windows, beaten walls, frozen pipes, dead birds and even leftover, freaky equipment. But rather than a simple walk-through, Papciak has made a cousin to Jan Svankmajer's **OSSUARY** (1970), also a highly controlled, part-animated, very playful tour (in that case, of a European structure made of human bones), edited in accordance to a beautiful score. In **STATE**, broken glass, crippled paint and a row of toilets like a T. Rex backbone become part of the film as fossil dig. Bird skeletons dance to the beat. Used instruments sprint away in an animated escape. By the frozen end, Papciak captures all the strong beauty of dilapidation.



MINOTAUR (1999, 8 minutes, 16mm) Daniel Sousa's animated version of the traditional myth is a drawn-line's dream. Through an efficient and thoughtful use of focus, movement, cello score and thick, black lines, Sousa gives the benefit of the doubt to the man-bull. A nice turn of the story without over-thinking it, that even children could watch.

Look to handcrankedfilm.com for clips of these and other films, and more info, including upcoming features.

FACETS MOVIE LOVERS VIDEO GUIDE

An example to grow on: FacetsVideo's new book of film lists is a great alternative to what has become an overwhelming whine factor of amateur and history-ignorant criticism.

In the past ten years lists have gotten out of control. The epitome of this sports-minded "who's the best", "don't fuck with these films", "I know more obscurities than you" crap is the American Film Institute's various lists of 100 best American films, as part of their marketing campaign with Blockbuster Video. In an apparent attempt to dumb down the Institute part of their name, the AFI asked industry professionals to name their best American picks out of 400 titles already selected. The end list included four films made in England with English cast and crew - but were partially funded by American studios. So where the money came from factors into a film being the best or not, or even which country owns it, according to AFI.

The AFI list suffers from films like *THE JAZZ SINGER*, the very first sound film. Horribly dated, primitive and just plain boring, this film makes the case for two best lists: what's important in film history, and what's entertaining. And these would change all the time as life goes on. Of course *JAZZ SINGER* is important, ground-breaking and should be seen. Does it hold up as one of the "best films ever made" over time? No.

Besides the fact: unless you've seen every single film ever made, your idea of best is limited. After that, it's all just your opinion and aesthetics. I can watch *FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH* anytime, as I remember getting a kiss in the theater. Any number of classic horror and sci-fi films remind me of Sunday afternoons as a kid. But is *GODZILLA VS MEGALON* really that good? I definitely can't watch *AIRPLANE 2*, as it played in the background while my long-term relationship came to an end. (Wait, maybe that film just sucks.)

On the other hand, I've found an incredible amount of new films from lists. Find a director or cinematographer or actor you like, see what else they've done. Like one MGM musical? You might like more they made in the same era. Even if you pick up one of those slim on content, loads of old pictures film books, it'll still give you ideas of what to check out.

The other recent problem with lists, and criticism in general, is the Internet. While everybody is allowed to have an opinion, the replacement of true film criticism with 100 people who don't remember BSW (Before Star Wars) is a massive turn for the worse. It is hard enough to get a unique -hell, mildly different- film out to theaters. Now distributors see the Internet has a powerful marketing tool and want to cater to its needs. They see people whining about subtitles and loving special effects. While newspaper critics aren't made of gold, at least they're paid to do a job and presumably have a writing background and some film history under their belt. As opposed to, "I thought of that idea a long time ago, just didn't get around to doing it." Or an overappreciation for a low-budget or foreign film simply because no one else has heard of it. You may be mining for gold, but you will often find fool's gold instead.

So the moral is: find a listmaker with similar likes (or one with everything you don't like), or find as many lists as possible to choose from, that aren't so fake-picky.

That said, the new list book from Facets is fantastic. Facets is a two-screen theater/video rental and distribution store in Chicago with an amazing list of titles. The lists in the book include films from every country, genre and year you could imagine. Some are strictly informational, like Cannes winners and films by the Hollywood Ten.

