



Lights, Camera, Action!

Frustration in *Zabriskie Point* is powerful

By JIM PURDY

Zabriskie Point marks quite a departure for film director Michelangelo Antonioni, whose previous works have dealt with the lack of meaning and purpose in modern life.

They are characterized with long, tellingly composed takes of individuals against a barren backdrop of silence and emptiness. Music and editing are sparse and functional, lending a smooth fluidity that is heavy and ponderous.

Nothing happens in his films so that the conflicts are never resolved: the disappearance of Anna is never explained in *L'Avventura*, the married couple make only a vague reconciliation in *La Notte*, and the murder is never validated in *Blow Up*.

In each situation the characters fail to resolve the issues or understand the crisis. The famous Antonioni trade-mark of people never looking at one another points out this failure to relate honestly in a self-centred world of alienation.

But these techniques have been somewhat altered to suit a slightly different approach to modern life. The slow heaviness that pervades his earlier films dealing with decadent boredom simply cannot express the hectic speed of technological America.

The camera never seems to be still, as if caught up in the constant hub-bub of consumer life, zooming and panning across a city-scape of billboards and industrial signs in a montage of quick editing. Out-of-focus is used subtly to produce a kaleidoscope of bright colours while the sound is frequently pierced with strident electronic music.

This expresses Antonioni's view of materialist America where everything is packaged and peddled as a consumer commodity. He accurately etches the cold, apathetic power structure -- hung up on profit and loss -- that control and have thereby perverted the American Dream.

While campus riots explode and death rates rise in Vietnam, business bureaucrats study a commercial for the luxurious "Sunnydunes" desert suburb. The commercial is peopled by smiling, clean mannequins, a perfectly bizarre and stereotyped image of white middle-class America.

From an extreme low angle beneath his desk, the camera views sitting wheeler-dealer Rod Taylor secretly listening in on a business conference over the intercom. Outside the window behind and above him atop a high building, the stars and stripes floats in the breeze. Antonioni then cuts to a similar angle, looking up at a faceless, gas-masked riot cop. The industrial bureaucracy has never been so aptly and succinctly portrayed.

It is this mute indifference that drives the two young heroes to a point of frustration that explodes in violence. Mark is eager to shoot any cop and defines his whole personality in terms of negation of the social structure.

Mark and Daria escape to the desert of death valley but instead of barren landscape as a metaphor for human emptiness, as in the other films, it is a positive, self-assertive antithesis to the American metropolis: quiet, dead, timeless and peaceful.

When they make love, the whole desert springs to life with youths rolling, gambling and loving in the sand, like children in a giant, surreal sandbox rediscovering innocence and Norman O. Brown's "love's body".

But escape from the invisible power structure is impossible. A cop arrives to interfere and prod, and when Mark returns the plane he has temporarily stolen, he is met with fatal police gunfire.

The stricken Daria, facing a crisis that demands a redefinition of social organization, is merely confronted with the cold in-

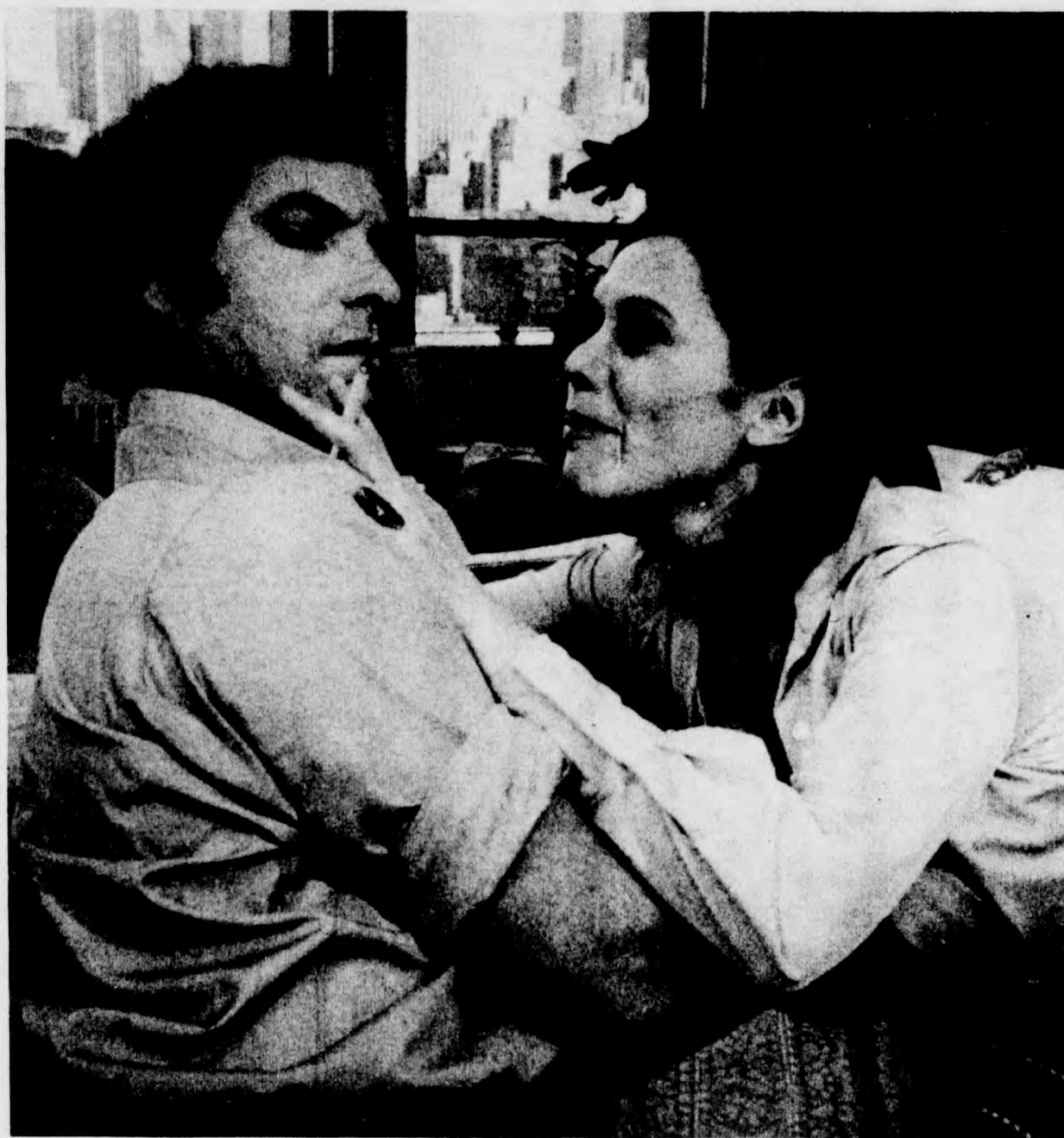
sensitivity of an affluent desert mansion, where the businessmen still discuss their big deals in grand opulence.

