

Cinemad

#4

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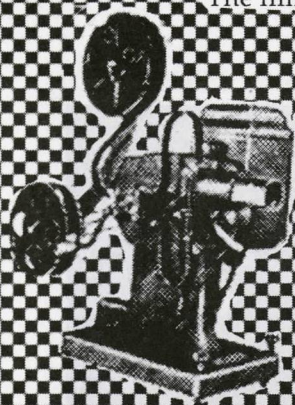


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CINEMAD

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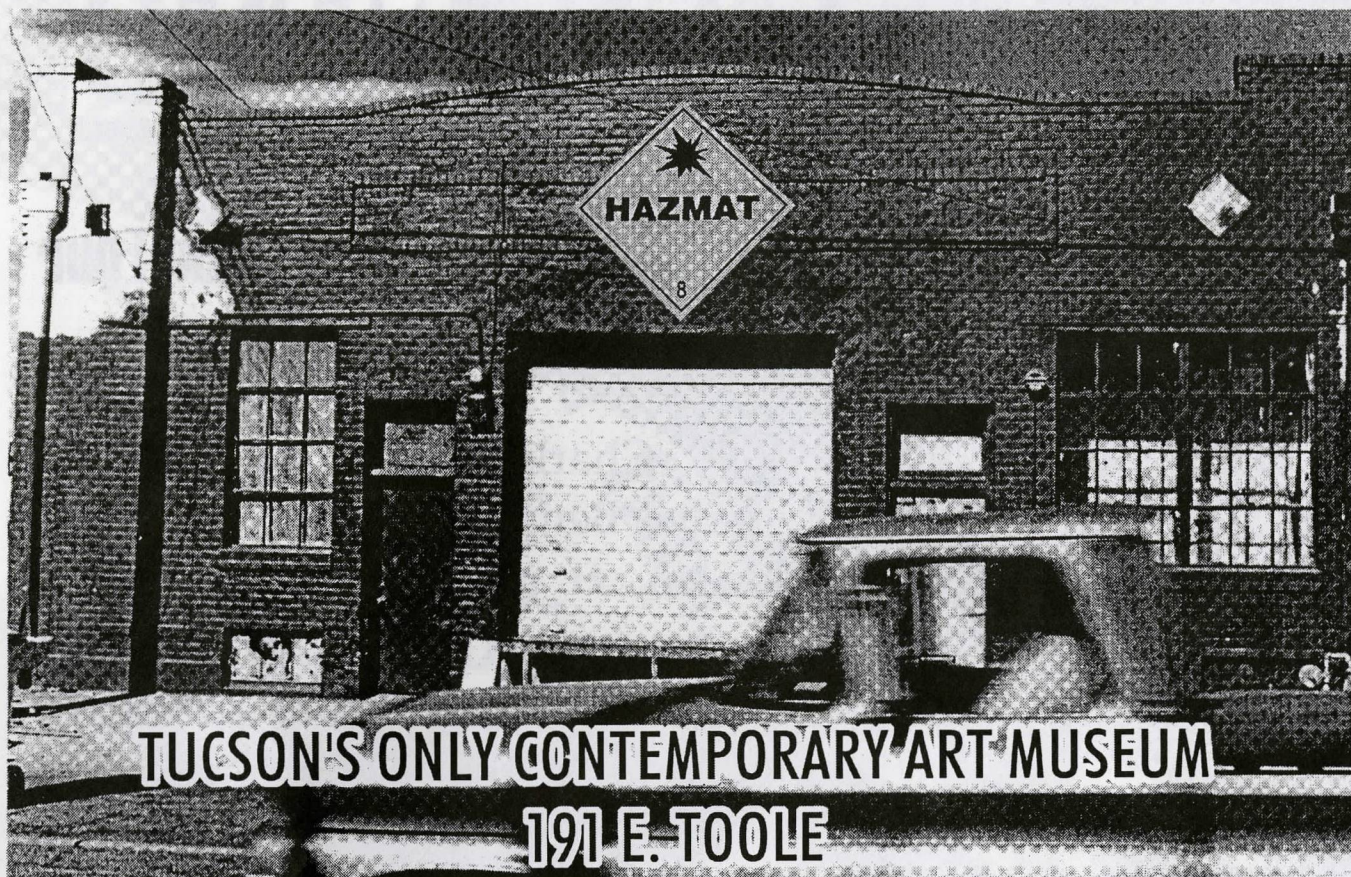
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Mike Plante

IF NO ONE SEES A FILM, WAS IT EVER MADE?

Every time you tell someone about an obscure film and convince them it is worth seeing, it suddenly exists for that person. It could be obscure for any number of reasons: it was banned at one time (TITICUT FOLLIES), a foreign film that basically hasn't made it to America (KILL!), an old, short, silent film (Buster Keaton's ONE WEEK), a film that was never released due to (wrong) personal reasons (WANDA), or even something that was (barely) released in America in the past decade (CHAMELEON STREET).

Except - you will never know about a million great films because they weren't made in L.A. or don't fit into a very narrow vision of marketing and distribution. A system that boring studios perpetuate and the equally boring public continue to pay money for. If you want to learn something from a film, or even find good, simple entertainment, you have get off your ass and make an effort.

As I was doing this issue, I tried to figure out how the hell I got interested in non-mainstream films in the first place. I used to think a film was hardcore by going over the top stylistically like EVIL DEAD. At least in part, that led to the avant-garde. If I was impressed by a couple of guys putting a camera on a 2x4, running through a forest, beating up their actor (all in fun) for the film, then I'm rolling in the aisle for a film made up of 35 two-minute shots. I fucking love it. Or a Japanese film about a deaf-mute guy who wants to surf - and my bootleg video copy has no subtitles. Or a film made almost entirely in a car, the driver searching endlessly for someone to bury them in the ground.

So wait - why would a filmmaker make a movie about that? If someone believes in their subject matter, in a vision, so strongly to take chances, to not resort to cliché filmmaking, to not insult the audience, then I can blow a lousy two hours to see what is so important to them.

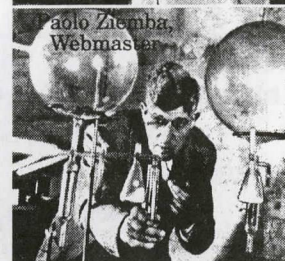
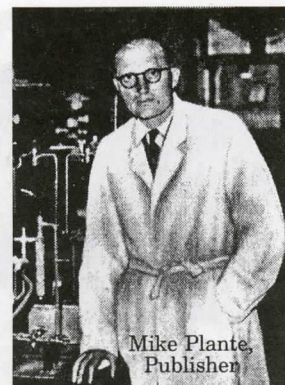
Well, I found themes, stories, characters, etc., that made me think, that fucked with my emotions. Some of these films I write about really piss me off. I want to know why. Most of the time, I end up really liking the thorn. Not because it's difficult. It isn't hard to have fun with Beat Takashi's smartass humor and bloody violence. It's not hard to watch a landscape film with pretty images and no text.

[On the other hand, paint splattered on film or overprocessed images doesn't always interest me. Some abstract films are filled with as much empty imagery as a TV commercial.]

I found a wealth that many movies only hinted at. All in films that were incredibly hard for me to find at all. The films that are easy to find as judged by how many people saw them. Only the top ten grossers make the news and anything else doesn't seem to exist.

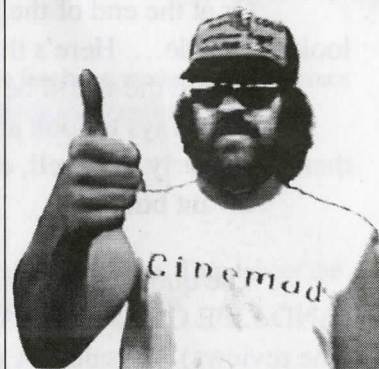
Just what is the point of a major Hollywood release? First is making money, duh. But ask the director and it's to tell a story, to entertain and to make emotional connections. But - you are telling me the same wafer-thin story again and again, not even counting all the remakes. You are not entertaining me with another lameass comedy that was once a lameass TV show. The emotional strings are still pulled in me by the overcome-all happy ending. Except, this is the hundreth time, and it wears off. I want something permanent for a change.

I always ask Cinemad's subjects if they grew up watching films. TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE is not high art, but I'll never forget sitting on top of my parents car and looking across the drive-in at that film on another

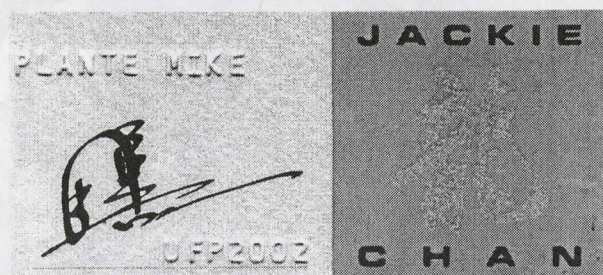


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Much gratitude to Scott MacDonald for light and Clark Chambers for food.



International Fan Club



screen, the sound of screams and saws drifting over. I'll always remember watching *THE LONGEST YARD* three times every year on TBS. "I think he broke his freaking nose."

These childhood memories are sweet because I relate my youth and everything going on at the time with the films. It's not exactly the films. A Cinemad operative in LA happened to get a 35mm print of *YARD*; what should have been a blast – watching it in a theater – produced

massive attacks of sleep and out-loud dreams of a fast-forward button.

What I have is the original event. Which does not make the film a masterpiece, or even a perfect genre film.

A lot of the mainstream outlet's ignoring of unusual film is simply based on category. Short films are only promoted as 'art.' Ask people if they watch short films. Then ask them if they watch music videos, stylistic commercials and sitcoms. Good news for those people: it happens that most short films suck just as much. The unfortunate part is that short films that actually do have some balls get ghettoized to the cable art channels, which don't show much art anyway.

Would the world be different if non-mainstream films accidentally played on Sunday mornings instead of Universal horrors? The studio figured everyone was at church so why not waste airplay with pretty images. "Mommy, mommy, can I get up early so I can watch the movie about King Arthur playing chess with the hood guy AGAIN?"

Or at the end of the programming day, into the next morning, give those acid heads something to look at. "Dude.... Here's that film with the ten minute shot of the river."

Would the world be different? FUCK NO. Well, maybe better....

Two ways to look at it: many people would love films that take chances if they were exposed to them at an early age (hell, exposed at all.) Many people want forgettable entertainment and nothing else. I want both.

The quote on the first page basically comes from influential Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami (*AND LIFE GOES ON*, *TASTE OF CHERRY*). In an interview in the great magazine *Cinemascope* (see zine reviews) AK said, "A photograph is better than a movie." He is speaking about minimalism: that complex equipment and planning does not necessarily make something more beautiful than a simple way of describing it. Kiarostami makes the point that the best films are ones that do not explain everything to us.

Take the gauge that films are judged by: money spent and made. You can go out and buy a ticket to a film, one that cost millions of dollars to make and publicize, or buy any number of thousands of videos, but you do not own that film. More often than not, it tells you exactly what the characters feel, why they do what they do and what they think about the whole world and its difficulties. This is entertainment and has its place but overwhelms the film community.

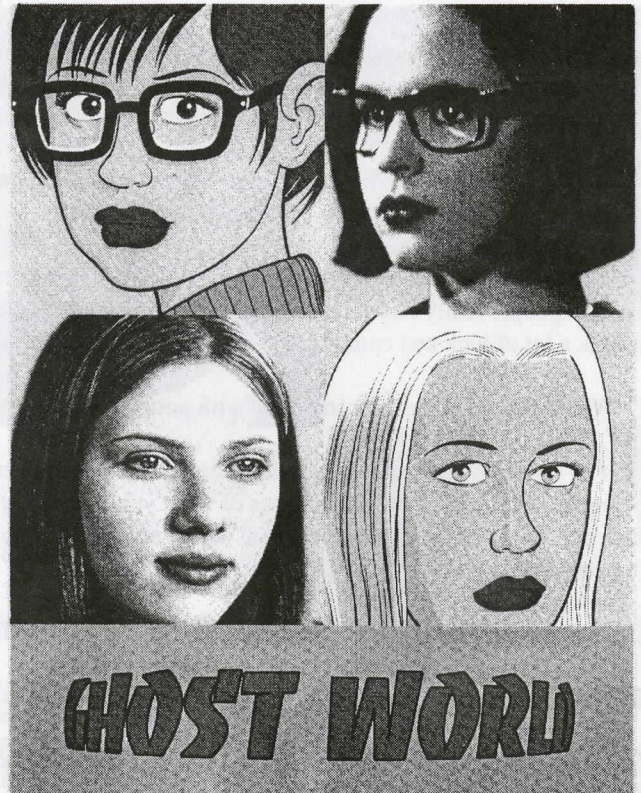
Take a film that is judged difficult because it makes you use your brain or brings up realistic, uncomfortable emotions. You probably won't be able to find it on K-Mart's shelves. It's a film that you do the work while watching. What happens inside the film lets you interpret it. The films you can own are not ones you can buy.

CINEMAD

10 Questions for DANIEL CLOWES

It has become a cliché to call a movie made from a comic book/graphic novel “highly anticipated,” but it applies best to *GHOST WORLD*. The upcoming film is based on Dan Clowes’ story, originally appearing in his fantastic *Eightball* comics. Forget the superheroes: insightful and funny, *GHOST WORLD* follows best friends Enid and Rebecca in their everyday teenage lives, heading into adulthood.

The film crew sounds like the best possible situation: it is directed by Terry Zwigoff, who also made the documentary *CRUMB*, is written by Clowes and Zwigoff, and stars Thora Birch (*AMERICAN BEAUTY*), Scarlett Johansson (*HORSE WHISPERER*) and Steve Buscemi (*FARGO* and *TREES LOUNGE*). The filming is done and there is no release date yet, probably early 2001.



CINEMAD: What are the producers/money-people of *GHOST WORLD* like? Accommodating to your work or pushing the project to be “*American Beauty 2: Make the Blond Bigger on the Poster*”?

DANIEL CLOWES: I have only dealt with Lianne Halfon [who also produced *CRUMB*], who has been working with us since the beginning. She keeps me and Terry away from the money people, and when we go to meetings she translates the Hollywoodese into simple English for us.

C: Did you know Terry Zwigoff already?

DC: He first approached me right after he finished *CRUMB* in 1994 and we have since become good friends. Throughout the entire process of making this film we have never once had an unpleasant discussion or exchanged angry words.

C: Did you always want to make a film version?

DC: I never thought about it until Terry approached me.

C: You and Zwigoff wrote the script - were you able to keep it close to your story, were you forced to make changes, or did you want to make changes anyway?

DC: The script, by choice, has very little to do with the comic. Nobody forced anything on us at any time.

C: How did you find screenplay writing different - as opposed to writing with drawing?

DC: You have to be much more direct and clear in a movie. Anything that is confusing or unintentionally ambiguous to the audience can completely derail a narrative and cause them to lose focus. In a comic, you have much more leeway to go off on tangents and do things that are not so linear, because the reader can absorb information at his own pace.

C: Everyone knows writers lose control after putting the pen down, but I heard that you got to spend a lot of time on the set. What was your impression of the film process?

DC: I was there for every stage of pre-production and was on set for every shot of the film. I was allowed to give my directions/notes to the actors, production designer, costume designer, etc. It was really the best possible experience for a writer, and if it comes out really bad I will freely accept my share of the blame.

C: With this and VELVET GLOVE film rumors going around, was there something that happened that made it easier to get the film started, not to mention finished?

DC: There was never any interest in a VELVET GLOVE film. That was just a rumor based on a comic I did. Basically, enough people really liked the script we wrote, including Thora Birch & co-producer John Malkovich, to get the thing made. It took a lot of luck and complicated, interminable negotiating.

C: Was it easy to place faith in others with your characters?

DC: Of course not, and nothing in the film is exactly how I envisioned it. It can be very frustrating to try to explain to, for example, a set decorator the specifics of what you're looking for, without having to do the entire job yourself. Still, more often than not, the actors and art department added nuances that I would never have imagined, and they all worked like dogs to get our (me & Terry's) vision on the screen, God bless 'em.

C: Which characters didn't make it into the film? I hope Weird Al and the guy from the personals are there.

DC: Both are there, as are the Satanists. Bob Skeetes didn't make the cut, however.

C: The situation (writer allowed access, money people not bearing down) is unique - do you want to make more films or will this always be a film that got lucky?

DC: I would definitely like to make more films, though I doubt any project could be as charmed as this one. Still, I'd love to put all my new-found film knowledge to use.

CINEMAD

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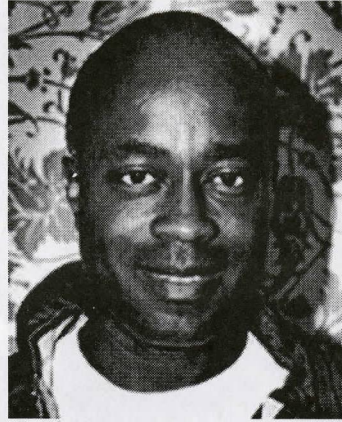
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Q AND NOT U

Charles Burnett



"When we studied film, it wasn't in order to be a 'director.' I wanted to be a filmmaker and a storyteller."

As current black cinema is buried in action clichés and overlong music videos, Charles Burnett's work has always been simply about people. His KILLER OF SHEEP (1977) was one of the first 50 films selected by the Library of Congress as a national treasure.

Comparable to the realistic style of European films made immediately after World War II, SHEEP effectively portrays the life and times of a black slaughterhouse worker and his family. With down-to-earth scenes that are noble, funny or both, SHEEP makes you feel a time and place that should be more distant but isn't. The main character works in an extreme place yet finds the poetry of the mundane in his own life — which his friends don't seem to understand.

SHEEP has had extremely limited distribution. It usually screens at schools and film festivals and has never been released on video. Burnett's later features are available but mostly ignored by mainstream press: the great TO SLEEP WITH ANGER (1990), starring and produced by Danny Glover; the relatively unknown NIGHTJOHN (1996), a made-for-TV slave era drama; and the poorly distributed THE GLASS SHIELD (1994).

You were born in Mississippi but you grew up in LA. Did you watch a lot of films? I watched a lot of old black and white films that came on TV. I never really thought about filmmaking when I was a kid, even when going through High School. I had an interest in photography but never had a chance to pursue it. It was an interesting time growing up in LA. It's strange, most of the kids I grew up with didn't think they would live to be 21. It was an attitude. ...The things we were doing were really stupid.

What did your parents do? My Father was in the service and my Mother was a nurse's aid. She was gone from 5 a.m. until late in the evening. So my brother and I grew up without a lot of parental guidance. We had a lot of freedom and took advantage of it.

Sort of what the kids are like in KILLER OF SHEEP. Yeah, not motivated at all. There were other kids who had a notion that you had to get not just a diploma, but go beyond that.

When did you graduate High School? Back in '63 or '64. I accompanied a friend to Los Angeles Community College to register. I had no real intentions of going because I thought I was about to be drafted. Anyway, I registered and learned that if you enrolled in college and took on a full load you could get a deferment from the draft. I was late in terms of realizing the importance of education, so it was at that point when my education began after High School.

But then you did electronics? I majored in electronics and got a degree and planned to go on to engineering. But there were a lot of people coming back (to school) from the electronic industry. They had to take refresher classes to keep up with what was going on. You get to know these guys and they were just not the kind of people I wanted to be in 20 years.

So when did you get into film? I got disenchanted with electronics so I decided to take creative writing. I had a wonderful teacher named Isabel Ziegler. We loved the class and hated to leave at the end of the two hours. I started going to movies because I was working at the public library downtown and in-between classes and work I would kill time going to the movies.

I was always interested in photography. The camera was the first thing that struck me.



I thought, that's what I want to do. UCLA and USC where the only two schools that were near and had a reputation. I tried to go to USC because it was closer but it was too costly; it was way beyond what I could afford. UCLA cost nothing and ended up being the best choice.

You did a lot of short films before SHEEP. That was one of the good things about school then. If you went to UCLA it was because you were in love with films, you were going to make films outside of the system. Hollywood was not open to newcomers and there were not people of color making films in Hollywood at the time. The attitude at UCLA was anti-Hollywood. It seemed everyone was in to some form of art and was using it as a means of expression.

Were they showing you a pretty wide range of movies? It was a great time to be in filmmaking. There was a world film culture so to speak. You felt like you were part of it. If Fellini made a film, we were waiting for it to come out. It wasn't like Fellini and other directors like Andrzej Wajda, Saytajit Ray and the rest were thought of as foreign. Films had to have a vision and something to say. Now you go to see Spielberg and most film classes are about Hollywood films. You have to search out where interesting films are shown.



NIGHTJOHN

want to appear as speaking for the black community. So the idea was to was to recreate events, conflicts and incidents that really happened and put them in a sequence that gave you a sense of a story. I was aware that I didn't have any answers to life's problems. So the only honest thing to do was to try to recreate a world, the community and its problems without coming to a resolution. The ending is that the process of living goes on and one has to try and struggle to maintain a sense of dignity and self and to endure. Life is positive as long as you stay in the fight.

When I was doing KILLER OF SHEEP, I was involved with a group of filmmakers who were making films about the working class. These films really didn't resemble in anyway the kinds of problems that people I knew faced. It was partly a response to this kind of filmmaking in which people who knew nothing about the subject act as spokesperson. I was trying to give the impression that what you would see was what you would see in the black community where I had lived. I was trying to create images that would speak for themselves and with that, somehow come up with a story that didn't feel like the plot was manipulated. It was to feel like a documentary.

The release date is listed as 1977, but it was actually edited and finished around '73 or '74, right? Yes. During

On KILLER OF SHEEP: "I was aware that I didn't have any answers to life's problems. So the only honest thing to do was to try to recreate a world, the community and its problems without coming to a resolution."

For the idea of KILLER OF SHEEP, basically you saw a slaughterhouse worker going to work. You wondered about how people could do that. The worker was a young kid, maybe a year or two younger than I was at the time. My car was not working for a while and I had to catch the bus to school and I would see this young boy who worked at a slaughterhouse. And he told me his story. A poor kid just going to work. You know, I could not imagine a boy doing that day in, day out, in any period of time without an effect. I eventually shot KILLER OF SHEEP at a slaughterhouse and it was enough to turn me into vegetarian. They used to hit the animals over the head with a sledgehammer.

Any idea what happened to that guy? No. I fixed my car so I stopped taking the bus.

The idea behind KILLER OF SHEEP was to try to tell a story without imposing my values. I mean, I didn't

that time, there wasn't any means of distributing independent films. You never thought you would or could make a living making film. You knew you were going to have to have a real job and do film on the side.

The film just got around by word of mouth. Pearl Bowser and Oliver Franklin had an organized tour of films. (SHEEP) went through a circuit. People saw it and invited it to their festivals. The Robert Flaherty Documentary Seminar was the first big event. International film festivals were looking to find what was new in independent films and they discovered my film.

All of a sudden black independent films became a topic. The question then: did they exist? A lot of them popped up because there were enough people who had made films in film schools. A lot of filmmakers came were New York and Los Angeles. Africa was producing a lot of black independent films. The French and Germans were strong in putting funds into producing.

So in money and in style - an European influence. I think it came out of the same sensibilities. The neo-realists had this thing about being disillusioned by the Fascist government. They wanted an honesty, someone to give a sense of reality and not a manipulative kind of art. I think at the time blacks who got involved in film were arguing the same thing and that is the

reason I got into films. A means of social change. At least to give an impression of what black life was like.

When we studied film, it wasn't in order to be a 'director.' I wanted to be a filmmaker and a storyteller. I think there is a difference. You can do the glamour and the parties - but that's not what it's about. We were brought up in a period when what you did made a difference. If you want to be a real director, you have to know how to write a story.

Now, most of the time you get scripts that have holes in them. I did a film called *THE WEDDING*. That was a nightmare. The script was awful. I thought if I brought up my criticism about it that they wouldn't accept me. It would be a nice way to get out of it. You don't want to make enemies in this business.

But they said okay. They started to make changes but then stopped. You spend all your time trying to make the story work - its like standing in the middle of a freeway and you're trying to write something important and all these cars are around, there's noise, you're dodging traffic (*laughs*). That's the situation they put you in. You have to make that script work. The actors would come up to me and say, "Charles, I don't understand this." I said, "I don't, either."