Others are opinionated but solid. "36 Directors To Watch" doesn't try to say they're the best directors, just check them out. Plus the variety is nice. You might come to the list knowing independent heroes Steven Soderberg, Todd Solondz and Paul T Anderson. But now you've heard of Harun Farocki, Guy Maddin and Nina Menkes. In this list is one of the only problems of this book -and it's not Facets' fault. What is available on video in America is limited. Hou Hsiao-Hsien is definitely a director to watch and will go down in history alongside greats like Akira Kurosawa and Satyajit Ray (I'm not even stretching here, see his films), but only two of HHH's eight or so fantastic films are available on video right now. Best African Films is a list of six titles, as none of longtime director Ousmane Sembene's films are easily available.

The variety makes this book great. Film noir, sections for classic and recent titles, films that "fell through the cracks", even best box art. No matter where you're coming from, you will find something unexpected here.

My favorite list is the perfect anecdote to the Internet crap: Favorite film lists of filmmakers, cameraman, writers, critics, artists, museum curators, etc. Or: people that have done stuff. Read, watch and learn.

Book is available directly from Facets in Chicago: facets.org.



GOOD GRIEF (2000, 80 minutes) A low-budget film by Andrew Dickson follows a group of friends in a small town as they make that nostalgic leap from dungeons and dragons (well, "Monsters and Mayhem" in the film) to the next immature level of sex, drugs and rock and roll. But there is always someone who doesn't want to make that change and sees his teenage world walking away from him in the halls. The friends go on a doomed treasure hunt, bringing up more conflict. When they decide to play D&D again the tension rises to the surface.

A nice look at what most of us go through, going from 20-sided dice or dolls to a perceived maturity of jocks or going out to party in the middle of nowhere. Dickson took a few years to make the film and it shows in some inconsistency, but it's his first feature and he takes a strong interest in his characters. Dickson has persistence to get the job done and I'm eager to see future projects from him.

The real persistence from Dickson is his distribution: he personally travelled around the country showing his film himself. Kids were pulled in by the theme and by the opener, punk rock favorite Al Burian (who also acts in the film) reading from his long-running zine *Burn Collector*.

Whatever Hollywood puts out is going to get around, not just because it cost millions to make or has the biggest stars, but because they run the distribution circuit. If you want to get a small film you made seen, you are going to have to do it yourself. I would love to see someone like Oliver Stone having to go town to town trying to drum up publicity or his film wouldn't be programmed. (Of course, Stone probably *would* knock on every door in town to speak his mind.)

While travelling on the road, showing your film and meeting new people is a lot of fun, it's a hell of a responsibility to take

upon yourself. If you can even get theaters - or more appropriately, converted spaces - to show your film, you need to deal with local critics who want to be a part of the big, famous films instead of supporting the stuff that is actually on their local level. Every city is different of course. On top of this are the usual hassles of driving, finding a place to stay, projection equipment, sound and getting people excited enough to come out. Then make enough money to keep doing it.

Dickson considers the tour a success, he doesn't have a bad thing to say about the experience. He took the film from coast-to-coast, played in all kinds of spaces and audiences showed up. He says the response was worth it and people are hungry to support this type of tour.

Send your thanks to him, for people like Dickson will make it easier for future filmmakers to do their own distribution.

GOOD GRIEF has screenings coming up and is available on video for sale and in many rental stores. Check out goodgriefmovie.com for all the info.



AMERICAN GRAFFITY (2000, 16 minutes) Seth Price's awesome film is a portrait of rural manliness and class confusion with culture. Two white, middle-class appearing men are "interviewed," looking for a hidden threat behind something heavy-handed like graffiti and kung-fu — even if it's not there, even if they are the ones doing it. **GRAFFITY** is like a sci-fi cigarette ad straight from 1970, in what that year means for saturated color and high school educational films. Vivid camerawork and eerie sound design to match, breaking it all down to flickering, perceived notions about crime and art. As Matt McCormick does in his experimental documentary *The Subconscious Art Of Graffiti Removal* (also reviewed this issue), Price brings up the issue of street graffiti as a recognized art form. It is illegal and media-connected to poor areas and violence, but a museum curator would love to take advantage

of it, at least in a modern art arena. Paint a canvas and you have a pursuit. Spraypaint a wall or a tree, you have a fear. This is generalizing, but I don't think too much.

