

AN EVALUATION AND PRELIMINARY CLASSIFICATION OF  
GUIDELINES USED BY SELECTED  
JOURNALISTIC FILM CRITICS

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT . . . . .	vi
 CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION. . . . .	1
Film As Art . . . . .	5
II. FINDING THE AUDIENCE. . . . .	9
Changes in the Film Audience. . . . .	11
III. THE CRITICAL ACT. . . . .	14
Problems Inherent in Film . . . . .	15
Problems Inherent in Our Own Selves . . . . .	17
Other Problems in Judging Film. . . . .	19
IV. THE MEDIA . . . . .	22
Monthly, Bi-Monthly and Quarterly Publica- tions . . . . .	22
Weekly Publications . . . . .	23
Daily Publications. . . . .	24
V. EXAMPLES OF JOURNALISTIC FILM CRITICISM . . . . .	26
<u>The Last Picture Show</u> . . . . .	26
Paul D. Zimmerman . . . . .	28
John Simon. . . . .	33
Terry Kay . . . . .	40
Vincent Canby . . . . .	42
Summary . . . . .	45
<u>The French Connection</u> . . . . .	47
Pauline Kael. . . . .	49
Stephen Farber. . . . .	56
Jay Cocks . . . . .	59
Charles Champlin. . . . .	61
Summary . . . . .	62

TABLE OF CONTENTS--Continued

	Page
<u>Frenzy</u> . . . . .	63
Stanley Kauffman . . . . .	65
Arthur Knight . . . . .	69
Summary . . . . .	71
<u>Last Tango in Paris</u> . . . . .	72
Pauline Kael . . . . .	75
Judith Crist . . . . .	81
Bruce Williamson . . . . .	84
Summary . . . . .	86
VI. DISCUSSION . . . . .	88
LIST OF REFERENCES . . . . .	90

## ABSTRACT

Approximately 75 percent of the nation's newspapers and 30 percent of the magazines print critical reports on the movies. Most are written by journalists who provide information and not aesthetic judgment. During the past 25 years, changes in the film industry and film audiences have influenced film criticism. Some critics provide more than information by blending a pragmatic approach with academic analysis.

This study describes 13 reviews by 12 selected journalistic film critics on four films: The Last Picture Show (1971), The French Connection (1972), Frenzy (1972), and Last Tango in Paris (1973).

Also studied are Joy Boyum and Adrienne Scott, who suggest in Film as Film: Critical Responses to Film Art, that every film be viewed as perfect and critics who find faults should examine personal prejudices that might interfere with a clear interpretation. These critics appear to be aware of the subjectivity of their judgment.

There does not appear to be a uniform standard for judgment of film. These critics established their own criteria. They reveal a knowledge of film history, ability to observe detail, and skill in writing.

Three factors appear common in the review: (1) Frequency of deadline does not appear to affect judgment. Those writing for dailies are as perceptive as those writing for weeklies or monthlies. (2) While the director is cited most often as the creator of the film, the critics appraise film as a group activity. (3) The majority of comment is devoted to theme and content, but the critics do not tell the whole plot or story development.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Motion picture advertisements in the movie section of New York's Village Voice, February 28, 1974 (p. 70) quoted these typical endorsements for a new movie:

"A master piece . . . so sensuous and lucid." Pauline Kael, The New Yorker.

"Altman's finest film and one of the most satisfying." Paul D. Zimmerman, Newsweek.

"Moving, eloquent, brilliant . . . a marvelous movie." Bernard Drew, Gannett Newspapers.

Comments like these are frequently taken from the reviewer's copy by motion picture advertisers on the assumption that if the critics liked it, it must be good. Sometimes a snappy phrase is taken out of context. What advertiser would print anything as negative as, "A magnificent waste of time and money" when it would serve his purpose to edit that to "magnificent"?

It would be difficult to measure how effective these praises are in luring viewers into the movie theater. Most journalistic film critics contend the review is a service feature and its main function is to inform. Judith Crist, critic for New York magazine and TV Guide, is quoted in Film Quarterly (Paletz 1968, p. 28) as saying that journalistic film criticism functions to let people know if the film is

something they should or should not see. Miss Crist was talking about the type of reviewing that makes up the bulk of material in the media.

According to a study released in 1970 by pollster Louis Harris (Steinberg 1972, p. 243) approximately 75 percent of the nation's newspapers print critical reports on the movies. These range in style and content from capsule plot synopses to lengthy essay-type discussions. The approaches to criticism of film range from what might be called the pragmatic to the academic. Or as Stephen Koch, critic and film historian, said in an article in Saturday Review (December 1970, p. 12) between the critic and the reviewer:

For one thing, the word critic is often misused. A true critic is not necessarily a reviewer; a reviewer is not necessarily a critic—in fact, rarely is. . . . The reviewer is fundamentally a newsman, and the review is basically a piece of news. . . . The reviewer's strong points are speed, topicality, wit, and fact. The critic publishes several months after the reviewer has forgotten what the movie was even about; his virtues are long meditation, a firm historical sense, profound insight, truth—even with a capital T. The two write in different ways, in different places, for different audiences. The critic's audience finds the reviewer flashy and cheap, the past master of snap judgment. The reviewer's audience finds the critic dull and overly elaborate. . . . There is, of course, a shadow line between the two; the same person can do both jobs, sometimes fuse the two activities.

While Koch's opinion of reviewers is subjective, the Harris study seems to back it up. Conducted for the United Church of Christ's Office of Communication, the study was an objective effort to survey practicing journalistic critics.

of the various arts and a major portion of those who participated were employed on newspapers as film critics. Findings of the study were outlined by Dr. Charles Steinberg (1972, p. 243) in The Movie Business: American Film Industry Practice:

The newspaper critics do not consider themselves scholars of the arts. They are content to call themselves journalists and to assert that the profession of writing criticism for print journalism probably should not require a training program with professional standards comparable to medicine or law. Nor are there any educational pre-requisites for the making of a movie critic. More than three-fourths of those who responded indicated that they had completed an academic degree, albeit most with no specific training in criticism. About half majored in English and slightly more than a fourth majored in journalism. Most did not set out to become motion picture critics and, indeed, worked in other areas before being assigned the movie "beat."

Steinberg (1972, p. 239) points out that newspaper editors do not seem to demand the same standards in selecting a movie critic as they do in selecting a music or drama critic. "No responsible newspaper editor would normally select an art critic or a book critic from shipping news, city desk or sports. But . . . few movie reviewers can lay claim to either special training in, or knowledge of . . . film media." The Harris study (Steinberg 1972, p. 243) indicates that most journalistic film critics are writing for a mass general audience that is looking for a report and not aesthetic judgment.

How does the journalistic film critic report what is good or bad at the movies? Steinberg (1972, p. 244) writes

that the Harris study found the majority of newspaper critics, particularly those in large urban areas, try to set high standards of critical performance:

They assert first that the critic must set forth a clear and succinct exposition not only of what he thinks about film, but also that he define the basis for his judgment. And the critic must, in any case, explain with honest conviction whether, in his opinion, the film is "good" or "bad" along with an equally clear exposition of what makes it inherently good or bad . . . at least one-fourth of the critics agree that totally objective criticism is almost invariably impossible to achieve.

It would appear the criteria for judgment is dependent on what each particular critic thinks about a film. Judith Crist is quoted in Reviewing for the Mass Media (Hunt 1972, p. 30) as saying:

We each have a standard. Mine for a "good" movie, requires that the movie fulfill its aspiration and that in the course of that fulfillment it illuminate some facet of experience for me, provide some sort of emotional empathy or tell me something about somebody or something.

Some journalistic critics borrow criteria from the academic critics. Koch's "true critic" is found among a small, but growing, number of people who write about film not only as an aesthetic phenomenon, but as having serious relevance as a sociological and psychological phenomenon. This group aims its writing at a small audience of cultivated readers for whom film is a serious art form. Many are journalists in the sense that they are published in film journals such as Film Quarterly, Film Culture, or Partisan Review.

Their role is not necessarily to steer people away or lead people to certain films. These critics tend to analyze

the content of the film, the techniques used in film, and the relationship between cinema and society.

Academic criticism of film has existed along with pragmatic criticism almost since the development of the moving picture. As early as 1915 Vachel Lindsay wrote The Art of the Motion Picture. Lindsay (1970, p. 45) advocated that the motion picture is "a great high art. The people I hope to convince of this are the great art museums of America, the departments of English, of the history of drama, of the practice of drama and the history and practice of art."

It proved to be an uphill battle for Lindsay and others who saw the motion picture as any form of art. Motion pictures evolved out of a novelty--a flickering image mechanically reproduced to thrill and entertain audiences. It was rejected as an art form by scholars, museums and most of the motion picture industry. It took fifty years for the status of film to improve to the level that Lindsay wanted. The film course is now a part of many universities' curricula and museums are showing movies as part of their programs. However, while the status of film has changed, we find that a clear definition of film as art is lacking.

#### Film As Art

Even among the academic film critics there are wide differences of opinion on how to judge film as art. Jay Gould Boyum and Adrienne Scott in Film as Film: Critical Responses

to Film Art (1971, p. 7) discuss the lack of tradition in film criticism.

In search of a past, there are those, for example, who see film as an extension of drama and who consequently evaluate it in terms of the criteria traditional reserved for this art. Thus, they will focus on dialogue, conflict, characterization. Others see the film as an extension of still photography, itself a very new art form, which has borrowed the vocabulary and criteria of painting and thus tend to talk about film in visual terms. Still others see it as a narrative form stemming from the epic and novel and evaluate it as a literary work.

Because film combines the elements of other arts—drama, music, literature and photography—it has not been easy to establish aesthetic criteria. Critic Andrew Sarris (1973, p. 38) credits the French directors with developing what is called in America, the auteur theory. It is popular among several film scholars and Mr. Sarris, movie critic for The Village Voice, has become strongly identified with the theory. Basically, the auteurists look upon the director as the auteur or author of the film, much as the writer is considered the author of a book or a painter is considered the creator of his painting. The critic then judges the film on the director's work. Sarris (1973, p. 137) contends this is the most efficient method of classifying the cinema, past and present.

The theory is not unanimously popular however. It seems to hold up well when the director has complete control over the film. And a number of directors are willing

to take credit for the creative style in which they claim they made their pictures. The problem is that in the American system few directors have complete control over the final product. Also, motion picture making is a group activity involving actors, writers, film editors, photographers and producers. Pauline Kael, film critic for The New Yorker magazine, disagrees with the auteur theory. In her anthology of reviews, Going Steady (1971, p. 112), she says:

Movies make hash of the schoolmarm's approach of how well the artist fulfilled his intentions. Whatever the original intention of the writers and director, it is usually supplanted, as the production gets under way, by the intention to make money-- and the industry judges film by how well it fulfills that intention. . . . The intention to make money is generally all too obvious.

The motivation to make money does not necessarily mean that the movies cannot be an art form. In arts such as painting and literature, there are monetary rewards. It is also possible to make money from good art.

In the search to define film as art, some critics have focused on technique. Boyum and Scott (1971, p. 7) write that:

Talking about technique moreover is to indicate that film is serious and self-conscious business. Then too, the critic may concentrate on technique, first, as a reaction to, as well as a way of, distinguishing his work from daily reviewing (newspaper). . . . that sees nothing but story line and its moral acceptability; and second, . . . as a way of establishing criteria to which all film critics may agree.

Miss Kael writes in Going Steady (1971, pp. 116-119) that technique is "hardly worth talking about unless

it's used for something worth doing." She says that most people are not concerned with technique. The question they ask first when they consider going to a movie is not, "how's it made?" but usually "what's it about?," which is usually followed by "who's in it?"

Todd Hunt in Reviewing for the Mass Media (1972, p. 102) says that most movie reviewers approach film with two questions: "Is it good entertainment?" and "Does it help us understand ourselves or the world around us?" The second question implies that the reviewer is looking for relevance of important messages in the film. There is no clear-cut, correct way to judge film. Pauline Kael in Going Steady (1971, p. 131) writes that a "simple good distinction is that all art is entertainment, but not all entertainment is art."

According to the Harris survey (Steinberg 1972, p. 244), almost three-fourths of the critics believe that it is possible to make a contribution to scholarship and believe that a review can go beyond informing and entertaining the reader. For this reason and other factors concerning the potential film audience, the journalistic film critics have turned increasingly toward a fusion of the academic and the pragmatic. How certain film critics have been able to cross that "shadow line" between the two is the subject of this study.

## CHAPTER II

### FINDING THE AUDIENCE

Who reads film criticism? We would assume that people who are planning to spend up to three dollars or more for the price of admission would want to know what they are getting for their money. However, the mass general film audience seems to ignore the critic's advice at times and films which get raved about fail miserably at the box office, while films which few critics like make money in the millions.

In New York the drama critics seem to have power in the making or breaking of a new play. But few, if any, film critics can lay claim to any power in influencing the potential film audience. Stephen Koch in Saturday Review (1970, p. 13) says the movie public is large enough and diverse enough to follow its own tastes and there may not be a mass general audience for film criticism. He says:

The most and the least self-aware branches of the film audience are unaffected by film reviews; neither the highbrows nor the lowbrows could care less. It is only with the slightly perplexed middlebrow that the critics have what they call their clout. . . . And even among the middlebrows there is some doubt. . . . What is mistaken for power is in fact a good guess about what the public is going to decide to like all on its own.