What do you do then? Certain things you have to fight for. The core of the film has to be right. I think you have to know what you need in a scene. You have line producers saying, "Do you really need this shot? Is there a way to doing it in one set up? Can you get out of the scene...."

In this business, the budget is the villain. It never reflects how much it really takes to make the film. At the end of the day, the line



Burnett directing: *ANNIHILATION OF FISH*; *THE GLASS SHIELD* (below)

producer and assistant director go on to other jobs but you're left with material to try to make sense out of it. You have to fight. Particularly if you're independent or starting out. You have to make sure what shots you need and you've got to get them.

[Burnett's second feature was the barely finished MY BROTHER'S WEDDING. After some shooting was com-

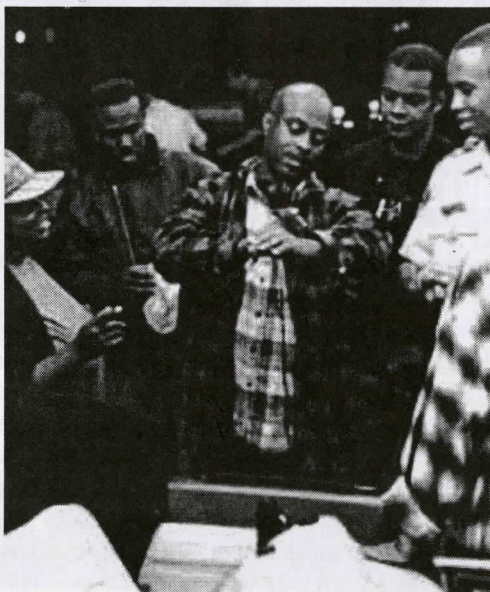
pleted, one of the main actors refused to continue working without getting more money. The blackmail continued with a loan for the actor. One day, the actor simply disappeared.]

After you had such weird experiences with the money and the actor in MY BROTHERS WEDDING, how do you not get discouraged from filmmaking? You do anything you can to survive - it's not a question of giving up. You have to find new avenues of doing it, sustain yourself and it is always possible.

Because BROTHERS WEDDING is still not finished, right? *[Burnett quickly edited a rough cut for German TV, the financiers of the project.]* I just got a dupe negative and now I can go back into it and do it right.

Maltin actually gives it three stars. Who?

Leonard Maltin. MY BROTHERS WEDDING?



Yeah. That makes me happy. I cringe when I look at it. I was in Boston with Ray Carney - he teaches film at Boston University. He was telling me that, "It is one of the best stories and worst acting I have ever seen in a movie." I could agree with him. It was just a chaotic thing. There were times you wanted to abandon it and start all over again. You couldn't, because you invested so much into it. If you have an actor that is holding you hostage from the beginning it is not going to get any better. Because as you get more footage he is going to have more and more leverage. So when he decided, "I want more money," you had to

give it to him. Then he just sort of disappeared.

What happened after he disappeared? We had to go find him. A couple of months later he claimed to be an ordained minister. I had to pay for him to fly back to L.A. He literally got off the plane in a vampire suit - a cape with a bible in his hand and a big cross hanging from his neck. So you know this guy has some problems. (smiles) You meet some interesting people in this business.

What did you see in black cinema that inspired you early on? I always wanted to tell stories long before I had seen any black independent films. Race movies (from the early 1900s through the 1940s), like those of Oscar Micheaux and Spencer Williams, later had a positive effect on me. I really admired what they did in their time. (Although) those were not the style of films I wanted to make. Particularly not like Micheaux's films, which dealt with black themes but his politics were screwed up.

No black independent films were being made when I was in school. It was like reinventing the wheel when we started. But there was always this dialogue about black



TO SLEEP WITH ANGER

much.

How much more realistic did you want to get? The little girl is very cute and stuff like that. There was one little girl that I was very interested in that had a different look to her, very shy, not outgoing and stuff. I would have had the environment a little harsher; it's rather pretty in a way.

GLASS SHIELD has realism with a little more sensationalism to it. Well, we wanted it to have the comic book look, the motif runs throughout. In the beginning it tells you that that is the kind of movie it is. It is how we perceive cops and stuff.

SHIELD has lots of good character actors in it. That always makes a film more interesting. M. Emmet Walsh is a pleasure to work with. Part of casting is choosing good people. Richard Anderson was very good to work with too. And with all their experience they never became obnoxious or anything, it's all about the work. They are so professional.

The funny thing is: when you have an interesting film, it's really hard to market. Studios want things that they know there is an identified market for. Rap things, for

"You can't say, 'We'll just put it out and the right audience will come to it.' That doesn't work. You have to have money and a passion to advertise. Then, because these movies don't do well, Hollywood takes it that people don't want to see these movies. For them, it's not never about a bad or lack of marketing strategy."

aesthetics and things like that. An ongoing debate about what is a black film.

Were there any offers to make exploitation stuff? There were offers. There were some students at UCLA that were doing that already. Chuck McNeil was doing it. Jamaa Fanaka, who did the PENITENTIARY series, started there. People don't take him seriously but he is a very smart guy.

Was NIGHT JOHN a good experience? It came together very nicely because I thought Disney wanted to Disney-ize it but they didn't. They told it like it was. Although it still has a kind of Disney flavor to it. You could have made it more realistic, but I don't know if people would have enjoyed it as

instance, they know a younger audience will come to. When we did GLASS SHIELD it was a problem because Miramax wanted to change it to more rap and gangster stuff. That's not what the movie was about. So we saw how to market the film differently.

TO SLEEP WITH ANGER was the same way. We had an argument: was it a comedy or a drama or what? You have to put money into marketing. You can't say, "We'll just put it out and the right audience will come to it." That doesn't work. You have to have money and a passion to advertise. Then, because these movies don't do well, Hollywood takes it that people don't want to see these movies. For them, it's never about a bad or lack of marketing strategy.

Especially with **ANGER** and **NIGHTJOHN**, you have spiritual characters. But they're not overbearing. I'm from the South. I was always around my Grandmother. There was this constant battle of someone trying to save your soul. Just growing up and then becoming a writer and director you begin to study people. The idea with films is focusing on people. You get to see what you can't see normally. Like still photography. Capturing whatever you think is special about another person. I've always looked at photography as able to do that. You see people every day and ignore them. But you see them on film, or in a still, you can really create this aura, this meaning, an understanding of this person. It's very nice.

Burnett's newest feature, THE ANNIHILATION OF FISH (1999), is an unusual love story consistent with the director's flair for capturing people. Although it stars James Earl Jones and Lynn Redgrave, the film still waiting for a distribution deal.

FILMS BY CHARLES BURNETT

As Director:

Finding Buck McHenry (2000) (TV)
The Annihilation of Fish (1999)
Selma, Lord, Selma (1999) (TV)
The Wedding (1998) (TV)
Nightjohn (1996) (TV)
The Glass Shield (1994)
America Becoming (1991)
To Sleep with Anger (1990)
My Brother's Wedding (1984)
Killer of Sheep (1977)

Short films:

Olivia's Story (1999)
Dr. Endesha Ida Mae Holland (1998)
The Final Insult (1997)
When It Rains (1995)
The Horse (1973)
Several Friends (1969)

As Cinematographer:

Crocodile Conspiracy (1986)
Bless Their Little Hearts (1984) (also writer)
A Different Image (1982)
Bush Mama (1976)

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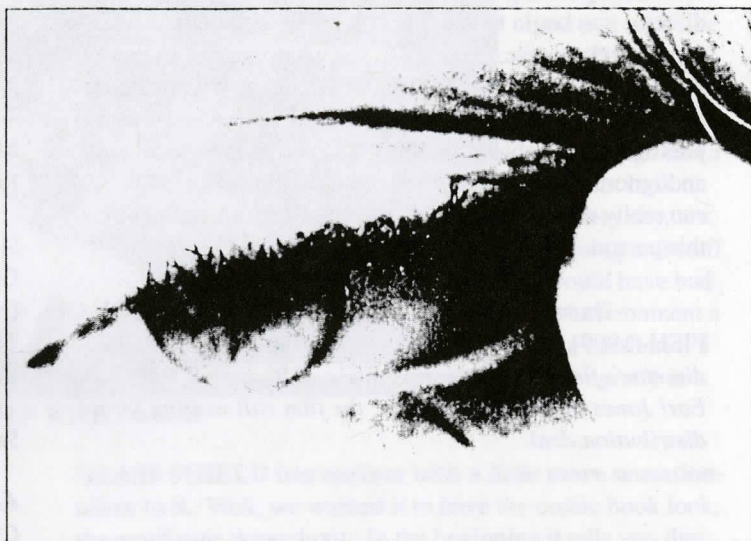
SHELTER FROM DEADLY INDIEWOOD FALLOUT

Scott MacDonald

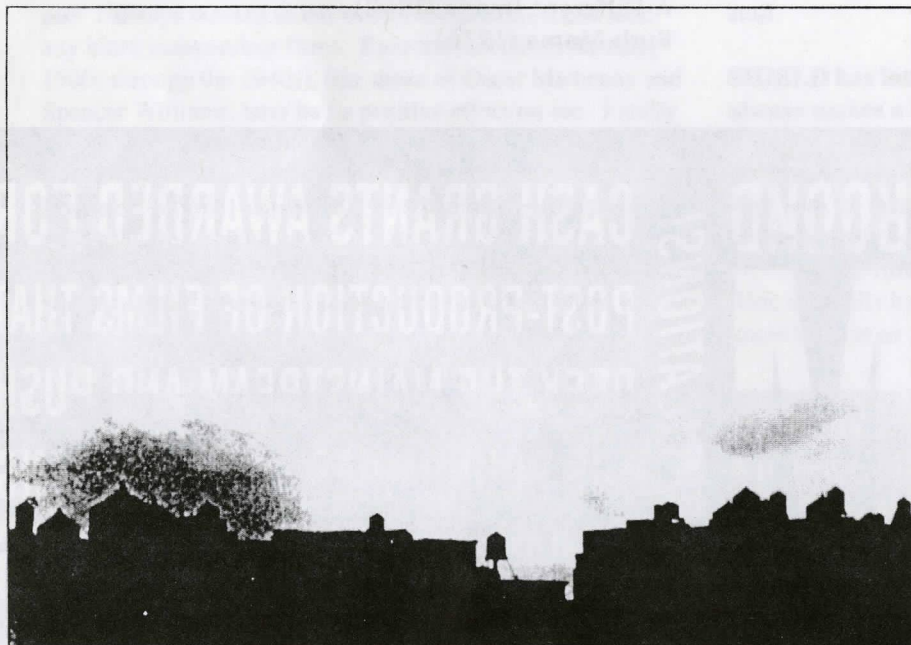
A Critical Cinema 3

Interviews with Independent Filmmakers

A Critical Cinema 3 continues Scott MacDonald's compilation of personal interviews and public discussions with major contributors to independent filmmaking and film awareness. An informative exchange with Amos Vogel, whose Cinema 16 Society drew American filmgoers into a broader sense of film history, is followed by interviews reflecting a wide range of approaches to filmmaking. Sally Potter discusses her popular feature, *Orlando*, in relation to the experimental work that preceded it, and Canadian independent John Porter argues compellingly for small-gauge, Super-8mm filmmaking. Ken Jacobs discusses the "Nervous System" apparatus with which he transforms old film footage into new forms of motion picture art; Jordan Belson describes his Vortex Concerts, ancestors of modern laser light shows; and Elias Merhige talks about going beneath the "rational structure of meaning" in *Begotten*.



A Critical Cinema 3 presents independent cinema as an international and multiethnic phenomenon. MacDonald interviews filmmakers from Sweden, France, Italy, Austria, Armenia, India, the Philippines, and Japan and examines the work of African Americans, European Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics. He provides an introductory overview of each interviewee, as well as detailed film/videographies and selected bibliographies. With its predecessors, *A Critical Cinema* (California, 1988) and *A Critical Cinema 2* (California, 1992), this is the most extensive, in-depth exploration of independent cinema available in English.



ALSO BY SCOTT MacDonald

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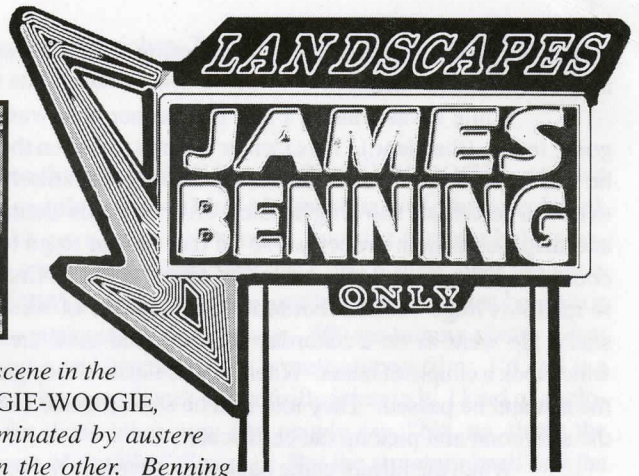
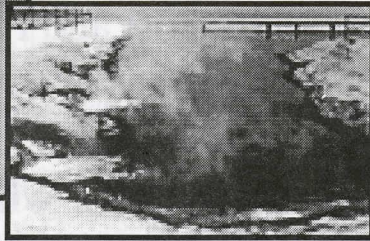
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Film
World



by Tom Vick When James Benning appeared on the avant-garde film scene in the early 1970's, his first three films, 8½ X 11, 11 X 14 and ONE WAY BOOGIE-WOOGIE, must have seemed like breaths of fresh air blowing into a scene dominated by austere Structuralist experiments on the one hand and trippy abstraction on the other. Benning combined Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton's Structuralist investigations into off-screen space, sound-image relationships and cinematic time with an interest in narrative and a deep sensitivity to composition, color, light and the landscape of his native Wisconsin.

In the late 1970s and into the '80s, Benning lived in New York, where his work became at the same time more personal and more concerned with universal themes of history, memory and death. While all of his New York films are interesting, the most successful are AMERICAN DREAMS, which juxtaposes Benning's remarkable collection of Hank Aaron memorabilia with the disturbed writings of Arthur Bremer, the man who shot George Wallace, and LANDSCAPE SUICIDE, which looks for the roots of two famous murders in the landscapes where they occurred and the actual court testimony of the killers.

After moving to California in the '90's, Benning made a fascinating and deeply personal document of a cross-country motorcycle trip, NORTH ON EVERS. He then turned his attention to landscape and history, making a series of films – DESERET, FOUR CORNERS, UTOPIA and EL VALLEY CENTRO – that are among his best.

Benning lives in a small town nestled in the desert hills near where he teaches at the California Institute of the Arts. On one side, Los Angeles suburbia, with its cookie-cutter housing developments and mammoth shopping malls, creeps closer with each year. On the other, the desert stretches out towards the Central Valley, the subject of his latest film. It's somehow an appropriate place for a man who has always kept one foot in the world of the avant-garde and the other in the life and landscape of everyday America. I visited him on a hot evening in July. We sat in the backyard with a couple of beers and I turned on my tape recorder. I started by asking him what he thought about looking back over his 30-year career, but Benning had something he wanted to get off his chest.

BENNING: I think I want to talk about money first. I've been talking a little bit with Jon Jost (profiled in the last issue of *Cinemad*) and I think he's thinking about money too. When I made EL VALLEY CENTRO, all these issues about money came up because the valley is so much about money.

When I went to film the shot of the crop duster, I went to rent a plane. Because when filmed crop dusters (without asking) they would all shake their fists at me and I couldn't just do it. I couldn't steal their image because they were afraid I would get hurt.

So I ended up having to rent a crop duster. They put water in the tank instead of chemicals - although they had just sprayed with chemicals, so the tank was probably still filled with it (*laughs*). When I went to rent the airplane, the guy who



EL VALLEY CENTRO

owned the place liked to drink in the morning so he showed up about three hours late.

While I was waiting I met this farmer who was also going to hire (the plane). This farmer told me that even though he was hiring someone to do this crop dusting, he himself had to have a certificate showing he knew how to handle chemicals and dispose of them properly. To do that he had to go to the county courthouse and take a test. To take the test he first had to read this huge booklet that took him a couple of weeks to study. He went in on a Saturday morning and took the test, which took a couple of hours. When he was finished they graded the test and he passed. They told him he should come back in the afternoon and pick up the certificate.

When the farmer came back they gave him the certificate and he asked them, "Well, how much is that? What does it cost?" They told him it was free to have the certificate. At which point he told me that he completely blew up and was infuriated that this certificate was free, which was confusing to me because I would be happy if something was free (*laughs*).

I didn't ask him why he was infuriated that he had to pay money. But later it occurred to me, as it occurred to me over and over while making the film, that as far as the people who were making the money in the valley – those big corporations and the richer farmers – were concerned, nothing was really worth any value if there wasn't a dollar amount attached to it. So it became apparent to me that that's why he was so infuriated - that he'd studied two weeks and taken a day to take this test to buy the thing and he didn't have to buy it after all.

So that's what I've been thinking about lately: money. It just doesn't exist for this kind of filmmaking that I'm engaging in. Which never bothered me until lately. I've worked really hard for a long time and I don't have any money. From the little bit of corresponding I've been doing with Jon Jost I think he's come to the same conclusion: that as hard as he worked, as many films as he made and as many showings that he had he never really accumulated any wealth from that enormous amount of work.

Of course, I have a teaching job so I have health insurance and a steady income. But I work at least as hard or harder making films and that gives me very little money towards those kinds of things.

Jost's solution at this point is to somewhat turn his back on making films, (instead) making videos that can be appreciated by an art system. Where you already have young filmmakers like Matthew Barney, who's connected to a rich gallery in New York that markets his work and in fact raises money and sells his films

as objects before they're even made. Which is just unbelievable to me.

Jost and I don't get the appreciation for our work because money isn't connected to it, and I think that's what actually bothers me more. It's this idea that money has to be attached to something for it to be worthwhile, like the farmer. I've talked

to people like Scott MacDonald and David James who write about these kinds of works, and they don't make money either. They've been banging their heads against the wall.

Has marketing just taken over everything? The thing about Barney is that part of the art, from what I understand, is the marketing of it. It's not so much the film as much as it is everything surrounding it and the way he sells himself. Yeah, I mean, that in itself disgusts me, too. Perhaps Jon Jost is wanting to do this because he's fed up with being broke also. He has a child now and it would be nice to have better health insurance when you have a family, that kind of thing. But perhaps it's just infuriation with what's happened with our kind of filmmaking. It's not just now. If you look at Hollis Frampton, who did such incredible work, he's known because he's done writing. Or Brakhage even, they're not known like they should be.

It's interesting because people my age look back at the sixties and seventies as this golden age when there were all these filmmakers working and making films every year and somehow surviving and able to make feature-length 16mm films, which now is almost impossible. I guess I've always had the impression that there was always some way to scrape

by and make a living then from just doing the work. Was that true then and not true now? Well, it was a lot cheaper to make films back then. Film stock was cheaper. Of course wages were a lot less but I think relatively it was even cheaper to make films back then. Mainly because there was much more 16mm film-making then. The quality of the service was better. The projection was better. There are a lot of depressing issues



(laughs). The quality of 16mm projection today is horrendous. You work very hard to make an image exactly the way you want to present it and then it's projected half out of focus, the sound system's bad and they scratch the prints.

I would guess that's one of the reasons Jost went to video. But you're not going to do that. No. Anyway, I still like making films and I'm really not that poor (laughs).

Any other thoughts on getting started making films? When I got started, none of these were issues for me, and really they're not today either. When I make a film, it's the

passion to make an image or to say something. When I began I knew very little about

what was going on. I bought an 8mm Bolex. I just kind of pointed it, zoomed with it, took it in and out of focus.... I did a lot of things I thought were pretty cool until I exhausted that. I thought, "What can I really do with this now that I'm done playing?" And it took years to really find what I wanted to talk about. I started basically as an image maker and then slowly I realized I should be saying some things, too, that are important to me.

8 1/2 X 11 and 11 X 14 were kind of the first films that got you attention. And I remember you making a comment at one point that after you made 11 X 14 people wanted you to make the same film over and over again. If you have any kind of success people expect you to make something along those lines. 11 X 14 wasn't really my first film but it's considered that because it was my first feature film or first ambitious work and it was very successful. They haven't seen anything you've done before so going from nothing to that is a huge leap. So when you do something else, it's not that they want you to make that film again but they would like to see that same giant leap again, which is of course impossible to do.

Those early works came out of myself finding a structure to look at what I thought film was: screen space and off-screen space, sound-image relationships. Then to add some kind of narrative content to that as a container to do those experiments in so a general audience can at least try to figure what the narrative is. Even though it was so bleak and difficult to find out and somewhat frustrating, it still was game-like and fun and somewhat rewarding. You could make up your own narrative and then those other things

make the film richer. That was a beginning attempt to make form and content kind of equal and balanced and play off each other.

So then there was ONE WAY BOOGIE WOOGIE, which a lot of people consider kind of a masterpiece. Actually I think 11 X 14 got a lot more attention, and that film got hidden because it was made right after 11 X 14. I think over the years (ONE WAY) surfaced as being quite a good film just because it was so rigorous in its structure. 60 one-minute shots. I just showed it in Vienna and it's a pretty funny film. I'd call it a comedy because there's a lot of silly jokes in it. I kind of apologize for those jokes now and people say, "No, no, that's the best part of the film" (laughs). But the structure itself and the framing and the attention to color and movement I think are quite extraordinary. The jokes are another thing.

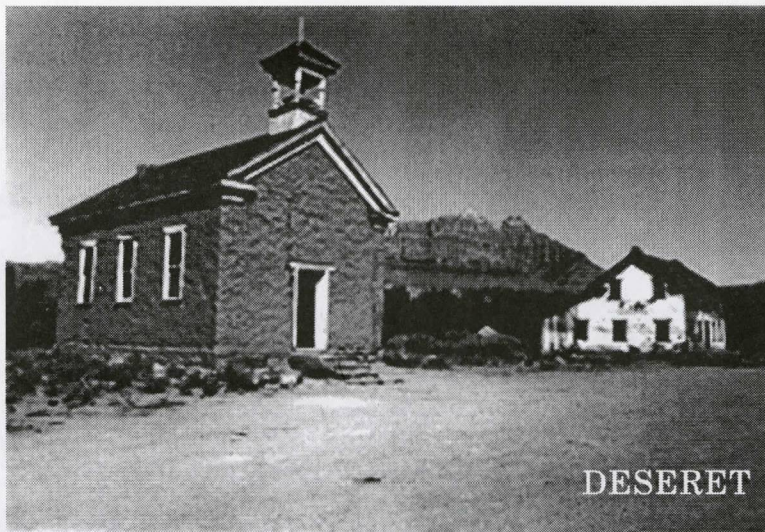
After that is when you went to New York. How do you feel about those films? The first film I made in New York was HIM AND ME, which came out of this friend of mine dying. I was trying to work through this tragedy and to try to understand what death was about. So it's a difficult film for me still to watch.

I don't think New York's a really good place for a filmmaker. Well, it is for a little while because you can make a film on your block and you can make a film inside your house, but you readily use up all the possibilities. And then after that it gets difficult. If you have to go five blocks away it's more dangerous to take a camera that far (laughs). So the second film I made – actually the next couple – I made in my loft. One was on an animation stand in a dark room. That was AMERICAN DREAMS. And then the short film O PANAMA: most of that was shot in the loft and a few scenes within a block away.

GRAND OPERA is all over the place. I think I lived in three or four different places during the making of it. Because of that, the ideas jumped around a lot, and I was purposely interested in making a film like that. So it was truly an experimental film, where the other ones aren't. It's probably

my least favorite film because it's so self-reflexive and it refers to other filmmakers. But I haven't seen it in so long, that I might like it again.

HIM AND ME came out of a written script. I wanted to make a film where you didn't know you were watching a narrative film until the very end. So it jumped around too, and then in the very last part of the film there's a woman on a telephone who talks about what happened to



her. It's about this friend who died. So it's referring to what happened to me in my real life. And when she talks on this telephone, everything she says refers back to all the shots you saw before, which are very disjunctive and not connected at all. By this telephone conversation retrospectively that whole beginning part of the film becomes incredibly narrative, where you didn't know you were even watching a narrative film to begin with.