The popular culture that is funneled through our country from the coasts is always diluted and changed, and funny sounding, to hear a Midwest man with a hunting jacket talk about Chinese traditions, adapted into his own lifestyle and speaking accent. Are the original misconceptions from television and late-night movies still there, just tolerated, or eventually thrown away if it's the cool thing to do? The Marlboro Man thinks he's on a safari adventure, but it's just Jersey City. *This film is currently on tour as part of curator Astria Suparak's "New Romantic/T.V. Sounds" group.*



GINA, AN ACTRESS, AGE 29 (2000) In 2000 Paul Harrill was the first filmmaker outside New York and Los Angeles to be awarded the Aperture Film Grant, which funds one short film per year. There is a need for specific grants like this because the notion of "short film" seems to be unmarketable. It has a connotation of art and boredom in the mainstream, as if every good idea has to be a long one. Meanwhile most of America spends its time watching 30-second commercials, 3-minute music videos and 22-minute sitcoms. Maybe it all has to be dumbed down for them, but I think it is also in the presentation.

Harrill's film, **GINA**, was made in his native Knoxville, Tennessee, and is part of a planned feature film. It went on to win Best Short

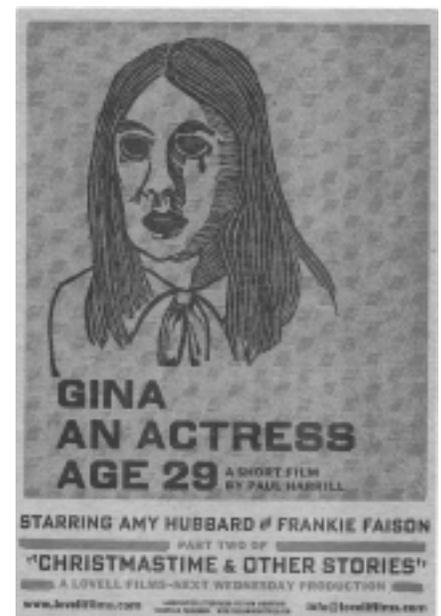
Film at the Sundance Film Festival in January, 2001.

The subtle and effective story follows a hopeful actress in her newest job, playing the very real part of a union buster. Harrill's attention to the characters and the ethics of the story make **GINA** a fresh breath of air. This film is a great example of how short films are completely accessible and shouldn't be contained to festivals and cable television, they should be before films in theaters (instead of ads) and on regular TV.

Harrill's actors are calm and quiet yet still move the plot along. Despite the slow pace, the film won't ever get categorized as artsy or neo-realist, a mainstream audience can relate to the characters more than to heroes and villains. You get into the characters and squirm as the modest actress has to go in front of union workers and basically lie. But since it's an acting job, it starts to get fuzzy as to her true role in it. If you work for a huge corporation that breaks your ethics, making it's product in third world countries for example, how negligent are you?

Harrill considers the nature of how acting relates to the setting and situation. Short, docudrama, low-key, resume-maker... too many terms get attached to something in order to market it. **GINA** is intelligent and good.

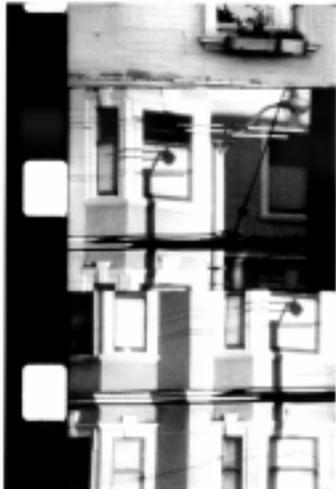
*An interview with Paul Harrill is available at insound.com/cinema. **GINA** is currently playing various festivals.*



Films by Ken Paul Rosenthal

SPRING FLAVOR (1996, 3minutes) A vibrant experimental film in the vein of Stan Brakhage. Changing, shifting, sometimes mysterious shapes of color and light go by, as I wonder if only film can do. They may be the beautiful things you see when you close your eyes and press against your eyelids (not too hard, kids), or they may be the tall weeds in a field as you lie back. Either way, I find these types of films nice emotional jumps to childhood memories, much more understanding than a condescending morning television show.