Box office power is something that a journalistic film critic should not be concerned with. Steinberg (1972,

p. 249) says: "What is important for all motion picture criticism is that the critic function not only to inform, but also to provide a direction finder for the viewer. . . ."

In order to do this, the journalistic film critic must attempt to define his audience. While many journalistic film critics say they are writing for a mass general public, changes in the past twenty-five years in the make-up of the potential film audience indicate that a mass general public for film may not be the same mass general audience for newspapers or film criticism. Gerald Mast in A Short History of the Movies (1971, pp. 332-333), attributes major changes in the make-up of the contemporary film audience to the advent of television. According to Mast, the motion picture industry reached a peak annual gross of approximately \$1.7 billion in 1948 when the average cost of a seat in a movie theater was forty cents. Within the next few years following 1948, television cut heavily into the movie audience and profits went down. Mast writes about the years from 1948 to 1963 (1971, p. 333):

Despite the gimmicks, despite the wide screen, despite the sexual innuendos, despite the industry's claim that "movies are better than ever," movie income and admissions continued to fall. In an effort to give the public what television could not, Hollywood discovered that it could not give it much of anything for very long. The public yawned respectfully through a big spectacle and returned to the television set. . . . In order to please its public, Hollywood had to discover who its public was. It could not assume . . . that its public was all of the people all of the time.

Mast (1971, p. 334) says that Hollywood discovered in the mid-1960s that movies had "become an elitist, not a popular art." By making movies for a smaller audience and by raising the admission price, the motion picture industry turned the corner in 1963 and profits have been healthy ever since.

### Changes in the Film Audience

What happened to the audience for films after the advent of television? Mast (1971, pp. 333-334) explains:

Just as the legitimate theater had been the art for some in the thirties when the movies were the art for everyone, so movies had become the art for some when television became the art for all. Whereas movies had been the casual, everyday form of entertainment before the war, television supplied that kind of entertainment after it. Movies, then, had to be aimed at the minority audience that wanted the kind of show that television could not or would not provide. . . . Television programs are aimed at the kind of audience who went to the movies in the thirties and forties—in fact, much of its audience is composed of those very people. Television formulas—family comedies, mysteries, hospital dramas, courtroom dramas—are old movie formulas. They have not changed because the audience has not changed. Films and film audiences have changed.

Stanley Kauffman in A World on Film (1966, p. 415) says the current film audience is "the first audience which has matured in a culture in which film has been of accepted serious relevance." This film generation of the 1970s is young. A study by Opinion Research Corporation (Peterson, Jensen, Rivers 1965, p. 128) indicates that the film audience is composed of young people, most under age 30.

Mast (1971, p. 413) says the American films which are being made for this young audience have similar values. These include:

An offbeat, anti-hero protagonist; the sterile society that surrounds him; the explicit treatment of sexual conflicts and psychological perversities; the glorification of the past and open spaces; the slick but tawdry surfaces of contemporary reality; the mixing of the comic and the serious; the self-conscious use of special effects (slow motion, quick cutting, ironic juxtaposition of the visual and sound).

Not all contemporary films fit this description of the new American cinema. Films are still being made for children, families and a general audience. That movies such as Airport, Love Story and The Poseidon Adventure can succeed indicates that the young audience is capable of turning out in support of what is considered "old-fashioned entertainment." Nor do we suddenly find ourselves in the midst of an abundance of great film art. In 1972 there were financially successful films in which there was no attempt at "art" by anyone's definition. Films were aimed at the exploitation of sex, blacks, violence and thrills.

However, there are fewer pictures being made each year and while the profit motive is there for every picture, many are trying to make films that could be classified as film art. And while these films may or may not succeed, the intent is there. Directors such as Stanley Kubrick, William Friedkin, Peter Bogdanovich, Alfred Hitchcock, Arthur Penn, Robert Altman, and others, are making the claim

that they are serious about their work and that they are trying to handle themes and film with individual artistic style.

As the status of film as an art form has gained acceptance with the young audience, the status of film criticism has improved. If we accept the theory that there is no mass audience for film criticism and that film has gained serious relevance for a certain segment of the audience, then we may conclude that reporting the facts about a movie may not be enough to provide a direction for the viewer.

Because of the material being made for film audiences, because the price of admission has gone up, and because the audience for film criticism is most likely to be readers who are interested in film as art as well as entertainment, it appears that one of the best approaches for the journalistic film critic to take is to blend the pragmatic and the academic.

Because the critical act does not begin until the reviewer says he liked or disliked a particular film, it is necessary to examine some problems encountered in judging the film medium.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CRITICAL ACT

The journalistic film critic is on familiar ground when he or she "reports" on the movie. The journalist deals with "facts such as the title, the names of the actors, the director, how the film was made and what the story is about. The critical act does not begin until the critic goes one step further and makes a judgment.

In saying that one "liked" or "disliked" a particular film a critical judgment is made. This is not so difficult because each viewer is a critic to some degree. The second step in the critical act is more difficult and that is: Explaining why one liked or disliked a film. It is easy to praise or dismiss a film on first impression. It is more difficult to try to reconstruct the film and analyze the reasons why we praise it or dismiss it.

In the following examples of film criticism, the same images and stories on the screen produced different reactions in different people. The reactions can tell us almost as much about the critic as they do about the film. Most critics agree that judging motion pictures is a subjective activity (Steinberg 1972, p. 244).

Even so, it might be possible to be "fair," if not objective, if the critic established a principle which the writer considers to be one of the best methods of judging film. This principle is proposed by Boyum and Scott in Film as Film: Critical Responses to Film Art (1971, p. xiii):

For us, criticism most conveniently begins with the assumption that the film we are about to experience is perfect: each detail, every nuance in the film will be accepted as contributing to the whole, as essential to our creation of a coherent work of art. What this means is that when we encounter a detail, a sequence even, that cannot be worked into the totality of the experience, we blame first our understanding, and only afterwards, the film.

Boyum and Scott admit that no perfect film exists, but in order to render a critical judgment, the critic who examines his beliefs and convictions can attempt to give the film a fair judgment.

#### Problems Inherent in Film

Scott and Boyum (1971, pp. 17-21) list six problems inherent in film that can distort judgment:

1. The use of conventions--The critic must be aware of the conventions used in the film medium. A flash of lightning sometimes signals terror; the black hat signified the villain; the fade out and fade in of the camera usually signifies the passage of time. These and other conventions depend on the viewer's past experience with film. A viewer becomes conditioned to these responses and sometimes a

convention that is misunderstood can result in an unwarranted interpretation.

2. Technical consistency--Past experience with movies invites formal expectations on the part of the viewer. The movie is expected to be a certain length, a certain size on the screen and to tell a story. When a film breaks from the technical consistency, it can lead to confusion and misinterpretation.

3. The actor as a barrier--One of the phenomenal things about film is its ability to create strong visual images of people. Actors become "stars" because of this phenomenon. Some films are built around strong motion picture stars in order to lure people into the theater on the expectation of seeing a particular personality. The "star" of a film can cause a reaction in the critic based on the critic's opinion of the "star" from previous films or off-screen appearance. This can distort the critic's judgment of the actor and the film.

4. The director as a barrier--In recent years film critics have placed increasing importance on the director. In some cases, films are advertised by billing the director and people in the 1970s talk about going to see a Hitchcock film or a Fellini film, much the way audiences in the 1940s talked about going to see a Bogart or Clark Gable film. The same problem in judgment exists in this case as with the actor.

5. The audience response--Pauline Kael, movie critic for The New Yorker magazine, often comments on the audience's response to a movie. The film experience is a social activity and the reactions of those around us provides an instant feedback. However, Scott and Boyum warn that audiences in different theaters have different reactions. These reactions can distort a thoughtful evaluation.

6. The illusion of reality--Critics often dismiss movies that are "not true-to-life." Boyum and Scott (1971, p. 21) contend that films offer only an illusion of reality and not a faithful representation of human experience. It is difficult not to confuse a realistic film with the real world, but the most realistic movie is only a strip of film.

#### Problems Inherent in Our Own Selves

Boyum and Scott (1971, pp. 12-16) list nine problems inherent in our own selves that can also distort interpretation:

1. Necessity of understanding--The viewer must understand what he sees and hears, both figuratively and literally.

2. Private associations--The viewer brings past experiences with him when he views a film and sometimes private associations can distort meanings. An example is Terry Kay, film critic, who admitted in a review in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (February 27, 1972, p. 4) that

he could not concentrate on The Last Picture Show because it reminded him of his childhood.

3. Culturally-induced associations--The critic's background and culture can distort meanings, if he or she fails to grasp the meanings in the film. For example, in Jean Renoir's The Crime of Monsieur Lange, a viewer whose culture has taught him that the person who commits a crime must be punished, may interpret Lange's escape at the end of the film as "getting away with the crime of murder." However, while Lange does not receive punishment from the law, he is forced to abandon his career and friends.

4. Reverberating heart strings--This is a failure to accept what is presented on the screen because of our sentiments or optimism.

5. Refusal to feel--This is the opposite of the reverberating heart string. We refuse to accept what is presented because the film seems too sentimental.

6. Intellectual commitments--An overly-firm commitment to a particular set of beliefs can frequently distort meanings or cause rejections of what is presented because it conflicts with those commitments.

7. Aesthetic presuppositions--These stem from what the critic or viewer thinks art in film should be. For example, some critics contend that movies cannot be art because of the profit motive in the movie industry. They tend to overlook that many writers who are considered

literary giants were also writing for money. Also, some critics insist that movies must have messages to be art. This can result in rejecting movies that do not have messages.

8. Not being with it--This problem seems minor, but without a knowledge of film history, the viewer may miss some important point in a film. "Not being with it" means that the viewer is not aware of the inter-film references that are showing up in many contemporary films. For example, The Last Picture Show contains references to the films of Howard Hawks and John Ford. Foreign films are filled with inter-film references, puns on earlier films, tributes to film styles and earlier directors. An awareness of this comes from experience and a study of film history.

9. Failure in aesthetic perception--This is largely a matter of education. A viewer may be trained to perceive principles of composition, organization unity and texture or color. The critic needs to study the visual images much like he would study a painting. The viewer should look for composition, symbols and images, and because the visual image is moving, he should study the pacing and editing.

#### Other Problems in Judging Film

The most important question for the reader of film criticism should be "Whose opinion is the most valid?" Boyum and Scott (1971, p. 12) say that the best critical judgment

is "one that most consistently utilizes the visual and aural stimuli that are given, neither adding to them, nor ignoring any of them." This would mean taking each reason for liking or disliking a film and analyzing that reason against what was offered on the screen. The key word is "interpretation" and the most valid interpretation will be the one that is based on what is offered on the screen and not what the critic reads into the film.

Another problem facing the journalistic critic is the time involved between viewing and judgment. Most critics working on daily publications must develop speed and some have been able to analyze films with keen observation in a relatively short-time span.

The journalistic film critic must also attempt to be entertaining as well as informative. The critic is usually carried by a medium that stresses information and entertainment and cannot be bogged down in long essay style discussions. The readership and the space allotted to reviews. It calls for a clear, concise format.

If criticism is to offer something more than information, if it is to be valid for the audience that is interested in film as art and if it is to provide a guide to what is the best in film art, then the writer feels the critic must strive to set high critical standards. He must be fair and above all honest.

Examples of journalistic film criticism on four major motion pictures have been selected for this study. These examples reflect some of the problems explained in this chapter and some of the virtues of valid criticism. Before examining these reviews, we need to look at the media which has an effect on style and format.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MEDIA

To a certain extent journalistic film criticism is shaped by the media in which it appears. Space is determined by the magazine's or newspaper's frequency of publication and size. Style and content also are shaped by the potential audience to which the publication is aimed. Magazines tend to specialize in certain areas; there are men's magazines, women's magazines, magazines for singles, married couples, old, young, parents and magazines devoted to certain subjects. The Harris study (Steinberg 1972, p. 243) reported that 30 percent of the nation's magazines carry movie reviews. Newspapers are published daily and weekly; and some newspapers print movie criticism once, twice, or three times per week. Newspapers are aimed at a larger more general audience in their respective areas of circulation. These factors influence journalistic film criticism.

#### Monthly, Bi-Monthly, and Quarterly Publications

Journalistic film critics who write for magazines which are published monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly have an advantage over the daily or weekly journalistic film critics because they can devote more time to thinking about

the movie and writing the review. There is a disadvantage in not being able to write about as many movies as daily or weekly critics because of the frequency of publication.

Most magazines that carry film criticism feature regular contributing critics who range in their approaches from the academic to the pragmatic. It is from the monthly and weekly publications that most of the type of criticism that blends the academic with the pragmatic has come. The majority of magazines are published in New York City, which is also where most of the major motion pictures debut. The National Society of Film Critics is composed of professional critics and most are based in New York. While these critics may be able to see a film before the rest of the country, those writing for monthly publications may not have their review published until after the movie has already played a month or more. A critic writing for a monthly or bi-monthly publication must be more selective and usually must write about several movies for each publication.

