

First, assume that Truth exists, and allow that art, as beauty, approaches Truth. The higher the art, the closer it approaches pure truth the Unity, or, if you like, the Godhead.

Now, assume that illusion exists as the antithesis of Truth, perhaps even an expression of truth in an inverse relationship to it.

Now, let us consider reality and allow that reality is the battleground of Truth and Illusion.

Now, consider man in his simultaneous Jeckyl and Hyde, ego and id, quest to understand reality - to grasp that which is truth and that which is illusion.

Of all the arts, it seems that film, by its photographic nature, is most intrinsically involved with this battle of truth and illusion inasmuch as we think of the camera as recording reality. The subject of many of our most highly regarded movies (PERSONA, BLOW-UP, THE GOLDEN COACH, CITIZEN KANE, THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE) is precisely this question: what is illusion and what is truth - that is, what is reality.

Consider what Anna Magnani is told at the conclusion of THE GOLDEN COACH (and the beginning of her self-awareness):

"Don't waste your time in the so-called real life. You belong to us - the actors, acrobats, mimes, clowns, mountebanks. Your only way to find true happiness is on any stage, on any platform, any public place, during those two little hours when you become another person - your true self."

Granted that the world is rampant with readily available illusion, one must assume that the artist (filmmaker, actor) finds truth from somewhere within himself - in whatever cloudy recognition he has of his "true self." We all have the knowledge of truth within us. It often illuminates our creations, our dreams, and, less often, our consciousness. The stage has always been a comfortable metaphor for life. ("All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players" - Shakespeare; "See the man with the stage fright, just standing up there to give it all his might" - The Band.) And many is the actor who admits to feeling more fully alive on stage than as himself.

Perhaps the biggest mistake of Western civilization, especially post atomic bomb Western civilization, has been to accept illusion as reality and to relegate art to a special category apart from reality, though parallel to it. This is the liberal dilemma - the philosophy that allows that no one thing is more true than any other, that all options are equally valid, that the way to get through life is to choose the apparent lesser of the available evils and then to suffer the consequences (and guilt) with dignity. This is the dilemma of Viet Nam.

When liberal critics argue that films must portray reality, they mean that one should reproduce the illusions of life (the comedies of Hollywood in New York). They will never accept that melodrama is closer to truth (and more emotionally constructive) than drama - that the true school of realism is headed by Rossellini and not by Peckinpah. What do we say with more dread than "Back to reality."



When will we learn that reality is not the fact that we all must die, but the fact that we all must live. To insist on honesty from a filmmaker we should mean that he honestly metaphor truth rather than honestly reproduce illusion.

When Mick Jagger quotes Nietzsche in PERFORMANCE saying, "Nothing is true; everything is permitted," he is telling us in no uncertain terms how to deal with illusion in modern life. Illusion is not, after all, an evil thing - - - if you can recognize it as illusion and don't mistake it for truth. Illusion exists so that man might have something to play with - as Jagger knows so very well. Everything is permitted.

Thus Michael York in SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE is indeed the new barbarian come to rescue the true aristocrats of life from the moral suffocation of liberalism. And are not the true heroes of the 1970's surely to be "murderers and perverts!" But murderers from whose point of view and perverts from whose point of view. We embrace the same people whom the establishment term murderers and perverts; and we recognize the true moral perverts and murders in our political leaders.

The sensibility that the Hollywood cinema of the 70's has lost is an awareness of the universal truth of mythology and a parallel awareness of the limitations of indulgent illusion. You cannot make meaningful films about America today by parroting the rampant illusion that characterizes this society. This is the mistake of the so-called "new Hollywood," and it is characterized by such as the screenplays of Robert Kaufman ("Getting Straight," "I Love My Wife"). Here the writer seeks a bitter humour in the calculated reproduction of American insanity. But what is more boring and ultimately fruitless than 2 hours of misled characters screaming interminable liberal arguments at each other - arguments that have no answers in the liberal system and only serve to compound illusions leading the characters ever farther from any solution. It is no coincidence that contemporary movies have no real endings. This is supposed to be honesty, but honesty never used to taste so wishy-washy.

Contrary to popular opinion, what the world does not need is more dialogue. The old directors can tell you that, in films, you do not communicate with words, but with images, emotions, cuts, etc. What is important about Viet Nam is not what is discussed at the Paris Peace Talks. Both as a country and as an audience, we are no longer moved by words. And now that anything can be said on screen, even the shock value of formerly taboo words is fading. The auteur theory arose when people began to see that the essence of film was not literary but visual. No amount of on-screen hipness, no attempt to reflect what is going on in this country by way of argument is going to replace directors with a coherent vision of the universe. The directors of the new Hollywood, for the most part, do not have coherent visions of the universe by which to illuminate their films.

By attacking liberalism one does not align oneself with the reactionaries, however. This has been adequately explained by Charles Reich in "The Greening of America." The "new Hollywood" is merely the defeat of Consciousness I (the old studios) by Consciousness II (the liberals); and the result is a dullness unprecedented in film history. But neither can the new American directors return to Ford, Hawks, and Hitchcock for their inspiration. The emerging consciousness of a



new generation will bring with it a new consciousness in filmmaking. This must be a return to the pursuit of truth and not a furthering of the pursuit of illusion.

What our filmmakers have lost touch with is the truth of mythology. Anyone who has learned the lesson of consciousness elevating drugs has experienced the truly mythological aspect of his existence. When you get "there", you are no longer you, the individual. You are man, the mythological. We all play out the same eternal stories with our lives. When you fall in love you are embarrassed at how exactly ~~kw~~ you relive every romantic cliché in the book. We are, each one of us, Oedipus, Odysseus, Charles Foster Kane, and Murnau's Everyman. The tension between our mythological existence and our individual temporal existence is the source of an infinity of timeless movies. The essential myths never change, but the dimension of earthly time is in constant motion. The critic (and filmmaker) can afford to forget neither dimension of art. True art has eternal, universal elements, but it also exists conspicuously in the particular moment of time when it was created (a fact auteurs often overlook). Rare indeed are the films which can successfully confine themselves to one side of this mythological/temporal duality. On the one side is Plato's ideal, on the other pure politics. Only in this regard do we begin to understand the high moral option Godard has chosen in his recent films. By abandoning mythology for politics, Godard makes a moral (as opposed to aesthetic) decision.

The "new Hollywood" does not represent a revolution in filmmaking. This is a non-visual, non-mythological upsurge of ignorance and illusion reproduction. Liberal filmmakers can never be major artists. The real revolution in American film is about to take place, however. The "new Hollywood", in its dullness, is providing a function in giving the final turn of the knife to the death of the studio system. A new product will take its place. A generation of filmmakers who have grown up with a visual orientation (weaned on 1950's television and the last flowering of the classical American cinema) are now ready to reinterpret the mythology of man through a new consciousness. This will be the new American cinema.