NEAR WINDOWS (1997, 15 minutes) An experimental play on the complete notion of Hitchcock, the ultimate voyeur filmmaker. The study of staring out makes me think of two things. One, this is the only way you can understand your world, to shut up and look, and avoid becoming familiar and complacent with your world.



You don't learn about a thing by seeing the same thing every day, you can get bored and let it sink away into the overall background. You only learn by looking at it every day and really look at it, explore it and force yourself to find new things. Second, if you've got a lot of time to do this, it can get egotistic.

Made on super-8 and 16mm film, **NEAR** has beautiful imagery of forms and structures, such as buildings and other windows. These aspects can only be found by staring out a lot (or, I guess, watching a film). Very nice time lapse and unusual framing of images make it fascinating with some nice moments contemplating the voyeurism of having a lot of windows. When people are in the frame, it is less interesting, they often look like they know they are being filmed and have this air of self-importance because the camera is on them.

Of course, people are always fun to look at.

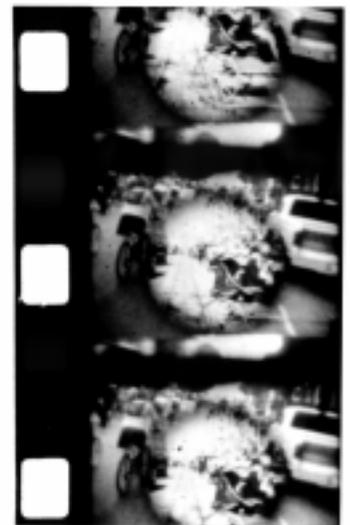
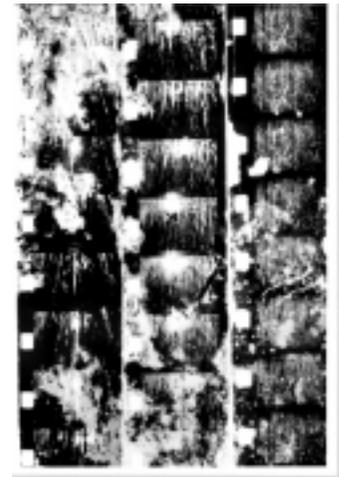
BLACKBIRDS (1998, 9 minutes) The footage of the Rodney King and Reginald Denny beatings (remember them?) are rephotographed and affected by handprocessing the film, scratching, adjusting colors and speeds. I didn't get any deep feeling from it, maybe because those images have been so played over and over again that I'm jaded. I understand that what happened in both cases is fucked up, there's nothing to re-examine. But that might be the whole point, the study of how an image gets engrained and how we gradually change our reaction to the physical picture and meaning. All films that use this footage will serve as a time capsule. The meaning and effect will change as later generations have less connection to the event. I'm trying to think of what I have to relate that way. A lynching is horrible to see no matter what time it took place. But add a distance from reality and it gets weirder. You can research the circumstances, but the immediate shock is irreplaceable. It's more bothering because you don't already have your labelled bottle in your mind to put the images in, only relations to an emotion.

On a purely technical level, it is fascinating to see the surface of film change, bubble and form with movement. Did Eastman have any idea of this future?



I MY BIKE (2001) I saw a 5 minute work-in-progress of this film, but the finished version should be fun. With a circle frame of different footage in the center, images from the seat of a bike today conflict, mold and warp speed with archive footage of past busy streets. You comfortably go back and forth between analyzing the historical aspects with just sitting back and sucking in the pretty pictures.

