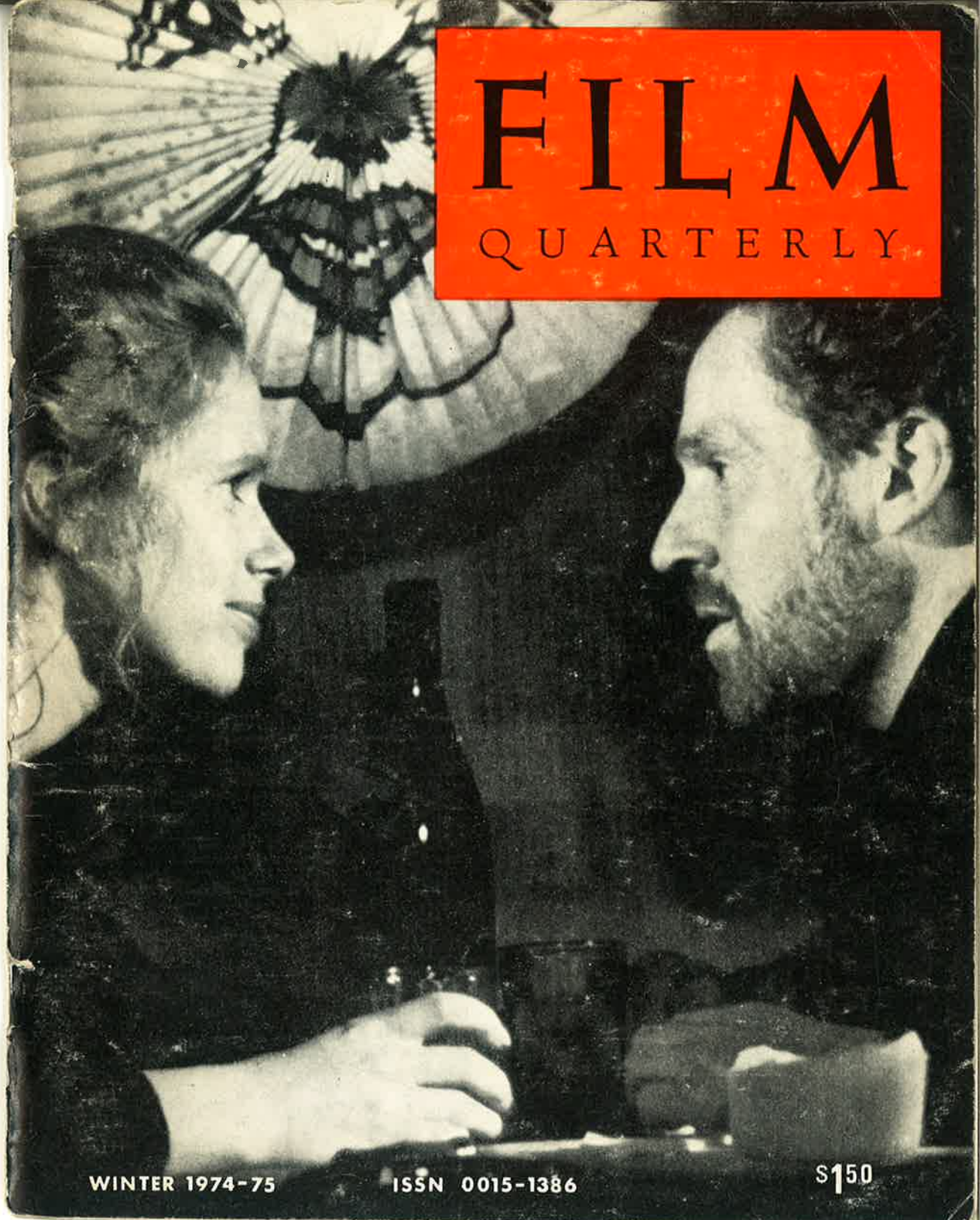
FILM
QUARTERLY



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ARTICLES

INTERVIEW

REVIEWS

SHORT NOTICES

COVER: Liv Ullman and Erland Josephson in Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage*.

Editor's Notebook

NOTES ON FILM SCHOLARSHIP, CRITICISM, METHODOLOGY, AND WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE ANYWAY?