However, the magazine usually is aimed at a selected audience and the critic writing for a magazine has a better idea of who the readers are and what they are looking for from the film criticism.

#### Weekly Publications

Weekly publications, magazines and newspapers, allow the critic less time to meditate on his review, but the

weekly is more timely than the monthly. Time, Newsweek, The New Yorker, are among the weekly magazines that carry two or three movie reviews in each issue. What the writer considers to be among the best in contemporary film criticism is found in weekly magazines and newspapers. Although these critics must see and evaluate several films per week, many have been able to write thoughtfully and in-depth about films.

#### Daily Publications

Even the daily newspapers are not able to review all the films. There are simply too many. In one week (December 9-24, 1972) eighteen new movies opened in New York City. The critic working for a large daily must get his reviews out quickly and while he or she may be more timely than a weekly or monthly publication, there is less time to concentrate. Only a few large urban area newspapers employ full time film critics. Many daily publications print reviews only once or twice a week. Space on a daily publication is more limited than on a weekly or monthly, but the critic has the advantage here of writing about more movies because he is published more often. Also, a critic writing for a daily publication can re-review films. The critic writing in a daily publication is more likely to be writing for a large general audience than a critic writing for a specialized weekly or monthly.

In the following examples of journalistic film criticism, no evidence could be found of the pressure of a deadline influencing a review. The journalistic film critics writing for the daily publications reflected as much insight and analysis as those writing for the weekly and monthly publications.

## CHAPTER V

### EXAMPLES OF JOURNALISTIC FILM CRITICISM

In order to examine how selected journalistic film critics evaluate films the writer has selected reviews on four major motion pictures: The Last Picture Show (1971), The French Connection (1971), Frenzy (1972), and Last Tango in Paris (1973). These films do not represent either the best or the worst in movie art. Each was financially successful and each received varying critical response.

The reviews that have been selected reflect different approaches to film and show how certain journalistic film critics judge movies, and reflect the blend of the academic and the pragmatic.

#### The Last Picture Show

The Last Picture Show won wide critical acclaim after its release in 1971. It was nominated for eight Academy Awards. Paul D. Zimmerman, film critic for Newsweek, thought so highly of the film that he gave it a first place vote for best picture of the year in 1971 in the annual polling of the National Society of Film Critics. (Denby 1972, p. 15). Set in Anarene, Texas, in 1952, it is a story of a small town and the people who live there. The town has only one movie theater, owned by

Sam the Lion, an aging western cowboy-type. Sam is played by Ben Johnson. Other characters include Sonny, an adolescent, played by Timothy J. Bottoms; Duane, Sonny's best friend, played by Jeff Bridges; a retarded child, played by Sam Bottoms; Jacy, Duane's girl friend, played by Cybill Sheperd; the high school football coach's wife, Ruth, played by Cloris Leachman; Jacy's mother, Lois, played by Ellen Burstyn; Genevieve, the local waitress, played by Eileen Brennan; Lester, a classmate of Sonny's played by Randy Quaid; and a construction worker, played by Clu Gulager. Other characters include Jacy's father, the preacher's son, and other teenagers in the town.

The story takes place in Sonny's last year of high school. The film depicts several of his relationships with friends, his introduction to sex and an affair with the neglected wife of the football coach. Sam the Lion is a central figure in Sonny's life, offering philosophy and a moral code. Jacy is the prettiest girl in town and one of Sonny's romantic interests. The film depicts her attempts to gain social acceptance in an upper class group of teenagers by stripping nude at a swimming party of a rich boy friend. In the course of the film, she loses her virginity to gain acceptance, sheds Duane, dates her mother's lover, and finally attempts to run away with Sonny. Duane rejected by Jacy, finally leaves town for the Army.

Jacy's mother is married to a wealthy oilman, but she is unhappy. She once had an affair with Sam, but in the course of the film we learn that she is having an affair with a construction worker. It is a tale of small town morals and the coming of age of youth in the 1950s. The action is among characters.

Sonny attempts to leave the environment, but cannot. Sam the Lion dies and leaves his movie theater to Sonny. The screen play is based on a novel by Larry McMurtry and was co-authored by director Peter Bogdanovich and McMurtry. It was Bogdanovich's second film. Bogdanovich was a film critic before becoming a film director.

#### Paul D. Zimmerman

Paul D. Zimmerman's review of The Last Picture Show originally was printed in Newsweek in 1971. It was reprinted in Film 71/72 (Denby 1972, pp. 86-88), a collection of reviews from the National Society of Film Critics. He started his review by making a bold claim:

The Last Picture Show is a masterpiece. It is not merely the best American movie of a rather dreary year; it is the most impressive work by a young American director since Citizen Kane. Orson Welles dazzled us with his cocksureness and the audacity of his innovations. Peter Bogdanovich, a thirty-one-year-old critic turned film-maker, works in the classic tradition of John Ford and Howard Hawks, even to the point of shooting this compassionate chronicle of small-town Texas life entirely in black and white.

Throughout the review Zimmerman praises the style in which this film is made. He compares Bogdanovich to

Orson Welles, director and co-author of Citizen Kane (1941). Apparently he assumes that his readers know who Orson Welles is and that Citizen Kane is considered by many film scholars to be a movie classic. He also mentions the "classic tradition" of Ford and Hawks. These references are to directors who made their films before most of the under-age-thirty audience was born.

Zimmerman also praises the use of black and white photography. He says in Denby (1972, p. 87):

With the aid of veteran cinematographer, Robert Surtees, Bogdanovich gets a feeling of desolation in his ghostly gray landscapes and grainy textures of his interiors—neglected poolrooms, oilcloth kitchens and linoleumed back bedrooms—that color could not capture.

However, he says the film is "not without its flaws, its brief excursions into sentimentality, its sometimes untidy definitions of family ties." Zimmerman does not explain the "flaws" in detail.

Zimmerman says, "These minor slips of an authentic and maturing talent are buried under an avalanche of positive achievements." He credits Bogdanovich with everything he finds good in the film.

Starting with the finely tuned screenplay adapted from Larry McMurry's novel by Bogdanovich and the novelist. If Robert Altman's genius in McCabe and Mrs. Miller was to create in time and space the birth and burgeoning of an entire town, Bogdanovich describes with equal brilliance its decline and fall (pp. 87-88).

Here Zimmerman compares Bogdanovich to director Robert Altman. It is clear that while Zimmerman acknowledges the

cinematographer, the writer and actors, he is an auteurist. He looks upon the director as the creative force in this film.

Many journalistic film critics saw this movie as a period piece or a nostalgic look at the decline of a small town in the 1950s. To Zimmerman the characters and the landscape are symbols of a larger theme. Zimmerman finds the character of Sam the Lion particularly interesting.

Even at the film's outset, Anarene, Texas, is physically moribund; its shabby stores, windswept, desolate streets and bleak main highway mark it as one of those way stations that American civilization left behind on its long push west.

But its soul has not expired, surviving in the figure of Sam the Lion, the owner of Anarene's pool hall, diner and movie house, who represents the last link to the frontier past. Sam must be perfectly cast if the film is to work. In the rugged terrain of his lived-in face, we must be able to read a recklessness now tamed, an innocence that has passed through sin into wisdom. (Denby 1972, p. 87).

That may be what Zimmerman saw in actor Ben Johnson's face because he says that Bogdanovich "finds the perfect actor for Sam in Ben Johnson, a veteran of westerns from Shane to Rio Grande to The Wild Bunch, who indeed embodies in the honesty of his worn face an integrity and totally masculine presence that sets him apart from the mean and seedy citizens around him." Zimmerman may be crediting Bogdanovich with perhaps more than he deserves. Zimmerman may have seen in Johnson's face "a recklessness

now tamed" but he was looking for this. He says the director "finds" and "uses" certain actors which make up a "brilliantly ensembled cast."

Timothy Bottoms as an All-American teenager whose sad eyes register the slow realization that he lives in and is destined always to live in a town without pity. Jeff Bridges brings the look of a young Elvis Presley to the role of Duane . . . who loses the rich girl in town and chooses possible death in Korea over a dead-end destiny in Anarene.

As Jacy Farrow, Duane's oil-rich girl friend, Bogdanovich uses an untried fashion model named Cybill Shepherd and artfully draws from her a performance that embodies every crummy value in town—duplicity, hard ambition, rote obedience to every local shibboleth. Still she retains an allure of innocence as much victim as victimizer, her wide eyes searching out financial security in men she doesn't care about because financial security has been held up to her as life's only sure thing. In the all-too-easy way she shuffles off Duane as a bad gamble and latches onto Sonny as a possible man of property, in the calculated way she discards her virginity because it's a social liability, we feel the pathos of a girl who plays for keeps the only game in town (pp. 87-88).

Zimmerman reveals some of the plot without telling all. By introducing the reader to each character, he tells something about the part they play in the story. He discusses the film's treatment of adolescence:

The film delights with its artful observations on the frustrations and fraud of teenage romance—in a long shot of Sonny kissing his gum-chomping girl friend at the movies while he stares longingly at Elizabeth Taylor on the screen; in the bored, automatic way his girl friend sheds her bra in the cab of a pickup truck and the equally automatic way she prevents his hand from breaking new ground; in the bossy way Jacy forces Duane to seduce her, in the clumsiness of his failure and his false bravado afterward; in a brilliant, erotic sequence at a nude swimming party in which a nervous determined Jacy, seeking initiation,

must strip on the diving board in return for social acceptance. The teenagers are all vitality and aspiration. But in Anarene, spiritual death comes at an early age (p. 88).

Again, Zimmerman tells the story without giving away the whole sequence of events. The reader has a picture of what the film is about. He is concise and skillful in the use of adjectives. He also finds that Ellen Burstyn as "Jacy's bitchy bored mother, creates a superb study of a woman who settled down and down and down in a mixture of wistful memories and knowing toughness." He has already stated that Sam the Lion is a key character. He sums up his interpretation of the movie's theme in the last paragraph of the review:

When Sam the Lion dies, the last vestiges of decency in Anarene die with him. Soon after, the movie house plays its last picture show, Red River, in which John Wayne's call to start the cattle drive reminds us how Anarene has declined from its early energies and ambitions into a mean spirited morass of wasted lives. Bogdanovich tailors his truths to fit local speech, as in Ellen Burstyn's observance that "nothin's ever the way it's supposed to be." True of Anarene, it applies with equal justice to every American town, every American life. For, in the end, The Last Picture Show stands as both an elegy to the American dream and its epitaph (p. 88).

Zimmerman's review appears to be an example of the fusion between the academic and pragmatic approach. He has informed the reader with facts about the director, the actors, the story, photographer and source material. He has made aesthetic judgments about the director's work, the technique and the acting. He also attempted to analyze the film

and explain his position. He reflected an interest in, and a knowledge of, film history and inter-film references. While he did not directly make a recommendation that the reader see the film, his review can be looked at as an endorsement of the movie. He placed a great emphasis on the role of the director as the creator of the art in this film and did not explain the "flaws" of sentimentality. For an alternate view on the same film, we will examine what movie critic John Simon saw in The Last Picture Show.

### John Simon

After The Last Picture Show had been well received by a majority of the film critics writing in New York, John Simon, then movie critic for The New Leader, found a number of flaws in the film. The review was originally printed in The New Leader in 1971 and was reprinted in Film 71/72 (Denby 1972, pp. 90-95). Simon starts his review by informing readers that The Last Picture Show is already a hit with the critics "so too with the audiences, and strikes me as not bad by current standards."

Simon questions whether Bogdanovich was a good critic before he turned film-maker and then questions how good a film-maker he is. He outlines the story in four paragraphs, but does not tell the entire development of events. After setting forth what the movie deals with, Simon says:

This doesn't sound half bad . . . but look at the film more closely.

The locale is captured accurately by Robert Surtees' black-and-white cinematography, and the time seems indeed to be 1951, as we are told it is. Told? Clobbered with it. Just about every hit song of the period manages to hit us from radios or jukeboxes; every major television program of the time seems to be watched by someone in the film at some point or other (p. 92).

Simon contends that the black and white cinematography is a way "to score easy points" with critics because it is so different from the usual color photography that the critics like it, "whether you call it honesty, nostalgia, or a homage to your favorite directors." Simon sees the black and white as a device that is a copy of Ford and Hawks rather than an innovation.

As far as the story itself is concerned, Simon writes that the general outline of the film "convinces." He says that the locale has not changed much "since Larry McMurtry wrote or lived the autobiographical novel on which he and Bogdanovich based this screenplay." He says that McMurtry "lived it, wrote it almost without sentimentality or anger, and Bogdanovich approaches the material reverently—all too reverently, in fact."