All are available on 16mm film through Canyon Cinema (415-626-2255) or on video from the filmmaker: kaypear@hotmail.com.





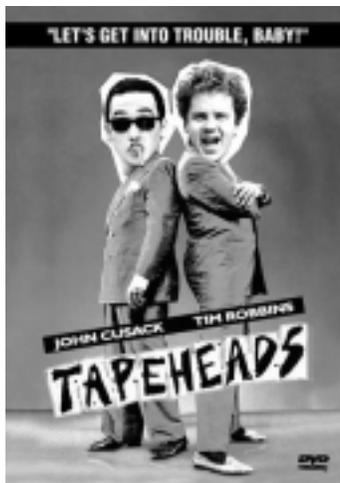
AGUIRRE: THE WRATH OF GOD (1972) Spaniards in search of El Dorado descend down an intense mountain peak with barely a path on it. Men slosh through a wet jungle forest with cannibals, dragging horses, cannons and women on thrones with them. Rafts try to navigate harsh rapids with no end in sight, sending one of them into a whirlpool. This is the first ten minutes. And it is probably easier than what it took to make the film.

Werner Herzog's masterpiece follows Klaus Kinski as a conquistador leading a group of men through his personal madness in Peru, searching for the mythical city of gold. Kinski wasn't an actor, he was a time-traveller, and his performances for Herzog are his best. My favorite scene of all his work is in this film early-on: as the huge group of slaves struggle and burn their souls carrying a woman on a throne-chair against the unforgiving jungle mud and trees, Kinski suddenly appears in the middle to offer a helping hand. He writhes and morphs, grabbing the slaves and shoving them, screaming at the top of his lungs, "Fools!!! The sedan chair is stuck!"

AGUIRRE is what got Herzog noticed around the world as part of a new group of German filmmakers along with Fassbinder and Wenders. His previous film was **EVEN DWARVES STARTED SMALL** (also put out by Anchor Bay), which resulted in Kinski calling him, "A mere dwarf director." The battles between he and Kinski should be legendary by now. The final result in Herzog stating he will grab his gun and kill both himself and Kinski as the actor was threatening to leave the production. Kinski was convinced and finished the film.

This story and more is part of the excellent analog track by Herzog, covering all of the hardcore production that overwhelms the more famous Coppola problems making *Apocalypse Now*. Herzog didn't have millions of dollars, rather 300 grand, had to live on the rafts for months and deal with the jungle and Kinski. But he never bitches – you do what you have to do, and the film is never compromised, from the costumes, the beautiful real locations and the boat hanging in the tree to the eerie group of small monkeys at the end (which Herzog had to steal, even though he paid for them). The analog track is constant (many now seem to take pauses to watch the film) with background on the idea, actors, filming and philosophies. Yes, that is a real mummy in the cannibal camp, for which Herzog's brother had to buy a passenger ticket for the plane ride over.

The DVD is another fantastic release from Anchor Bay, giving the nice treatment to a title that can't be making them millionaires. The image looks great and is not letterboxed, so I assume that that is how Herzog prefers it. The three trailers didn't add much to the presentation, but that's a minor point. When they are finished with the entire Herzog collection, it will be one of the most fascinating career studies on DVD.



TAPEHEADS (1988) I can't explain why but I've watched this a hundred times and I keep laughing, alongside Cusack's *Better Off Dead*. John Cusack and Tim Robbins were still playing losers and became good friends off camera when they made *Tapeheads*, as they play bumbling would-be music video makers. In order to get their boyhood heroes The Swanky Modes (played by real-life singers Sam Moore and Junior Walker) the gig of all gigs, they scam and plug their way through unpaid work, Roscoe's chicken and waffles, relentless hitmen and a vengeful politician. Great character acting by Jessica Walter, Don Cornelius and Clu Gulager. Cameos by a ton of folks, including executive producer Michael Nesmith (from the Monkees), Jello Biafra, Fishbone and the Nuge. Along the way are all kinds of catchy little jokes that you either like and remember forever or... just don't like. "We love Menudo." "On spec." The mounting parking tickets. At least watch it for Cusack and Robbins passing the Brothers Against Drunk Driving (BADD) alcohol test: going through the alphabet backwards with your eyes closed, skipping all the vowels and giving the hand sign for each letter.