There may or may not be such an entity as "the film community." But for years a lot of people believed that there was, and that it comprised all those dedicated souls who took the medium seriously—who wrote about it, taught about it, or used it conscientiously as artists. Despite the idiosyncracy and downright quarrelsomeness of most of those who loved films in this personal way, a curious sense of a shared world persisted. You could meet people in Budapest and recognize their concerns, their loves, as close to your own. Tastes varied; devotion to the art was the glue that held this subculture together.

It may be only a consequence of our growing sophistication about intellectual methodologies that this happy universe of shared discourse now seems on the verge of shattering. If you attend a gathering of film scholars, as I did recently, you sense abysses of intellectual stance which are far deeper than the cleavages of opinion and feeling that help make any professional field exciting and worth participating in. This may be a sign of theoretical and political growth. But it may also be a sign that a momentary diversion or heresy, useful in part, is in danger of isolating itself from some more broadly defined intellectual conversation.

Let me outline, sketchily and polemically, three admittedly extreme models of how film thought is currently being carried on. I should preface these models with a notice that what I am saying here flows from a specifically liberal view of social process: that many schools of thought should contend, and that it behooves each of them to appeal to as wide a spectrum of support as possible—lest elitism, scholasticism, sectarianism, and pedantry set in. (Tendencies which are endemic among intellectuals from middle-class backgrounds, including myself, and which both vitiate the intellectual power of thought and isolate it from social need and social effect.)

In one widely practiced type of literary criticism, and in a body of film criticism more or less parallel

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to it, it has been taken for granted that we let the words or images "speak." We trust the tale, not the teller; indeed, except for anecdotal amusement, we try to ignore the teller. Though we bring various sociopolitical assumptions to our "reading," we draw evidence about what the work is strictly from within it. (We may then —this is an operation like Aristotle's in the *Poetics*— attempt to derive from a body of such observations definable genres such as tragedy or the Western.) What seems crucial about this tradition is that it assigns to the work a role of free-standing object, an independent entity. And the writer's task is to help readers gain a workable understanding of the work's nature. If we conceive of films in this way we can love them. It seems natural and easy to feel they have become, like friends or lovers, important parts of our emotional lives. We speak of them enthusiastically (or later vindictively) to those who don't know them. They enter our heads as part of our experience, and join there with the other things we fancy we know about "life." Our structural dissections of such works are done, at their best, in a spirit of loving curiosity, a desire to share their beauties with the reader.

The kind of analysis generally called *auteurist* is a second model. It continues to treat individual films as worthy of attention in themselves. But it insists that the critic carry out this task in a context of the director's other work (as, of course, much literary criticism has also done, if less systematically). However, the individual film in a fully *auteurist* analysis takes a less central position. What is *really* of concern is the director's personal vision, an entity which at least inheres in actual films, but whose essence is a more general and abstract phenomenon emanating from the director's mind. An individual film may still be lovable, partly because it is a manifestation of the director's vision—as we may love the child of someone we love. But the analytical operation to which the film is subjected tends to resemble a Platonic detective process: having certain ideas about the themes, structures, and strategies the director customarily uses, we search the film to see how they are manifested. Only if that search fails would we have to deal with the film purely in itself, and we would tend to call it an aberration in the director's canon. A necessary refinement, of course, covers the vagaries of Hollywood, where directors customarily worked from scripts by diverse hands and under powerful and erratic producers, and the striking changes of style which occur with European directors—so that we can hope to explain how the same man made *Smiles of a Summer Night* and *Hour of the Wolf*, for instance.

In the third model of film thought, which often goes under the label semiotic or structuralist, individual films may either totally or partially disappear from the discourse. We may read lengthy tracts in *Screen* and *Cahiers* (and we occasionally indulge this tendency in *FQ*) in which no films are mentioned or referred to at all, directly or indirectly. Even in the writings of Umberto Eco, who seems to me the most acute and sensitive of the semiological writers, references to actual films are replaced by token verbal references to clearly imaginary "images," like "a white horse in profile," which seem to me so impoverished compared to real film images that discussing them can profit us little.