And then what led you back to more rigorously structured, less personal work? I guess it just happened. I made *O PANAMA*, which was based on short stories by Burt Barr. It was a short, 28 minute film. So that, again, is more of a narrative film.

But then I did *AMERICAN DREAMS*, which was made inside the loft on an animation stand. That was very rigorously structured, according to the years that Henry Aaron played baseball and to the political events that I thought effected my life over those years.

That film I always liked right from the beginning, and its structure was so strong that I think that might have been the turning point to lead me back to structure in a much more strong way.

After that I made *LANDSCAPE SUICIDE*. It's two stories that have exactly the same structures. In the first one you hear a confession, then you see the landscapes where that particular murder occurred. In the second one you see the landscapes first and then you see the trial transcript performed by an actor. So you have an opposite experience. In the first half you get the social coding of the landscape and then you see the landscape itself. In the second you see the landscape first and you think, "What could have happened here?" Then you get this coding of the crime through the exact language of the people who performed those crimes.

A lot of those films from that period are also about death and crime. Were these things that were just on your mind at the time? I started from *HIM AND ME*, from this friend dying, then on my own trying to investigate what I thought death was and that led to the violence of extreme death.

After *LANDSCAPE SUICIDE* I made *USED INNOCENCE*, which again has a looser structure. But again, it's based on a true murder story, a person who was convicted of murder and claimed she was innocent. That film I haven't shown very much, but I just looked at it recently and I think it's quite good too. I should show that again. Maybe I was ahead of my own thinking. I also exposed myself as being

somewhat pathetic in the film, so it's difficult (*laughs*) to look at. But now I'm not afraid of being pathetic (*laughs*).

That's one of the most interesting things about that, and also *NORTH ON EVERS*. There's a kind of candor. I remember there's a part in *NORTH ON EVERS* where you talk about fantasizing about the truck stop hookers and stuff. That's the kind of thing most people wouldn't admit about themselves and put into a film. Yeah. The text I worked on for like nine months, and even though it may seem that I'm candid, it's pretty crafted and I still look pretty good in it. I probably should have said more. Although then maybe it wouldn't be watchable. When I watch it now I think I admitted things but I didn't let myself really scrape my face against the ground, you know. I come up smiling.

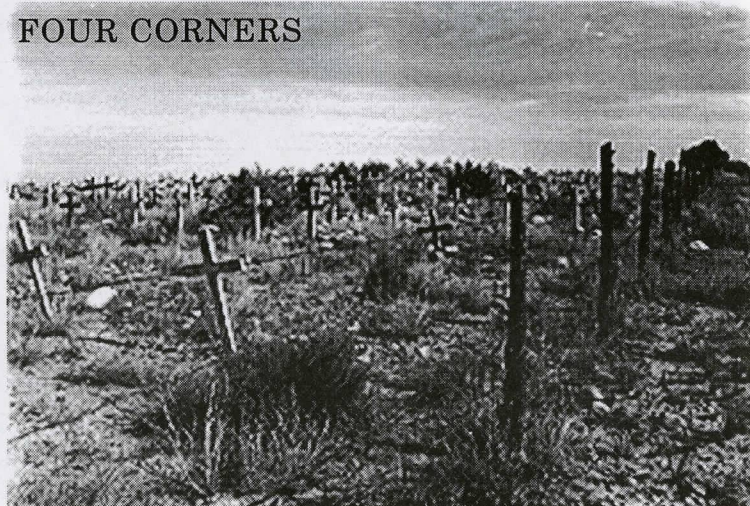
In a way it's kind of good to pull back. There's a line you can cross where it becomes embarrassingly personal. But I think most of those stories are metaphors for something much larger than just one man's pain or grief or fun or desire. I hope it gets beyond that and becomes much more universal.

Then we come to *DESERET*. The question that that movie always leads me to is what goes into composing a shot? In a lot of your films, what makes them compelling is the strong compositions of the shots. Even if you're not watching the narrative, they're pleasurable just to watch. All the films I made in the nineties, starting with *NORTH ON EVERS*, I think have very strong images but also lots of content. You can't possibly stay with all of it through the whole film. You drift to looking or listening or thinking. They're very demanding films to watch.

W i t h *DESERET*, as far as the compositions, the whole film is shot in Utah. I think there are 600 and some shots, maybe more. Editing it was really fun because I had lots of choices to make. I just watched it again. I was amazed at how fast it goes. I kept thinking, "I want to see these shots longer. Who made this film (*laughs*)?"

Well it's also a function

FOUR CORNERS



of the structure again. It perceptively accelerates, but it sneaks up on you. The images themselves, I just drove around and when things appeared interesting to me I'd jump out of the car and I would make the image. I don't know how to describe how I make an image. When I look through the viewfinder I know I'm going to do it or I know I'm not. It's just there. Like I said in Germany I'm very much affected by fascist architecture and symmetry.

Did that go over well? Well, somebody told me that the translation was changed (*laughs*). But I'm very serious about that. Especially in Berlin, the architecture was thought of as being very monumental at the time it was being built and now the scale is like two-thirds size. It looks small, but it still has this strength from its symmetry. I guess when I look through a lens I don't necessarily look for symmetrical things because sometimes asymmetrical things are very strong too. I look and I see it and I say, okay, that's a good frame, you know. I don't know how to teach anybody how to do that. You have to know what you like.

I guess it's called a "good eye." But I think it's much more than that. You have good feet, you walked around a lot. Or you've spent some time thinking about it.

When I arranged the shots I arranged them according to the text. *DESERET* uses 94 texts from the *New York Times* from 1851 to the present when it was made. So the actual syntax of journalistic language changes over the 150 years where it becomes much more terse as the language becomes modern. I was cutting one shot per each sentence, and since the sentences were longer in 1851 than they are in 1995 the film automatically speeds up.

I also have a shot between each story and I made each of those get a frame or two shorter. It's very unperceivable, but it speeds up too. The whole film is designed to go "zoom." And I think that happens.

I had a funny experience when I showed it in Vienna. Some of the people said they couldn't even understand the language in the beginning because of the syntax, and it took them a while to actually hear it. When I was watching it, I felt that myself. Once Utah becomes a state and the stories are much more pragmatic and they're much more about how Utah becomes the perfect right-

wing model for America, that language becomes so clear and easy to follow. Where the earlier language that was about taking power away from Mormons and all of that, is maybe harder to understand because that history is further away. And if you don't know the history, the actual context of that story might be more difficult.

Where the context of some environmental crisis in 1990, I think we all can understand. Some massacre that happened in 1857 where the Mormons dressed up as Indians is difficult for us to engage in. I like the film because of that. I think it's very much about language and about journalistic language, as much as it is about Utah. It's also about creating a history written at the time that it happens, that happens to have the bias of the *New York Times* and the bias of an Eastern establishment looking at Utah, which is 2000 miles away. Rather than looking at a history that has the bias of the person who won the war that writes the history. All histories are biased. I really like this particular history because it's a bias of the times and the *New York Times* (*laughs*).

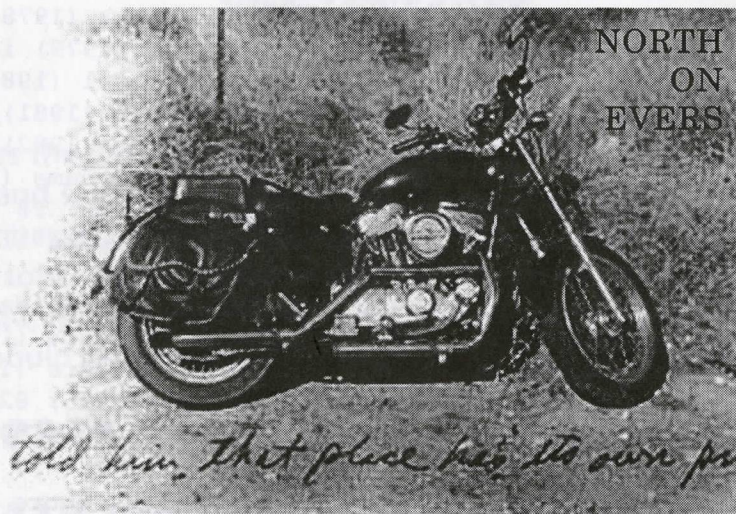
And then there's FOUR CORNERS. How do you feel about that film? *FOUR CORNERS* is four stories that I wrote. Three of them basically deal with American Indian history and Anasazi culture. Indians from before Christ to about the 1500's, and then also Navajos.

Then the stories also deal with present day history of poor whites in Farmington, New Mexico and their relationship to Navajos in Farmington. A comparison is made to my own history of growing up in Milwaukee in a poor white neighborhood that's next to a black ghetto that's kind of swallowing up the white neighborhood. Exactly the same kind of blind prejudice exists in Milwaukee as it did in Farmington.

It's really an attempt to place my own personal history in a much larger context. It actually functions very much like *LANDSCAPE SUICIDE* because you have stories and then you have landscapes. I think *FOUR CORNERS* and *EL VALLEY CENTRO* are the two films I really like at this point, that I'm very happy with.

Not UTOPIA? *UTOPIA* I like a lot just because I was bold enough to steal somebody else's soundtrack. I stole Richard Dindo's soundtrack from *THE BOLIVIAN DIARY OF CHE GUEVARA* and then cut images of Southern California to that film, both to change the tone of his soundtrack and then also to bring revolution to Southern California, where it truly belongs.

Because everything that exists here, especially in the farming



communities, is a reversed kind of imperialism that Che was against. Rather than the US going to Central and South America to exploit the land and the people there, Southern California farming communities import people from Central and South America and Mexico to use them as cheap labor. So you have this opposite, kind of reversed imperialism. The economy of California desires that. It really relies on illegal labor.

I like all my films in the nineties. Actually I've been looking at my films a lot with the retrospective I had in LA, and this one currently in Vienna, and then I had one in New York. So I've been having to consider all of my work together. There's only a few that I wish I hadn't made, and a lot of people like those more than anything else. GRAND OPERA and HIM AND ME I have trouble with. Maybe USED INNOCENCE.

So you've been living in California for how long now? Thirteen years. **And it took you about ten years to finally make a California film.** Yeah. I just felt that I didn't know it. I had to learn what it was about. I'm still an outsider when I go to the Central Valley to make a film about farm work, even though in the sixties for a short period of time I worked with migrant workers in Colorado. That's hardly knowing what it's like to be a migrant worker today in California. I know it was difficult back then and I'm sure it's as difficult today.

But the newest film, for me it really presents a portrait of that valley, at least as I see it, as honest as I can be. I think it's as pure cinema as I can make. That's how strongly I feel about it.

I thought it was such a demanding film, being 35 shots that are each two and a half minutes long with no text, just with ambient sound. I thought audiences might not be able to deal with that. It's a good example of how films shouldn't always aim at the lowest common denominator, that audiences are a lot smarter than you think. People that have never seen a film like that before stay for the whole film and come up afterwards and say they were quite moved by it. That's exciting for me; to reach audiences that I really don't have.

In festivals and places like Berlin and Vienna, what kind of responses do you get? When I first started making films and I shot 11 X 14, which I think is a rather accessible film now, in 1977 if I kept half the audience I would be happy. People just didn't know what to do with the film. But I think now, some of those ideas have trickled down even into more mainstream filmmaking. Like David Lynch's new film, where the takes are a bit longer and they're not afraid to look at things. So my audiences, I think, are more generous with staying now.

At Berlin the last show of EL VALLEY CENTRO had 1100 people and nobody left. It was a sold out theater. I came back and everybody was there and I was completely shocked. I was afraid to go back to talk because I thought the place would be half empty, because at film festivals so many times people go just to sample what it might be and then leave. But it kept the whole audience. I was in Austin, Texas and had 300 people I think at the Alamo Theater there, and they all stayed. Although Austin has a great film community.

I still show at places that have a certain kind of film

culture and that brings about a certain kind of film viewer, and it's much more homogenous than one would think around the country. Even though I think we have little effect, **there is an audience that's been created around the world for it. Be it small, it actually is happening.** So all that stuff I was saying in the beginning, maybe large numbers aren't that important. As long as you have a handful that are really engaged, it's quite exciting.

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

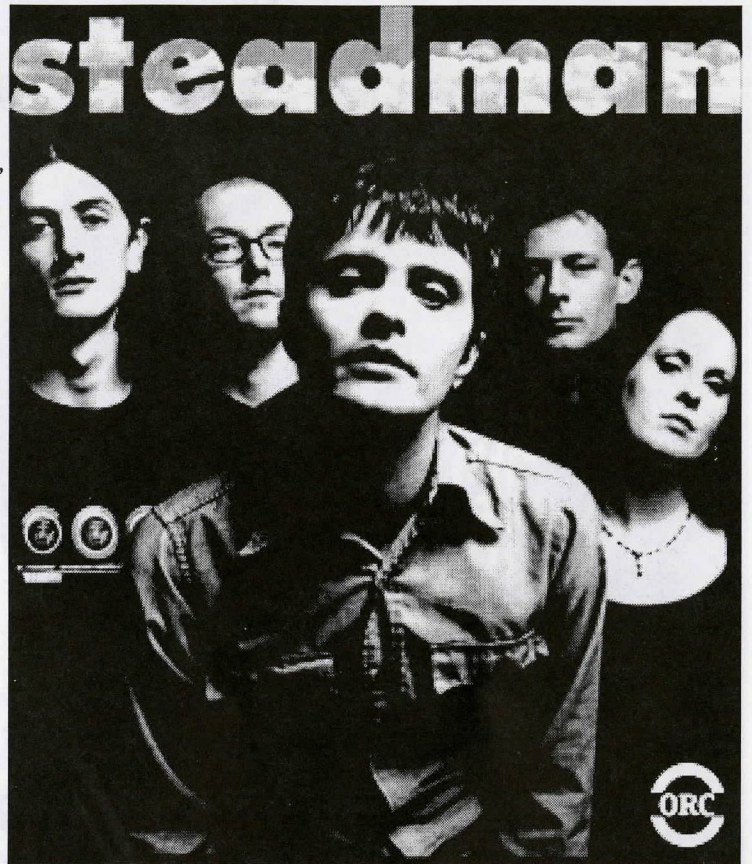
FILMS BY JAMES BENNING:

- did you ever hear that cricket sound? (1971) 1 min
- Art Hist. 101 (1972) 17 min
- Ode to Musak (1972) 3 min
- Time and a Half (1972) 17 min
- Michigan Avenue (made with Bette Gordon) (1973) 6 min
- 57 (1973) 7 min
- Honeyland Road (1973) 6 min
- I-94 (with Bette Gordon) (1974) 3 min
- 8 1/2 x 11 (1974) 33 min
- Gleem (1974) 2 min
- An Erotic Film (1975) 11 min
- 9-1-75 (1975) 22 min
- Saturday Night (1975) 3 min
- 3 minutes on the dangers of film recording (1975) 3 min
- The United States of America (with Bette Gordon) (1975) 27 min
- Chicago Loop (1976) 8.5 min
- A to B (1976) 2 min
- 11 x 14 (1976) 83 min
- One Way Boogie Woogie (1977) 60 min
- Four Oil Wells (1978) installation
- Grand Opera (1978) 90 min
- Oklahoma (1979) installation
- Double Yodel (1980) installation
- Last Dance (1981) installation
- Him and Me (1982) 88 min
- American Dreams (1983) 56 min
- Panama (1985) 28 min
- Pascal's Lemma (1985) computer installation
- Landscape Suicide (1986) 95 min
- Used Innocence (1988) 95 min
- North on Evers (1991) 87 min
- Deseret (1995) 82 min
- Four Corners (1997) 80 min
- Utopia (1998) 93 min
- El Valley Centro (1999) 87.5 min

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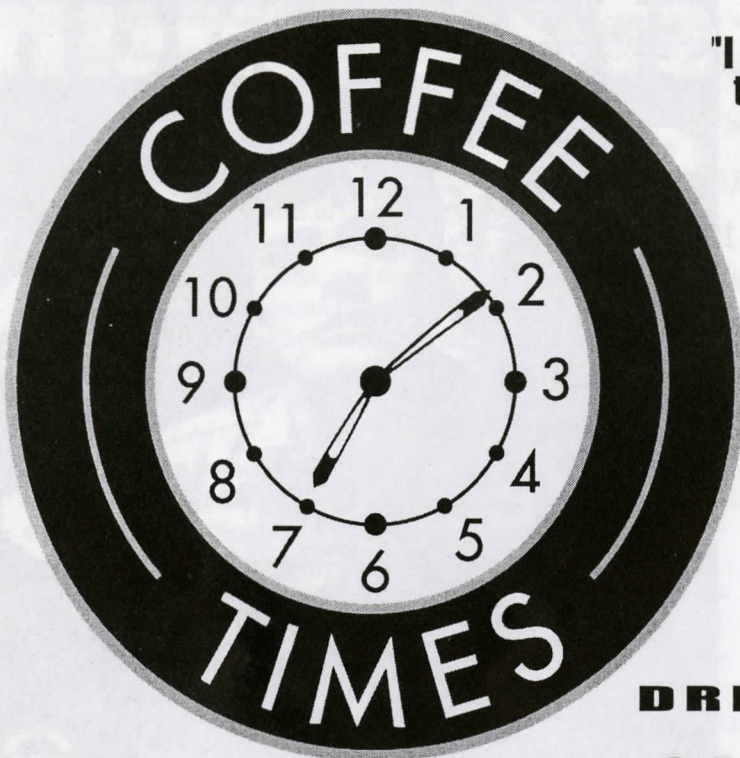
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Canyon Cinema announces the publication of a major new catalog of avant garde/experimental films and video tapes for rent and sale. This 500 page volume, Canyon Cinema Catalog 2000 (#8), contains 285 illustrations and describes more than 3500 works of cinematic art. A limited number of this volume are being printed and sold. There is a charge of \$35 plus \$5 postage for domestic orders, California residents add \$2.98 sales tax (rates for Europe, Canada, Alaska and Hawaii are higher). Checks for this amount should be sent directly to:

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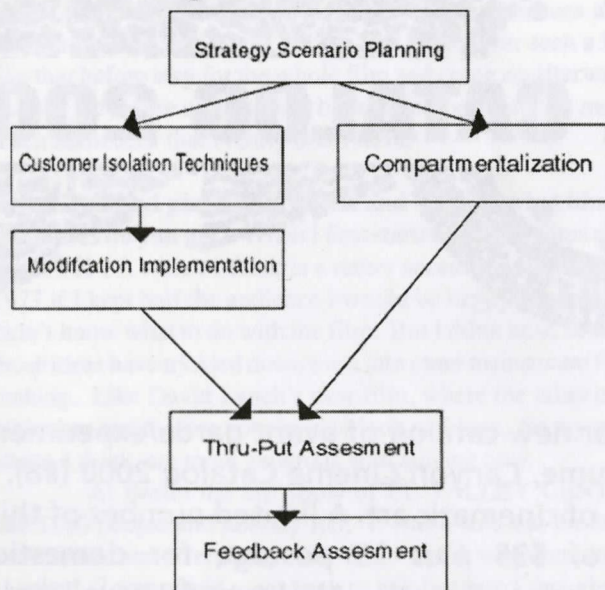
**"I didn't drink coffee until
this place opened up."**

-Mike Plante, Cinemad

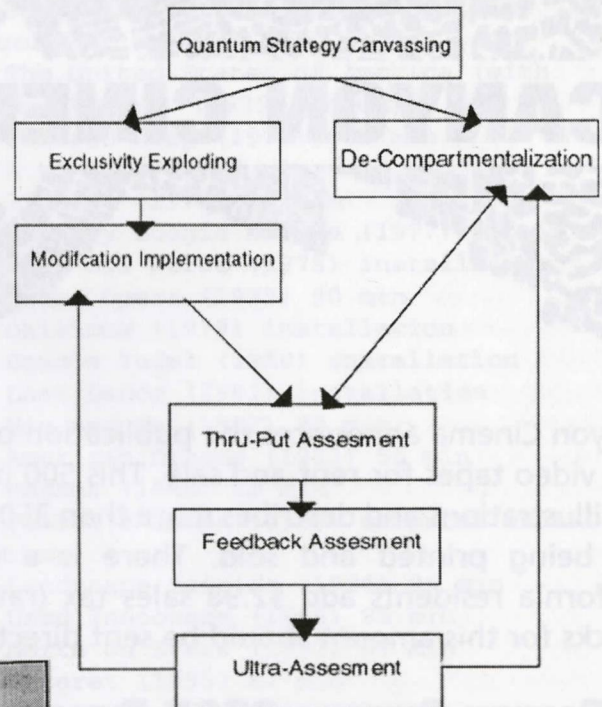
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For a while in the small town I lived in, my Dad knew a stunt man that was taking some time off from making movies. I remember meeting Jeff Jensen once - I was in a body cast and he told me a story about breaking his foot performing a stunt. I felt better. Recently I heard he was still making movies and television shows - but he didn't appear on MacGyver. Instead he's done bigger things like directing and running down Hoover Dam....

Did you grow up watching films? Yeah, I did. I actually went to USC to play football. My Dad was a pro football player and I wanted to play ball. When I blew my knee out for the fifth time, I realized that football was not an option. I moved to Hawaii, tried to figure out what I was going to do with my life. I was kind of goofing off, played tennis, got my pilot's license. I had raced motorcycles for Yamaha and Husqvarna in the mid-70s and had gotten my SAG card by doing motorcycle commercials. I never thought anything more about it.

It was after USC that you were riding? Actually I was riding all through High School. I turned pro when I was 16, raced the big off road races like the Baha 1000. I raced both cars and bikes.

So I'm going up to the hotel in Hawaii where they always used to shoot *Hawaii Five-O*. One day I am watching this stunt guy trying to do this thing on a motorcycle - riding it up stairs on a street bike. It's not easy but it is not that hard. He's having a heck of a time. I'm going, "Wow, I could do that." That put the idea of doing stunt work in my head.

I ended up getting hired on *Five-O*, then moved back to Hollywood to start pursuing (stunt work). I am six-foot-five, 215 pounds. There was no one who could do the bike stuff my size, so my career just took off quickly.

I was voted into the Stunt Mans' Association in 1984. At the time I was the youngest member in the group, there was only a hundred plus members worldwide. In 1985 I was voted into the Hollywood Stunt Mans' Hall of Fame. But from day one I would look at the director and say, "That's what I want to do."

So stunt work was my way into the business. After I got to



Hollywood I went back to USC and their cinema department. I studied acting, directing and scriptwriting, that sort of stuff (and) got in the DGA.

The mid-80s for me was a stunt man's dream, working on *The Fall Guy*, *Knight Rider* and *T.J. Hooker*, all those shows. I would work two or three jobs a day; it was amazing just bouncing all over the place. Then I did more coordinating. I directed second unit on *RAMBO 3*, the U.S. portion, in 1988. Later on that year I coordinated for Brian DePalma on *CASUALTIES OF WAR* over in Thailand.

From there, things just kept building by word of mouth and reputation and all of that sort of stuff. I also formed a driving team with Bobby Unser Jr. We do probably 50% of all the car and truck commercials you see out there, that's either myself or Bobby or one of our drivers in it.

I remember the story about doing WEIRD SCIENCE and breaking your foot. I was the guy with the half-metal face that rides the bike into the party. Because of my size I would get a lot of parts like that. I had a kind of baby face, I didn't look mean. But I would always get (the role of) thug number 2, a couple lines of dialogue and then fall down the stairs.

WEIRD SCIENCE was a fun one but I broke my foot wheeling through the door into the kitchen. With one eye covered it kind of throws you off a little bit. To fit the handle bars through the door I had to pop the front end up, turn the front wheel and hit it with the turn, get the bars through and then straighten it back out. On the first take I didn't have it quite lined up right and my foot got jammed between the foot peg and the door. It just ripped me off the bike and I broke those little bones on the top of my right foot.

So my foot would swell up in the boot. Going home, I would keep my boot on because it would work like a cast. Then yell and scream as I pulled my boot off. Ice it all night, then put my boot on real quick in the morning and let it swell up inside. Because I still had something like three weeks to go on it.