Comparison of a novel, upon which a movie is based, to that movie is a common practice among movie critics. Simon acknowledges that he has not read the book but says that two other film critics, Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris, have read the novel and they pointed out that there were

some minor, but "not wholly insignificant changes made, adding up to a certain romanticizing of the matter." He also reports that McMurtry spoke at a symposium and mentioned that in working on the script of the movie, he discovered how much better a novel could have been made from the material. Simon adds "by implication, how much better a film, had Bogdanovich not been so enamoured of the published text."

Thus the movies the kids see in the film are better than the ones in the novel (Bogdanovich even anachronistically drags in Red River as a tribute to one of his auteur heroes, Howard Hawks); Lois is not allowed in the film to have sex with Sonny, whom her daughter has betrayed; Jacy's crude sexual bout with her mother's lover on a pool table, and the young bloods having intercourse with a blind heifer are also excised (p. 93).

The difficulty in making this type of judgment—rejecting the movie for failure to recreate the book upon which it is based—is that the film and the novel are two different mediums. Unless the movie makes the claim that it is a visual reproduction of a novel (which is still not the same thing as the novel) it is not necessarily obligated to follow the exact story or characterization. Many movies are based on novels and changes are made in the movie to fit the visual medium or to fit the concepts of the director or writer. In film criticism it is probably a valid practice to acknowledge sources and make comparisons, but the writer thinks rejecting a movie because it is not the same as its source is not a valid critical act. There is also some doubt that

Red River is an anachronism. It was released in 1948 and it is possible that in 1951 or 1952 the movie would be available in Anarene, Texas.

Another thing that movie critics look for is the logical development of plot and characterization. Simon elaborates on what might be untidy family relationships that Zimmerman found:

I cannot believe the scene where all their classmates watch Jacy's and Duane's sexual initiation from cars parked outside the motel; I do not see the need to make Lester, a two-bit operator . . . seem more idiotic than Billy, the real halfwit. I think that it is bad boiling down of the novel that introduces Sonny's father out of nowhere and never tells us anything about Sonny's home life; the same goes for Duane and his family, with a mother making a belated, almost subliminal appearance. The character of Abilene, the town stud, is woefully underdeveloped; Sam the Lion is so idealized that we see him only in scenes where he can deploy generosity, righteous indignation, gracious forgiveness, or noble, homespun philosophy. His basic, quotidian relationship to Genevieve and Billy is left completely unexamined (p. 94).

Here Simon is critical of the movie for what it did not do rather than what it did. In addition to these flaws, he does not like the acting. The lead character Sonny is not convincing—"whether in the writing, acting or directing, or in all three." Simon says Sonny appears to be stupid.

We are supposedly looking, for the most part through his eyes, and he is meant to be a reasonable enough young fellow in the process of coming of age. Yet, what has he really learned or taught us in the end? And how can we take him seriously if he is so stupid that, when Genevieve observes the town is so small that no one can sneeze in it without other people holding out a handkerchief, he asks, "What do you mean?" (p. 94).

Simon finds all the characters "cloddish and dreary." He says that true artists can "illuminate the simplest people . . . and can make plain words take on great resonance," and that the authors succeed once or twice in this film but "that is hardly enough to rouse one's sympathy for its sleep" (p. 94).

In evaluating other characters, Simon finds Ellen Burstyn "competent" but "burdened with drippy lines"; Eileen Brennan "captures the essence of the likeable tough broad" but this characterization is easy; Cloris Leechman "gives a poor performance" because "her weeping comes out comic" and her "shy love lacks genuine warmth" and she does not look right for the part; Randy Quaid is "unpleasant"; Clu Gulager, Timothy and Sam Bottoms and Cybill Shepherd "leave one unmoved." Simon adds that "Miss Shepherd is a model (though how, with that dubious figure, I can't imagine) whose face Bogdanovich found on a teenage magazine cover. Although her face is absolutely right for Jacy, nothing else is."

In the case of Simon's judgment of Miss Shepherd, he implies that she does not have a shapely figure. However, her face is right. The question is—if Miss Shepherd had a more shapely body, would it add to the creditability of the part? Also, Simon reveals ignorance about fashion modeling which does not require shapely figures, especially for teen magazines.

The only kind words Simon had for any of the cast were for Ben Johnson who "does nicely by Sam the Lion." In evaluating Bogdanovich as a director, Simons says that the direction is "sheer derivativeness."

A John Ford shot is followed by a George Stevens one; a Welles shot by one out of Raoul Walsh. Even if every sequence is not as patently copied as the funeral is from Shane, the feeling is unmistakable that one is watching a film directed not by a young director in 1971, but by a conclave of the bigger Hollywood directors circa 1941. This may give the film visual authenticity, but of what kind? Imagine a present-day composer writing like Hayden, a painter working in the exact style of Vermeer. At best, such men are epigones; at worst, forgers. At its most successful, The Last Picture Show, rises to the heights of pastiche (p. 94).

Simon also reflects a knowledge of film history; however, it is questionable whether there is any such thing as a "Ford shot" or an "Orson Welles shot" because in motion picture photography the composition of shots does not belong to any one director. Welles used shots in Citizen Kane that had been used in earlier films. It may be true that Bogdanovich is enamoured of earlier directors, but whether he worked in "the classic tradition" or used "sheer derivativeness," what matters is how well the shots worked in the film.

Simon also has an eye for detail. He finds a number of "serious minor problems" in the style and the sets:

When Sonny and Ruth make love for the first time, the springs of the bed do not just squeak, they undulate. If this were intended as a deliberate heightening for a subjective point of view, it would have to occur throughout the film, which it doesn't. Sonny has a way of fondly turning the baseball cap on Billy's head so that the visor faces backward. He does this

some half dozen times in the film, and when he doesn't do it, Duane does. It becomes grating in its predictability. . . . Or take Billy's death; the boy is run over by a truck. The scene is staged stiffly and ploddingly, and the gloom-inducing devices run amuck. Never on those other windy days has a shutter been banging in the poolroom; now there is one beating the Devil's tattoo. Never before has a single tumble weed tumbled down the streets of Anarene; now there is a bunch of them doing enough tumbling for the main ring at Barnum & Bailey's (pp. 94-95).

Boyum and Scott (1971, p. 21) say visual authenticity "gives only the illusion of reality" and that film is not reality. When the movie critic says that film is not true to life, he is saying that he does not believe in the humanity of the characters, or the situations in which they find themselves, or that the experiences are not possible in the real world. Simon is willing to accept the bed springs that undulate instead of squeaking as a deliberate heightening as a subjective point of view only if the film consistently views things from this standpoint.

Simon says that the "whole last part of the film proceeds by jerky, disparate lurches that do not blend into a balanced narrative, and the conclusion is so ambiguous . . . as to be close to mere effect " (p. 95).

At other times, instead of hitting us over the head, Bogdanovich does not make a point at all. When Sonny, after Billy's death, gets into his truck and drives off to leave this horrible town forever . . . he suddenly makes a U turn and capitulates. A reliable film-maker would have taken us inside Sonny as the resolution to escape peters out; if nothing else, he would have found an objective correlative, the tiny external factor that undermines the boy's

resolve. Instead, like so many things in the film, the change of mind has to be taken simply on faith (p. 95).

Simon's tone throughout the review is cynical. He picks the film apart after admitting that other critics and audiences liked the film. His approach is more academic than pragmatic because he is making a case against the film's art and, therefore, its entertainment value. He explicates many devices used in the film and reflects a keen perception of imagery, set design, and technique. He apparently set out to find flaws and succeeded when the film failed to meet the standards he set. His judgment of the acting appears to be based on personal preference.

#### Terry Kay

Was The Last Picture Show entertainment? The bleak landscape, the dreary characters and the depressing story of corruption, sexual and moral decay, and death seem to indicate that The Last Picture Show was not a pleasant experience. But it is also a story about adolescents trying to grow up in a small town and some critics saw it as a nostalgia piece.

Terry Kay, movie critic and amusements editor for the Atlanta (Georgia) Journal grew up in a small town in Georgia and saw the movie as pure nostalgia. His review, which appeared February 22, 1972 in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (p. 4, Sec. F) offers an interesting example of the critic's position on subjectivity. Kay started the

review with an account of a telephone caller who was "stunned" over Kay's approval of The Last Picture Show in an earlier review. He says that the caller talked at length on the problem of subjectivity versus objectivity in film criticism and the point was made that movies which affect us personally will turn our attention in a favorable way.

It is the same as sizing up a political candidate; if he is for us and against them, he is right enough for a vote.

The Last Picture Show was for me. Us. Anyone who grew up in that particular period of the early '50s, when a "dissolving economy," as Tennessee Williams called it, surrounded us with its ethereal presence . . .

The Last Picture Show reminded me of those days. Specks and flashes of the film could have been hoisted out of my life. . . . I tried to be objective. Forced myself to think of Robert Surtees' photography. Listened closely to the script. Took careful note of the nude swimming party (would that have happened?). But it was too personal (p. 4).

Kay says he could not judge the film objectively because it reminded him of his boyhood in Royston, Georgia. He lived in a town that had only one movie theater. He points out that several films have dealt with the past and calls Red Sky at Morning and Summer of '42 nostalgia pieces. Mr. Kay says (p. 4):

The one thing that impressed me about each of these films, replaying them in my mind, in each, the story line is really a mild aside.

What matters is the episodic adventures of the films. The small things. . . . Just enough to get past the mind and into a dark corner of secrets. . . . It is rather like an expression attributed to William

Inge in describing characters in one of his plays: They are like travelers who aren't traveling for the destination but for what they might see along the way . . . so it is with The Last Picture Show. . . . The destinations mean little. We know them anyway. But what we see along the way is an adventure. For all of us have landmarks, distinctive episodes in our experiences. Sometimes it is good to stop enroute to wherever (whatever) and read the plaques that we have left to tell significant tales.

Kay's observation about the story not being as important as episodic adventure within the story and his background explain his position. It is an honest statement and a valid judgment. Kay says that not everyone grew up in a small town in the early '50s and "I understand their frustration with films that seem, to them, indulgent" and that the film's intellectual qualities may "leave much to be desired," but "I see nothing wrong with being affected by the phantom forces of any movie or of giving in to subjectivity when that surrender means pleasure." Kay says that even nostalgia has its place and he recommends the film again. This is a second review. One of the advantages of working for a daily publication is that a film critic is able to re-review films and restate his opinion more frequently because of the frequency of publication.

#### Vincent Canby

Vincent Canby, movie critic for The New York Times, is in the position of being able to see and write about movies before any other critic in the country. Movies open in New York and he is there writing for a daily newspaper.

He has space for analysis and is able to re-review movies and follow up on reviews. He manages to write about two or three movies each week. He reviewed The Last Picture Show when it opened at the New York Film Festival in October 1971. His review was published in The New York Times, October 4, 1971 (p. 51).

Canby gave the film a favorable review saying that it "has the effect of a lovely, leisurely, horizontal pan shot across the life of Anarene, Texas, on a plain that to raise the eye even 10 degrees would be to see only an endless sky."

Instead of viewing the black and white photography as a copy or tribute to earlier directors, Canby sees the texture of the film as a reminder of a high school yearbook. Giving these two brief descriptions of the tone of the film, he says that the story is "a series of interlocking stories that are on the edge of Winesburg, Ohio," but that illuminate a good deal more of one segment of the American experience than other American films in recent memory.

It is 1951—the time of Truman, Jo Stafford, of "I, the Jury", as a best-selling paperback, when tank-town movie houses like the Royal Theater had to close down because the citizens of Anarene, like most other Americans, were discovering in Television a more convenient dream machine that brought it further isolation from community—a phenomenon analyzed by Philip Slater, the sociologist, as America's pursuit of Loneliness (p. 51).

Canby says, however, that The Last Picture Show is "not sociology even though it is sociologically true," nor

is it "another exercise in romantic nostalgia on the order of Summer of 42."

It is filled with carefully researched details of time and place, but although these details are essential to the decor of the film—they are not the essence. It is a movie that doesn't look back, rather it starts off and ends in its own time, as much as does such a completely dissimilar story as that of Sunday, Bloody Sunday (p. 51).

Canby says the film is about the maturation of a young boy who comes of age in the course of the movie. Relating the film to literature he says the "emotional crises and confrontations" of youth are "staples of all sorts of American coming-of-age literature from Penrod to Petyon Place to Portnoy's Complaint." He says that these familiar staples are "treated with such humor, and such sympathy (with the exception of a few overwrought scenes) it becomes an adventure in rediscovery of a very decent, straightforward kind of movie . . . and of human values."

Here is a meaning that Canby has found that Simon, Zimmerman and Kay did not write about—a decent, straightforward kind of movie dealing with human values.

Canby also evaluates the actors. He "likes everyone in the cast" and acknowledges the performers. He also finds "small quibbles about the film." For example, he says that Bogdanovich and McMurtry have "done everything to get the entire novel on the screen," but have omitted certain elements—such as Sonny's family background and

why the coach's wife is such a pushover for Sonny. He adds: "Perhaps the movie is too horizontal—too objective."

Canby recommends the movie and relates that in 1970 Jack Valenti, head of the Motion Picture Association, described the movie critics as physicians who should heal themselves and advised critics to try to make motion pictures themselves if they wanted to be taken seriously. Canby says that Bogdanovich, a former critic, has apparently taken Valenti's advice.