This tendency must seem like a heresy for anyone used to scientific work with its close linkage of theory and practice (even in linguistics, where examples or cases can be presented in the same language as the over-all discourse). Its causes, no doubt, are complex. There is an overriding urge to join film with other communications media, so that what serves for one is often assumed to serve for all (after all, is it not widely repeated that film is some kind of language?). There is the overriding concern to get clear ideologically, to escape the unacknowledged biases of older criticism; this task can so occupy a writer's attention that entire articles become essays in throat-clearing, but nothing except methodology is actually addressed. There is a tendency, perhaps because of general French intellectual habits, to compress the range of discourse upward toward great abstraction, where the real topic being discussed is no longer actual films and their relations with actual films and actual ideological patterns, but the process of communication quite generally. This process may, for some writers, hardly require the existence of films in order to take place; they might just as well be novels or paintings, since their individual nature is of no particular interest. They are mere fodder for the analytical machine, and one will do as well as another; what matters about them is whether they offer a handle for analysis. If you ask a practitioner of such thought whether he or she *likes* a given film, or *feels* anything about it, you may get an icy stare. The films themselves have faded away, wraithlike, leaving only the rack of methodology behind.

Luckily, there is another active strand in the semiological/structuralist model—though it is as yet represented only by a few published English examples, chiefly *Cahiers' "Young Mr. Lincoln" (Screen)* and Charles Eckert's *"Marked Women" (FQ)*. In such work we find that the actual film stages a comeback—though not on grounds of personal appeal or artistic quality. Films can be, in fact, chosen utterly at random for this kind of analysis, or (as Will Wright does in *Sixguns and Society*, his forthcoming structuralist study of Westerns —UC Press) purely on popularity, since what is of basic concern is their social role. In this approach the film's

primacy as an aesthetic object has been abolished, but its importance as a "case" for study remains. It is assumed—I think reasonably—that a well done study of this type will illuminate many films besides its immediate subject. But the real topic of such work is, again, a *process:* this time, processes of displacement or implication or "informing absences" or myth-formation. Such processes, however, are taken to inhere in actual films, and their presence is generally demonstrated with refreshingly concrete evidence. It seems to me that this kind of work, along with James Roy MacBean's detailed Marxist analyses, shows the greatest promise of lasting intellectual achievement, because it offers a way of continually linking theory and practice, and of continually demonstrating, throughout an analysis, that theoretical ideas produce useful understandings.

Political and methodological problems crisscross in any consideration of film thought. Because of the importance of May 1968 to subsequent French thinking, it is sometimes assumed that the fundamental divisions are political; and, despite the fact that most film people have always been leftists, it is probably true that the refinements of Marxist thought in recent years, enabling it to cope with ideology somewhat self-reflexively, constitute an important break. We also confront, however, what I can only call an escape into metaphysics, even if it is supposedly a materialist metaphysics. This is not a bad thing to have happen occasionally. The kind of semantic concern displayed by Kristeva and other imperialist semioticians is in some ways a startling replay of "general semantics"—an earlier system of making sure we know what levels of abstraction we are operating on, of reminding us that "the word [image] is not the thing," of noticing the assumptions, political-social-epistemological, that lurk in apparently simple discourse. But when such work becomes purely abstract, its theoretical vigor is compromised. Like a plant that grows spindly and finally topples over, it lacks the sustenance that can only be provided by contact with the real world of actual films. Moreover, its social role and impact are constricted, for it is miserably unpleasant to read; the constant shifting of abstract terms has all the human charm of a freight yard. And it is a scholastic illusion to imagine that unreadibility necessarily implies novelty or theoretical force; reading original works by Freud or Einstein reminds us that thinkers of the greatest originality are also often brilliant expositors.

New ideas not only can be made enticing, they *must* be, one way or another, or they will die. We thus urge that writers attempting to develop new theory make it a matter of priority that (to maul Marianne Moore's metaphor) they populate their theoretical gardens with real films and real viewers. —E. C.

INFLATION

Rising costs of paper and printing have forced the University of California Press to raise prices on all its journals. Single copies of *FQ* will henceforth cost $1.50. Individual subscription rates will be $6.00 domestic and $7.00 foreign. (Institutional subscription rates and back-issue prices are somewhat higher.) If you are a bookstore or newsstand purchaser and have found the magazine of interest, we urge you to subscribe; you will thus be sure of getting each issue, and you receive the yearly index.