Were you thinking about the injuries when getting into the stunt business? When you have that bad of a knee and the average career for a NFL player is 3 or 4 years, I probably would have ended up in the movie business eventually.

It has actually been safer than football, too. I've been banged up through the years but only hospitalized one night. In *RAISING ARIZONA* I did all the motorcycle stuff

for Tex Cobb. Did a big jump - when he first appears. He goes through this wall of fire, comes down this dirt road and does this huge jump over the camera. It was 127 feet. When you jump over a camera you always give it a little extra just to make sure you are clear.

I had no helmet and no sleeves, doubling the actor. Everything went great, flying through the air perfectly, landing perfectly straight, suspension compressed. (In the raw footage) you could see everything working perfectly and then the next frame you see my front wheel explode, spokes flying out, threw me over the bars at 60 plus miles an hour. Thrown probably 15 or 18 feet in the air. I spent a night in a hospital for observation. Cut my elbow open a little bit and scraped my head, but it was fine and I finished the show.

No helmet or anything? No, but it all happens in slow motion, it really does. I mean, you are flying through the air and you are going, "Okay, this is going to hurt." I kind of shoulder-rolled to my left and hit my head. I rolled to a stop,

laid there and blacked out for a second. Then I'm thinking, "Okay, am I racing? Am I going to get run over?" I started looking behind me for other bikes and then my buddy ran up to me. I asked, "Well, how am I?" He's said, "Well, the head wound is not that bad, a lot of blood. The elbow looks pretty good - I can see your tendon." But I got up, walked to the ambulance and all that so it wasn't bad.

You know, you take so much prepara-

tion. When you are setting up to do something, you are thinking, "Okay, I know I'm going to lay this bike down at 70 miles per hour," so you set up yourself and the bike to do that. When you are out there riding or playing it's those unknown wrecks that get you. With a film, you know you are going in that day to crash a car so you have the car set up. The whole point is to be able to go to work the next day. I have been very fortunate in my entire career as far as not being seriously hurt.

How do the actors treat stunt men on the set? A lot of actors don't like to admit they don't do their own stuff. I think in today's day and age the audience is so much more savvy. There are so many behind-the-scenes shows.... We are only there to make the actor look better, to protect the actor and keep it safe. When I direct, I try to set things up to where I can use the actor for so much of it, then put the stunt people into it for the big stuff.

I directed most of *THE WATCHER* but got screwed



Raising hell in Arizona

out of my credit. I got secondary director credit but I actually directed 18 of the 28 days of the film's first unit, including all the Keanu stuff. The writer did the other parts. The director did not direct anything. It was a big battle with the Director's Guild, but that's neither here nor there.

There is a huge car chase on *THE WATCHER*. They cut the shit out of it but I actually had James Spader in the car doing a lot of high speed driving. I taught him how to do a 180, so you can see him actually sliding the car. On other films I have actually taken actors to race school and in conjunction with an instructor there taught him the finer points of driving, then worked out a particular slide or skid we would be doing in the film.

Did you work in MacGyver? No! I never did an episode of *MacGyver*. They did the first year here and then the rest were up in Canada. I've done over 400 episodes of television and over 150 films. Never did a *MacGyver*, the one you ask about I didn't do.

I guess I figured every stunt man had done something on that show. I was called to work on it before they moved but I was never actually available when they called or it just never worked out.

Probably one of my most famous stunts is from the movie *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER*. I doubled Dolph Lundgren in that. I did that big repel down the face of Hoover Dam at the opening of the film. A 650-foot Australian repel. Mark Stefanich was Jean Claude's Double.

We had gone out there a couple of weeks prior. Nobody had done an Australian repel that far before so nobody knew what equipment to use. To slow yourself down you actually have to pick the rope up and hold it to you. Friction through what is called a figure eight. If you are doing a normal repel backwards the figure eight is in front of you, the rope comes down along your side, you take it into your right hand and shove it into the small of your back. With that friction and the figure eight it stops you. An Australian repel is just the opposite. You're face down, so you are running down the face of the dam but you have to be able to pick the rope up and bring it to your belt to slow yourself down.

Well, you can't pick up 650 feet of rope. So nobody knew what to use. We went out there the first time to rehearse it one day, we are setting up stuff and we had this breaking device. When you squeeze it you move, when you release it you stop. We wired the handle to where it wouldn't stop you but it would give us some friction going through there.

(During shooting) I did it like five times and one time with a camera on my head. It was just wild. It was an old-fashioned stunt: it wasn't cheated, it wasn't done with CGI, and there were no safety cables or anything. If we fell, we died. As simple as that. Poor Mark, you could barely see

"You are flying through the air and you are going, 'Okay, this is going to hurt.'"

him but I'm featured all the way down.

Is the second unit directing usually without the actors?

The second unit is just establishing shots or aerial shots or beauty shots, sunrise, sunset. A small crew that goes out and waits for the perfect light or whatever. A lot of times the second unit is all the action stuff. Then the first unit will join up with you later and you insert them into various pieces of the action so it cuts together.

There are times my second units are action stuff with the first unit actors. In fact on *THE WATCHER* our second unit was bigger than the first unit. The first unit was shooting inserts of doorknobs and staplers and I would have the entire cast out there and shooting entire dialogue scenes. With the budgets the way they are these days, studios are trying to do these pictures in 25 to 30 days and it's so much work.

So you got a second unit credit on *WATCHER*. I

fought for co-director credit. I directed so much of it, including dialogue scenes. I did an entire re-write of the film. I wrote all the action scenes, they were totally different than what was originally scripted. I was promised stuff that I didn't get.

But it's cool because it opened a lot of doors for me. I'm starting pre-production on a film with my partner, who is also my wife Gina Mari. She's made her career as an actress. Since she has been with me she jumped out of a seven-story burning building on *WATCHER* into the river, she's done car chases, etc., by association with me.

She is the female lead in our movie, called *CLOWNS ON DOPE*. We have got a deal where we have this first film and then we have got a slate of eight other films over the next four years with a hundred and ten million dollars for us to do. Projects that I have written and a couple of projects that we have acquired from other writers. So we are very excited.

Is this going to be action again or are you trying to get out of that? No, not at all. In fact, *CLOWNS ON DOPE* has very few stunts in it. I don't want to get pigeonholed to be just an action director, that's not me at all. The next script we are doing is a thing called *BLIND FAITH*, a psychological thriller. Stunts will always be in my heart, I will probably always go out and do the odd car crash and stuff, you get paid to destroy other peoples' property. But I'm done hitting the ground for a living, I just want to write and produce. I do love driving and I will still continue to racecars and motor-

cycles on occasion.

When you are riding around on the streets do you ever feel the urge to go nuts? I don't do anything in my own car, if it's a rental car it's a different deal, but I don't do any stunts in my own car. It's just so crazy driving around in L.A.

Even a stunt man thinks it's nuts driving in L.A. Oh man, you have got to be on your toes. Had I not had the experience I have in cars and motorcycles, I could have been in accidents so many times. Car control is my thing and you have to ride a motorcycle as if every one is trying to kill you. If you keep that attitude and always have a place to go then you are safe. People don't look for you at all; a lot of times they will look right at you and still turn.

Gina just bought a 1967 Triumph Cub and restored it. She knows how to ride but I'm teaching her proper front braking control, 70 percent of your stopping power. I am teaching her in the dirt because that is the best way to learn. The bike will slide and it gives you so much more control.

Have there been any dicks you want to mention? There have been a few dicks but I'd rather not mention them. There are some that are less gentle on stuntmen. When you are doing a fight, some of them don't pull their punches.

Nice guys? I do have a funny story about Jackie Chan. I was doing CANNONBALL RUN 2, doubling Richard Kiel - the guy from the Bond movies with the big steel teeth, driving the Mitsubishi. Jackie Chan is his passenger. Jackie was scared to death to ride in the car going fast. The deal was that I had to come in this car, do a 360 spin, fly to a stop, Jackie jumps out, camera follows him, I jump out, unzip my Richard Kiel jumpsuit - I have a biker outfit on underneath - and at a certain point I jump into the fight. All in one shot.

So I've got my bad knee. We were rehearsing the fight and Jackie has to do this quick double kick to the inside of my knees. I'm saying, "Jackie, take it easy on my knee, my knee is very tender." He was slapping them pretty good.

I said, "Jackie, if you hit my knee again I might crash that car."

He says, "Oh no, I won't touch your knee, no problem, no problem!"

Sure enough, from that point on he never touched me, beautiful kicks just felt like a whisper.

But every time going in, were getting ready for another take and he's in the car saying, "Okay Jeff - no crash, no crash."

"Okay Jackie, I won't crash, don't hit my knee."

"Okay, I no hit your knee."

Jeff Jensen Partial Filmography:

(He has done over 400 TV episodes - including 150 of *Unsolved Mysteries* - and over 150 films.)

stunts and/or stunt co-ordinator:

The Watcher (2000) [co-director]

Star Trek: Insurrection (1998)

A Life Less Ordinary (1997)*

The Arrival (1996)

The Flintstones (1994)

The Puppet Masters (1994)

Surviving the Game (1994)

Speed (1994)

Rising Sun (1993)

Ruby (1992)

Hoffa (1992)

Under Siege (1992)

Universal Soldier (1992)

Star Trek VI (1991)

The Indian Runner (1991)*

Defending Your Life (1991)

Joe Versus the Volcano (1990)

Air America (1990)

"I don't want to get pigeonholed to be just an action director, that's not me at all. ...But I'm done hitting the ground for a living."

Robocop 2 (1990)

Total Recall (1990)

Glory (1989)

Casualties of War (1989)*

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1989)

Rambo 3 (1988)*

Raising Arizona (1987)

Planes, Trains & Automobiles (1987)

The Running Man (1987)

The Untouchables (1987)

The Money Pit (1986)

Commando (1985)

Weird Science (1985)

Mask (1985)

Cannonball Run 2 (1984)

Star Trek III: The Search for Spock (1984)

Lone Wolf McQuade (1983)

*also second-unit director



Jeff Krulik

knows where you park.



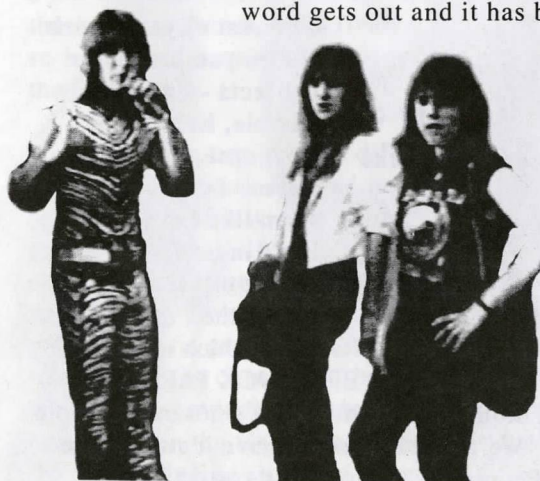
*While running a D.C. area public access station in the 1980s, Jeff Krulik was able to produce his own short documentaries with a few friends. He achieved a huge cult status with his **HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT** (1986), made with John Heyn. While only 15 minutes long, the footage of small town fans outside a Judas Priest concert getting loaded and discussing the finer points of music, drugs and jumping bones made an instant cult classic. Bootleg video copies of H-M LOT popped up all over America in the 1990s, especially as Internet video trading took off.*

*While later working for Discovery Channel Online and on his own, Krulik has continued his documentation of celebrity and roadside America. Projects like **NEIL DIAMOND PARKING LOT**, **ON THE BUS** (with Ernest Borgnine) and the great **FOLLOW THAT TORCH** — in which Krulik visits various roadside attractions while following the path of the Olympic Torch through the American South, including the Chimp Farm — can be seen on his website.*

Is literally everything you have done now on your website? No, everything except for the new stuff. The idea of having that kind of quantity is really appealing to me. Not that I necessarily expect anybody to watch all of it. It's just the site is becoming a destination by accident rather than design and I'm real excited about that. By having my own film festival, word gets out and it has been

getting out.

Almost like the heavy metal bootleg getting around. That's a plus, that really



helps to have that name attached.

How did **HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT take off?**

Again by action rather than design. Although now we try to exploit the fact that people know about that. I did it in 1986 with my friend and co-producer John Heyn. He came up with the idea; I came up with the equipment and title. John edited it at his job, so it was really a dual effort.

It was only an hour of footage. We were there for only two hours so we really hit paydirt and got some choice material. Never in a million years did we imagine — 15 years later — it having the impact it does.



What did you do with it right away? Did you show it on access? That is the funny thing: I never showed it on public access. It was more fun to try something different, which in this case was screening it in some local night-

clubs. We had a record store that was really big on promoting it named 'Joe's Record Paradise.' They used to make people watch it and they would rent it, that was cool. We got it screened at the American Film Institute, I screened it at a record convention and that was it. That was better payoff than just throwing it up on my really dinky provincial public access station.

However, public access is where I started, that's where I learned a lot, that's where I produced a lot. **HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT** did come out of that.

I don't remember when I first saw it or how. It wasn't that long ago, like two years. But just since the Internet has cropped up, I've found so many video traders. It's pretty cool, now by being able to actually stream it (over the Internet). It has always been this kind of public domain piece because we never secured any rights for the music from Judas Priest. We never secured any releases from the people in it.

Has anybody said anything at all? We actually heard from one person in it who was thrilled, he loves it. He calls himself Member OO1 of the Heavy Metal Parking Lot Alumni. He is one of the guys from Reston, Virginia. He's just in a group shot, he says one thing. (Today) he works in the record industry in LA. He actually got wind of this and rented it from some place in LA and saw himself. He said he almost choked! It was a crowd that he used to hang out with back when he was in High School that he has lost touch with. He went to College, got into the music industry on the West Coast and basically left all that stuff behind. His name is Jay Huguen, he goes to record conventions and it's like a badge of honor. People recognize him.

We just heard from a woman named Eileen who I am pretty sure is the one who says, "Jack Daniels and Coke — what else?" She is with the woman with Kelly at the end, they were friends. Actually a buddy of mine went to High School with them and when he went to a reunion he told her about it. She has written me an email, but I wrote her back and she hasn't responded so I don't have confirmation myself. What's really neat is we have probably ten positive ID's from people who know the people. We have even gotten some High School yearbook photos of Zebra Man and the girl who said she wants to jump Rob Halford's bones.

That's hilarious. You want to do a reunion? Our dream is to make a feature film. We are trying to sell the idea and —granted— it is total exploitation. But who better to rip it off than us? I don't think it is going to compromise what this original underground video is. We want a feature narrative film like WAYNE'S WORLD meets ROCK AND ROLL HIGH SCHOOL. This is all pipe dream stuff. Stranger things have happened. But we would love to have a reunion at the end of it.

Sony used some of the H-M LOT footage without asking? In 1988 we sent it to the band and never heard from them. We wanted to have them screen it during their concert and that was gonna be the end of it. Even though we borrowed the music we positioned it as a tribute to the band.

We've actually become Judas Priest fans, metal fans. We weren't when we started it. I don't have any of their albums but I love listening to their anthems (laughs). We didn't meet the band and never heard from them.

But the official Judas Priest documentary the band made had footage from PARKING LOT in it!

They used about a minute of the fans. It's great; we didn't get any credit. It was really grainy, too, I can't believe they used it. We basically stole from them and they stole from us.

They must know how much it's gotten around.

Again, we've had no contact directly. But I know somebody who knew somebody who involved in some sort of VH-1 show where (singer) Rob Halford was a guest, within the last two years. Somebody he knows went up and asked Halford if he's heard of it. Halford told this person that he had seen it and loved it. I believe that. That's cool. I'm thrilled. Somehow people are still afraid to mention it to the band.

The mondo crowd seems to watch things without being too judgmental. They just collect things and watch and get excited. But most laugh 'at' it.

Look, I don't want to jinx myself and have them all of a sudden slap a cease and desist order. Thankfully, they've shrugged their shoulders and hopefully know we haven't made any money off it. We were lucky; Priest is this real seminal metal band. We could've been doing a Nazareth concert.

But one of the best observations about it I've heard, and its true, is that nobody else had cameras then. We had these big, clunky public access cameras. The fact that we told people we were from MTV has gotten blown out of proportion. We were just goofing and because of the one guy's over-reaction - "bullllshit!" - that it made it in. (With everyone else) we were saying we were going to give it to the band, fairly benign stuff, local cable.

I kinda feel bad, because I don't want to misrepresent myself with anything. Other people fuck with their subjects better and that's their schtick. I have no interest in doing that. The MTV comment is a funny reaction but it is an albatross around my neck. We never positioned ourselves as being from MTV except that one time. In the outtakes (on the website) you can hear us saying other stuff.

"To me the biggest compliment people can say is, "Is this for real?" I know I've succeeded. Any of my subjects - they're all real. I could never make any of this stuff up. "

The rest of your work shows you love your subjects - Freddie Blassie, Ernest Borgnine, the Chimp Farm. I don't want to seem like I did everything myself - my

partner Jeff Heyn came up with a lot of the stuff, we started the parking lot franchise together. I just did HARRY POTTER PARKING LOT, which is getting out there. He did MONSTER TRUCK PARKING LOT, which didn't work out. But it's not ours, people can do this. We're lucky that we have it attached to ourselves. People say, 'Why don't you do Jimmy

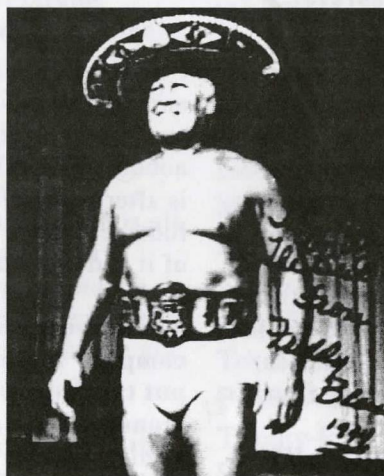
Buffet,' or whoever. But, personally, I don't think it works all the time! If someone wants to throw money - any money! - to do it, I'd be happy to further it along.

How did you get into running public access? I grew up in Maryland/suburb D.C. and went to the University of Maryland (English degree). I always wanted to do music videos. I worked in a pretty hip college radio station there that nobody heard. But we all had a lot of fun. It was really a breeding ground for my ideas in the late '70s and early '80s. I found a real free spirit, free kind of thinking there. I got to do public access in my spare time.

Then in 1985 the person running the studio quit and I was promoted. It was like a dream come true. I started to run this fledgling studio. The dream turned sour when I stayed five years. I produced a lot but not nearly enough in hindsight. I was like a glorified babysitter for the community. There were basically just local residents, do-gooders who just wanted to make television and had no idea what they were doing even after you trained them and they'd quit. It was frustrating. I really had a hard time towards the end [At the start of one of Krulik's compilation tapes you can see the incredible highlights of his tenure there].

They ultimately closed the place. A couple of months later I got a job with Discovery Channel and that's where I worked for five years, so I really got to work both sides of the industry.

How were the two worlds different? Public access allowed me to produce even if it was on a kind of grass roots level. It wasn't professional by any stretch. When I went to Discovery I would occasionally get to work on professional shoots but most of the channel at the time was buying product, that meant people out in the field were having the fun producing stuff and we were



From top: Lancelot Link, Krulik on the King of Porn's bed, Classy Freddie Blassie, Krulik and Borgnine.

just administrators of the company.

The thing was I kept making offbeat, weird man-on-the-street videos when I could. The FOLLOW THE TORCH gig was from people who liked my stuff that I was doing for fun. They had me follow the Olympic Torch for a couple of weeks with my new camera (for their website). But the thing was, that was in 1996 and video on the web was really in its infancy then.

The idea was to get lost following the Torch and down in (the South) there is just great material. So it was a dream come true to get paid to do that and get some material. It is only on the web.

All those roadside places are dying out everywhere. We had a blast. I went back to the Chimp Farm in November and it was bad timing. Some government agency shut them down and they were renovating the place. I wasn't allowed to shoot any footage of the chimps.

Where are you at, California?

Tucson. You must have some places near you.

Outside of town there's a place: (insert scary wavy font here) "The Thing." Of course it's some sort of dried up desert animal but the amount of billboards devoted to it, and all the other things - the drive to it, stuff for sale at the place, bumper stickers, etc, makes it a fun event. That's hilarious.

What did you find interesting about the roadside attractions? I think it's the idea that it's not a big corporation behind it. It's some Mom and Pop idea of a tourist trap, a much more organic P.T. Barnum-esque notion. I'm not saying the big amusement parks are bad. The roadsides are symbolic of an era when the entertainment dollar wasn't so spread around. For me, I grew up in the '60s and '70s, I went to New Hampshire and to Santa's Village and Clark's Trained Bears. In Baltimore

there is the Enchanted Forest.

It feels like more of a personal experience. A low-key, unique experience that can be shared by others but it's not so — "Oh yeah, I rode that four times." Exactly. It's just so much more real.

Plus it doesn't cost fucking 50 bucks. It's often stuff that people don't know whether to laugh "at" or "with". Sure. I just showed OBSESSED WITH JEWS the other night in New York [About accountant Neil Keller's collection of 9000 items relating to prominent Jewish people]. I mean - it's funny. The guy who's in it thinks it's funny. He laughs so people don't know what to make of this stuff.

To me the biggest compliment people can say is, "Is this for real?" I know I've succeeded. Any of my subjects - they're all real. I could never make any of this stuff up. I do want to push myself in areas like that. I do want to make a narrative piece. But I also want to keep doing what I've made sort of a name for myself at, which is offbeat documentaries.

Sometimes people accuse me of making fun of my subjects. I try to straddle the fence. I think that all filmmaking is exploitative to some degree. To me, I want everybody to be in on the joke: the audience, subjects and me. I generally put myself in my films.

Yeah, there's no sadder shot than you on the KING OF PORN's bed. (laughs) You know, it was an exasperating day and I put myself in there.

You have a pretty safe pursuit of celebrities. The cult of celebrity I'm fascinated with. I'm not interested in A-list celebrities; I'm more into Fred Blassie or Ernest Borgnine. I love pop culture and, I guess, what can be born out of that. I think it's because they are celebrities but they're not. People know them. Blassie less than Borgnine, but then the guys who created Lancelot Link [the TV spy show with talking chimps]. That's a hook there. Lots of people know it through syndication or even when it came out in the '70s it was seen as pretty weird. But I want to introduce it to a lot of others.

How hard was it to get Borgnine? The whole thing



"I wanted (ON THE BUS) in the K-Marts, I wanted it in the drug store checkout lines, I wanted it all across America in the discount video bin next to Abbott and Costello Go Wherever."

was sort of a dare. Me and my colleague at Discovery, Brendan Conway, heard through some paper or show that Borgnine drives a bus, kind of an incredible image. What would happen if Borgnine pulled up in a bus at a 7-11 in a strange town to get a burrito? The more we talked about the more we got a big kick out of the notion.

One day we were: "Let's call his agent." You know, we positioned ourselves as big producers. Just talk the talk even if you can't back it up. She said, "Yeah! Ernie's always wanted to do something like this." Next thing you know we're arranging a meeting in New York. I went up and pitched him, made up professional t-shirts - "Borgnine On Tour". He loved the idea.

I just said, 'dammit - I've been talking about this for a year and a half - gotta make good on it.'

I went into some credit card debt, borrowed some money, hired a crew and we followed Borgnine for a week just to get a reel to sell the idea. Unfortunately, nobody bought it as a TV show - not uncommon. This is after I left Discovery in '95. But I had so much footage that we were able to make a documentary out of it and that was great. He loves it.

And Goodtimes has it on video! The worst video company in the world. [Known as the company to put tapes out on shitty EP slow mode to save money.] Let me just say I'm disappointed in their lack of distribution. It wasn't like anyone else was beating down my door. In a lot of ways, I thought that was hysterical - that's perfect that Goodtimes would sell it. At long as it was cheap — 9.95 for people — I didn't care necessarily. Because I wanted it in the K-Marts, I wanted it in the drug store checkout lines, I wanted it all across America in the discount video bin next to Abbott and Costello Go Wherever. I thought that was just perfect.