The DVD is letterboxed and has a strong analog track with Nesmith, director Bill Fishman and production designer Catherine Hardwicke. Much of the time it is as light-hearted as the movie and interesting. Unfortunately, Fishman brings up tons of scenes that were deleted from the film but aren't included on the DVD. I'm sure there's some reason for this, maybe they just weren't available, but it's kind of frustrating - they actually sound funny instead of the usual deleted scene that deserved to be cut out and forgotten. I was surprised that so much stuff was actually cut out, and that Cusack and Robbins wanted to play the opposite roles when they auditioned. But, this ain't the high theater either. At times the analog track has some of those "Remember when that happened" stories, that only work if you really really like the film. But then, why else would you watch the whole thing with the analog track on?

OTHER READS

Beer Frame

Digest – two and a half bucks
671 DeGraw St #2, Brooklyn, NY 11217
core77.com/inconspicuous/index.html

Covering weird products or products advertised weirdly, with perfect doses of information, humor and nostalgia. One of the mainstays of non-music zines I love, along with *Cometbus*, *Dishwasher*, *Farm Pulp* and *Infiltration* to name a few.

Book of Letters

Digest – two bucks
Po box 890, Allston, MA 02134
home.earthlink.net/~richmackin/

I had always heard that this was a great zine, by a guy (Rich Mackin) sending hilarious letters asking the questions you always wanted to ask big corporations that seemed to know everything in their advertising. He sometimes even got responses, ranging from funny in their blandness to reluctantly coming up with the best answer they could. Well, I finally found an issue and it's true.

Cinema Scope

Full size – five bucks
465 Lytton Blvd
Toronto, ON M5N 1S5 Canada

Again, one of the best things going in film writing. If you like Cinemad, then you can like CScope as well, plus they can afford more pages and issues a year. Critical writing that's more traditional, but I don't have to break out the dictionary too often, to learn a word that could've been phrased a whole lot easier. CScope is on the forefront of what's interesting and happening in cinema today, from Hou Hsiao-Hsien to Liv Ullman, covering films to books to festivals.

Microfilm

Full size – three and a half bucks
Po box 45, Champaign, IL 61824-0045
artisticunderground.com/mf_unbound/

Microfilm is taking its place alongside film mags like *Cashiers du Cinemart* in the wake of what *Film Threat* tried to be. The emphasis is on the '90s term of independent cinema; covering low-budget cinema but stressing genre. Microfilm also addresses the influence and possibilities of digital video and its effect outside the Hollywood system. Where Microfilm is good is when it searches out new genre voices, talks to people with the desire to get their film made no matter what, and finding your own life in the films you see and make. On the other hand, Troma never needs to be written about again. This is the trap that *Film Threat* fell in pretty fast, the need to be liked – first covering awesome work that was also popular (*Ren & Stimpy*) then collapsing into paranoia about sales (covers with Stephen Baldwin and DOUBLE DRAGON). Microfilm can get past that.

Razorcake

Full size - three bucks
Po box 42129, LA, CA 90042
razorcake.com

RC is continuing the legacy of the non-defunct *Flipside* with much of the same staff. So get on it – this is a magazine with real enthusiasm. Good interviews, issue #2 with The Crowd, Scared of Chaka, Hostage Records, The Forgotten, Flogging Molly and more, with columns and tons of reviews.

Shock Cinema

Full size – five bucks
Steve Puchalski, Po Box 518, Peter Stuyvesant Sta., NYC, 10009
members.aol.com/shockcin/

There's no way I have the time and space for all the character actors in the world, so it's a good thing there's zines like Shock Cinema. Their newest has an interview with the awesome Victor Argo from *Taxi Driver* and *Bad Lt*. Shock is the alternative to the typical cult rag.