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MARSHA KINDER

Life and Death in the Cinema of Outrage, or, The Bouffe & the Barf

On the weekend of September 7th, two films that have outraged the audiences at Cannes were exhibited in California's underground capitols —Berkeley and Venice. Dusan Makavejev's *Sweet Movie* made its American debut at Berkeley's Wheeler Auditorium. Resisting pressures from American distributors who are determined to prune the film, Makavejev apparently wanted to test it with an unconventional audience. Although response was wildly varied, it was uniformly passionate: *Sweet Movie* was attacked as an homage to Hitler, ridiculed as a 40-year-old's wet dream, and celebrated as a brilliant work of revolutionary anarchy. Meanwhile, in Southern California, Marco Ferreri's *The Grande Bouffe* was presented, not on Hollywood Boulevard or in Westwood, but at the Fox Venice, a low-budget neighborhood theater that offers a different pair of third-run movies or old classics, creatively matched, every night of the week. Ferreri's film ran for three nights, enabling audiences to choose another eating classic *(Tom Jones, The Loved One,* or *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie)* as a second course. The enthusiastic sell-out crowds included not only Venice regulars, but film buffs from all over L.A. The response to these two showings paralleled the reaction at Cannes: while *The Grande Bouffe* was awarded the International Prize, *Sweet Movie* was mainly abused.

On the surface, the films have many similarities. Both painfully funny, they are stuffed with graphic scenes of vomiting, shitting, slurping, and screwing. They both play with the polarities of filth and purity, chaos and order, eroticism and death. In the tradition of Rabelais, Swift, Burroughs, and Buñuel, they use eating as a central metaphor, rendering literal the ideal of the consumer society where one culture, class, race, or sex devours another. The basic biological processes focus attention on survival. Both films raise the question of whether an artful death can be more vital than a sterile life. Both self-consciously allude to other films and other forms of art, trying to revitalize old recipes with new combinations and lots of spice. What results in both cases is a surrealistic hash.

Despite the surface similarities, the films have very different implications, which may account for the contrasting responses they evoke. *Sweet Movie* with its chaotic collage structure is truly anarchistic, whereas *The Grande Bouffe,* beneath its extravagant grossness, has an almost neoclassical rigor. As in his earlier films (especially *WR: The Mysteries of the Organism*), Makavejev bombards his audience with intensely disturbing images, mixing sweetness and terror, hilarity and the macabre, pure ideology with sickening violence. In the opening scene a woman croons, "I see something black, is it my beloved, or is it cowshit?" Confidently, we giggle at the incongruity. But later we get rather edgy when we see inmates of a radical therapy commune prancing around with their shit on a platter while the silly victimized heroine moons in a corner before writhing sensuously in a vat of chocolate. The values have been reversed: showing your shit seems preferable to being sugarcoated. But, on the gut level, we are still revolted by the shit and turned on by the sugar. We feel terribly uneasy because we are not sure how we are supposed to respond—to *anything.*

SWEET MOVIE: *Miss Universe as erotic bonbon.*

We cannot revert to neat formulas or political rhetoric because they, too, seem to be under attack. Like Swift, Sterne, Buñuel, and Godard, Makavejev forces us to explore our own judgments and instinctive responses to the images he presents; it's impossible to have a passive response. Because of the disturbing nature of the material and the ambiguous way it is presented, at moments we may feel stupid, ridiculous, perverted, or counter-revolutionary—which is terribly threatening. So some viewers in the Berkeley audience wanted to reject the film completely by vomiting in disgust or seeing it simply as a pile of shit, yet no one could deny that it served up weighty matters that were hard to digest.

In contrast, after two hours of steady gorging in *The Grande Bouffe* we are left with very little of substance. The film turns out to be as light as a Suckling lyric. Like the dogs (frequently an image for critics) in the final scene, we are presented with a lot of meat but are reluctant to sink in our teeth. Instead, we are more likely to identify with the characters who have O.D.'d on purée, paté, and froth. Yet we can feel smug for we have survived the orgy with our values and manners intact. The weekend banquet, in which four men eat themselves to death, is a work of decadent art—a highly civilized suicide. Fantasy is indulged, but within the lines of decorum. All of the screwing, sucking, farting, and shitting are, to our relief, only comic simulations. Cannibalism is carefully eschewed, and so is violence (e.g., at the last moment we are spared the right of a turkey being decapitated); even the dogs show restraint. Paradoxically, the grossest acts are performed with good taste. Like the chef who prepares the food, Ferreri in mak-

ing his film carefully shapes the external form and rigorously follows old recipes for he, too, is serving his fare to a gourmet audience that has consumed a surfeit of imagery and is not really hungry.