Yeah! That does make all the sense. Unfortunately, (laughs) it never got out to those places! I've got more copies of it on my shelf. A lot of that is just timing, meeting the right people. The person who bought it (for Goodtimes) - he got fired. If he hadn't been there working there for a small amount of time, I wouldn't even have the deal. I feel like I won. I'm grateful, I got a video with box art, it does have a

release. Publisher's Clearing House had it (*laughs*).

My other stuff has shown around in festivals. It's usually anchored by H-M LOT. But that was done in 1986. We retired it, basically, in 1990.

So many people got copies of it though. It just happened by trading. It's the most flattering, unbelievable thing. That people thought highly enough of it to make copies and create this underground.

One significant story: a guy named Mike Heath, who is a D.C. resident, moved to the West Coast. I'll never forget, he came to the Discovery Channel in 1992, showed up one day saying he was gonna move and asked for copies. I gave him four copies.

A couple years later (co-director) John Heyn got a call from Sophia Coppola saying she had rented H-M LOT from Mondo Video in Los Angeles and could she use it in this Comedy Central show she was producing. That was the first time we realized it was getting circulated. This must have been in '94, if not later.

There are lots of resources in LA. Mondo Video is right next to the Amok Bookstore. Cinefile in Westwood is fantastic. That 'mondo'/extreme culture set reminds me of roadside America. Right. Now I'm trying to get to the next level - whatever that means. In my case, to get out of this sub-distribution. The underground film fests have been great, I'll be associated with them forever, but I also want to be able to get to the next level in production.

I optioned the Times Square book, which is all about the sex industry. I was a fan of Josh Alan Friedman, who wrote it, and I want to make it into a TV show. I don't know how to do it but I'm willing to put up some money to show my good faith. We've got to be lined up in the right place at the right time.

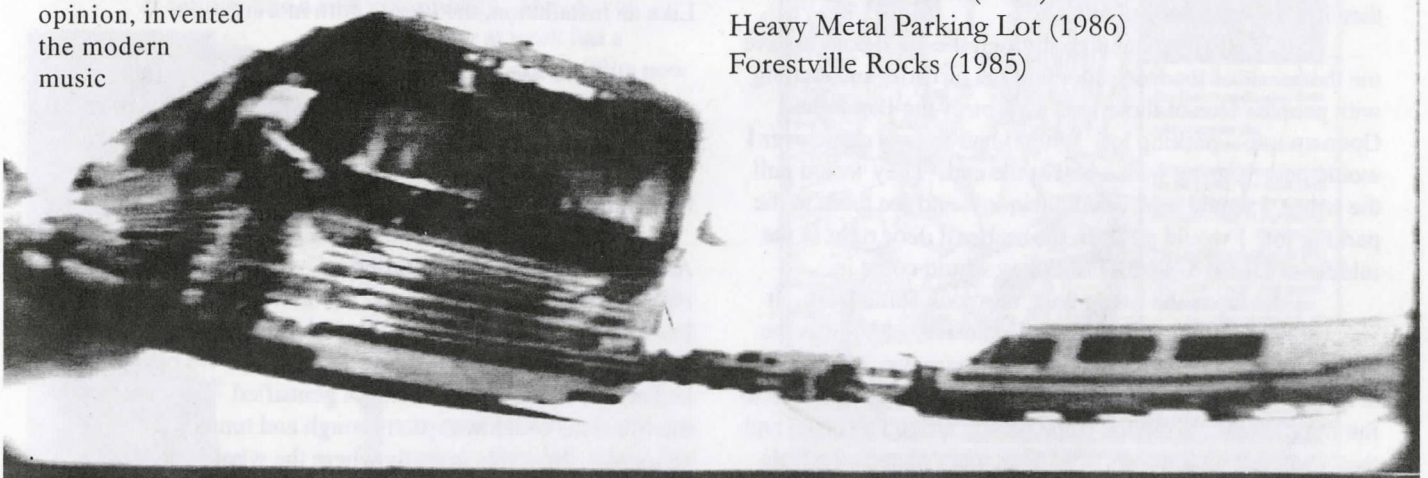
In closing, do you want to say something about the 'turkey' film? That's Chuck Statler, who's my hero. He basically, in my opinion, invented the modern music

video with his work for DEVO, and he did all of Stiff Records' early films. He made 60 to 70 music videos on 16mm film, all before MTV. That turkey film blew me away when I saw it in high school, it really headed me in a new direction. When I started showing "The Films of Jeff Krulik" I always had that film at the beginning as my tribute to Chuck. I love sharing that with people. Chuck now makes commercials in Minneapolis, he's a family man. I'd love to work with him. He's a great influence on me.

Krulik's films can be seen at www.planetkrulik.com. HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT and other Krulik films can be bought at www.insound.com/cinema/.

Jeff Krulik's Videos:

Harry Potter Parking Lot (2000)
Obsessed With Jews (2000)
The Scott and Gary Show Tribute (2000)
I Created Lancelot Link (1999)
Memo from Reidy (1999)
Follow That @#! Torch (1998)
Wanna Watch? (trailer) (1998)
Neil Diamond Parking Lot (1998)
Heavy Metal Parking Lot: The Lost Footage (1998)
Go Go Girls Don't Cry (1997)
Ernest Borgnine on the Bus (1997)
Katie Bar the Door: The Goodwill Book Sale (1997)
Miss Naomi, Practicing Nudist (1997)
Mr. Blassie Goes to Washington (1996)
King of Porn/Meet Fanboy (1996)
Neat Stuff Demo Reel(s) (1995)
Texas Chainsaw Massacre 20th Anniversary (1995)
Public Access Gibberish (1990)
Twenty-Five Cents Before Noon (1988)
Show Us Your Belly (1988)
Memories of Elvis (1987)
Heavy Metal Parking Lot (1986)
Forestville Rocks (1985)



Living in a Movie Theater

Craig Baldwin



California native Craig Baldwin makes films consisting primarily of found footage, including the conspiracy epic TRIBULATION 99 (1991), O NO CORONADO (1992), the Negativland documentary SONIC OUTLAWS (1995) and his newest, SPECTRES OF THE SPECTRUM (2000). Living and working in movie theaters has influenced his filmmaking. The hands-on feel and texture of various film stocks and formats. Watching small parts of different genres of films at random times. Not to mention working poor, forced to find cheap materials.

When did you first start living in a movie theater? I graduated from college and went on a trip to Europe. When I came back I didn't have a place. As an undergraduate I worked at a porn theater. I still knew the people who ran it. When I came back I was broke and homeless, basically. It was in my boss's interests to have someone look after the place, in the tenderloin area (of San Francisco). Real interesting part of town. Very funky, sex trade down there. Anyway, his point was, "You need a place to stay, I need someone to look after the theater. Why don't you just live here?" He didn't bat an eye.

The only thing is there was no place (physically in the theater) for me to live. My space was basically just off of the projection booth. So any time I would go to do any business, I would walk right next to these projectors running the show.

There were two theaters. Art Theater 1 and 2. Which is still a place, by the way. They do video projection now; they did away with the projectionists all together. Back then it was very heavily 16mm.

I would come and go through the back door to save me the hassle of the front door and the turnstile and dealing with people. One of those one-way, push-the-bar doors. Open up into a parking lot. When I had friends come over I would have a string with a bell at the end. They would pull the string, I would look out the window and see them in the parking lot. I would go open the rear exit door right in the middle of DEEP THROAT and they would come in.

As far as the living area, that took some work. It was very rudimentary. I had a little shower, which was the important thing. On the ground floor there was a sink. I just diverted some water through a Y-joint and took a hose up to the floor above. Wrapped some plastic around a corner and that's where I took my shower. Had a hot plate and a little kitchen, used the same source of water to wash my plates.

Laid the mattress on the floor kind of thing.

Did living in the booth influence your filmmaking? Actually, how I got into film was of feeling so free and running what I wanted to. Seeing film lying all over the place, doing what I wanted with it in terms of stop-start, turn the projector on, show this piece, show that piece.... It's really a deep mystification of the whole process. Seeing exactly what film was from a material point of view.

I was between going to school. In fact, the film that got me into the competitive San Francisco State was called FLICKSKIN. As opposed to skin flick. It was about my fascination, not so much with porn - although I like porn, all genre film - it was really about the stress, the wear, the

surface of film. Literally the skin of the film. And about how porn films in particular were beaten up, way outside the norm. They were so much more interesting to me. I did a little home-made rear-projection screen where I could take the material and slow it down and focus on particular scratches and artifacts within the film. I was working out of the aesthetic of the porn.

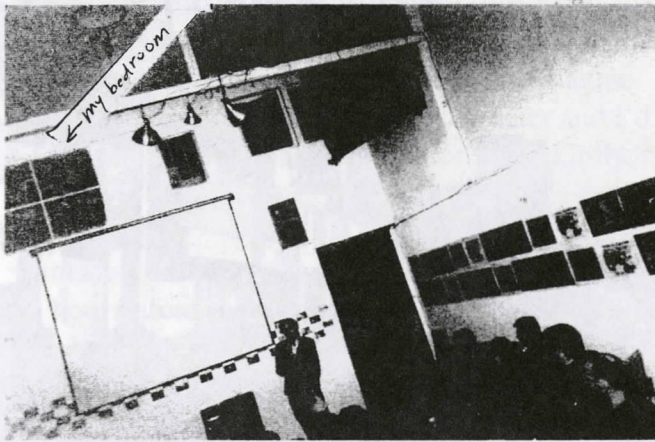
Another porn theater was literally right around the corner from where I lived and worked really had a major influence on me, seeing the way movies were watched there. Everybody was standing up, milling around. The screen was the last thing they were

looking at. More of a place you would go to get your cock sucked, or do drugs. Anything goes, a very free-form zone. Ultimately you'd watch the movie from maybe a foot away from the screen, 15 degrees off the axis of the screen. So immediately I saw that film could be a lot of different things. Like an installation, the idea of film in a site.

How long did you live there? Only about 8 months or so. The porn business I worked at for many years but after a while I got back on my feet economically and wanted privacy and all that kind of stuff. But I remember it fondly. *(laughs)*

The theater I'm in now is a gallery, called ATA: Artists Television Access gallery. I've lived in apartments but generally I've always lived in warehouses or storefronts. I was living in an ex-bar South of Market. Around the corner from me were the people who started ATA. We both got kicked out of the area, which got gentrified. We ended up in the Mission, which was pretty rough and tumble about 15 years ago. Now this is really where the whole dot-com culture has settled in.





We knew the guy who owned the storefront. He just got married and his wife didn't want to live there. Too funky. We got a bunch of people together to move the gallery here and start our various enterprises. It's a media arts space during the day, there's a performance going on right now. Studios are in the basement. I live in a loft area. The main floor is used for the public; work on the walls, performances or films and videos.

Which there is an average of three shows per week. That's Other Cinema. I could easily say I live in a movie theater/media arts gallery. The city doesn't know and it would be a big hassle to prove it. We're extremely small. The landlord's getting his money so what does he care if people crash here. It probably makes it all that more secure. And, by the way, there are other people that live in the building. Above the gallery are two floors of apartments.

In between I lived in a few places. There was the old Haas five-story candy factory. But even that - there were theaters in there. It was taken over by artists and other counter-culture types in the '70s. There was a daycare school, a computer center, a guy doing punk rock shows in the basement, people who had ceramic studios.... We ran movies all the time in there. It was a multi-purpose type space called Project One. Now I think it's actually city or state offices.

It sounds like a real community. The idea of



living at work has a negative connotation now because of Yuppies moving in. But there's people who are architects, not really this street-type culture but more of a professional culture, where people get a salary and then live in a big open space that's very luxurious and comfortable. Multi-purpose housing is an idea whose time has come. For a lot of people apartments

just won't do. That's not a public thing, like living in a movie theater. But all that kind of conversion has to go on now because of the move back to the cities.

What are the cons of living in a movie theater?

Constantly there's noise. Sometimes I have to be exposed to bad films showing.

There's no such thing as privacy. Every time I come and go I'm walking in front of people. Generally people say, I'm going to come over, let's talk about this book. But this is a public space, people drop in anytime they want and expect to have a time with me. There's no door so they just walk in. "Hey, here's this book." Well, great, I happen to be having a nervous breakdown right now! Talk to my secretary, make an appointment or email. It's not that they're rude, there's just no barriers.

Pros? I don't forget anything at home when I go to the studio. As far as showing my films, I don't have to pay rent on the four walls. It's already my rent.

And I eat off the receptions. There's an opening at least once a week and I'll stuff my pockets with cheese. Plus the beer and the wine.... A major pro, being able to survive off this thing. The ability to see a lot of different types of work.

Has living in a theater affected your relationships/love interests? Actually I think it increases my chances (*laughs*). There's objects of desires around all the time. People who are interested will hang around.

You are nuts if you don't check out the Other Cinema theater at www.othercinema.com.

photos: opposite - Baldwin at work;
this page - Baldwin's bedroom; standing in booth.

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by Minda Martin *Currently a teacher at UC San Diego, Minda has made short films and two feature documentaries, **MOTHER'S HERITAGE** and **AKA KATHE**. When she told me she would be working on a film in Egypt over New Year's 2000, I asked her to give me some of her travel notes. -ed.*

My friend, an Egyptian-American filmmaker, Tania Kamal-Eldin, invited me to help her shoot a documentary in Cairo, Egypt. This was my first trip to Cairo. The media, replete with accounts of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, had formed my preconception of contemporary Egypt. The day after I bought the ticket, an Egypt Air flight crashed. Coincidentally, this was the same flight I was to take in two weeks.

My anxiety escalated when I went to a health clinic to find out what shots I needed for the trip. I was given a ten-page print out of all of the maladies prevalent in Egypt. Tania assured me that as long as I didn't eat food from the street vendors or drink the tap water, I'd be okay. But she warned me that I would get sick. Inevitably, visitors to Egypt are afflicted with Pharaoh's Revenge, a wicked bout of diarrhea.

We would be traveling during Ramadan, the holy month when Muslims fast throughout the day. Virtually all the restaurants shut down during the day and alcohol is hard to come by.

But getting ill and not being able to drink was the least of my worries. I had to figure out how to pack the film so the airport x-rays wouldn't zap it. I found out that many airlines were using higher doses of x-rays on cargo luggage than on carry-on bags. So I placed the film in two carry-on bags which I wrapped in lead laminated pouches. It also helps to buy slower film speeds.

I still wasn't sure if the film was going to be unharmed. According to Egyptian law, you must declare your video and film cameras upon entry into the country. This would have been a giveaway that I was shooting film, consequently ushering more problems. To begin with, you're supposed to have permits for any film you shoot. Secondly, you are not supposed to leave Egypt with unprocessed film.

Fortunately the camera I brought, a Bolex H-5, doesn't look like a film camera most people are familiar with. Its sleek design is more similar to an older version of 35mm still cameras. When I was photographing Egyptians, this worked to my advantage. They were not intimidated or suspicious.

We had brought an intervolumeter with us to make time-lapses. It caused more trouble because of its suspicious resemblance to a bomb. It's a small metal box with coiling wires, knobs and numbers, which

are attached to the Bolex to control time intervals. When I arrived in Cairo, to my chagrin, security guards toted machine guns. I could only imagine they were going to find the intervolumeter and I'd never be able to explain its function. Thankfully, it was never found.

Ramadan worked to our advantage. We had arrived an hour before sunset and everyone was hungry, cranky, and anxious to get us out of the airport. Fortunately the luggage and our carry-on bags were not searched.

As we were exiting the airport, a government tourist official asked us why we were in Cairo. Tania told them in Arabic that I was an American tourist. He told us to follow him. Because the government tourist officials solicited us we bypassed customs. He took us to an affable Egyptian woman sitting in front of a poster of the Pyramids. She represented the government tourist organization. We knew it was overpriced, but decided I could do with a tour for my first day in Egypt. It would be a good way to shoot footage as well as getting a taste of Cairo.

After we unpacked our luggage in our room, we looked for a place to hide the intervolumeter. "If someone discovers this," Tania chuckled, "they'll probably suspect us of being Israeli spies or terrorists."

At sunrise, I awoke to the sound of the muezzin chanting the call to prayer from a nearby mosque. Several muezzins could be heard echoing over crackling speakers. This vociferous ritual is repeated five times a day at prayer times.

Much of Egypt's income depends upon tourism.

Egyptians are very sensitive to Westerners filming their country in a negative light. Anybody can demand to know what you are shooting; and curious passersby's often do. But the more I shot, the less intimidated I became. I noticed that Tania was more anxious about shooting in public than I was. Her knowledge of the potential repercussions inhibited her. I was eager to see Cairo, and I had the privilege to have a camera to document what I saw. It's not the images or the sounds, but it's catching reality, as complex and paradoxical as the way I was seeing it.

After a few days of shooting, we had to address the issue of how to get the film back to the US. Do we process the film in Cairo, or do we run it through the x-rays again and develop in the US? The labs in Cairo are government controlled, so it was questionable how good the quality would be. I tried a local lab in Cairo. They were shocked that I was the cinematographer, that is, a woman cinematographer.



As we feared, the print looked terrible, full of scratches and dirt. There were even gaps. Why had they cut parts out? I distinctly remembered footage of two blonde female tourists riding camels towards the Giza Pyramid. We decided we had no alternative but to risk taking our unprocessed footage

through the airport to be transferred in the US.

In order to shoot on the streets of Cairo we needed a permit from the Ministry of Interior and the Censorship board. At the lab, we were recommended a production manager. For the price of what you'd pay for a low-budget production manager in the US, we were able to hire someone who outdid our expectations. The production manager, who was Egyptian, dealt with the Minis-

try of Interior and the Censorship Board using a script that had no resemblance to our project. They gave him the permit and he went throughout Cairo, looking for spots that pertained to the theme of modernity vs. tradition.



During the shoot with the production manager, I had my first confrontation with the Secret Police. I was filming a billboard of a show called, "Me and You and Monica." It was a comedy with a famous Egyptian comedian wearing a dress of the statue of liberty. I had been warned to look out for the Secret Police, but I was expecting a Maxwell Smart character wearing a suit, not a poor student at a bus stop with broken glasses and a thin knapsack. He pulled out his badge and was polite in his attempt to arrest us. If we had not had the permit and the production manager with us, we would've been arrested.

It was a day before the end of the shoot, and I had photographed various portraits of Egyptians and non-Egyptians, rich and poor, but I felt I hadn't captured an intimacy of an Egyptian's perspective. I was still a tourist and feared this came across in my images. We went to Khan-Khalilli, an ancient bazaar trading in silks, coffees, teas, spices, silver and gold, now a tourist destination.

While we sat drinking watered down beer at an outdoor coffeehouse, we ran into a young Egyptian called Ihab. In her typically guarded tone, Tania told him about our documentary, CAIRO CHRONICLES. He offered to take us around his neighborhood, which he proudly remarked was the setting of Nagib Mahfouz's novels.

We followed him through noisy, winding alleys to a

destination unknown. When we entered an old building and walked up a narrow staircase I noticed Tania walking cautiously in back. Later she told me we could have been assaulted and for once she was glad she was carrying the tripod.

Any skepticism we had diminished when we walked into a small crowded apartment with a hefty woman coming to greet us. We were immediately welcomed in a way that I had never experienced and will never forget. We squeezed into a tiny bedroom and served tea and a meal comprised of rice and mulikheya, a green herbal soup. They wouldn't eat until we ate something, and even then they seemed more intent on attending to our needs than eating their dinner.

From their balcony that overlooked alleys, mosques, and rubble strewn buildings, I filmed children playing marbles, men playing musical instruments, and a youth on a bicycle carrying a huge load of belady bread (a delicious pita type bread that costs less than 5 cents a loaf). Ihab's brothers and sisters as well as various other relatives came in to greet us. We were strange newcomers that piqued their interest.

I could tell that Tania's Arabic skills and patience were being exhausted. When we tried to depart, they insisted we stay. A couple of family members disappeared and returned with little gifts for us. It was particularly endearing since they had rustled up what little they had to share with us.

On our way out, they introduced us to a woman on the floor below them. She was over one hundred years old but no one was certain of her age. At



first it depressed me to see her sitting alone inside a dark tiny room, on a small mattress. She warmly squeezed my hand and looked at me with her dark bright eyes and kind smile. She certainly didn't need my pity. She was thrilled to have so many people visiting her.

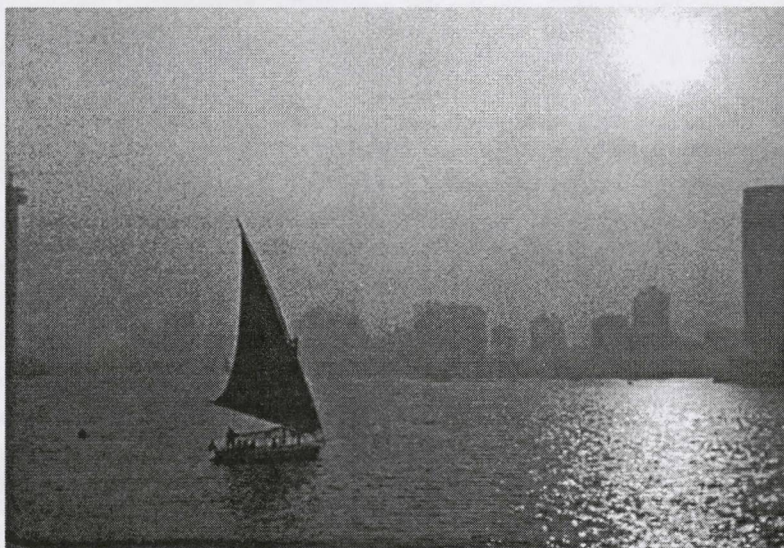
The last couple of days were fraught with preparations to leave. Tania and I were nervous about the unprocessed film. I tried to figure out how to pack the film in all of our carry-on bags without making us look like professional filmmakers. I divided the rolls of film equally into the lead-laminated pouches and camouflaged them among tourist paraphernalia.

Tania invited a group of people on a falooka, an ancient boat with long elegant sails. We discreetly hid our bottles of vodka and whisky and sailed happily down the Nile in the cool night air. I filmed the colorful lights glimmering in the reflection of the Nile's dark water.

We bought some Ramadan pastries and went to say farewell to Ihab and his family. Shortly after our visit, they were dressed in their best clothing, inviting us to see their relatives. I assumed it would be a ten-minute trip. Instead, it turned out to be a one-hour drive with five people crammed in a taxi.

We entered an area along a polluted canal. Large tract buildings were separated with piles of trash and stray dogs picking through the litter. Many of the buildings were unfinished, which is not uncommon to save on construction costs. It was late and I was hoping the family we were visiting would be tired.

Instead, they brought out a pipe, beer and peanuts and generously shared them with us. Even their two-year-old baby was bright-eyed. I was disturbed by the television in the center of the room. It was another quintessential indicator of how my culture was invading Egypt. Next to a poor reception of the Oprah Winfrey show, sat a domineering woman with rollers in her hair, inhaling a water pipe. She ordered the men to bring beer and clean up.