Canby concludes his review by asking viewers not to get The Last Picture Show confused with another movie which also had just opened entitled The Last Movie. They are in no way similar, he says.

Canby's review is brief, factual and offered his evaluation of the material. It is more pragmatic than academic, and he makes comparisons of the material to literature. He focused on content more than technique. The flaws he found were not in style, acting, or theme, but in the logical development of character.

### Summary

The four preceding critics found that The Last Picture Show had flaws and apparently was not a complete work of art. Zimmerman and Kay did not go into details. Zimmerman says that the film has brief excursions into sentimentality and untidy definitions of family ties. Canby also

points out the lack of development of certain characters. Kay writes that the film's intellectual qualities may leave something to be desired. While Simon went into detail on the film's shortcomings, he included the romanticizing of the material and the failure to make some characters more clearly defined.

These critics seem to be critical of what the film does not do, as well as what was presented on the screen. The reviews here are examples of the fusion between the academic and the pragmatic. Kay's review is pure personal preference and he tells us it is.

Kay's review is an example of how, in the writer's opinion, a critic should honestly evaluate his decision that he liked or disliked a film. In the evaluation Kay found that his private associations set up a barrier to a fair judgment. Simon, who apparently had read other critics (he tells us the movie is a hit with critics and refers to reviews by Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris), is searching for flaws. His review is almost an explication of the film, but he does not go into a play-by-play analysis.

Simon, Zimmerman and Canby credit Bogdanovich with being the film-maker. We can see the auteur theory at work in Zimmerman's review. All four critics reveal a sense of perception and an eye for detail. Kay says he tried to watch the photography, study the script, tried to be objective. He seems to divide the film into components to be

judged—music, dialogue, acting, direction, technique, photography. The writer believes that journalistic critics tend to divide their reviews into components of evaluation. One part of the review will deal with acting, another with direction, another with technique. The reviews that blend the academic with the pragmatic devote the greatest amount of copy to informing the reader on what the film is about; its theme, message or story.

### The French Connection

Since early silent movies, violence has been depicted on the screen. In America a whole genre of gangster and police films has developed. Treated in various ways, violence has become more and more explicit in the 1970s.

The French Connection deals with the violence and brutality of police and criminals. Filmed on location in New York City, the movie was directed by William Friedkin. The screen play by Ernest Tidyman was adapted from a book by Robin Moore. The story is based on an actual event involving the New York City police and one of the largest shipments of heroin smuggled into the United States. Two former policemen, Eddie Egan and Sonny Grosso, who took part in the actual case, had minor roles in the film and provided technical assistance.

The lead characters include: two policemen, "Pop-eye" Doyle, played by Gene Hackman, and Doyle's assistant

played by Roy Scheider; and Charnier, the French Connection, played by Fernando Rey.

The plot is simple. A huge shipment of heroin is smuggled into New York from France. In the course of their work, two city policemen discover the smugglers and pursue the drug dealers. The action is fast and one segment contains a long car chase through the city streets. Much of the film deals with characterization. The policeman Doyle is shown as a racist, a reckless and brutal man, while the French Connection is shown as a suave, successful, charming man.

The movie moves along in a fast tempo until the climax when the police have a showdown with the drug dealer and his henchmen in an abandoned warehouse. Charnier gets away (we are told in a written epilog flashed on the screen) and Doyle accidentally shoots an FBI agent. The epilog also informs us that the henchmen got off with light sentences or probation.

Some critics, such as Michael Shedlin in Film Quarterly (1972, pp. 2-9), saw the movie as a fascist statement for law and order. Director William Friedkin is quoted by Charles T. Gregory in the spring 1973 issue of Film Heritage (p. 6) as saying that he did not intend to glorify either the police or the criminals. He said, "I made The French Connection in the open-mouthed awe at the way both the cops and the smugglers regarded their efforts.

. . . A tremendously thin line exists between cops and criminals." Friedkin says he tried to be objective and show the parallels and contrasts between Charnier and Doyle.

The film was financially successful and won an Academy Award for the best picture of the year in 1971. The following selected criticism reveals what certain journalistic critics found both good and bad about the film.

#### Pauline Kael

Pauline Kael writes film criticism for The New Yorker magazine on an alternating basis with Penelope Gilliatt. She found The French Connection "gripping action" and "charged with suspense," but she objected to the movie's use of violence for the sake of thrills. Her review originally appeared in The New Yorker in 1971 and was reprinted in Film 71/72 (Denby 1972, pp. 214-220).

Her review begins with an anecdote which is typical of her style. "When Mayor Lindsay began his efforts to attract the movie-production business, it probably didn't occur to him or his associates that they were ushering in a new movie age of nightmare realism . . . the New York-made movies have provided a permanent record of the city in breakdown." Typical of her style, she records the actions and reactions of the audience. She says, "I doubt if at any other time in American movie history there has been such a close relationship between life on the screen and the life

in a portion of the audience. . . . The City of New York has helped American movies grow up; it has also given movies a new spirit of nervous, anxious hopelessness, which is the true spirit of New York" (p. 215). This discussion of New York indicates that Miss Kael is aware of the audience to which The New Yorker is aimed. She has not begun to evaluate the film. Instead, she makes observations about the audience.

The movies have captured the soul of this city in a way that goes beyond simple notions of realism. The panhandler in the movie who jostles the hero looks just like the one who jostled you as you leave the movie theater. . . . Screams in the theater at Halloween movies used to be a joke, signals for laughter and applause, because nobody believed in the terror on the screen. The midnight showings of horror films go on all year round, and the screams are no longer pranks. . . .

It is not uncommon now for fights and semi-psychotic episodes to take place in the theaters, especially when the movies being played are shockers. Audiences for these movies in the Times Square area and in the Village are highly volatile. Probably the unstable, often dazed members of the audience are particularly susceptible to the violence and tension on the screen . . . whether the movies bring it out in the audience or whether the particular audiences that are attracted bring it into the theater, it's there in the theater . . . and you feel the violence on the screen may at any moment touch off violence in the theater (p. 215).

Miss Kael has set the tone of her review and devotes nearly a thousand words to a description of the New York audience before mentioning the name of the film. She says,

I don't believe that people are going to shock and horror films because of a need to exorcise their fears. . . . I think they are going for entertainment, and I don't see how one can ignore the fact

that the kind of entertainment that attracts them now is often irrational and horrifyingly brutal (p. 216).

She says that the audience is turned on by this type of film "and an extraordinarily well-made thriller gets the audience sky high and keeps it there—The French Connection, directed by William Friedkin." After a rather sociological commentary on potential audiences and the movie industry, Miss Kael then tells the reader what the film is about. She describes the first minute of the film's action in which an unidentified man in France is shot in the face and torso by a sinister-looking assassin. The man was carrying a loaf of French bread, and the assassin picks up the loaf, breaks off a piece to munch and then tosses the loaf on the corpse.

From that point she says, "the film jumps to New York and proceeds through chases, pistol-whippings, slashings, beatings, murders, snipings and more chases for close to two hours." Miss Kael acknowledges the film is "undeniably gripping, slam-bang fast, charged with suspense and is hyped up additionally with a television-thriller-style score." She also points out a scene which has nothing to do with the plot in which there is an automobile wreck and "we are treated to two views of the bloody faces of the fresh corpses." This is added, she says, to give the audience a "minute-to-minute injection of excitement." Miss Kael says the movie is "pretty businesslike" and is the "most 'New York' of all the recent New York movies. It is also probably

the best example of what the trade reporters sometimes refer to as 'the cinema du zap'."

It's no wonder that The French Connection is a hit, but what in hell is it? It uses eighty-six separate locations in New York City. . . . I suppose the answer we're meant to give is that it's an image of the modern big city as Inferno, and that Popeye is an Existential hero, but the movie keeps zagging us . . . most of its effects are of the Psycho-derived blast-in-the-face variety. Even the expert pacing is achieved by somewhat questionable means; the ominous music keeps tightening the screws and heating things up. The noise of New York already has us tense. The movie is like an aggravated case of New York: It raises this noise level to produce the kind of painful tension that is usually described as almost unbearable suspense. But it's the same kind of suspense that you feel when someone outside your window keeps pushing down on the car horn and you think the blaring sound is going to drive you out of your skull. This horn routine, is, in fact, what the cop does throughout the longest chase sequence (p. 217).

Kael has moved from a discussion of what the movie is about to how the film is made and how it achieves the high level of action. She says this technique creates suspense by "the sheer pounding abrasiveness of its means" and "you don't have to be an artist or be original or ingenious to work on the raw nerves of an audience this way—you just have to be smart and brutal" (p. 217).

In her book, Going Steady (1971, p. 118) Pauline Kael says that "for the greatest movie artists where there is a unity of technique and subject, one doesn't need to talk about technique much because it is subsumed in the art." She says that analysis of film technique is a scholarly function and movie critics should look for "what

is new and beautiful in the work" and not how it was made. "Taking it apart is far less important than trying to see it as a whole."

Seeing The French Connection as a whole, Miss Kael finds the acting and direction excellent, but she objects to what the movie means in terms of entertainment.

I know that there are many people—and very intelligent people too—who love this kind of fast-action movie, who say that this is what movies do best and that this is what they really want when they go to a movie. . . . Well, it's not what I want, and the fact that Friedkin has done a sensational job of direction just makes that clearer. It's not what I want not because it fails (it doesn't fail) but because of what it is. It is, I think, jolts for jolts. There's nothing in the movie that you enjoy thinking over afterward. . . . Every other effect in the movie—even the climactic car-versus-runaway-elevated train chase is achieved by noise, speed and brutality (p. 218).

She does not give the reader a play-by-play description of the plot. She finds a few "small errors."

A good comic contrast of drug dealers dining at their ease in a splendid restaurant while freezing, hungry cops who are tailing them curse in a doorway and finally eat a hunk of pizza is spoiled because, for the sake of composition with the two groups in the same shot, the police have been placed where the diners could obviously see them. It is also a mistake, I think, that at the end the picture just stops instead of coming to a full period. . . . There's no logic in having the Lincoln Continental that is shipped from France with the heroin inside abandoned on a back street at night rather than parked snugly in the garage of its owner's hotel; it appears to be on the street just so the narcotics agents can spot it. . . . There's an elaborate sequence of an auto auction at an automobile graveyard which serves no clear purpose. And . . . you have no idea who that poor devil was who got shot in the overture, or why (p. 218).

Miss Kael here is pointing out things which did not fit into the logical development of the plot. After she has viewed the film as a whole, she has found nuances in the film that cannot be fitted into the film experience. She says this "sloppy plotting" does not seem to matter because it is covered up with speed and violence. She has no complaints about the acting, but she objects to Doyle.

A crude writer can give his crummy, cheap jokes to a crude character, and the jokes really pay off. The rotten jokes get laughs and also show how ugly the character's idea of humor is. . . . Popeye (the name is out of Faulkner, I assume) has a filthy mouth and a complete catalogue of race prejudices. . . . He is the anti-hero carried to a new lumpenprole low. . . . Sam Spade might play dirty, but he had a code and a personal style. . . . Popeye is insanely callous, a shrewd bully who enjoys terrorizing black junkies, and the film includes raids on bars that are gratuitous to the story line just to show what a mean son-of-a-bitch he is (p. 219).

Miss Kael refers to Sam Spade, a tough detective character, who had a moral code. In the detective genre, the hero is usually a tough character, but adheres to a code of loyalty, justice, and a sense of right and wrong. Popeye has no code and his motivation in this film is not explained. Friedkin contends that he is not making Popeye the hero, but is offering an objective view of the way things really are in the world of cops and robbers.

Miss Kael says that presenting the cops and criminals in a supposedly amoral way is "total commercial opportunism passing itself off as an Existential view."

She says that when the movie shows the police as brutal and reckless it allows one part of the audience to say, "that's a real pig" and another part of the audience to say, "that's the only way to deal with those people."

Kael says Popeye's low character is used to make the cops-and-robbers melodrama "superficially modern by making it meaningless," and sees the epilogue at the end as also double in meaning: "To tell us to get tougher judges and to make tougher laws, and to provide an ironic coda showing that Popeye's efforts were really futile." She concludes by saying that the only thing the movie "believes in" is giving the audience "jolts" and "you can feel the raw, primitive response in the theater" (p. 220).

Miss Kael's review is a blend of the academic and the pragmatic. She did not find the film to be art, but a well-produced commercial product. She found the film's technique also excellent. She says that the director has done a sensational job. The film is rejected because of the message that Miss Kael interprets from the film. The review explains Miss Kael's position and informs the reader about the film and gives some observations about the audience for this type of action film. Miss Kael apparently was in a minority because most critics gave The French Connection favorable reviews.

Stephen Farber

In addition to movie reviews by Vincent Canby, The New York Times often runs reviews by other noted critics and personalities. For example, in addition to Canby's review of The Candidate, the Times ran an article by Bella Abzug on her views of how the film depicted politics.

On November 21, 1971 (pp. 15, 17), the Times printed an analysis of The French Connection by critic Stephen Farber. Farber uses an academic approach to film and explicates movies for theme and content. His reviews have appeared in film journals.