The Grand Bouffe is a well-made five-act comedy. Act I introduces the four banquet guests in brief parallel scenes, which reveal their profession, the aspect of society they represent, and the manner in which they relate to women. Ugo Tognazzi is a Jewish pastry chef, whose father has given him a set of the finest German knives. The only one who could in any way be identified with the working class, his artistic genius enables him to be accepted by the others as their social equal. Since the kitchen is his domain, he is the one who most actively controls the deaths, making it ambiguous whether he is victim or killer. In the opening scene he is with an unidentified woman (perhaps a cooking assistant or helpmate wife), who seems to have little power over him. He is much more focused on his work and on his father's tools. Michel Piccoli is a "creative person" working in TV. Effeminate and fastidious, he enthusiastically discusses cleaning products and relishes his rubber gloves, yet later he will be responsible for many scatological explosions. His pure white daughter tries to con him into helping her black stud get a job. As queen of the media, Michel embodies the fusion of gentility and filth, sentiment and hustle, that dominates the airwaves. Marcello Mastroianni is an airline pilot who is master of the cockpit. A Don Juan who is basically hostile to women, he orders the stewardess to tote his bags, revealing his favorite power game. Although his profession gives him the greatest power, Judge Philippe Noiret is tyrannized by his wetnurse, who keeps him infantilized in a state of perverted innocence, safe from the whores and hooked on his Mother Surrogate.

Act II presents the basic situation—the four men riding in a car on their way to a weekend in the country. As the meat arrives in trucks, the animals are carefully counted and catalogued (two soft-eyed deer, ten semi-wild guinea hens, three dozen young roosters, etc.) as if they are headed for Noah's ark, but the goal is suicide rather than survival. Act III covers the arrival of a different kind of meat: one Madonna and three whores. The men indulge their favorite sexual fantasies. Always the hard-driving man, Marcello screws a whore with the manifold from his Bugatti; he rips a g-string off another whore and dons it as an eye-patch, disguising himself as a dashing pirate. Philippe plays helpless baby with Andrea, the maternal teacher who sews up his fly and his future; he vows to legitimize their union with a legal marriage. Ugo agrees to play with a whore who feeds him before choosing his own paternal role as Brando in *The Godfather*. Draped in a flowing robe, Michel declaims his antipathy toward the Sex in pithy aphorisms: WOMAN'S BODY IS VANITY. Suffering from severe gas pains, his stomach puffs up and he is told to "pretend you're a little Indian boy in Bombay and you're hungry." But he'd rather pretend he's pregnant, for his big belly improves his drag. After a night of stuffing and retching, the practical whores desert the banquet (like rats fleeing a sinking ship or like the servants leaving the dinner party in *The Exterminating Angel*) because they realize the men are stupid, crazy, and suicidal. As one observes: "It's disgusting to eat when you're not hungry." Only Andrea, with her gargantuan appetites, stays for the Godardian weekend.

The living arrangement among the one woman and four men is the focus of Act IV. Lying on Marcello's communal bed, Andrea, with her luscious white flesh, looks like a Rubens or a Renior. The perfect embodiment of sensuality and sentiment, she is always the willing guide to men. Stolen away from her schoolboys, she is adopted by the childish banqueteers as Mama Muse. Amply endowed, Andrea easily serves all of their needs: she submissively surrenders her ass to Marcello; as Mama, she provides Philippe with a titular head; she plays midwife to Michel, pouncing on his stomach to make him fart; and she cooperatively works as Ugo's assistant in the kitchen, always willing to give him a hand. This communal harmony is disturbed when

Marcello eats himself into impotence and tries to blame his failure on Andrea's fat. Before fleeing in his Bugatti, he punctures the dramatic illusion and exposes the bare bones of the plot: "There's no fantasy in this story . . . it's impossible to eat yourself to death." As if to underscore that this is the climactic (or anticlimactic) moment of the drama, Michel's bowel suddenly explodes, creating a tidal wave of shit.