By 4.30 am they were ready to eat before the sun rose, because they would be fasting throughout the day. I was becoming delirious with sleep deprivation. The entire family, including the baby, escorted us to a cab. When we reached the cab,

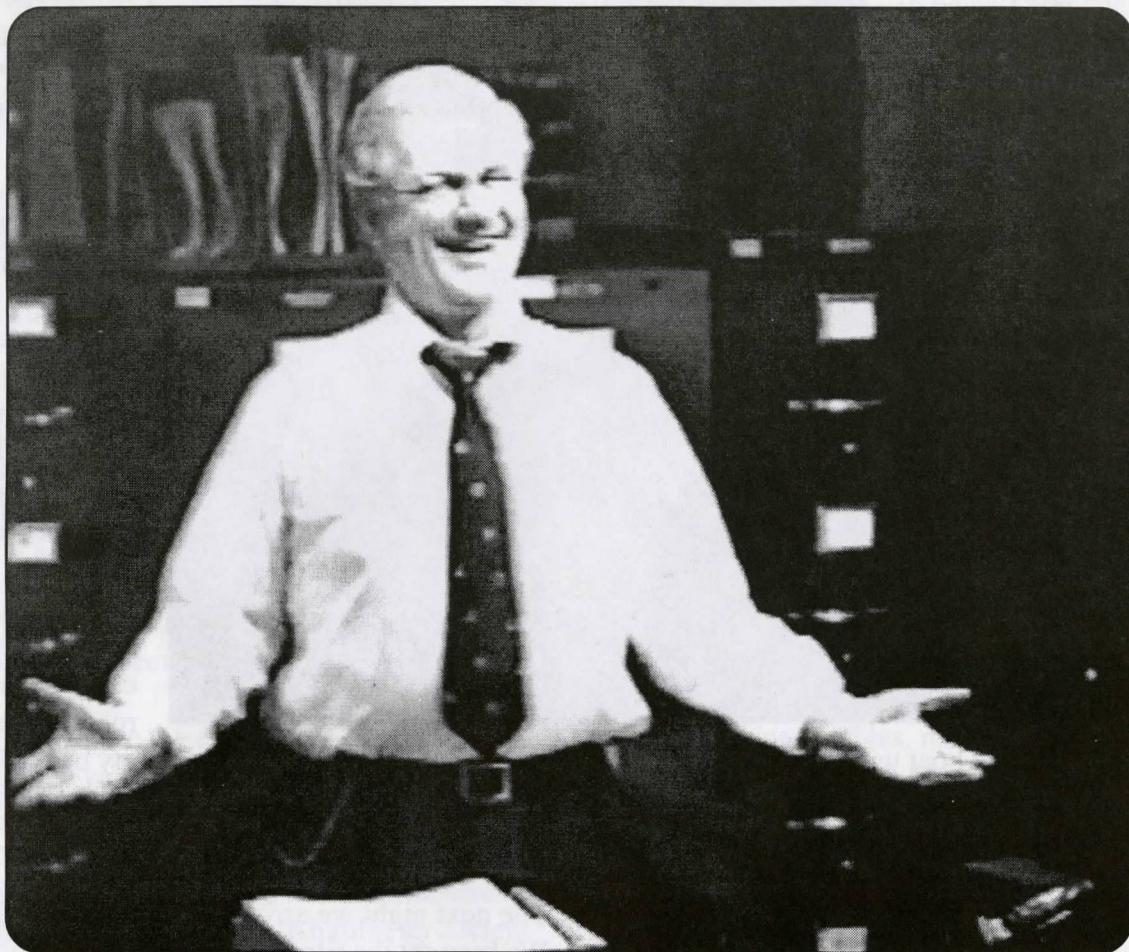
they insisted on paying for our way back. Their generosity hospitality and affection overwhelmed me.

The next night we arrived at the airport at 1.00 am. We brought the film permit, and were nervous about getting through customs. To our advantage, there was a long line of people. We were once again rushed through customs unsearched.

As we boarded the plane, I realized how attached I had become to Cairo in just three weeks. My preconceptions had changed dramatically. There is a saying that once you drink from the Nile you'll always return. It has been almost year since I made the trip, and I'm preparing for another visit to Cairo.

The film footage in Cairo was unharmed by the x-rays and is being used in the documentary CAIRO CHRONICLES, which will be completed in the spring of 2001.

THAT GUY



CAPTAIN CHARLES DURNING
1923-



Apologies: ThatGuy Precinct is not finished. But it must be done correctly and not released before its time. Thank you.

-The Management

P R E C I N C T



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1919-1980

Searching for Paradjanov

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by **Theron Patterson** *In the summer of 1999 I got a full-time gig in Singapore teaching filmmaking. Despite the six to seven day work weeks, the job has been great and for the first time in my life I ain't living paycheck to paycheck. I've been able to save a bit and use the money to travel on my time off. In December of '99 I went to Turkey and the Republic of Georgia and in May 2000 I was lucky enough to spend two weeks in Armenia.*

A few years back while on an adventurous rental kick, I picked up a video in the Russian section called ASHIK KERIB by Sergei Paradjanov. I'm not sure what it is that drew me to the video. I knew absolutely nothing about the director or the film. When I finally sat down to watch the film, it was an experience that changed the way I thought about film and filmmaking.

During the making of ASHIK KERIB, Paradjanov said: "I think the absolute best filmmaking would be for the deaf and dumb. We talk too much; there are too many words. We're drowning in words. Only in ballet do we see pure beauty, pure pantomime. That is what I am aspiring to."

In December of 1999 I was trapped in the no-man's land in between the countries of Georgia and Turkey on the Black Sea Coast. It was 3 am. The other bus passengers and I shivered in the cold, waiting seven hours for our luggage to clear customs. The captain of the border guards approached me and asked me why I was in Georgia. Somewhere in the conversation I mentioned Paradjanov and the soldiers eyes lit up. "You know about Paradjanov?" I asked, surprised that he would know an obscure art film director. "Of course!!!" he beamed. Every Georgian I met during my trip knew of him and his films. I was trying to traverse Georgia all the way into Armenia to get to a museum in Yerevan I had heard about dedicated to Paradjanov. I ran out of money and time before I made it to Armenia and was forced to return home.

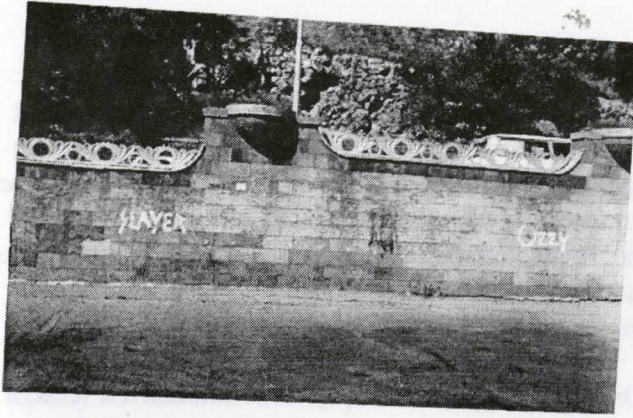
The museum and Paradjanov's films accounted for two of the main reasons I was in the former Soviet state (and now independent republic) of Armenia. Paradjanov occupies a unique place in film history in that he is usually referred to as one of the great "unknown masters" of modern film; I hope the fact that I had physically traveled to

Armenia to get information about him testifies to this. There are no books in English written about him (although Green Integer has just published seven of his scenarios in English) and what information you can find is sporadic and sometimes contradictory.

In May of this year I returned to Caucasia and finally found myself in Yerevan, walking down Khorovadz Street (a.k.a. "BBQ" street), trying to find the museum. After an hour of



Filmmaker Sergei Paradjanov



winding past the uncountable number of shish kabob stalls I found Proshian Street and walked down the dirt road past tenement buildings and playing kids to find the museum. The building itself is a large house with traditional wood carved balconies, built on the edge of a bluff overlooking Hrazdan Kirch, a canyon with an abandoned train station, a stream and small houses tucked between trees.

From the entrance to the building is a wonderful view of the outskirts of southwestern Yerevan. In the far distance are the ever-looming dual snow-capped peaks of Mt. Arat; the view itself is worth contemplating for an hour or so before even entering the museum. Once inside I met Ophelia, who gave me a wonderful personal tour of the grounds and plenty of information.

He was born Sarkis Paradjanian to Armenian parents in 1924 in T'bilisi (capital of the Republic of Georgia). From 1945 to 1952 Paradjanov was studying at the Moscow Institute of Cinematography and by 1949 he was working in the Dovshenko Film Studios in Kiev, Ukraine. His name was now the Russia-fied Sergei Paradjanov and he was (quite prolifically) producing films in the Soviet Realist tradition.

As the story goes, after seeing MY NAME IS IVAN (1962) by Andrei Tarkovsky, Paradjanov underwent a transformation both artistically and spiritually. He would form a close personal relationship with Tarkovsky and, even though he was a dozen years his senior, Paradjanov considered himself to be a mentee of Tarkovsky. The result of this metamorphosis was his first major film to win him wide acclaim: SHADOWS OF OUR FORGOTTEN ANCESTORS (1964).

The film, a gut-wrenching love story set in the Ukrainian countryside, was seen as nationalistic by the Soviet Authorities. Although I've never been to the Ukraine and know almost nothing about it, a sense of the spirit of the Ukrainian people and their culture seeps out of the film. Not in an anthropological way, but almost as if one is having a dream that one is Ukrainian, living inside a fairy tale set in the Ukraine. Its culture is alive and kinetic as is the music, sound, camera work and acting, and a massive sense of human spirit leaps off the screen. The film established him internationally and also within the critical gaze of the Soviets.

Paradjanov's next film, THE COLOR OF POMEGRANATES (1969), took the artistic leaps made in ANCESTORS and multiplied them (the film caused him to be dubbed by critics as a Soviet equivalent of Salvador Dali or Jean Cocteau). The film is a poetic biography of the 18th century Armenian poet Sayat Nova. Any sense of narrative has been eschewed in favor of delving into the soul of the works created by Nova and into the cultural consciousness from which his work was born.

The film also multiplied Paradjanov's international critical acclaim, but it would come at a cost. It was banned by the Soviet authorities and recut against his wishes to be "more comprehensible." In 1973 he was sentenced to 15 years in a maximum-security hard labor prison camp. I have read and heard conflicting stories on how and why it happened, but most center on (supposed) trumped-up charges of homosexuality and illegal trade in antiques.



Inside the museum

While in prison Paradjanov dubbed himself “the priest of the zone” (in reference to Tarkovsky’s *STALKER*). He created several thousand works of art, mostly collage pieces made from prison refuse such as bottle caps and toilet brushes, and also founded an art movement called “fluerism,” where he and his inmate art students made collages from flowers.

“These years of squalor were the best years of my life,” Paradjanov claimed, gaining from the experience “an amazing deathlessness.” A famous anecdote is that Tarkovsky asked Paradjanov how to become a better filmmaker. He replied that Tarkovsky should spend a year in a Soviet maximum-security prison.

During short spells out of prison it is said that Paradjanov could be found on the streets of T’bilisi selling heirlooms. Due to the international attention garnered by his pre-prison films, a public outcry was rallied for his release, and partly to glasnost, in 1977 he was granted an early release.

Paradjanov was, however, still under a 15-year ban from filmmaking. Jobless, he eventually ended up again in a Georgian prison in 1982 for 11 months. After his second release he was finally able to create another film, the amazing *LEGEND OF SURAM FORTRESS* (1984). In 1988, Paradjanov completed *ASHIK KERIB* and began working on the autobiographical film *Confessions*. [In the museum you can also see drawings and preparations for a film version of Pocahontas that Paradjanov wanted to go to America to shoot. The works were far from completion when he passed away in July 1990.]

I found it hard not to experience Armenia (and my previous trip to Georgia) through the images and sounds in his films. Ironical considering that most of his

work focuses on fantastical legends, fairy tales and myths. His films resonate with the images and sounds and dances of a culture’s mythical self. Formally speaking, imagine Peter Greenaway’s work without the virtuosity, gloss, sheen, and conceptual cornerstones, and in place of those put a naïveté and a roughness, the spirit of a child reading a children’s book and letting that imagination extend the images on the page.

One of my students recently borrowed *ASHIK KERIB* from me. When she returned it I asked what she

thought. “Crappy, but good,” she responded, which was also my initial response. Five minutes into *KERIB* I thought, “Is this guy for real, is this a bad film on purpose? What the hell is going on?” Seventy-minutes later I had all but forgotten the initial assessment. As with most great films, its beauty is initially off-putting and disorienting, while at the same time evocative and haunting. To alienate I don’t think is Paradjanov’s aim; rather, to enter into his narratives fully we must be willing to leave most expectations at the door.

As for the low production values in his later films, while traveling through Georgia and Armenia I constantly found myself thinking, “How the fuck

was a film even made here.” But the lack of money was no less a hindrance than an opportunity. In *ASHIK KERIB* the hero is thrown to a tiger. The animal, however, is two actors in a tiger suit, complete with a double-faced revolving tiger’s head. It seems laughable, but as he would say, it works better than if he had used a real tiger.

Paradjanov once said, “We impoverish ourselves by thinking only in film categories. Therefore I constantly take up my paintbrush.... Another system of thinking, different methods of perception and reflection of life are opened to me.”



In line with this way of thinking Paradjanov eschews traditional narrative visual language: there are no shot/reverse shots, cross-cutting between scenes, etc. Instead, he composes living tableaux, moving paintings. Rarely is there any spatial or temporal continuity between shots; each shot shows us a new carefully arranged "stage" where actors, clothed in elegant costumes of Paradjanov's design and construction, openly and unselfconsciously "perform" for the camera, usually in carefully choreographed movements and accompanied by lush music.

Paradjanov is still a filmmaker, however, and his films are not just records of stage performances; landscapes and architecture play an important role in his vision, as do "chapter headings" of montages of paintings, sculptures, silver/chinaware, calligraphy, musical instruments, people-less vignettes of the cultural landscape of the story. The films routinely include dances, ceremonies of all kinds, weddings, funerals, feasts, connecting us with the many faces of the culture in which the story takes place. Indeed place seems to play a major role in his films, but as with most master storytellers, the story is so tied into the place, and specific to the place, and true to the place, that it transcends the place and allows itself to be universally understood.

Music plays an important role in his films, especially in *ASHIK KERIB* with its gorgeous soundtrack of kanaun (Armenian Zither), Saz and amazing vocals in the Muslim Mugham tradition. Characters routinely play instruments to the music in obvious bad lip-synching, but like the fake tiger in *ASHIK KERIB* the "bad craft" actually enables his films to speak in a more directly emotional voice.

A childlike sense of innocence and quality of perception is a persistent quality in Paradjanov's films, and in the museum, where there is a specially designed room for children.

If you're in the neighborhood, drop by the Paradjanov Museum in Yerevan, Dzoragiugh Ethnographic Center, bldgs 15 & 16, off of Khorovadz Street. If you're in LA drop by Zankou Chicken (various locations) for orgasmic Armenian/Lebanese food. Theron Patterson recently finished a feature on video entitled HEINOUS.



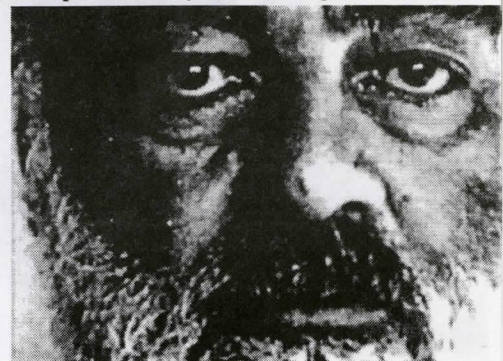
Sergei Paradjanov Partial Filmography

- 1951 Moldavian Fairy Tale (short)
- 1954 Andriesh (w/ Y. Bzelian)
- 1958 The First Lad
- 1961 Ukranian Rhapsody
- 1963 The Stone Flower
- 1964 Dumka/The Ballad
- 1965 Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors
(aka Wild Horses of Fire)
- 1969 The Color of Pomegranates
(aka Sayat Nova) (released 1972)
- 1978 Return to Life (short)
- 1985 The Legend of Suram Fortress
- 1986 Arabesques on Themes from
Pirosmani (doc)
- 1988 Ashik Kerib
- 1990 Swan Lake - The Zone (script only)

many of these videos are available from Kino (www.kino.com), as well as the documentary "Paradjanov: A Requiem" featuring interviews with the director.

The museum's website is at:
www.ru/vega/museum/index_e.htm

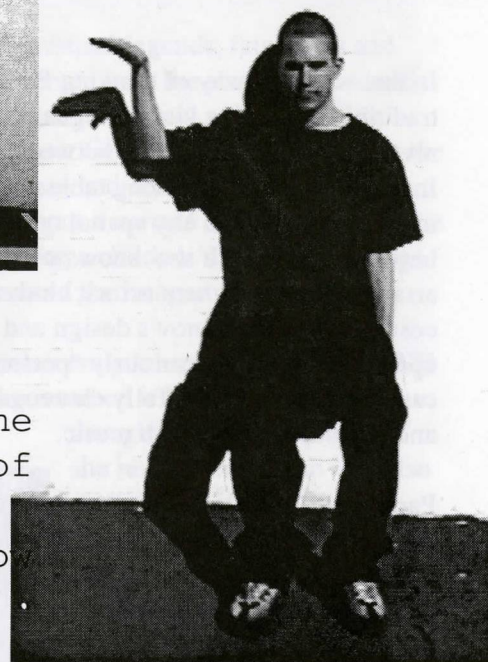
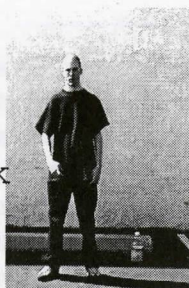
Seven Visions by Paradjanov published by Green Integer
www.greeninteger.com





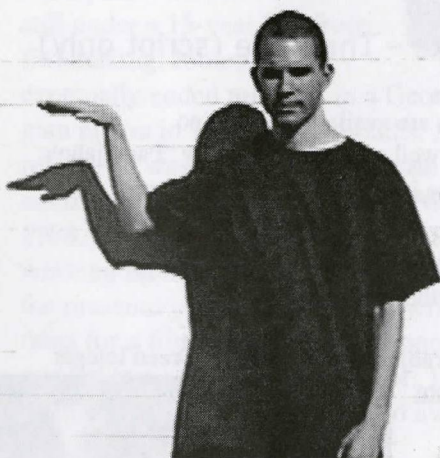
*Larry 'Bud' Melman
on the subway*

For one summer, 8-Diagram Video Clerk worked as an intern in an audio post-production studio in New York City. It was here that he encountered many of those 'famous' people. Here is how tall they were.

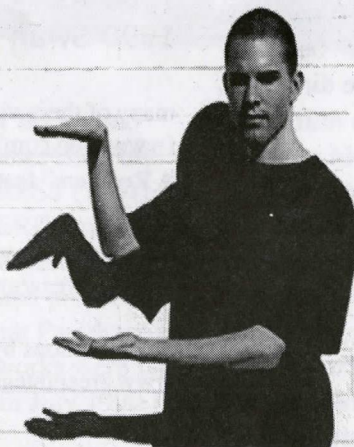


Bette Midler

Heights of the Stars



Al Pacino

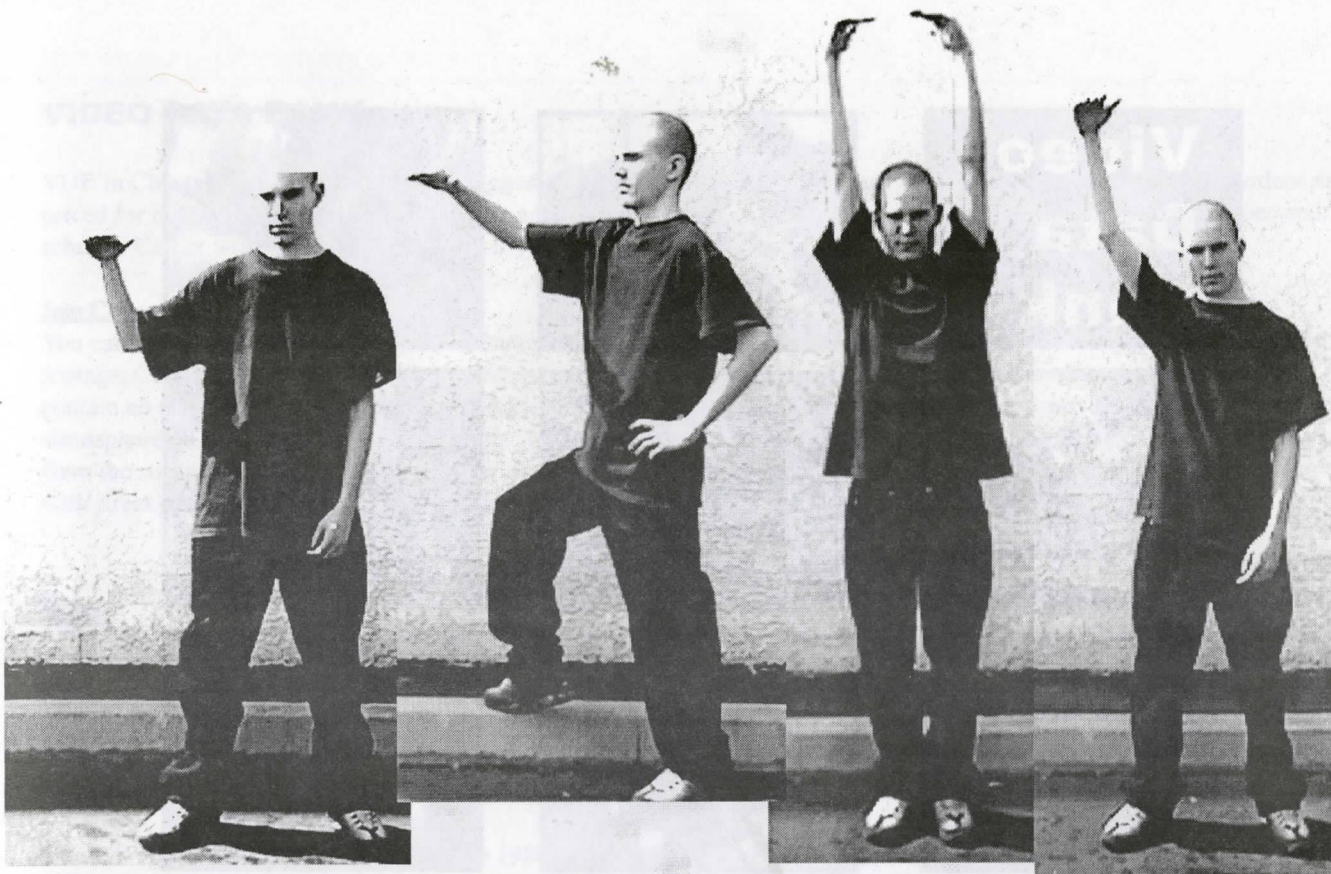


Al Pacino's head



Julianne Moore

note: 8DVC does not wish to convey that Mr. Pacino had a big ego, rather he was "almost all head." Also, Bette Midler was sitting down.

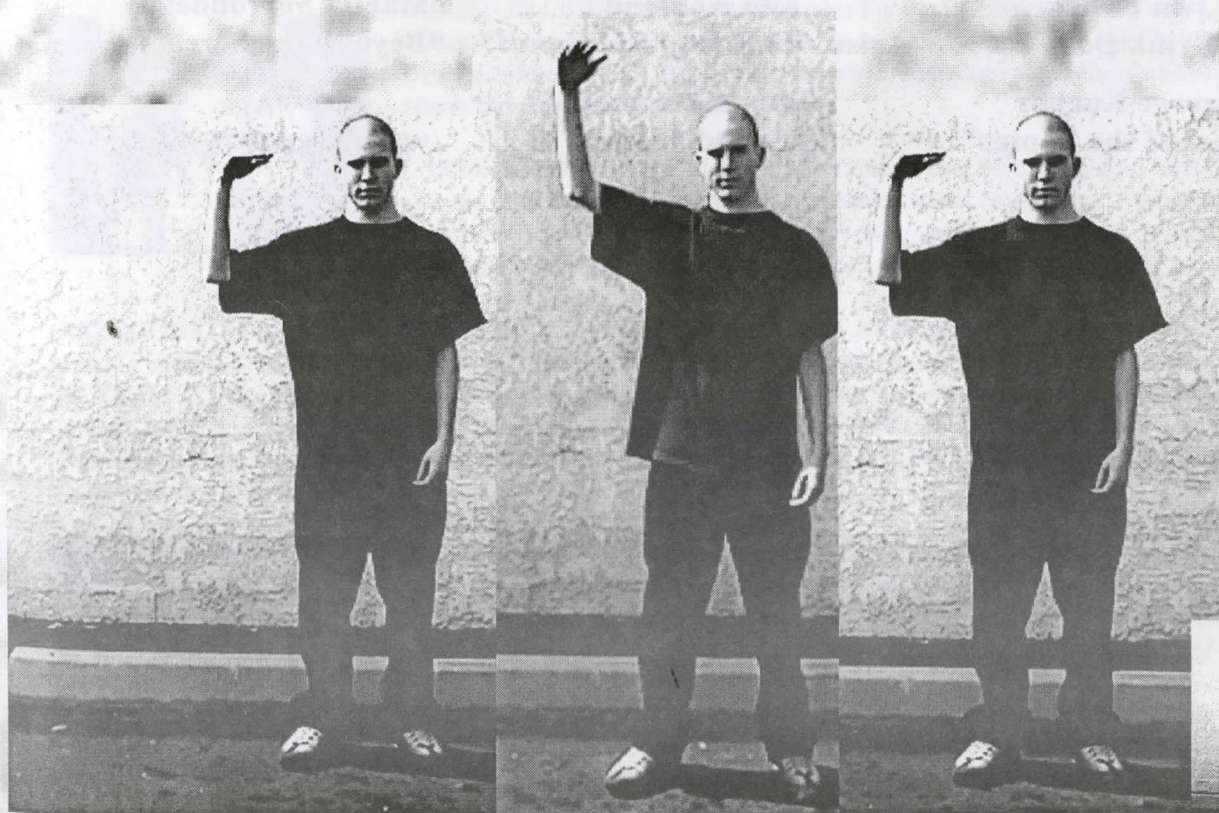


Anthony Hopkins

Debbie Harry

Frank Oz

Tim Robbins

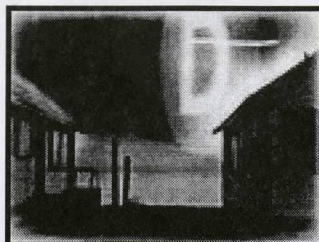


Elizabeth Hurley

Jim Jarmusch

Gina Gershon

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United States for videotapes
by and about contemporary artists

Miranda July
"Nest of Tens"

Christopher Wilcha
"The Target Shoots First"

Jem Cohen
"Drink Deep"

Ken Kobland
"Arise! Walk Dog Eat Donut"

Martin Sorrondéguy
"Beyond the Screams"

George Kuchor
"Planet of the Vamps"

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VIDEO DATA BANK Reviews

VDB in Chicago is one of the country's biggest resource of video work, primarily in the avant-garde vein. Some videos are priced for individuals (less than \$40), others are more expensive, priced for rental or sale to institutions like libraries and schools. Call or write VDB for more info. If you live in the Chicago area you can walk right in....