He gave The French Connection a favorable review for three reasons: first, he enjoyed the thrilling suspense; second, he thought the movie made a "most significant contribution to the detective genre" by its treatment of the police "hero"; and third, because of the social messages he saw in the film.

Farber begins the review with a discussion of the past "classic genres" of American films which he says the great majority have been "undistinguished, utterly conventional and banal." However, "of the classic American genre only the thriller seems to me to have ever had any real vitality." He cites several examples of "urban crime movies" that have "offered up truths about society." He lists several—Public Enemy, Scarface, Maltese Falcon, The Big

Sleep, Kiss Me Deadly, Double Indemnity, and Touch of Evil.

Of these, he says, "the thriller genre has yielded a surprising number of interesting and expressive, at times even experimental, films, about American life" (p. 15).

Farber says The French Connection is the best thriller since Point Blank and the best movie of the year. "It is first of all a stylish and exciting melodrama about a \$32 million heroin exchange, but beyond that, a hellishly precise vision of the disintegration of modern urban life and of the ambiguous role of the police in an increasingly polarized and corrupt society" (p. 15).

He credits director William Friedkin with finding "real New York locations that look almost preternaturally eerie, sinister, and fantastic." He discusses some of the scenes of city streets, children playing and the realism of the movie.

The characterization that contrasts Doyle with Charnier is seen as "an interesting study of the clash of cultures, an archetypal confrontation of American innocence and European corruption." He says Charnier's grace and charm makes him almost a "Jamesian villain." Farber sees Doyle as the "resolute, vulgar, grasping American cop" who "succeeds by determination, energy and brute force."

In discovering a new kind of policemen hero, the film makes its most significant contribution to the detective genre . . . most detectives operate with a code . . . but Hackman's Doyle is a cop of

a different code—brutal, racist, foul-mouthed, petty, compulsive, lecherous. But even at his most appalling he is recognizably human. Something more than the one dimensional "pig" of current liberal folklore (p. 15).

Farber's reaction to Doyle is different from Miss Kael's, yet they both describe the character in the same way. Farber also sees Doyle as a "hero". He says both Charnier and Doyle "share the same ruthlessness and amorality" and "the chilling thing is that Popeye is a good cop with more than the prescribed American initiative and guts."

Both Kael and Farber are looking at Popeye as the hero or anti-hero of this film. While Kael strongly dislikes this character and sees him as a supposedly existential hero, Farber sees him as a realistic character. He says that "glib anti-establishment films which cast the cop as American Fascist overlook one salient ironic fact that The French Connection recognizes: The underpaid cop is really one of the deprived members of contemporary society, even though he is defending 'law and order' for the privileged and complacent." He says that Popeye Doyle is motivated by "envy" and a "personal sense of injustice and deprivation." Farber says this is established through scenes such as the shot of the rich and cultured drug dealer eating in a fine restaurant while Doyle watches outside in the cold. Farber says Doyle "releases his jealousy and dissatisfaction by brutalizing the people—blacks in particular—whom he sees as his social inferiors . . . by

placing the cop in a very carefully defined social and economic milieu, the film allows us to understand some of the reasons for police brutality" (p. 17). Farber calls it one of the fullest portraits of the police in a fiction film, but makes no reference to the fact that it was based on a real case history. He says Hackman is convincing in the role of Doyle.

Farber says Friedkin has found "images of the city in decay," and the "film's disorienting network of impersonations suggests something about the erosion of any clear sense of identity under the pressures and confusions of urban life, the blurring of traditional moral distinctions, the rootlessness and anomie that contribute to the peculiar desperation of the modern city nightmare" (p. 17).

In this analysis, Farber tries to define what the film is trying to say rather than giving a plot outline. He relates it to other films of its genre and to literature. By focusing on locale, imagery, characterization and theme, Farber has used the criteria employed by those who evaluate literary works.

### Jay Cocks

Jay Cocks' reviews for Time magazine are usually very pragmatic. He stays mainly with facts and does not go into in depth analysis. He tells what the movie is about, gives some of the plot, and usually judges how well the

movie entertains. He reviewed The French Connection in Time on November 1, 1971 (p. 109):

The French Connection is a knockout police thriller with so much jarring excitement that it almost calls for comic-book expletives. POW! ZOWIE! The film has all the depth of a mud puddle, but director William Friedkin (The Night They Raided Minsky's) sets such a frantic pace that there is hardly a chance to notice, much less care. The connection is a French businessman (Fernando Rey) who arrives in New York with a multimillion-dollar shipment of high-grade heroin stashed underneath a car door. By dumb luck, a couple of tough narcs get into the deal and chase "Frog 1" and his friends all around the town, turning New York into gun city in the process.

Many of the scenes were shot along the East River, around ramshackle warehouses and worn tenements that give the movie a sense of gritty realism. The actors who play the cops are so well cast that they seem to have grown up next door to the precinct house. Gene Hackman plays Popeye Doyle, who likes to ogle girls in boots, break heads and bust blacks; Roy Scheider is his dogged, if only slightly less compulsive, assistant. Eddie Egan plays their boss with bullish authenticity as well he might since he is an ex-cop who figured in the actual incident on which the movie is based.

Midway through it all there is a race between an automobile and an elevated train that is sharply reminiscent of the careering car in Bullitt. Phillip D'Antoni produced both movies, and it is obvious from the similarities in pacing that he also took a hand in their direction. If he was imitating his first success with The French Connection, he has also improved upon it.

Cocks stays with the facts. He apparently did not see the social messages that Farber saw. His criteria have stemmed only from the movie's action.

Charles Champlin

Charles Champlin is the critic-at-large for the Los Angeles Times. He gave The French Connection a favorable review for basically the same reasons cited by Farber. Champlin's review was published in the Los Angeles Times November 3, 1971 (pp. 1, 13, Sec. IV).

He begins the review by relating the film to Bullitt saying that it is "every bit as entertaining . . . a slam-bang, suspenseful, plain spoken, sardonically funny, furiously paced melodrama." He makes approximately the same observation that Farber does: "It is a police drama and like Bullitt, only more so, it takes for granted that detectives are human beings with the usual quota of frailties but also (if we are lucky) a compensating, compulsive drive to catch criminals."

Champlin says the movie has "the gritty authenticity of a first rate documentary" and is "thought provoking and reverberating." Champlin also appraises the cast: Hackman and Scheider "create an often unflattering credibility which is powerful indeed." Tidyman has "a crackling good script." Friedkin does "as good a job as I've seen in a good while." Owen Roizman's photography "absolutedly captures the look and feel of New York." Egan and Grosso are "good." And in a final tribute at the conclusion of the review, Champlin notes that Don Ellis, composer, provided "a major asset in creating the movie's pace and moods."

Here Champlin offers an excellent example of how a journalistic film critic attempts to evaluate the group activity of film. Instead of looking to the director as the sole creator of the film, Champlin has spread the credit throughout the cast and crew. He also sees messages:

The French Connection seems to have a message—several—in fact—although I'm not entirely sure that the messages are exclusively those which the producers . . . had in mind. Superficially the message is that the detectives live in misery and do their jobs out of a dogged devotion; the top dope peddlers live in opulence and get away or are coddled by the courts. . . . It is possible to realize how catastrophically a half century's attempts to punish narcotics out of existence has failed and have in fact acted like kerosene on a blaze . . . among other things cops and robbers have become a law unto themselves (p. 13).

Champlin's review is a blend of the academic and the pragmatic. He has divided his review into components of evaluation. He tells us what the film is about and how good each part of the whole is—direction, acting, photography, music, locale, story. He then tells us that the film has a message. He sees the same sociological messages that Farber saw.

### Summary

David Manning White and Richard Alverson in The Celluloid Weapon (1972, p. 260) write that message films have been made since the early silent era: "Hollywood message film-makers have utilized the entertainment story as a vehicle for expressing a social viewpoint."

Pauline Kael saw this film as a commercial copout which offered a take-your-choice message. Either Popeye is an existential hero in an Inferno without good guys or bad guys, or it is a statement for law and order. Cocks said it has all the depth of a muddle puddle. Farber and Champ-  
lin see it as a realistic study of an underpaid cop. They speculate at his motivations and go into the psychology and sociology of the film's subject. We have only Friedkin's word that the film is an amoral study of the real thing.

Looking for and explaining the message of the theme of a film is a difficult task for the journalistic film critic, but from an academic or a pragmatic standpoint, the writer believes that pointing out any messages in a film is a valid critical act. The critic, if he is to inform his readers about the film, cannot ignore any message. However, he must be careful not to read any messages into the film that are not there.

### Frenzy

Alfred Hitchcock has built his reputation as a film director on movies that deal with suspense, mystery and excitement. Because his films contain similarities, his latest work is usually compared with his earlier films. Hitchcock is more concerned with getting a response from the audience than putting across any messages.

Frenzy (1972) was made in the Hitchcock tradition.

Filmed in his native London, England, it is a murder mystery about a psychotic murderer who strangles his victims with neckties. The script is by Anthony Shaffer. The plot involves a former R.A.F. pilot who is wrongly accused of murder after his ex-wife is found strangled. Jon Finch plays the hero Richard Blaney. Barbare Leigh-Hunt plays his ex-wife. The real murderer is Blaney's good friend Bob Rusk, played by Barry Foster. Blaney does not know that his friend is the murderer, but the audience is shown this early as a device to heighten suspense when the two come together later in the film.

Blaney is trapped by circumstantial evidence and brought to trial by Inspector Oxford of Scotland Yard. Oxford is played by Alec McCord. Oxford's wife, played by Vivien Merchant, provides comic relief in scenes where she tests her gourmet cooking on the reluctant Inspector. Anna Massey plays Blaney's girl friend.

The audience knows that the wrong man has been caught (a familiar story in Hitchcock films) and the real murderer is on the loose. Blaney must clear his name, which he does in the resolution of the story. The following reviews discuss the Hitchcock style.

Stanley Kauffman

Stanley Kauffman uses an academic approach in his reviews for The New Republic. He writes about several films and alternates between film criticism and drama criticism. He has a knowledge of film history and keen perception. His review of Frenzy appeared in The New Republic July 8, 1972: (pp. 22, 34).

The review of Frenzy is an examination of Hitchcock's style which Kauffman says is "overwhelmingly dependent" on the script. He says that "all of Hitchcock's successes are primarily writers' films." He says that Frenzy is Hitchcock's best work since North by Northwest (1963) and the credit goes to Anthony Shaffer "who has made the come-back for Hitchcock."

Hitchcock hadn't deteriorated as a director in recent films, he merely had poor scripts. . . . Some critics and Hitchcock himself keep telling us that content doesn't matter, style is all, in plotty suspense pictures! Hitchcock said recently "too many films are looked at for their content. What's important is their treatment." . . . Arguably there are some directors who have made good films with mediocre material, but Hitchcock is surely not one of them. Look at Marnie and Topaz again, if you can, and see how sterile all the Hitchcockery is when it is used on stupid material. On the other hand, look again at The Thirty-Nine Steps and see how the film lives, not because of the (very good) direction but basically because of the script (p. 22).

Kauffman compares Hitchcock's Thirty-Nine Steps (1936) with two later films. He contends that the earlier work is also a "writer's picture." Kauffman sees Hitchcock as a skilled and talented director, but dependent on the

script. He says if film is basically images instead of content, then why are not all films by a good image maker equally good? Kauffman says that Frenzy is a good reworking of the familiar Hitchcock devices which include the running gag—this time it is the Inspector's wife and her cooking, and a protagonist who is innocent but pursued by the authorities.

Again there are sardonic juxtapositions: a (presumably) guilty man sits, background, in a pub while two men in the foreground discuss the murder. Again there are the false clues: a cut from a necktie around the neck of a strangled woman to a man putting on a similar necktie, but he is not the guilty man. (I spill a few beans. We learn of his innocence early. The story is built on counterpoint between the seemingly guilty man and a seemingly innocent one.) Again the highly realistic texture is fractured by arrant movie mechanics: the hero's friend just happens to spot him in a park at a crucial moment and gives him shelter. . . .

After a somewhat slow start, the story gets going, and makes us itch with the right frustration as we see the wrong man being cornered (p. 22).

Kauffman describes the ending as a "typical copout" for Hitchcock. Just when the hero is tried and found guilty and "we might be willing to think that we are getting a full view of the dark side of the mirror" the Inspector who caught the hero "sets out to prove the innocence of the very man he has brought to book. Why the Inspector should have so readily changed is not really a matter of psychology but of box office" (p. 22).

Here Kauffman's statement about "a full view of the dark side of the mirror" implies that if a man were convicted

of the circumstances offered in the movie, it is unlikely that he would get off. However, the story offered is plausible and acceptable within the framework of a fiction film. Kauffman not only sees the story as a typical Hitchcock film, but adds that the style is a "familiar battery of Hitchcock cinematic devices" that work "on generally good ground" in this film.

