

Russel's new film powerful and pleasing

Once in a very long while, a film director attempts to make an exploration of the profundity of existence, trying to convey an experience which encompasses the scope of philosophy and human conceptual capability by making total use of all possible areas of film technique: dialogue, music and sound, optical effects, acting, splicing, superimposing, etc. 2001: A Space Odyssey was such a film. *Altered States* is another.

Ken Russel has been both a much-loved and much-despised film-maker, of late tending toward the latter state in critic's affections. *Altered States* should swing the pendulum back in his favor. Russel attempts to make a more conclusive statement than Kubrick did, and for that reason his film will likely be found to be more, or less, satisfying philosophically. No matter what the ultimate worth of the conclusions of the film, the sheer magnitude of what is endeavoured, and the force and skill with which the movie has been forged, should make this movie desirable viewing for everybody.

Much of the credit for the vision and reach of the film must go to writer Paddy Chayevsky (of Network fame). While not astoundingly original in his plot, Chayevsky makes it distinctly his own through personal insights into social relations and their connection to society, and man's origins, and by taking the risk of answering the questions he brings to light. To Russel must go the credit of realizing Chayevsky's often bizarre imaginings on screen, with

intricately-woven light patterns, mythological epics compacted into silent, 90-second visual presentations, and the reactions coached out of his actors to things which they could not see, since they were added later as effects. It is also quite a feat to keep a movie of this sort flowing, and building, while utilizing numerous astounding, belief-shaking, surrealistic images

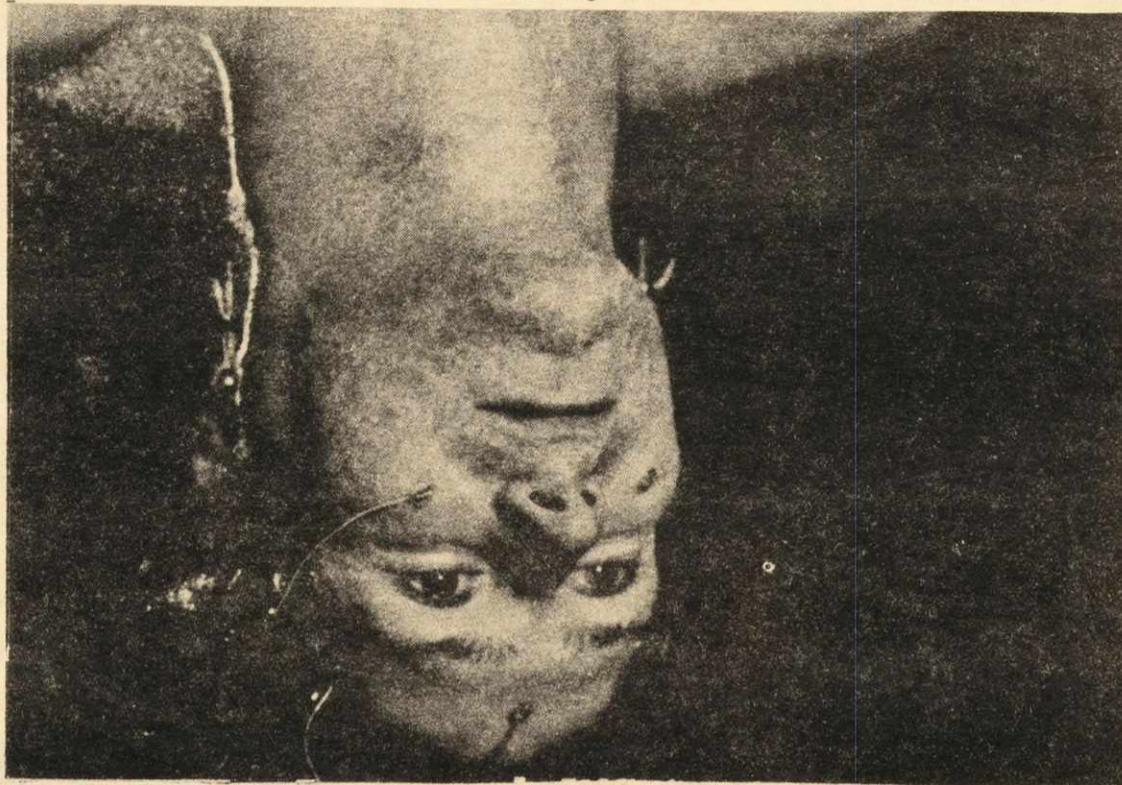
consciousness exist, and that in our minds lies the sum fabric of all living history; that our genes contain the spark of the original life-form, and indeed are made up of its cells reworked in form. He begins to experiment with isolation techniques (suspension in liquid, inside an enclosed tank) as a means of losing the mind from its temporal fixture and discovering the truth

ramifications: others' refusal to believe, relationship problems, the value of love comparative to truth, the scientific/mystical experience definition problem. All are pulled together to give a cohesive study of the search for meaning in life through both science and spiritualism.

William Hurt is made for his role as a slightly mad scientific adventurer and

suspense that carries you along with the exploration. The other actors are competent, but remain in the background, although Blair Brown must be mentioned as Hurt's co-experimenter, if only because he is the first to pay Richard Dreyfuss the sincere tribute of imitation.

The special effects should be lauded into the next decade. Aside from the aforementioned montages and surreal mini-epics, Hurt's body (or parts of it) is made to appear to undergo periodically grotesque physical distortion as it momentarily regresses, sort of like an acid flashback. There are also the most convincing apparitions of hell that I have ever seen, and glorious humanoid-light creations, especially in the intense final scenes where Hurt and his girlfriend start to disintegrate into the nothingness that existed before life, and Hurt must draw on both their consciousnesses to summon the faith in reality that brings him back.



and events which explode off the screen, thrusting into the viewer's mind and keep it reeling, without giving rise to empty anti-climaxes or simply unbelievable overkill.

The movie deals with an eccentric, quasi-mystic young university professor who is obsessed with the idea that different states of con-

sciousness exist. An involved series of experiments progresses, with progressively mind-boggling results, culminating in not only mentally tapping into the past, but physically regressing, first to the form of the primordial man, then to the first cell itself. Mixed in are various sub-plots and

iconoclast. His fervent, manic eyes and features, added to by his passionate style of movement and oddly patterned speech (somewhat like a stoned hippie who spouts spiritual nonsense, but in Harvard diction and a disturbingly possible logic) catch you up in his pathological assault on truth, and give the proper note of



The buffeting that your senses and imagination will take in this movie will probably cause any thematic content to be overshadowed by the sheer experience of watching the movie and receiving the effect Russel has created on the screen. Afterwards, however, bits of the ideas behind the spectacles will likely filter back, and make you ponder the question of reality, truth, and their relationship to life (or vice-versa). The film concludes that it is life that is real, and time that is temporary, a rather bold and inviting affirmation of our own existence. Whether or not this movie provides an adequate substantiation of the possibility of this being correct, it is one hell of an interesting attempt at doing so.



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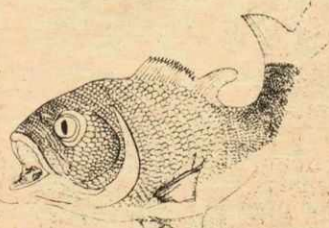


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