Jem Cohen:

You can work your way through Cohen's career with VDB. Working off a huge archive of his own super-8mm and 16mm film footage, Cohen's projects have no actors yet make interesting characters. They are not documentaries but they generally contain no staged scenes. They have no show-off shots yet use time-lapse, slo-mo and camera movement to create a rich atmosphere. "Once I became hooked on this concept of carrying a little camera all the time," Cohen explains, "it led me away from the structures of cinema as defined by the industry. It led me toward a more documentary tradition that had more to do with street photography than it did with movies."



VDB's collection "The Early Works of Jem Cohen" contains *THIS IS A HISTORY OF NEW YORK* (1987), *JUST HOLD STILL* (1989) and *DRINK DEEP* (1992). *STILL* is itself a collection of early shorts by Cohen, "a visual LP of songs by the same author," including the beautiful "4:44", about walking home from a girl's house, "Love Teller", a collaboration with unique cartoonist Ben Katchor, and -for lack of a better term- music videos for songs by Fugazi and R.E.M. The nice *DRINK DEEP* is scenes from a swimming hole. *HISTORY OF NY* was Cohen's first 'long' narrative; a visual archeologist's lesson on the most important city; and gained Cohen attention leading to his future work.

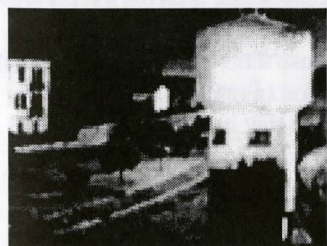
BLACK HOLE RADIO (1992) In the late 1980s someone set up a confession phone line service in New York City: you could call and confess something for free, but if you wanted to hear other people's confessions you were charged by the minute. Cohen and Ian Mackaye put together a video and an audio track sampled from the confessions. It was originally part of an installation where one person at a time would enter a booth with a phone and a monitor. Once they shut the door, the phone would ring. Once they picked up the phone, the video would start and the confessions would play on the earpiece.



BURIED IN LIGHT (Central And Eastern Europe In Passing) (1994) is diary footage from Cohen's European trip, to capture their landscapes, people and culture before impending Western influence does. Luckily for the world, someone caught these scenes in super-8 and 16mm film instead of television.

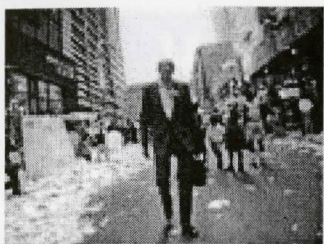
LOST BOOK FOUND (1996) Probably Cohen's best. Haunting words and images fascinate a young push cart vendor who wrongly decided to not buy the book from a street-grate fisherman. The film I wish I made. Say no more: legendary director Abbas Kiarostami is a fan, congratulating Cohen on "creating something out of the air."

FUGAZI: INSTRUMENT (1998) While first shooting for pleasure, Cohen and the band Fugazi (friends since they were all growing up in D.C.) were making it into an official film for the last five years. Rather than a strict informational documentary, *INSTRUMENT* is a unique portrait, incorporating serious aspects and humor, as well as private ideas about what a band is as opposed to public ones. Using every format from consumer video donated by fans to sync-sound 16mm film, *INSTRUMENT* shows that it's not about breaking down the barriers between musicians and fans, it's about not putting them up in the first place.



AMBER CITY (1999) Ten years after *HISTORY OF NY* Cohen has continued his style of beautiful images of landscapes and people with poetic narration, but he has advanced as well. In this portrait of an unnamed Italian city, the editing is more fluid and the images are even better. I love gritty super-8 but the colors in this 16mm film are amazing.

BLOOD ORANGE SKY (2000) One of Cohen's talents - and importance to film - is capturing a time and place, as he would tell you, in the tradition of the very first photographers. This time a portrait of Sicily, best seen after his *AMBER CITY*.



LITTLE FLAGS (2000) Cohen's newest short is 5-minutes and was actually shot in 1992 after a parade celebrating Operation Desert Storm. The mood is weird, especially a short following a tall, thin man through the abandoned streets filled with confetti.

If you wondered what music videos or short films -thankfully without dialogue- should be like, then you need to see Jem Cohen's work. But if you think you are the only one "able" to recognize the subtle everyday beauty of the world, or see hardened poetry in a stranger's expression, you are wrong.



George Kuchor:

I wish I could bring up specific titles, but Kuchor's work is all-encompassing and you would do best by watching any of his work. Somewhere in between John Cassavetes' independence, John Waters' style and Hollywood Babylon are George Kuchor's works - strongly independent film and video shorts, made on small budgets with heavily stylized acting, over-the-top locations and great camera shots.

Starting in New York City and continuing to where he teaches in San Francisco, Kuchor has been active since the 1960s. While most of his projects involve his own life, others are sensational melodramas. All are fun and seem to invoke that decade's sensibility.

Kuchor is like an avant-garde Herschal Gordon Lewis, the mild-mannered, well-dressed '50s man who made his living by making over-the-top, bloody horror films marketed for teenage drive-in crowds. Except Kuchor relates his life and surroundings in his films and does it for himself rather than exploitation for money, giving the rest of us an odd look into his singular world.



Miranda July:

July has created numerous projects in a variety of forms, all very unique. Since age 7 she has written and performed plays. In the 1990s she has gotten noticed for creating BIG MISS MOVIOLA, a chainletter of films and videos made by women; and for her various multi-media performance pieces including LOVE DIAMOND (1998) and SWAN TOOL (2000). But she has also made videos that are just as interesting as her live work. Her knack for playing multiple characters and combining various technical formats to investigate people and their habits is fun and insightful.

ATLANTA (1996) As in her live performances, July plays multiple characters: a young girl whose dream is to compete as a swimmer in the Olympics and her Mom, who gives her daughter the push she wish someone had given her. You can guess whose dream is really being played out. While minimal — hell, it's three shots — the film is pushed by July's force. She completely changes her mannerisms and voice as easily as changing her looks with clothes and wigs. It's funny to see the exchange between too-young athlete and too-burned out coach that must take place all the time.



AMATEURIST (1998) Scientist July carefully studies and interprets lab rat July by watching her from a surveillance camera. It offers a way to look at interpreting reality - how much can you make up about what you see, and what from that will mean anything to other people?

July: "As if you could capture (reality) on film. In some ways, an artist's representation of reality or trying to make you feel what you might feel in reality, could be so much more accurate than something that was caught on video. Because there's just surfaces, really, that you're capturing on video. How real was the actual situation in reality? (*laughs*) You know? Maybe everyone there wasn't too committed to reality at that moment. (They were) somewhere else inside themselves. Maybe that the way that woman looks in that body is really only half the story."



NEST OF TENS (1999) July's latest video follows multiple characters (this time played by different actors - July plays only one) as they poke and prod each other using the odd social structures and expectations humans have created for themselves. July takes some of her recurring themes - experiments, numerology, obsessions - and makes advancements on them.

Individual titles:



BLO NIGHTLY NEWS (1994) by the Barbie Liberation Organization

A humorous fake newscast by the organization who took a number of speaking Barbie and G.I. Joe dolls, swapped their voice boxes, repackaged them and covertly placed them back onto stores' shelves. Obviously, this is as hilarious as it is political. This video not only shows their campaign promises and results but shows the technical means on switching the voice boxes and hints on how to get it back into the store. While the production of the video isn't always as amusing as the newscasts and industrial training videos it parodies, the subject matter is great fun and it's only a half-hour of your time.



ROAM SWEET ROAM (1996) by Ellen Spiro

Spiro is a road filmmaker for real: she lives in an airstream trailer. In ROAM she travels around America searching for the non-typical 'loner'. Instead of romantic 20-something poets and rebels, Spiro finds and interviews various retirees who don't want to settle down in one place in their old age. She portrays them honestly, showing their passion for life hasn't stopped. Because of this the video is extremely upbeat and funny, with Spiro's dog narrating, encountering a variety of characters.



THE TARGET SHOOTS FIRST (1999) by Christopher Wilcha

With a surface-level description of "a video diary of working at Columbia House," you might skip over TARGET. But

this 70-minute documentary/diary is not pretentious or boring. Instead it's a fun and honest document of when a guy with punk rock ethics finds himself in a corporate position. In the early 1990s Wilcha was hired at Columbia House music mail order company on the strength of his knowing what was happening in the "alternative" music explosion. He decided to take his camera to work every day for two years, resulting in this 70-minute video. Wilcha captured an important time and place in the music industry, not to mention how a young man who thinks he can change things reacts within a huge corporate structure.

more reviews next issue, contact VDB directly for rental/sales info.

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DREAM OF LIGHT

(1990) 138 min.

Directed by Victor Erice

Video by Facets Video

a.k.a "The Quince Tree Sun"

The director of cult favorite *THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE*, Victor Erice, has another film coming out on video which should establish him on the long list of *mystery directors*. I don't mean the genre, rather a director like Terrence Malick or Alexander Sukorov, who have very few films available and are relatively unknown, but completely master the medium and are influential. Or even like Stanley Kubrick, who would take years to complete a project and kept himself away from publicity (see Malick again).

Spanish director Erice gives us a portrait of famous Spanish painter Antonio Lopez Garcia taking weeks to paint a portrait of sunlight and a quince tree.

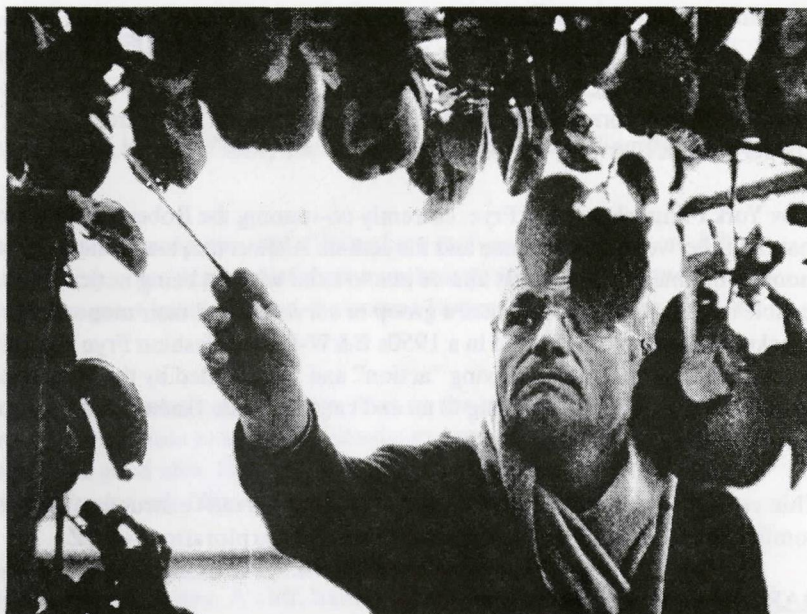
We get to see every facet of the painter at work. Besides the obvious studying of the object and painting, he puts up string to mark how the branches move over the time it takes to make the portrait. He paints marks on the branches themselves and the fruit. He puts stakes in the ground not only to keep the painting in the same place but to put his feet in the same place every day. He fights the weather and the aging of the fruit.

Over the weeks it takes to make the painting, we see workers putting up a wall and various visitors stop by to see how Garcia is coming along.

You can draw the obvious parallel: time slowly marches on, unstoppable, although we try to grab solid moments and plant stakes to keep us grounded. The visitors all reminisce of past times, as time goes by. The workers make the wall taller and stronger each day; another blockade in your life.

A parallel I enjoy more is the one between painter, painting and everyday life. As Garcia concentrates on the beauty of one image, there are still lives everywhere. Each visitor telling a story. Each stage of the wall being built. The workers' left over meal. The painter sleeping, dreaming of painting.

I was surprised to read that the film is a sort of documentary with Garcia's actions caught as he was really painting, not scripted, with everyone in the film



appearing as themselves.

At least some planning had to be done on the film side. The shot compositions are always perfect for the action. Long takes of wide-framed shots allow the characters to move and react, then close-ups capture important touches and actions.

All in all beautiful imagery of beautiful actions. Erice's sound complements this. It is usually natural with the score coming in occasionally, always in a good way. If an American director made this, you would be deaf from the booming orchestra. Instead, Erice hits you with the images.

Film can be like a painting in many ways: the light, composition, grain, colors, etc. But they are also similar in an economical way of learning.

There are a thousand films like *DREAM OF LIGHT* in that I will only see them on video (until I move to a bigger city, until distributors get smarter, and so on). I enjoy them but I am not really "seeing" them.

Most famous paintings I know from art books. So at most I have seen a 8 1/2 by 11 version, usually smaller, often in black and white. The handful of times I have gotten to a big museum I have been blown away by the real size of the paintings. You start to consider the labor, time and planning that goes into it. You see the bumps and valleys of the physical paint on the canvas. You realize the fucking talent that is there.

It is the same with seeing a film in a theater as opposed to on a television. Seeing *DREAM* on video just hints at Erice's talent.

Available at rental prices (so bug your video store) from www.facets.org.

REVIEWS

ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY (1999, Brian Frye, 10 min)

Send SASE for informational pamphlets and inspirational literature:
Cooper Station Box 499, NYC, 10276-0499

New York Filmmaker Brian Frye, currently co-running the Robert Beck Memorial Cinema in NYC, brings us a hypnotic short that floats between the audience and the screen. A short that brakes down what is dramatic while creating a truly voyeuristic moment in time and space that allows one to exist without being noticed. What seems to be a brief period in time after a terrible disaster Frye deconstructs a group of survivors and their monotone groans of misfortune (a group that literally looks hijacked from the 50s). Filmed in a 1950s B&W-B-Film fashion Frye not only gives us the character's dramatic cries, but the moments before and after allowing "action" and "cut" yelled by the director to slip in. These scenes then become more cut-up by quick edits, film mags coming to an end causing white flashes, characters reading their lines incorrectly, and moments of pure stillness.

This voyage into a world outside of the straight narrative structure is refreshing and it seems that Frye is more than comfortable to lend a hand in this much-needed exploration. — PZ

BARDOT IN A BOX

The Brigitte Bardot Collection *DVD Box Set by Anchor Bay*

I remember seeing and hearing Bresson talk in *THE ROAD TO BRESSON* and my first reaction - holy crap! Bresson has been so "behind" the camera and his craft that he seemed to exist only as one of the essences of cinema ...no flesh, no bone. It took me awhile to recover from that one.

Seeing Bardot outside of her tempting and provocative rolls in *BRIGITTE BARDOT...TAKE ONE* was similar in its own twisted way. I dreamt her up to be oh so sweet (thank God for Contempt!) -just like the rest of the men during her fame-never allowing the idea of her as a real person to sink in (hard not to do for her films and many other projects have gotten very little exposure until recently). No real regrets though, but I must admit it was somewhat uncomfortable yet intriguing to see her much later in life talking about the days of her prime. I almost wanted to stop watching to hold onto my dreams, but was happy I didn't for this documentary gives you just enough facts to still leave your fantasies attached.

Like Marcello Mastroianni in *I REMEMBER, YES I REMEMBER* and Robert Bresson in *THE ROAD TO BRESSON* Anchor Bay lets Brigitte Bardot seductively cuddle between adding to the much-needed collection of the cinema's past.

This fun, yet never demanding box set gives you a little taste of Bardot's career ranging from silly and absurd charm - *PLEASE NOT NOW* (highly recommended) - to the teenager's shout "Oh God I love the Cinemax channel" of *LES FEMMES* plus the straightforward drama of *COME DANCE WITH ME* and the "innocence" of *THE NAUGHTY GIRL*.

Anchor Bay does a great job in presenting each film: *COME DANCE WITH ME* - striking colors with an Aspect Ratio of 1.66:1, *NAUGHTY GIRL* - in vivid B&W with an Aspect Ratio of 2.35:1, *PLEASE NOT NOW* - again in vivid B&W with an Aspect Ratio of 2.35:1, and finally, which end up being the least favorite of the pack, *LES FEMMES* which falls with a full-frame presentation. Each disc does come with talent bios and trailers minus the highly desirable analog tracks.

All in all if Bardot is easy on your eyes and you're not ashamed to admit this then you can not ask for anything more than Bardot in a box. - PZ

EVEN DWARVES STARTED SMALL (1970, Werner Herzog) DVD by Anchor Bay

Werner Herzog made his madman mark with this, his second feature, starring an all-dwarf cast. Inmates at some sort of institution take over for hilarious and anarchic results. The first time I saw it was as a projectionist in a revival house a few years back. On 16mm it was three reels. For the first two, we were laughing and having a good time. On the third reel, we were silent and freaked out. I don't mean to build it up past your expectations, its not *SALO* material. But I saw it three times in a row and the last reel always wiggled me out. You laugh and then it sinks in.

The haunting tone, other world locations, great camerawork and sympathy with those on the edge of society set the scene for Herzog's later and better-known masterpieces *AGUIRRE* and *MYSTERY OF KASPAR HAUSER*.

The German director doesn't exploit outcasts; he loves and defends them by showing that it is n so-called normal people that truly have to prove their humanity. He insists that it is not the dwarves who are small but 'the world that has gotten out of shape.'

Filming was rough. At the end of the shoot Herzog jumped in a bunch of spiny cactus to show his understanding. He still has some of the needles in his leg.

The analog track is solid, basically because it has Herzog on it. I group him with filmmakers such as Robert Bresson, John Cassavetes, Andrei Tarkovsky and Orson Welles, in that every other thing out of their mouths is profound yet not pretentious (okay, sometimes Welles was pushy). As always Herzog has great, manic behind-the-scenes stories (like one of the dwarves getting run over by a car going in circles).

Norman Hill (who is also on the NOSFERATU analog track) interviews the director. Also on the track is cult actor-director Crispin Glover, I'm guessing in an attempt to get some real weirdness to happen or maybe to get some appeal for Herzog among cult watchers who are scared by subtitles – which is a good idea. Glover asks some good questions but it doesn't get crazy. However, this is still one of the most important and freaky cult films that will ever be released on DVD. —MP

I'LL NEVER FORGET WHAT'S 'ISNAME (1967, Michael Winner) DVD by Anchor Bay

One of those films that now fit into so many pre-judgable categories. A cult, hard-to-find film, not re-released to theaters and just coming out on video for the first time. Two legendary and notoriously hard-to-work with actors: Oliver Reed and Orson Welles. Made in England in the late 60s, usually a good sign. A young and interesting director - Michael Winner, who also did THE GIRL GETTERS and THE JOKERS (both 1966), and 1971's LAWMAN. [Yes, if you looked at his filmography, he also did the first three DEATH WISH films and three other Bronson films. But before that...]

Reed opens the film by quitting his advertising job in outlandish fashion. His Boss (Welles) offers to fire him since he hates him - but Reed is too good. With the freedom of giving up a job, dalliances with his wife (but they're separated) and two mistresses (Marianna Faithful as one of them) and yet another girl (Carol White from the great POOR COW), Reed feels enough power to question his past and all the authority he has lost to all his life.

While the pace is slower than I expected, I got into the characters and satire pretty quickly. All the acting is good and if you've ever had problems with the man, then you'll get along just fine with the themes. Welles basically plays his over-the-top himself, which I enjoy. Great camerawork and stylish editing make it beautiful to watch.

On the analog track is director Winner giving one of the better commentaries I've heard in a while. He's very well spoken and has a million great stories about Welles, Reed, other actors & behind the scenes stuff. Other topics include his film influences ("There's more influence by Fellini in this than I thought!"), differences in London then and now and how the film is really not that dated at all, at least in the themes and even the look. He's completely right. All in all, a great track I'll listen to again.

The extra text about Oliver Reed insists he was a regular guy who was sometimes difficult, then goes on to relate some of his obnoxious exploits. I'll give you just one: after one long alcoholic flight, Reed entered the terminal passed out on the luggage conveyor. —MP

MY BEST FIEND (1999, Werner Herzog) DVD by Anchor Bay

A portrait of working w/ Klaus Kinski, FIEND is interesting & hilarious. Before the (1999) Telluride screening I (shakily) introduced myself to Mr. Herzog as the projectionist of his film and a big fan. He told me, "Now — the film opens up right in the middle of Kinski ranting — so you have to make sure the sound is solid!"

Sure enough, the opening shot has Kinski standing alone on a concert stage in tight '70s polyester shirt, huge collar and tight jeans. He is ranting something or other about how he's Christ, in German into a microphone. Apparently he went on a "Jesus Tour" and basically went nuts in front of a crowd, pissing them off. It's great. Some mad audience members go on stage and try to 'debate' him but Kinski just keeps ranting.

Andy Kaufman was Klaus Kinski's only competition.

Kinski is portrayed through film clips, behind the scenes footage (including an amazing rant caught on film during the making of FITZCARRALDO) and even some old video footage of Kinski's 1979 tribute at Telluride. Unfortunately, Herzog could not locate the footage of when he and Kinski were walking by an open, half-full dumpster - he threw Kinski in and shut the lid as

the mad actor frantically tried to get out.

Herzog travels back to the remote jungle locations of AGUIRRE and FITZCARRALDO to talk about working with Kinski. He also goes back to the apartment where the two first met when Herzog was 13 and Kinski moved in as a boarder, instantly ripping the place up. Herzog also talks about helping Kinski make things up for his "vile and base" autobiography.

The film is a little long but real fun and very insightful about Kinski's talent and unreasonable quest for attention. It's amazing that these two powerhouses worked together so well so many times while, as Herzog puts it, the two "simultaneously hatched plans to murder one another." The work they did together was the best of each man's career.

PIT STOP (1967, Jack Hill) DVD by Anchor Bay

It's a cool summer night on an empty street. A drag racing Chevy enters the frame like some kinda UFO. Exiting this baby is the man called "The Winner" (Dick Davalos) who touches up his hair, lights his square, and checks for competition. With a swingin' beat several other cars pull onto the street ready to race. A deal is made and the race is off. Too bad for all for the Fuzz gotta call and The Winner gets crammed into jail! Bail has been paid by the man who was part of the race and makes an offer that's out of control. "Ever think about racing in one of these?" he asks..."A figure eight track...you mean it's got an intersection?"