There is the razzle-dazzle murder editing, as in the Psycho shower, this time dealing with a rape and a strangling—a sequence that will doubtless become a "classic" in editing classes for the easily impressed. There is the familiar quiet moment of murder-discovery during which the camera waits outside while someone goes in and discovers the body we know is there. There is the weaving of locale into the fabric of the story—in this case, the Covent Garden market and that look like the actual premises of the Duckworth publishing company in that district (p. 22).

He relates that this is the first film Hitchcock has made in his native land in twenty years and says the opening shot, a slow ride over London, the Thames River and under Tower Bridge, is something that Hitchcock fans will sing about. However, to Kauffman it looks like "a distended travelogue shot" which is "out of key with the picture" and "upholstered with pompous music." The opening shot ends on a politician who is giving a speech about pollution in the Thames. During the speech a corpse floats ashore. Kauffman says this is "unfunny padding" and would have been more effective if the shot had ended on the corpse.

I realize that I'm fluctuating in this review between pros and cons and I suppose that's because, even though I recognize that this is better than Hitchcock's

latest work, sometimes genuinely exciting, and a film that only an extremely skilled and experienced director could have made, still there is something loathsome about the film and about Hitchcock himself to me. He has said that his love of film is far more important to him than any considerations of morality . . . it has a tinny ring from Hitchcock because his amorality is so specious, his cynicism so pop, his explorations of evil so patently show-biz. He turns his back on morality so coyly, so venally that his lack of conviction becomes a lack rather than a conviction. (p. 34).

Kauffman here objects to Hitchcock's motivations much the same way Pauline Kael objected to the motivations in The French Connection. He feels that Hitchcock has compromised his art for money at the box office. He says that Hitchcock's appeal to the voyeurism of the audience becomes "faintly loathsome when it is sexual." He says that Hitchcock has taken advantage of the opportunity to use nudity in the film and finds the scene in which Rusk grapples with a female corpse in the back of a truck in order to retrieve a lost ring as "cheap sensationalism posing as sophisticated frisson" (p. 34).

Kauffman concludes his review with an appraisal of the cast. He has favorable comments for all, but says that Foster does not have "quite enough force" and "as Hitchcock says, 'the more successful the villain, the more successful the picture. That's a cardinal rule . . .'" "Middling villain, middling success" (p. 34).

Kauffman's review is a blend of the academic and the pragmatic. His basic dislike of Frenzy appears to be a

dislike for Hitchcock's motives. He is trying to dispel any claims that the director is the artist. He has also elevated the writer as the auteur. Kauffman is obviously not a Hitchcock fan, but Arthur Knight apparently is and while he saw the same familiar things in Frenzy, he liked what he saw.

### Arthur Knight

Arthur Knight is one of the movie critics writing for Saturday Review magazine. He agreed with Kauffman that Frenzy is Hitchcock's best work since North by Northwest. His review which appeared in the June 24, 1972, issue of Saturday Review (p. 74), began with a comment on British mystery writing.

The British seem to have a special feeling about their murderers, regarding them more as eccentrics than criminals. One of the charms of the British school of mystery fiction writing is the way all of the characters tend to be "characters." There is probably no one in the world more bemused by the eccentric aspects of crime than the urban, rubicund Alfred Hitchcock, nor anyone better equipped to display it. He positively revels in the depiction of a heinous murder (as in the unforgettable shower sequence from Psycho) and figuratively rubs his hands with delight as the finger of suspicion points inexorably in the wrong direction. The "wrong man" is a recurrent theme in the Hitchcock rubric; it is central to his latest—and also his best—film in more than a decade, Frenzy.

Knight says, "There are, of course, the expected Hitchcock touches and the Hitchcock humor. But the great thing is that everything works." This statement is

probably one of the best methods of evaluation of film:

What is important is that everything works.

Knight then discusses the plot at length. He notes in most pictures of this sort, where the identity of the villain is the whole crux of the plot, it would be "breaking the critic's 'boy scout oath' to reveal the film's ending," but not so in Frenzy because the viewer learns early that the Hitchcock hero is not the real villain. Hitchcock lets the audience know who the villain is—also early in the film. Knight does not tell the entire plot. He says the story deals with how the hero must escape incriminating evidence.

Knight praises script writer Anthony Shaffer and adds that Hitchcock, though uncredited, helped with the script. He also praises the cast. He points out Bernard Cribbins who has a small part as a bartender, saying that all the characters are finely drawn and Cribbins is a lesson in what a fine actor can do with a small part. He says that Hitchcock "was able to cast his film without calling upon actors and actresses who have become stereotyped through years of film or television exposure." After praising the actors, Knight discusses the sets:

But the best thing about Frenzy is that it brings back Alfred Hitchcock at the top of his form. Perhaps the decision to film in his beloved London had something to do with this. There is a feeling that he not only knows his locations—the pubs, the clubs, the hotels, the open parks—but knows how to use them.

Covent Garden is located directly across from Henrietta Street, where venerable publishing houses let their rooms above their offices to tenants—a marvelously respectable front for Rusk's nefarious deed. Blaney's trial is held in the actual Old Bailey Courthouse, not a reproduction, and Hitchcock uses its swinging doors to avoid the clichés of most courtroom procedures. . . . For Hitchcock this return to London is a matter of knowing not so much where to find colorful backdrops as where to find settings that function for his script (p. 74).

Knight has blended the academic and the pragmatic approaches. He accepts the film on its own terms. The characters are characters and not real people. It is a traditional suspense film and he says it works well within that framework. He does compare it with other Hitchcock films.

### Summary

Neither Kauffman nor Knight wanted to reveal too much of the plot. Knight said it would be breaking the critic's "boy scout oath" and Kauffman apologized for "spilling a few beans." This approach is common in journalistic film criticism. It is similar to the book reviewer who does not want to give away the whole story. This is true for mysteries especially. After all, when the plot revolves around who the murderer is, why spoil it for the reader?

Apparently both critics here feel they are writing to readers who have not yet seen the film. This is the way most journalistic film criticism is structured. In

order to discuss the film and to tell what it is about, it is necessary to give some plot outline. Most critics avoid telling everything. A thorough analysis would require a complete explication which is the method of a complete academic approach. The main difference in this case between the academic and pragmatic is: The pragmatic reviewer assumes his audience has not yet seen the film, while the academic reviewer assumes his readers have seen the film.

### Last Tango In Paris

Gerald Mast in A Short History of the Movies (1971, p. 413) writes:

Films have always used sex—whether it was the sexiness of Griffith's Friendless Ones, the sexiness of Marlene Dietrich's veiled face in a key light, or the sexiness of bare breasts and a pair of jocky shorts in a 1969 motel room. . . . The key question about any film style is not whether it uses sex and violence, but how it uses them.

Last Tango in Paris (released here in 1973) is a study of the sexual and emotional relationship between a middle-aged man and a young girl. The film uses sexual encounters to show character and develop the story. It reflects two trends in contemporary film: The influence of the foreign director and the use of explicit sexual activities.

The influence of foreign directors on American films has grown since the late 1940s according to Mast

(1971, p. 414). He says "the innovations of Godard, Truffaut, and Antonioni eventually conquered the rising generation of film-makers in the 1950s and '60s."

Foreign films had little success with audiences in this country until recent years. However, with the changes in the American film audience in the past twenty-five years, the foreign film has a better chance for success in this country. American films have adapted some of the characteristics of the foreign films that are sensitive to intellectual and social messages, introspective on the human condition and sexually mature (Mast 1971, p. 333).

American films in the 1970s are using more nudity, explicit sex, and profanity than at any time in American film history. Supreme Court decisions in the 1950 paved the way for more freedom of expression in films. Arthur F. McClure in The Movies: An American Idiom traces the history of the court decisions and battles with censorship boards (1971, pp. 117-153). Last Tango in Paris takes full advantage of this freedom although the sex scenes in the film are simulated. The film made news for its use of sex and the fact that it starred an established screen veteran, Marlon Brando.

The plot is simple: Paul (Brando), a middle-aged American in Paris, meets a young Parisienne girl (Maria Schneider) in a vacant apartment; their attraction is instant and they agree to share the apartment on a no-name basis

purely for sexual encounters. We are told that Paul is deeply depressed because his wife has committed suicide. At first the young girl tries to find out about Paul, but he rejects her advances and insists on maintaining a sexual relationship only. Later, after his wife is buried, he changes and it is he who wants to know about her. No longer wanting just sexual encounters, he wants to know her as a person. Unknown to Paul, but established for the audience, is the girl's home life. She is engaged and decides to leave Paul for her fiance. The fiance is a young film-maker who stars his bride-to-be in a television movie (seen by many critics as a pun on film-making).

She rejects Paul and he begs her to stay. She then sees him as a middle-aged man and not a mysterious lover. He chases her to a Tango Parlour and they have one last tango together as a sort of simulated sexual act. She flees the parlour and the drunken Paul follows her home. She finally kills him with a pistol when he refuses to leave. As a final irony, she plans to tell the police that he was a stranger who tried to rape her.

Some critics were quick to point out that the film was not pornography. The following examples show judgment based on how the sex was used and not just that it was used.

Pauline Kael

Pauline Kael attended a special showing of Last Tango in Paris at the New York Film Festival in October 1972. The film was not released in America for the general public until 1973. Her review was published in The New Yorker magazine on October 28, 1972 (pp. 130-138). Impressed by the film, she said the first showing in America "should become a landmark in movie history."

There was no riot, and no one threw anything at the screen, but I think it's fair to say that the audience was in a state of shock. . . . The movie breakthrough has finally come. Exploitation films have been supplying mechanized sex--sex as physical stimulant but without any passion or emotional violence. The sex in Last Tango in Paris expresses the characters' drives . . . the physical menace of sexuality that is emotionally charged is such a departure from everything that we've come to expect at the movies that there was something almost like fear in the atmosphere of the party in the lobby that followed the screening (p. 130).

Miss Kael begins by recording the audience reaction. She then explains that the film is not pornography, but is "the most powerfully erotic movie ever made" and "may turn out to be the most liberating movie ever made." She says that she had expected a work of art from Bertolucci because her impressions of his last film, The Conformist. She said it was a natural reaction to "go into shock" and the "unexpected sexuality and new realism it requires of the actors."

Bertolucci and Brando have altered the face of an art form. . . . Many of us had expected eroticism

to come to the movies, and some of us had expected eroticism to come from Bertolucci, because he seemed to have the elegance and the richness and the sensuality to make lushly erotic movies. But I think those of us who had speculated about erotic movies had tended to think in terms of Terry Southern's deliriously comic novel on the subject "Blue Movie"; we had expected artistic blue movies. . . . What nobody talked about was a sex film that would churn up everybody's emotions (p. 130).

Miss Kael then explains what the film is about. She says that the two main characters, Paul and Jeanne, go through "an intensified, speeded up history of the sex relationships of the dominating men and the adoring women who have provided the key sex model of the past few decades—the model that is collapsing" (p. 130).

She sees the sex shown here as "sexual warfare"—a battle "of unequally matched partners, asserting whatever dominance they can, seizing any advantage." This battle goes on for three days in a flat where Paul's "male physical strength and the mythology he has built on it are the primary facts." Jeanne, she says, takes part in Paul's myth because she is "so erotically sensitized" by the sexual encounters. Later in the film, she wins the battle because she dominates Paul and sees him as a "washed-up middle-aged man."

In this review Miss Kael gives a discussion of Brando's acting. In other reviews the writer found the actor being discussed second to the director or the theme. First Miss Kael discusses the character Paul:

Much of the movie is American in spirit. Brando's Paul (a former actor and journalist who has been living off his French wife) is like a drunk with a literary turn of mind. He bellows his contempt for hypocrisies and orthodoxies; he keeps trying to shove them all back down other people's throats. His profane humor and self-loathing, self-centeredness and street "wisdom" are in the style of the American hardboiled fiction aimed at the masculine fantasy market. . . . Bertolucci has a remarkably unbiased intelligence. Part of the convulsive effect of Last Tango in Paris is that we are drawn to Paul's view of society and yet we can't help seeing him as a self-dramatizing, self-pitying clown. Paul believes that his animal noises are more honest than words, and that his obscene vision of things is the way things really are; he's often convincing (p. 132).

She says that Bertolucci and Brando have achieved "realism with the terror of actual experience still alive on the screen." In explaining this she compares the film to experimental films of novelist Norman Mailer. She says Mailer has been trying to pull a new realism out of himself onto film, without a script, depending wholly on improvisation. She says that Mailer was right about what was needed but hopelessly wrong in how he went about getting it. She says Mailer, who tried to "by-pass the self-consciousness and fakery of a man acting himself by improvising within a fictional construct," tried to will a work of art into existence without going through the steps of making it. Miss Kael (p. 133) says, "Bertolucci is able to build a structure that supports improvisation. Everything is prepared, but everything is subject to change, and the whole film is alive with a sense of discovery." Here Miss Kael is getting into a discussion of theory of acting and film

making. She quotes Bertolucci as saying that he builds characters on what the actors are in themselves. Miss Kael says he does not ask the actors to play preconceived parts—except for dialogue and even that is subject to change. She says it is not just Brando improvising, it is Brando improvising as Paul. "When Brando improvises within Bertolucci's structure, the full art is realized" (p. 133).