Sound Collector

Digest size – five worthy bucks
Po box 2056, nyc, 10013
info@soundcollector.com

If you think there are too many music magazines, especially with interviews of the same bands over and over again, Sound Collector is a prescription for you. They cover a wide (but still unusual) range of subjects from The Rondelles to Iannis Xenakis to syncing separate tapes in car stereos in a parking garage. Solid interviews and articles that are challenging, pushing past the usual cul-de-sac of like-it-or-not music criticism. SC considers the whole idea of making sound, in what has been tried and what it means in the overall scope of things. Anyone that is interested in a band's "goals" and not just what has been done is someone to listen to.

Spank

Full size – three bucks
1004 Rose Ave, Des Moines, IA 50315-3000
skatterbrain.com/spankfanzone.html

If you are going to have a music zine, at least slam pack it full of stuff like Spank does. Columns, interviews with John Reis, American Steel, Sunshine, Throttlefinger and more, and, that's right, tons of reviews.

Spectre

Full size – two bucks
2122 W. Moffat, Chicago, IL 60647
spectrechicago@ameritech.net

Outside of Cinema Scope mag, which is on a different style kick, Spectre is the first film magazine that I have seen that is close to what I try to do with Cinemad. A mix of the American underground (Jeff Krulik, Chris Smith), films you will probably never see (Warhol's SLEEP), debunking some myths (Warhol's SLEEP), interviewing the impossible to find because they came to town (Alexandro Jodorowsky) and injecting your own life into it (guide to Chicago movies) as best you can. All the time trying to be informative, critical and fun in the most accessible manner. Don't forget the foreign and deep respect for classics. And this is issue #1....

Traveling Shoes

Digest – two bucks
Po box 206653, New Haven, CT 06520-6653
travshs@comports.com

I heard about TS because it was highly rated in *Zine Guide* and worth every mention. Pick your own reason for picking it up: great, down-to-earth travel stories (issue number three in Seville) in interesting places, packed packed packed with text, a realistic look at whatever is on the way. Writer H.D. Miller has a fresh insight into what he is doing, saying you can look for the authentic but have to realize that what you've created and expected in that is flawed and opinionated. That said, he still comes upon some fascinating places, with good research and a nice writing style. In fact, write and bug him so he does another issue.

Your Flesh

Full size – five bucks
Po box 25764, Chicago, IL 60625-0764

Okay, I picked it up because it gave a good review to Cinemad, but ha! It was packed with people I wanted to read about anyway – High On Fire, the enigmatic Zoe Lund, the amazing King Brothers, the new but old Johnny Dowd, and, get this, tons of reviews.

FUCKFEST

For no other reason than we were interested in which film says it the most. The contest excludes comedy concert films, especially by Redd Foxx.

Our returning home of the whopper is **GOODFELLAS**, saying fuck 267 times for 1.83 per minute. Will Scorsese top himself?!?

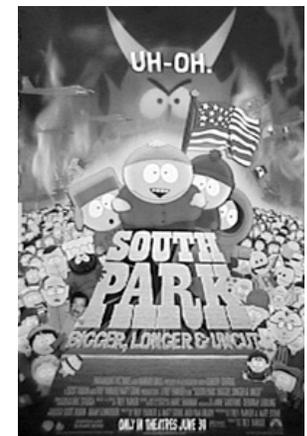
RAGING BULL

(1980) Directed by Martin Scorsese. Written by Paul Schrader and Mardik Martin (from the book). Starring Robert DeNiro, Joe Pesci, Cathy Moriarty, Frank Vincent (ThatGuy), Nicholas Colasanto (ThatGuy).

The amazing film which is still numbing to see 20 years later. The true story of boxer Jake LaMotta is no ROCKY bullshit soap opera; it has all the ups and downs of not only a boxer but an abusive, unsympathetic (to himself as others) man in a very realistic tone. The way people talk and act, the in-between motions, it captures the neighborhood like a documentary. On top of that, BULL has the most beautiful black and white cinematography, especially in the carefully done fight scenes (all that boxing cut down on the word count).