Act V covers the four deaths, structurally following *And Then There Were None*. Marcello is discovered dead in the Bugatti—frozen in flight. After playing his own swan song on the piano (accompanying himself on his own unique wind instrument), Michel farts to death and dies in a puddle of shit. Having made Andrea into a tart (using her ass as a cookie cutter) and a paté monument adorned with eggs (a Jewish symbol of death), Ugo dies eating his own masterpiece. Lying passively on his pantry table, he has Philippe stuff morsels in his mouth while Andrea gives him a hand job till he reaches his fatal orgasm. Philippe's death is slightly more saccharine: after ordering the delivery men to put the meat in the garden, he adores the picture of his nursing mother and dies eating a jello tit, falling on Andrea's breast; meanwhile, a hungry puppy frolics beside him. Andrea is the only survivor. She retreats into the house, abandoning the other leftover meat to the dogs. As the final image of the film freezes, the working men laugh, the chickens cackle, the dogs howl, just as we guffawed while the corpses were frozen in turn.

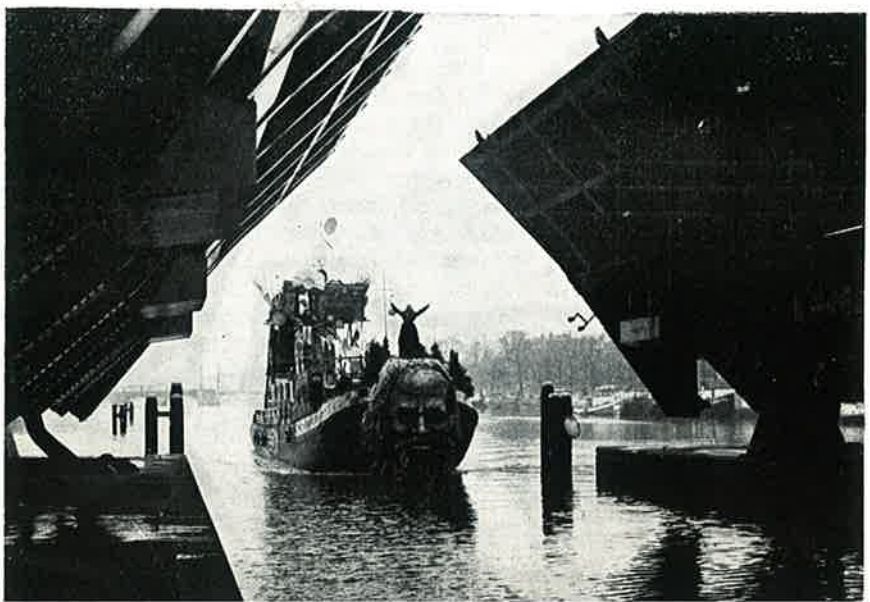
The classicism of the film's structure is reinforced by many allusions to elitist Western art. One dish is named "Crayfish à la Mozart" while the incongruous combination of kidneys bordelaise with chocolate and cream is labeled "surrealistic." When the men are still alone, they slurp up clams on the half shell while watching art slides of the female form in erotic poses, getting off vicariously in two media. Andrea enters their territory while searching for the linden tree where Boileau, the French poet-critic of neoclassicism, composed his verse. After a discussion of Boileau, the conversation turns to a consideration of Bugatti as an artist. In our contemporary decadent culture, since art has been almost totally cut off from its social and moral context, anything, no matter how trivial or heinous, can be considered an art form—the design of soup cans and automobiles, happenings and self-mutilations, so why not banquets and suicides? Before the banquet begins, Philippe (the lawmaker who has inherited the estate) refuses a gift (a character from *The Red Lantern*) offered to him by a Chinese visitor. Suspicious of the alien Eastern Communist culture, he turns instead to the Western epic tradition, quipping: "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts." If that is not enough to evoke the *Aeneid*, the decrepit servant hobbling in the background is named Hector. For a long time the epic had top position in the Western literary hierarchy, as a genre that celebrated the values of the aristocracy and glorified frivolous wars. Its main competition was tragedy, another genre (as Robbe-Grillet insists) based on self-destructiveness. After the refusal of the Chinese gift, one of the men grabs a cow's head and recites Hamlet's suicidal soliloquy, "To be or not to be . . . " Perhaps Ferreri is suggesting that most creative products of Western civilization lead to a dead end and that this overdeveloped imperialist culture is bent on self-destruction. Ironically, he chooses comedy to express this theme—a genre that traditionally glorifies adaptability and survival.