Miss Kael continues to praise Brando. She says the "excitement of Brando's performance here is in the revelation of how creative screen acting can be." She recalls the first time she saw Brando in a play in 1946. She was so taken by his performance that she forgot he was "acting." She warns that a lot of other people may make this same mistake when they see him as Paul.

Expressing a character's sexuality makes new demands on an actor, and Brando has no trick accent to play with this time and no putty on his face. It's perfectly apparent the role was conceived for Brando, using elements of his past as integral parts of the character. Bertolucci wasn't surprised by what Brando did; he was ready to use what Brando brought to the role. And when Brando is a full creative presence on the screen, the realism transcends the simulated actuality of any known style of cinema verite, because his surface accuracy expresses what is going on underneath. He's an actor; when he shows you something, he lets you know what it means. (pp. 133-134).

Miss Kael's reference to putty and a fake accent is a reference to Brando's role in The Godfather. She says:

At the simplest level, Brando, by his inflections and rhythms, makes the dialogue his own and makes Paul an authentic American abroad, in a way that an Italian-writer-director simply couldn't do . . . at

a more complex level, he helps Bertolucci discover the movie in the process of shooting it, and that's what makes moviemaking an art (p. 135).

She says (p. 135), "Acting involves the joy of self-discovery, and to improvise, as actors mean it, is the most distinctive part of acting—to bring out and give what you didn't know you had in you; it's the surprise, the 'magic' in acting . . . a director has to be supportive for an actor to feel both secure enough and free enough to reach into himself." Miss Kael then describes scenes in which Brando excels as an actor.

Miss Kael is aware of Brando's reputation as an actor and what this means to his role. She says the first sex act leaves the audience gasping "and the gasp was caused in part by our awareness that this was Marlon Brando doing it, not an unknown actor."

There are other things in the film that she notes: the use of colors, orange, beige, pink and brown to create mood and tone; the inter-film references to past filmmakers, for example the fiance is seen as an affectionate take-off on Godard and the movie he is making echoes Jean Vigo's L'Atalante; even the supporting cast was selected for their associations with past films. She says Bertolucci "draws upon the movie background of this movie because movies are as active in him as direct experience."

She also comments on Maria Schneider's performance as Jeanne, "a girl who had never acted before but who is

like a bouquet of Renoir's screen heroines and his father's models. "She carries the whole history of movie passion in her long legs and baby face . . . in the great film tradition of irresistibly naughty girls. She has a movie face—open to the camera, and yet no more concerned about it than a plant or a kitten" (p. 137). Miss Kael continues:

She often looks like a plump-cheeked Jane Fonda in her Barbarella days . . . the pliable, softly unprinciples Jeanne of Maria Schneider must be the winner; it is the soft ones who defeat men and walk away. . . . Jeanne is like the adorably sensual bitch-heroines of French films of the twenties and thirties—both shallow and wise. These girls know how to take care of themselves. . . . Brando's Paul, the essentially naive outsider, the romantic, is no match for a French bourgeois girl. (p. 137).

She predicts that people will be arguing about this film for as long as there are movies. She says:

I've tried to describe the impact of a film that has made the strongest impression on me in almost twenty years of reviewing. . . . It is a movie that you can't get out of your system, and I think it will make some people very angry and disgust others. I don't believe that there's anyone whose feelings can be totally resolved about the sex scenes and the social attitudes in this film (p. 140).

This review is an excellent example of the blend of the academic and pragmatic. Miss Kael has explained what the film is about without reducing it to a mere plot outline. It is not the sexual encounters that are important in her view, but how they are used.

Judith Crist

Judith Crist's review on Last Tango in Paris which appeared in the February 5, 1973 issue of the New York magazine (pp. 64-65) appears to begin with a challenge to Pauline Kael's review.

For starters let's cut through all the official and semi-official pre-sell stuff about Last Tango in Paris, ranging from orgasmic cineastic euphoria after its October 14 New York Film Festival showing (non-euphoria reactions don't get reprinted in the ads) to cover stories (it's post-Inauguration dull time on the national and international scenes) to smart witties on the Johnny Carson show . . .

We are not facing an ultimate cultural milestone: Le Sacre du Printemps or even Nude Descending a Staircase this is not.

She says it has been ten years since "we thought La Dolce Vita was a bit racy . . . it would be an insult to Bertolucci and a disappointment to the thrill-seeker, if those who hadn't worked up the courage to see the hard-core pornography, planned to see this movie to get their kicks the respectable way by paying \$5 admission" (p. 64).

Crist says that this is a personal work by Brando and by Bertolucci whose artistry has become more and more apparent with maturity in five films. She says that because this is a personal work, the reactions are more subjective than ever and "even if you believe that nonsense about critical objectivity, you will learn more about the reviewers than about the film. . . ." (p. 64).

Miss Crist goes into a discussion of some of the sexual encounters shown in the film as "part warning, part preparation" for her readers.

To call the film "adult" is a disservice, for who but adults are riddled with hangups, inhibitions, prejudices and blocks that turn them off or infuriate or sicken them when they are confronted by even Carnal Knowledge or Sunday Bloody Sunday. It is however, a strong film in its sexual depictions. Not mind you, that you are going to see the "real" thing as in Schoolgirl or Mona or Throat, although indeed Brando and Maria Schneider create the illusion. And although the Brando backside is bared, the privacy of his public parts is sustained even at the sacrifice of truth, in that great male-chauvinist tradition that of course presents us with all of Miss Schneider that there is to see. Where new sexual ground is broken in this "respectable" film, however is in the simulation of sodomy and anal stimulation, both in sado-masochistic terms, and in the spewing of language and verbal imagery more usually associated with more esoteric sexual practices. (p. 64).

Miss Crist says if you cannot accept this sort of content you may reduce this film to a depiction of sexual fantasy. She then gives a brief plot outline telling what the film is about. She does not give the complete story however. She then praises Brando.

For the film is Brando and he provides not only the most satisfying and complete characterization since his Streetcar, On the Waterfront and One-Eyed Jacks performances, but also two sequences of such power, of such piercing emotional intensity and perception that he brings an aura of greatness to the entire film. It is, alas, only an aura, for the film is all machismo filled with such detestation of and contempt for women that its universality is limited (p. 64).

Here Miss Crist's main objection to the film is its treatment of women. It is a personal work which she finds excellent on those terms, but she says its universality is

limited because of its view of women. In addition, the "mechanics" of the plot "tend to the slick and the self-indulgent, marred by contrivances of theatrics that replace the insights of drama and so the artistry is flawed." She says Brando's Paul is in effect an older Stanley Kowalski, a character he played in Streetcar. And it is the monologue that Paul delivers at the side of the bed of his dead wife that gives the film its "raison d'etre" and "proves Brando's greatness." Miss Crist finds that Jeanne is not true-to-life, but contrived for the sake of plot.

The girl, a lovely frizzy-haired creature, is a far less interesting character, incredible to me and, I suspect, a contrivance and a tool for the moviemens. She is all of the flesh, dashing about Paris with her fiance . . . who for the convenience of the film is busily making a movie about her for television. This device, obviously, permits Miss Schneider to reveal her past and present, offers us all sorts of pleasing interludes away from the love nest, and allows the plot to thicken. . . . But the girl as a person is never quite credible; so "open" a girl (and I refer not merely to her lack of underpants) would hardly be in such instant thrall even to Brando, let alone Paul (p. 64).

Miss Crist points out that even the girl's decision to marry "seems more plot device than self-determination" and her final actions in the film are "totally out of character." Miss Crist does not tell the tragic ending.

Nor were the surrounding women any more than "service" characters. The dead wife remains an enigma and thereby a villain; her mother, a kindly woman, is a religious fool to be tormented; the girl's mother is a babbling bourgeois, and

even a prostitute . . . must be so revolting that even her prospective client rejects her.

This anti-womanism, permeates the film, but admittedly it is in keeping with its personal viewpoint and, if anything, enforces the essential theme of the rejected man seeking to reassert himself and discovering that it is the human rather than the sexual response that man must live by (p. 65).

She says there are also a number of "avenues to explore in retrospect, the question of middle-aged machismo, of public and private performances and private image and the reverse thereof." Then continues: "The excellence of their performance [Brando and Bertolucci] is their ability to hold the viewer's eyes to the chosen path and their bold approach to an intimate experience in terms that cause us to explore ourselves" (p. 65).

The first part of the review is very pragmatic. She is trying to advise the thrill seekers and the art seekers. She has explained what the film is about on several levels. She discusses what is shown in the way of sexual activity and explains her interpretation of the theme. She warns that the film is likely to turn some people off because of its treatment of the sexual encounters.

#### Bruce Williamson

Bruce Williamson writes reviews for the monthly publication, Playboy, a magazine aimed at a male audience.

Each month he reviews several films in a light pragmatic style. Williamson's review (pp. 27-28) was printed in the February 1973 issue of Playboy.

He begins by saying (p. 28): "Everything about Last Tango is first class and as far removed from the nether world of pornography as the art of Francis Bacon, whose portraits obviously inspired the film's sculptured intensity and cinematographer Vittorio Storaro." He continues: "Unless the Italian censors take scissors to the celluloid before it's approved for export, the language spoken and the sexual acts portrayed constitute a major breakthrough in commercial films, particularly those featuring stars of Brando's magnitude." He warns that some of Brando's admirers "may be taken back by his role here" because it is different from anything he has done.

Brando is deeply convincing as Paul, a middle-aged American in Paris whose tentative existence begins to collapse after his wife's suicide. Still in shock, he walks the streets, sees an apartment for rent and meets a seductive young girl (Maria) while looking the place over. On impulse, he rips off her underclothes and makes love to her, in standing position; and the odd-balling couple soon conclude a strange pact. They will have a completely physical relationship, no names given, no questions asked or answered (p. 28).

Williamson tells the readers what the film is about and gives a brief description of the plot. He does not give

the complete story. He says that the sexual arrangement is Bertolucci's way "to explore the possibilities that have occurred, if only subconsciously, to everyone driven to despair by conventional romantic pairing . . . the final morality of Last Tango is its discovery that for-sex-only proves insufficient for the man and for the girl" (p. 28).

He says "a case might be built against Bertolucci's self-indulgence" in making the young fiance "an ebullient film-maker and so a peg to hang irrelevant jokes about films and filming." Williamson and Miss Crist make the same observation about the fiance's film-making. Miss Kael saw this as a tribute to the film-maker Godard. All three reflect a knowledge of inter-film references.

Williamson is quick to point out that the film is not pornography:

Despite anal intercourse, genital word games and bedtime banter encountered only in the liveliest beds, Bertolucci is never vulgar by any standard that implies low aspirations or a simple desire to shock. At times, in fact, Brando makes love with his clothes on, when common sense would seem to demand that he join Maria tout nu. Last Tango is nonetheless a brave, outrageous, risky and exemplary film that shatters precedent while straining just a bit to achieve tragedy (p. 28).

### Summary

These three critics made the point that Last Tango in Paris is not pornography. Miss Kael went into all the reasons why she thought the film was artistic. Miss Crist disagreed about its art, but acknowledged that it was

Brando's performance and Bertolucci's skill that made it more than a study of sexual fantasy. Williamson said the film was not vulgar and was actually a story of morality. The main thing is that these critics discussed how the sex was used rather than just reporting that it was used.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

The preceding reviews reflect varying degrees of the blend of the academic and pragmatic approaches to film criticism. All of the reviews were pragmatic in the sense that they were intended to inform the reader about the film in order to recommend it for viewing, or to point to weaknesses in the film. Jay Cocks and Bruce Williamson were the least analytic in their reviews. Farber, Kauffman, Miss Kael, Simon, and Zimmerman were the most analytical. Kay's review was purely subjective. Knight and Miss Crist balanced the pragmatic and the academic.

The journalistic film critics whose reviews were described in this study, have several things in common in their work.

1. They reveal a keen sense of perception. Each is an observant critic, aware of the visual image, sound, acting, sets, locale, plot, technique, imagery, and style.
2. They function to inform.
3. They write to entertain.
4. They tell what the movie is about without giving away the ending or telling the whole film story.
5. They reveal a knowledge of film history.

6. They acknowledge the group activity of film production. While the director is cited the most often as the creative force, other contributors are also acknowledged.

7. They tell not only that they liked or disliked a film, but why.

8. They focus mainly on content, theme, and messages, if any.

The writer could find no evidence of the frequency of publication or pressure of a deadline having an effect on the perception and judgment of these journalistic film critics. The critics writing for daily publications were just as perceptive as those writing for weekly or monthly publications.

The critics who blend the academic and the pragmatic have attempted to set standards of performance for the motion picture as art or entertainment or both. They have succeeded in offering insights into the films they reviewed. Because the film medium is so versatile (movies can be journalism, literature, visual art, sociology, propaganda, or a combination of these) journalistic film criticism should be versatile.

The writer found that these journalistic critics were not making snap judgments. Indeed, the film criticism in the journalistic media, while it appears to be subjective opinion, is based on standards set by each critic that reflect insight, thoughtfulness and an honest evaluation.

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