This is the beginning of what is actually a gem of a flick. With just the right amount of action, dancing dames, speeding cars, and crazy drivers who love to smash things up! Even the moments where such films like this might drag, PIT STOP shines and never lets up. It could be my love for the 60s, which I know is a huge part of it, but this flick not only captures a time period, but also tells an interesting story using actual footage from these insane figure eight races. There's even a moment when an old timer (a true F8 driver) gives a few tips to The Winner and he's actually driving the car at high speed (all other times the drivers are shown driving with a projected race track behind them known as Eastman Translight).

Plus, Jack Hill goes to town with the daddy-o music, macho maniacs, and hip-twistin' foxes capturing them all in a very impressive remastered Black & White print (aspect ratio of 1.66:1). Anchor Bay goes to town also with plenty of extras. Audio Commentary by Jack Hill and Johnny Thunders, Trailers in B&W and color, and a featurette about the making of PIT STOP. — PZ

THE RIVER (1996, Tsai Ming-liang) in theatres now

Edward Yang once said that he makes films about people with extreme problems so that his audience can go home saying "At least my life's not that bad!" This is exactly how I felt after seeing Taiwanese director Tsai Ming Liang's 3rd feature, THE RIVER. You'd think that such a beautiful yet uncomfortable film would be worth seeing once and that's it. To expose oneself to this story's pain again and again would just seem plain mad. I've seen it three times and each time it gets better.

It's the story of a young man, Tsai regular Lee Kang-sheng, who meets an old friend, another Tsai regular Chen Shiang-chyi, and gets asked to help out on the film she's working on. Lee reluctantly accepts and plays the role of a dead body floating in what looks like a very contaminated river. After the shoot Lee and Chen disappear to a hotel to wash up and then they have sex. After this scene Chen disappears from the film entirely. I prefer not to reveal the rest of the plot for the introduction of the other characters in the film plays a vital role in expressing the loneliness and isolation that all the characters feel.

The one thing that I will mention that's key to the film is the pain in the neck that Lee gets from the river. This pain starts out small, but by the end of the film his pain is so profound/symbolic that I found myself massaging my own neck as if I too was contaminated by the same river. The power of a simple character trait, the pain in Lee's neck, proves that you do not need to spend loads of cash to get a film's audience to react.

If you're not a fan of Tsai already - REBELS OF THE NEON GOD (1992), VIVE L'AMOUR (1994), and THE HOLE (1998) - than the above might not intrigue you enough to see the film. Many critics have compared him to Michelangelo Antonioni for Tsai's themes focus on urban melancholia of loneliness and isolation. Tsai also has a very similar visual sense to Antonioni for the environment plays a major role in both of their films. If this still doesn't intrigue you than the simple fact that Tsai rests among other great directors of our time such as Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao Hsien and Abbas Kiarostami should. A new wave of directors that are constantly challenging and reshaping the way stories are told. — PZ

THE SEVENTH CONTINENT (1989, Michael Haneke) VHS by Cinema Parallel

It's rare to view a film once and then when watching it a second time be able to feel the beat of each shot as if there would be no other way to shoot it. I guess you could say that this film hit me rather hard. This overlooked masterpiece tells the story of a middle class family dealing with the day to day boredom of their machine like lives.

German filmmaker Michael Haneke, who most people might know for directing *FUNNY GAMES* (which I haven't seen yet and fear to see for I'm afraid that it's not gonna come close to this gem of a flick), presents us with a supposedly true story full of mystery and intensity with very little dialogue or action. He keeps our attention through the beautifully composed shots that gain complexity as the film comes to a more than profound ending.

A simple scene when the family has a guest over for dinner. They eat their food, look at each other, say the food is good, and then a song on the radio somewhat loudly intrudes this ritual and the guest gets uncomfortable. The music is turned down and the guest says, "Thank you." The other scene is when the mother helps her daughter get ready for bed and the two hug for only a brief moment. Oh yeah, almost forgot about the introduction of the sound of a ship blowing its horn - calling the main characters to their still unclear destiny. These scenes may seem rather small and insignificant but their simplicity is their complexity and all in all I believe that Robert Bresson would be very proud with what Haneke has achieved. A final note about this film...sound. It's such a relief to have the actual sound as the "soundtrack" of a movie. So many films today seem to have forgotten that natural sound can be just as effective as a blaring rock song. The other night I watched the ending of *LADYHAWKE* (1985) and there was a scene where Rutger Hauer slowly sways his sword from the neck of a Bishop. The sound of his leather clothing shifting literally keeps you on the edge of your seat allowing you to feel the intensity of the situation.

Sound, as applied to Haneke's film, not only creates a mood, but is also an important character that allows the audience to relate to the story on another level. One scene that plays with the importance of sound is a scene where music is introduced to create an almost dreamlike state for one of the main characters, a relief for the viewer due to the strict realism presented before this moment, which is then purposefully cut off by the sound of a closing door. From this film alone Haneke's use of sound can be compared to the works of such directors as Bresson and fellow contemporary filmmakers Abbas Kiarostami and the films of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne. - PZ

X - THE UNHEARD MUSIC (1986, W. T. Morgan) old VHS tape

I came across this in the video store a few times but finally watched it (the Key Video box being a hint that it's probably out-of-print). I've always liked X but this documentary on them might turn it into love.

Made during the highpoint of the band's existence, after the albums *Los Angeles* and *Wild Gift*, and with their best lineup of Exene, John Doe, Billy Zoom and DJ Bonebrake. The doc has interviews in their houses (always an interesting way to see into people), live performances (with good lighting and sound) various shots of LA landmarks, collections of stills and more. There is also a nice acoustic rendition of a Hank Williams song by Exene and Doe.

Rather than a bunch of songs strung together, the film is inventive. One sequence of old punk photos put together on one song, nice photography of a huge house moving through LA - so LA - over another song, X at a record signing of *Under the Big Black Sun* over another and more, breaking up the good live footage. [The record signing takes you back - it's records, first of all, priced at 5.99.]

The doc helps itself into being feature-length by offering info on the music industry and other related societal topics for the time with other interviews and cool found footage. The difference is shown between Slash (10 employees and good music) and MCA (900 employees and no brains at the top). The head of Elektra comes off as an untalented Jerry Lewis.

A great band but also a great music documentary that shows the beauty of poetic moments in everyday life, maybe in everyone's life, while not harping on celebrity bullshit just because they're famous as well as talented. If Anchor Bay is reading, since you are re-releasing *REPO MAN*, how about this one, too, along with the first *DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION* and the first *SUBURBIA*? —MP

MP-Mike Plante
PZ-Paolo Ziemba

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 champion is **GOODFELLAS** with a soul shocking 267 fucks, for 1.83 per minute. This might be the champ until another Scorsese film comes up.

First Contestant: **POPE OF GREENWICH VILLAGE**

(1984) Directed by Stuart Rosenberg. Written by Vincent Patrick.

Starring Mickey Rourke, Eric Roberts, Daryl Hannah, Kenneth McMillan (ThatGuy), Burt Young (ThatGuy), Tony Musante (ThatGuy).

Loser Rourke gets caught up in bad heist by bigger loser Roberts, whom gets his thumb taken by the mob - in a scene featuring ThatGuy Richard Foronjy from REPO MAN, in which he commonly explained, "Don't you ever say 'fuck you' to me!" What starts out as an interesting low-key look at hoodlums doesn't go anywhere, but features a solid performance from character actor McMillan. I was told I said fuck more times while watching the movie, as in "Fuck, this is boring."

Extra credit: Roberts' afro.

Second Contestant: **TOMMY LASORDA**

(1970s-80s) From the bootleg(?) CD "Celebrities At Their Worst."

Starring Tommy Lasorda, numerous sportswriters.



When baseball manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers, Lasorda had a few things to get off his chest in classic manager foul-mouthedness. Writers interviewing him had their tape recorders going. As Lasorda commented on games, umpires and strategies, curse words and hilarity ensued. Some enterprising person got a hold of these recordings and shared them with the world. (Although he means to make a point, Lasorda often sounds light-hearted and is nice to the writers.)

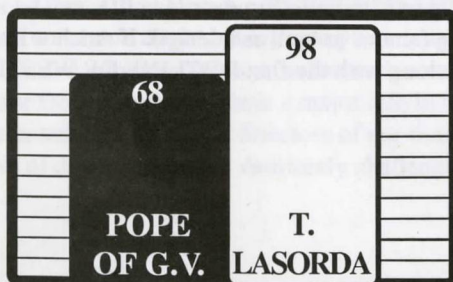
Extra Credit: It's good to hear "horseshit" used as a noun, an adjective and a verb. 200 points for saying, "He's a fucking motherfucker."

THE RESULT: Let's face it, I wanted a week off. **GOODFELLAS** rolls on....

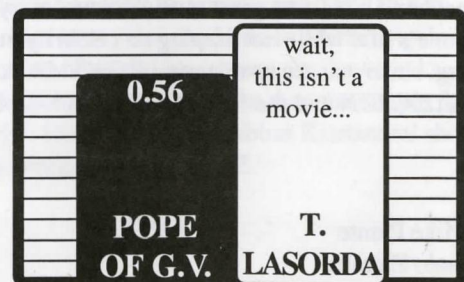
By the way, both contestants this time will "guaran-fucking-tee" you.

Next Issue: **SOUTH PARK** vs. **RAGING BULL**.

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OTHER READS

Bad Azz Mofo

David Walker, PO Box 40649, Portland, OR 97240-0649
www.badazzmofo.com

He's back - right now with a digest-sized issue with reprints and new interviews with black cinema stars and filmmakers from the '70s on. But he promises new full-size issues in the future. Write him for more info and beg him to keep it coming.

Cinema Scope

Full size, five bucks

465 Lytton Blvd, Toronto, Ontario M5N 1S5 Canada
cinema_scope@hotmail.com

Still going strong, issue #3 has great coverage on the talented Taiwanese filmmaker Hou Hsiao-Hsien and his films, more best of the 90s lists and film fest coverage. #4 has articles on DANCER IN THE DARK, Cannes and an amazing interview with Abbas Kiarostami that will give you filmmaking quotes to live by.

Double Down

Full size, three bucks, fifty cents

PO Box 194264, San Francisco, CA 94119

www.spacedesign.com/doubledown

Nicely laid out culture mag that's on the tip of what's underground and still very accessible: #4 has interviews with Dan Clowes, Man or Astroman, Macha, Starlite Desperation and Andy Ward, among others.

Farm Pulp

Tall sized, three bucks

PO Box 2151, Seattle WA 98111

So good it hurts. Great fiction(?) writing and cool layout, with many half-pages and foldouts. Get it and get it good.

Flicker

Digest, four bucks

c/o Norwood Cheek, 6310 1/2 Primrose Ave.,
Hollywood, CA 90068

www.chapel-hill.nc.us/flicker

"Your guide to the world of Super-8" is a great resource for those who know you can still get great results from small formats. Lists of where to get cameras, repairs, film and processing, and festivals to take part in. A few articles and styling old ads reprinted. Flicker has their own solid festivals in LA, Chapel Hill and Richmond, Virginia.

Genetic Disorder

Full size, free in San Diego county, three bucks for you
PO Box 15237, San Diego, CA 92175

Everything I like about zines - a lot of down-to-earth writing and storytelling, serious and funny; reviews of music I've never heard of but will probably like and not too much of taking yourself too seriously. On top of that, (#14, at least, is) over a hundred pages. I dream of Genetic's girth.

Also, I was fortunate enough to sleep on editor Larry's palace floor for a few nights and first-handedly observed his cool, calm demeanor and sleekness. People, mostly women, knocked on his door at all hours for advice and comfort. Larry also knows how to fish.

Psychotronic Video

Full size, five bucks

4102 Main St, Chincoteague, VA, 23336

Along with Chris Stigliano's *Black to Comm*, Michael Weldon's Psychotronic Video is easily my favorite magazine. Each issue since it's progression beyond a New York City teevee tipsheet has introduced me to some of my now favorite oddball and forgotten culture, and the articles on stuff I already knew about have always had some new and obsessively arcane information in them. There's more music in Psychotronic lately, and Weldon (onetime drummer for Cleveland's Mirrors, an early 70's Velvets inspired group spawned from the same scene that gave the world the Electric Eels, Rocket from the Tombs, etc) seems to be documenting every childhood favorite of his over the course of the magazine.

The most recent issue (#33) has a great & lengthy article on Cleveland's "Upbeat!" show, a long running Midwest cousin to Shindig and Hullabaloo that showcased an amazing array of rock'n'roll acts from 1965 to 1971 (The Rationals, The Sonics (!), The Velvet Underground, & Funkadelic just for starters), as well as a detailed article on Buck Kartalian, a muscle bound, alternate universe Dick Smith who had memorable turns in *Please Don't Eat My Mother* and *The Acid Eaters* in addition to his more well known role as the cigar smoking Julius in *Planet of the Apes*. Articles on Robert (Count Yorga) Quarry and Julie (look at me, I'm naked & tall) Strain are no less comprehensive.

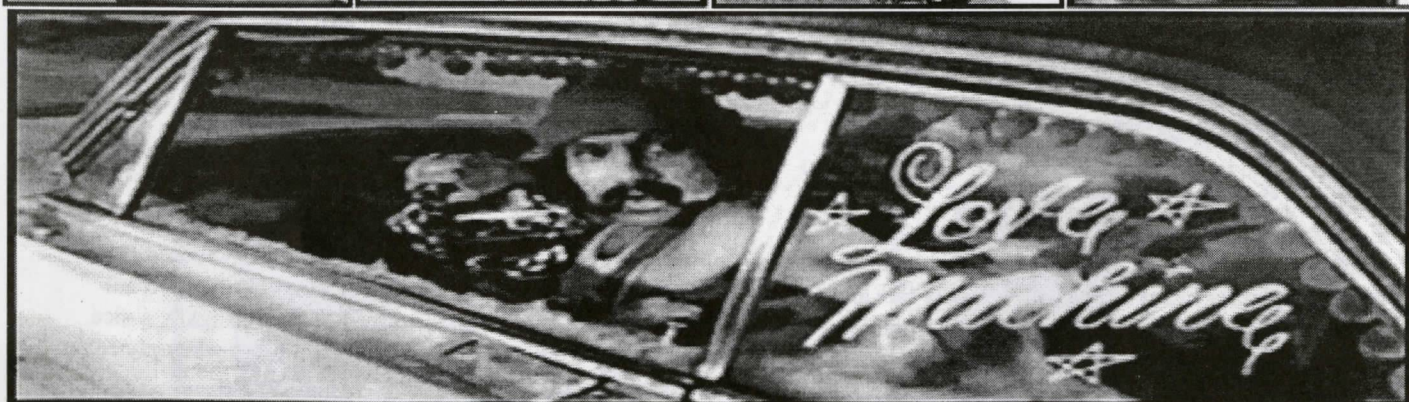
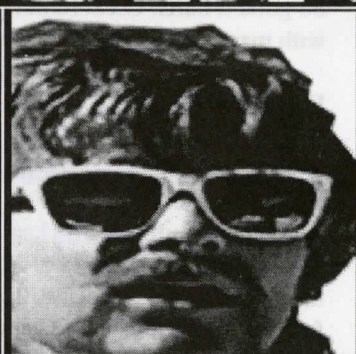
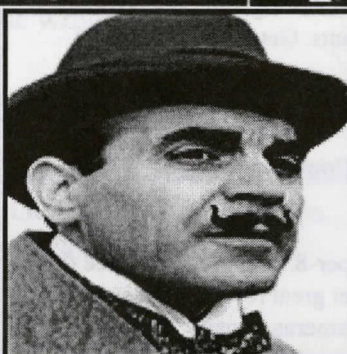
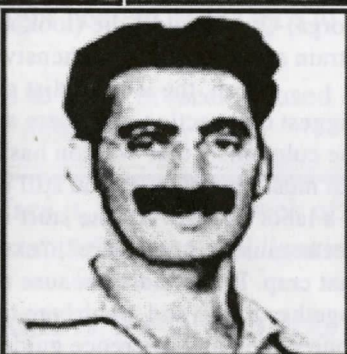
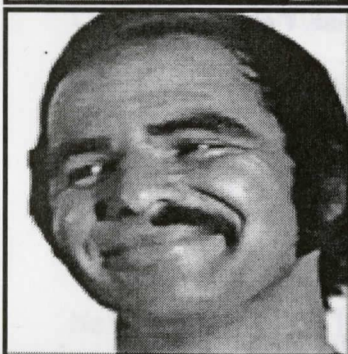
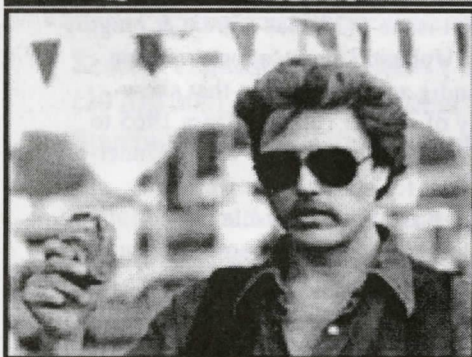
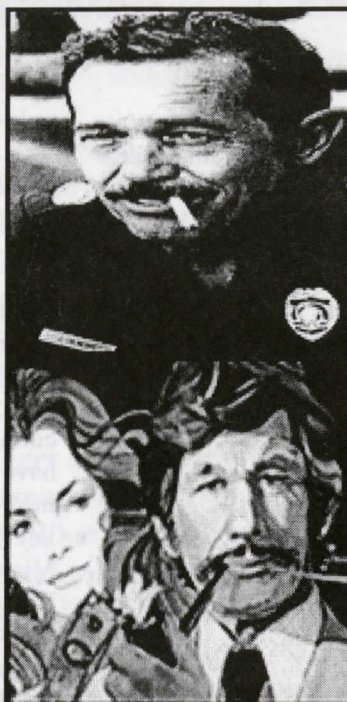
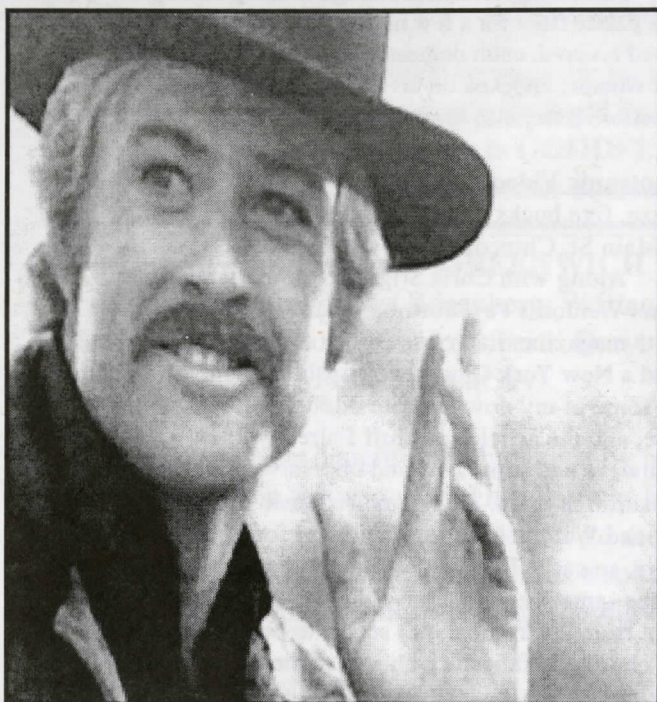
Yeah, the laundry list style reviews and the biggest obit section anywhere are present, and so are all the columnists that Weldon has amassed over the years, but most importantly, you still really get a sense that this is a labor of love. All the stuff in Psychotronic is in there not because it's "obscure", "extreme", "bad", or any of that crap. It's in there because the people who put it together like it and are driven to obsession by it. As a sourcebook and reference guide for sideline film/art/culture/whatever, Psychotronic still can't be beat. (Jason Willis)

Shock Cinema

Full Size/Five bucks/Steve Puchalski, PO Box 518,
Peter Stuyvesant St., New York, NY 10009

<http://members.aol.com/shockcin/>

More interviews with the reviews this time, including great ThatGuy Eddie Deezen, cult-director-extraordinaire Paul Morrissey and '70s actress Carol Speed. Once again, a nice alternative to the mainstream AND cult mags who only cover horror/sci-fi titles.



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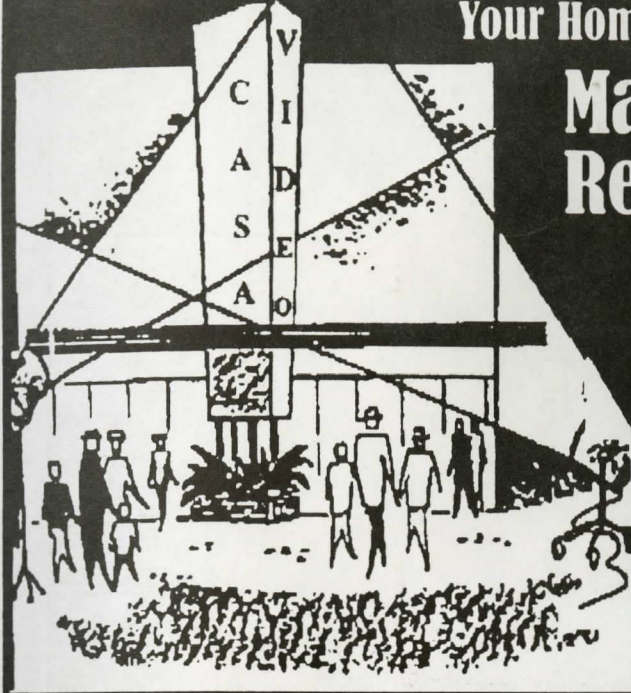
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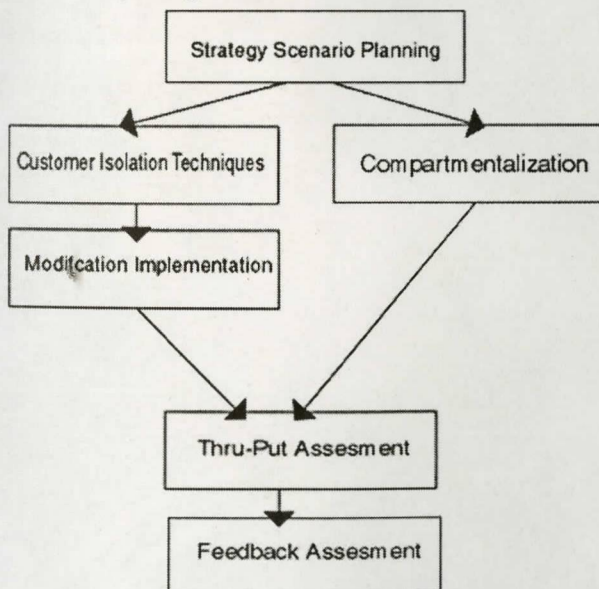
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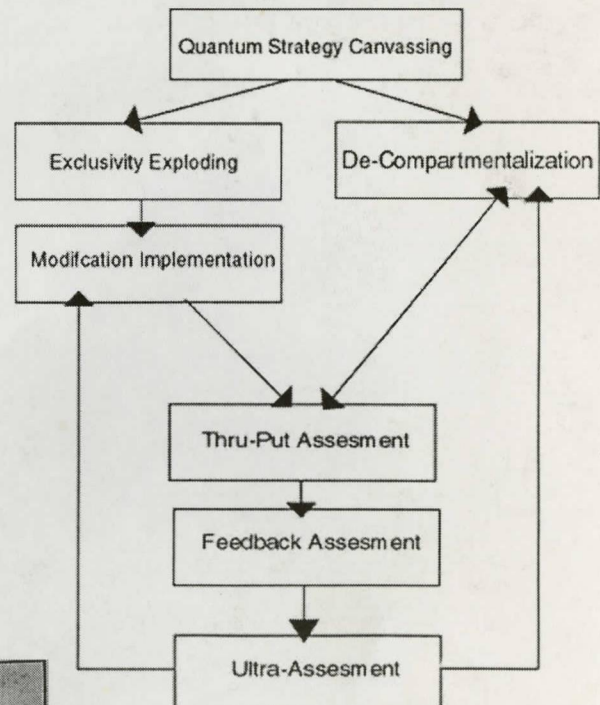
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