Sweet Movie presents a darker vision of experience, yet it joyously celebrates life and survival. The refrain of the theme song (written by Makavejev) asks the paradoxical question: is there life after birth? The film answers affirmatively with a collage of farcical plots and newsreels, presenting sugarcoated violence with wit and terror. The structure intercuts between two plots, which follow the episodic adventures of two contrasting women: the antiseptically pure Miss Canada, who wins the title of Miss World 1984 but is really the prize loser; and the vivacious Captain Anna Planeta, soulful veteran of the Revolution, who turns out to be a killer.

Our bourgeois heroine is first displayed in

pure white fur at a beauty contest, managed by a carnivorous mother determined to buy her millionaire son (Mr. Kapital) the best wife on the market. After careful inspection, Miss Canada is judged to have the world's purest hymen and to be the vessel-virgin worthy of receiving Kapital's golden cock. Nevertheless, on the wedding night her groom rubs her down with alcohol, determined to kill all germs and desire. Once besmirched, she is subjected to a series of colorful violations (which would befit Terry Southern's *Candy*). After nearly being drowned by her mother-in-law in the family pool, she is abducted by a black body-builder, who stashes her in a giant white milk bottle. For travelling purposes, he transfers her to a red plastic suitcase, from which she manages to wiggle free, right into the clutches of El Macho, a brown glitter rock star. Immediately transformed into a groupie, our plastic heroine begins to come alive, but unfortunately she and her lover get stuck together like dogs and have to be parted (in the Eiffel Tower restaurant kitchen). Next she turns up as a guest at Otto Muehl's radical therapy commune where inmates help each other get their shit together. We watch them joyfully eating, vomiting, and shitting. One grown man lies on his back, kicking his legs in the air as he regresses to infancy, cooing and pissing while his helpmates caress him and sprinkle his body with baby powder. In the original script Miss World was to be liberated and cured by this commune, but the actress was so threatened by the encounter with these real-life crazies that Makavejev changed the plot and recorded her actual tears. She ends up as an erotic bonbon, voluptuously bobbing in a vat of chocolate, no longer white and pure but still the sweet victim.

Our heroic Comrade Planeta is a proletarian Cleopatra, riding on a barge called Survival; the head of Karl Marx, her own Mr. Kapital, dominates the prow. Along the shore, she is pursued by a sailor from the *Potemkin*. The excitement of the pursuit is heightened by the montage editing, which playfully parodies Eisenstein. The frantic coupling of Anna and her red sailor is lustful and comic; it is gleefully witnessed by people massing on the shore. Thus far, we like Anna Planeta much better than Miss Canada, admiring her earthy vitality and sympathizing with her struggle (she laments that most of her old comrades are dead). But then we begin to get hints that she is dangerous. While she and a friend bathe the sailor, erotically soaping his body, he suddenly lies back and plays dead. Makavejev cuts abruptly to documentary footage of the corpses of ten thousand Polish officers allegedly murdered by the Soviets during World War II. Other newsreels show infants being given rigorous physical training. When the film



The barge Survival in SWEET MOVIE

cuts back to the sailor in the bath, he comes to life. But the fusion of eroticism and death and the danger of the Revolution being betrayed have been established as themes that will dominate the rest of the story. Then Anna, dressed in a virginal white bridal dress, performs a seductive striptease, enticing little boys into her bed of white sugar with colorful lollipops dangling overhead and bins of bright jellybeans lined up nearby. Although we do not actually see the children being harmed in this scene, we feel vaguely uneasy and suspect they may be in danger (as in the documentary footage of the infant exercises). We are unsure how to react. We don't want to be prudish, yet if the sexes were reversed (if the adult were male and the children female) we would probably condemn it as child-molesting and might even object to child actors being exposed to such eroticism. But under Makavejev's direction the scene is undeniably a turn-on, and the little boys seem to be enjoying themselves. The Survival barge may turn out to be the Good Ship Lollipop, yet we all have been taught that children should not take candy from strangers, and this lady (sweet as she may be) is certainly acting very strange. Later, our worst fears are confirmed when she and her sailor make love in their bed of sugar (evoking memories of the sandy eroticism in *El Topo* and *Woman in the Dunes*). Licking the sweetness off his body, she suddenly plunges a dagger into his gut. The camera dwells lovingly on the sensuous pool of thick red blood bubbling up through the sugar as the sailor moans in ectasy, "I was jealous when Vakulinchuk died." (Film buffs will recall that Vakulinchuk was the martyred sailor in Eisenstein's *Potemkin*.) Makavejev claims that Pierre Clementi, the actor playing the sailor, took the masochism much farther than was originally intended. Having just been released from prison after a dope bust in Italy, Clementi brought to the film the aura of the victim. Yet the final line Makavejev gives him links his reaction to an important theme in the film—whether death can be more vital than the sterile life portrayed in the other plot. Anna's story ends with her arrest, as the corpses of the sailor and the little boys, carefully wrapped in plastic, are laid out on the shore. Ironically, all of the political and sexual vitality of Anna's world leads to death whereas the sterility and death of Miss Canada's world end in eroticism.