The film and the frustration culminate in a powerful cinematic image. Antonioni explodes the mansion over and over from various angles and blows up in extreme close-up and painful slow motion, all the consumer goods of

American materialism, from clothing to food to books. All the products and riches of the great USA float weightlessly and grotesquely while music pulsates in the background to form an image of the total destruction of the American Way.

Zabriskie Point is a compelling, visual film with a camera that floats and soars in a sea of brilliant

colours while rock and pop and electronic music punctuate the images and heighten their emotional power. It has a complex but quiet and conscious control so that each and every shot, sound and action has great significance and emotional intensity. As a view of America, it is perceptive, accurate and above all else, beautifully and brilliantly presented.



Rip Torn gives believable performance as a sexually hung-up psychiatrist.

Coming Apart doesn't come

By BILL AUCHTERLONIE

Milton Moses Ginsberg's *Coming Apart* opens the door on one man's erotic problems and shows how he attempts to deal with them. The film abounds in nudity, but has very little explicit sexuality. The film is not one which has any great visual cutting pace and it is very sparse and barren in areas. Strangely this film is being labelled as a "cinema of ideas" work.

This is the first film which Ginsberg (not to be confused with the Allan, hare-krishna variety) has directed, although he is a recognized craftsman of the art. He has worked as a screenwriter, editor, cameraman, and in several other areas of the medium for some time. And, unfortunately this film isn't his film.

The most outstanding aspect of *Coming Apart* is the acting. Rip Torn (a man not-as pretentious as his name) plays Joe, the New York psychiatrist, with an astonishing believability. Of the many women in the film, Sally Kirkland gives the most in her role as a young sexually-deprived designer. Both Rip and Sally have backgrounds in the Hollywood and Broadway traditions but somehow this hasn't ruined them. In fact I am of the opinion that this film has become more their film than Ginsberg's. (Because of comments on the film made after the pre-screening on Friday night by Milton, Rip, and Sally.)

The story is about the confrontation of Joe's greatest problem -- his inability to make love with women. Ironically, our first impressions of Joe are that he is a 'stud'. But we soon realize that all is not fun and games. He begins to degenerate in facing this problem more and more as the film rolls on; (the twist is that he is filming himself). He makes Antonioni-like allusions to truth and its relation to reality; but that's all there is -- allusions.

The film falls short of being good in many ways. It becomes increasingly boring from the time Joe starts to come apart until the end... not because of lack of 'pace', (the film has no 'pace' in the accepted meaning of that word) but because the idea of the last part of the film is spread so thin as to bore even the most erotic audience. I think Ginsberg could have made his point in less time, and much more emphatically.

There are a few techniques in *Coming Apart* which are new to a feature film, but these bits lack purpose and are too often overused. However, I will say 'hear-hear' to *Coming Apart* for its place in attacking the Ontario Censor Board. I am very much against the censorship of adult information of any kind at any time.

It is to me a complex infringement on the freedom to think. On Friday night after viewing an uncensored version of the film, a woman from the Ontario Censor Board asked Ginsberg if he would consider dropping any of the scenes from the film. He flatly replied: "No!", to which most of the audience answered with applause. I only hope that the woman from the censor board got the message.

Coming Apart is a very erotic film that tries to and almost succeeds in cutting into some very deep sexual hang-ups. I don't think (from this example) that Ginsberg is another Antonioni or another Anderson. But Rip Torn and Sally Kirkland may have a future as part of the new wave star set along with Dustin Hoffman et al. The film bored me in parts and I guess that's what bothered me most -- the film is only half there.

I can only ask that if the censor board allows *Coming Apart* out and into the theatres; see it and make your own decision -- that's what it's all about!

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