Extra Credit: "You fuck my wife?" and calling someone a Mamaluke of the Year.

Super Extra Credit: During the filming of one scene, the producer commented to Scorsese that there was a lot of cussing going on and asked, "What about the television version?" Scorsese started to think about it. Pesci got mad and said, "Gee Marty, I didn't know you were a TV director." Scorsese got mad. "Right. You're right. Keep going, keep going. Cuss more!"



SOUTH PARK: BIGGER, LONGER & UNCUT

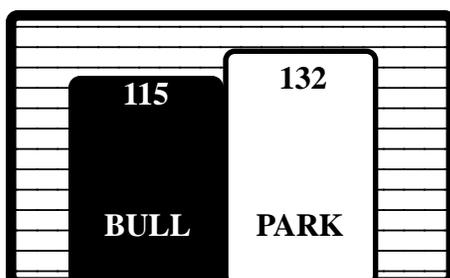
(1999) Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Parker, Matt Stone and Pam Brady. Starring a bunch of cartoon kids.

Modern-day icons like Oprah and Rosie try to communicate and illustrate important messages to the public about parenting, censorship and war. But you'd learn a lot more by watching all 80 minutes of this film instead. The PARK crew from the popular television show break it all down as the kids go to an R rated movie and repeat everything they hear, sending their liberal right-wing parents on a tirade that results in an all-out war with Canada, with Satan and Saddam as lovers taking over the Earth. Creepy and funny, with surprisingly good comments on everything from science to pop culture. And fast - I had to turn the subtitles on to keep up with the f-word.

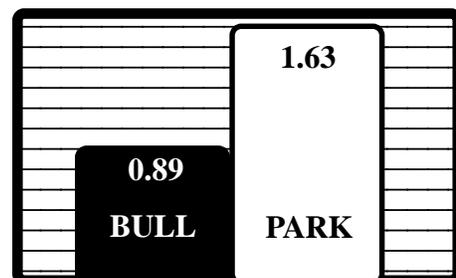
Extra Credit: "So what? It doesn't hurt anybody. Fuck, fuckity, fuck-fuck-fuck." And dropping a bomb on David Arquette.

THE RESULT: Kids these days....

SAYING THE WORD



AVG PER MINUTE



THE END OF CINEMA

Abel Ferrara on

The Analog Track on

THE DRILLER KILLER

Special Edition produced by Cult Epics



Director (and star of Killer) Abel Ferrara is eccentric, messy and gives 200%. For example, the director's commentary on the DVD of his first film, DRILLER KILLER. One day I ran into my friend Oliver after he saw this. All his own speech was gone, he could only repeat mumbling lines from the track. From the opening credit of "This Film Should Be Played Loud" to the ending, guttural "what the fuck was that?" glide through Abel's mondo world of red. Whoa, hey. The first dolly shot in the history of cinema. Learn about the making of the film while he pauses to watch shower scenes and laughs at bums puking. Oopsy-daisy. Experience the fascinating, beautifully dirty New York B.G. (Before Guilani). Again, this is 1978. Learn how he pulled it together technically. There's a shot for the drive-in. Span the distance to these far-away actors you haven't seen since. Yeah, Mama. It's like he hasn't seen the film since it was made. Laughing at the drill going into people. Go 'head, go'ahead. What's going on?? The antithesis for academic analysis - but it's not conscious of that, it is straight ahead like blacktop in Arizona. Eeeehuuuh. It's not what you say but your attitude saying it. Bring up meaning and a structure, capture a time and a place, shoot for the stars and consider your failures, laugh about it all. And there *is* analysis, there *are* themes that are studied and fulfilled, there *is* reasoning and meaning. I lived, absolutely, at the mercy of this girl. The film might have taken months to make, but the commentary had to be recorded only once, at once. Pure.