Such a turn of events leads some Marxists to accuse Makavejev of being counter-revolutionary, but I think he is insisting that everyone, despite his or her political context, is forced to experience life as a paradoxical mixture of joy and pain, control and anarchy, sugar and shit. We are trained by our culture to like sugarcoating, which makes us more susceptible to political manipulation. Sugar is biologically related to both energy and anxiety. Its whiteness may lead us to interpret it as a symbol of goodness, yet we have the counter example of Moby Dick. Like Melville, Makavejev insists on the ambiguities. Anything sweet is bound to be dangerous —even this funny anarchistic movie. Shit, on the other hand, is revolutionary. Makavejev, the Reichian, insists that the sphincter is a political muscle; once it is controlled, the whole organism is prepared for fascist domination. We learn discipline one muscle at a time, starting in infancy with toilet training (which again evokes

the newsreels of infant exercises). Like Blake, too, Makavejev sees children as the victim of society and the potential agent of revolution. Thus, the psychotic's regression to infancy is an act of political liberation. The final image of *Sweet Movie* shows the children's corpses coming back to life, breaking the dramatic illusion and reaffirming survival, in contrast to *The Grande Bouffe* where the breakdown of dramatic illusion brings death.

Despite its grim vision, *Sweet Movie* has an overwhelming vitality whereas *The Grande Bouffe,* hilarious as it may be, is essentially sterile. Ferreri's film succumbs to the form of decadent art it attacks. In order to overcome cultural boredom and lack of hunger, it force feeds a consumer audience huge quantities of meat, extravagantly prepared. We leave the theater feeling bloated and stuffed, with a strong desire to fast or fart. In contrast, Makavejev gives us a huge dose of energizing sugar. We leave the theater feeling confused and threatened, wanting to strike out at Makavejev because he engages us in a radical therapy and forces us to confront our own shit. Courageously he follows his material and players wherever they lead him, even if it is beyond his original intention or control. Like Bergman, he willingly goes to the edge of psychic peril, risking his own sanity and freedom and total rejection by his audience, which he met in person at the Berkeley showing with a comic resilience—smiling, shrugging, joking, trying to implicate even the shrillest objectors into his predicament.

PETER BISKIND

LINA WERTMULLER: The Politics of Private Life

The Seduction of Mimi and *Love and Anarchy,* two recent films by Italian director Lina Wertmüller, have just been released in the United States. They reveal a mature and major talent, one which shows that Fellini's influence on the films of his own country has not been wholly malign but, in the hands of a disciplined disciple (she assisted on *8½*), can be made to serve large and significant purposes.

Fellini's later films, like Antonioni's, are an expression of the felt alienation of modern life, the bifurcation of experience into fact and fancy, public and private or, in terms of the history of film, the classic opposition between Lumière and Méliès. The withdrawal or exile of consciousness from the world leaves consciousness imprisoned in its own subjectivity, and the world a menacing collection of lifeless objects. Wertmüller moves beyond bourgeois Italian modernism to demystify the experience of alienation by rendering transparent the clouded consciousness of private life. She picks up the pieces of Fellini's world, draws together the fragments of dream and memory on the one hand, and inert spectacle on the other, and shows that they are part of a whole. She reveals the peculiar historical circumstances which gave rise to the cleavage between private life and production, and thereby lays the basis for overcoming it. Unhappily, this vision of wholeness is unavailable to her characters, who perceive it, if at all, by its absence. They are destroyed, for the most part, by their own blindness or the incomprehension of others.

All the important first- and second-generation Italian directors, Rossellini, De Sica, Antonioni,