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# Movies

## "Threshold" shows entrance to humanity

by Ward McBurney

The Atlantic Film & Video Festival opened last Monday night with a film that, true to its name, will keep you on an emotional edge. *Threshold*, starring Donald Sutherland and directed by Richard Pearce, carries an intensity that makes it worth noticing amongst so many other artistic diversions.

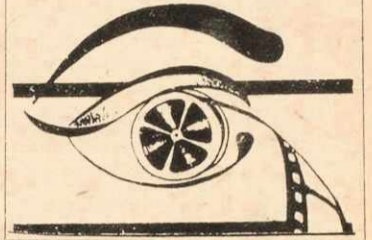
Here we find science and the never-ending battle against death. The film lives inside the sanitised walls of a hospital, its characters united around the human heart; its failure, its transplanting, and, ultimately, the possibility of its replacement by artificial means. Enter the "threshold", no less than life or death.

At first you might wonder if Sutherland is going in for a remake of *M\*A\*S\*H*, since the first place you see him is in an operating room. But Hawkeye's ghost is not to be resurrected -- the film presents a totally new creation. As a brilliant and accomplished heart surgeon, Sutherland draws on his great talent, not on his past. The result is an exceptional performance that rivets one's attention. The practical concern displayed for the lives of his patients is communicated with a force that only genuine acting can create. There is little doubt Sutherland carries most of the film's appeal, but he has some interesting supports.

The first of these is John Marley who magnetically portrays an obsessed genius bent on building an artificial heart. Carrying the dangerous mixture of idealism and science, this young doctor manages to be admirable, pathetic, and finally detestable by the film's end.

The guinea pig of these two medical protagonists is another strong point to the work. Mare Winningham, as the lucky young woman being given the new start on life, says more through her eyes and hands for the isolation and loneliness of the near-condemned patient than any agonising pain

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Mon Sun



and suffering (pass the saw) scene could ever do. Winningham fills one with the empathy needed to draw the idle spectator out of a cozy world and into the terrible situation the film so admirably represents.

*Threshold* comes out on an optimistic note, but is no wonderdrug-miracles-of-modern-science tale. It is the film's stark realism that catches you. The film and its characters are effective not because they are larger than life, but because they validly represent life and those with queasy stomachs had better watch out, as the blattancy in the operating room is as open as heart surgery can get.

The centre of life is the centre of attention -- to actually see that thing which keeps us going with its alarming frailties -- this is enough. One needs few dramatic speeches or emotional outbursts, for the humanity conveyed in the eyes of those present in the operating room suffices.

*Threshold* has several happy side-effects. It is almost impossible to leave without some of the courage it displays rubbing off. Or at least, the serious (though not depressing) atmosphere lays low the pettiness in everyday life. One comes out refreshed not because one has been distracted with flighty trivia, but rather because one has been involved in a truly human issue.

The value of individual life comes out on top.

## "Circle of Deceit" deceives itself

by Michelle Mayns  
*Circle of Deceit* (1981)

Directed by Volker Schlöndorff

We hear a lot about the war in Lebanon these days. Journalists follow the fighting and carnage to send the grisly facts home to us. The film *Circle of Deceit* was shot on location amidst the ruins and shooting of Beirut, but it is not a film about the Moslems or the Christians. It is a film about a journalist.

The film opens in Germany at the home of George Laschen (Bruno Ganz). Laschen's family situation there is strained and empty of affection. His lovemaking with his wife is preceded by tense, angry words. As he leaves to cover the civil war in Beirut his mind is in

conflict and his future at home is uncertain.

While gathering information for his story, we follow Laschen and his photographer (Jerzy Skolimowski) through the horrors of the city. During the day it is quiet except for the occasional shot of a sniper; during the night the sky is lit up by the fireworks of bombs and gunfire. The morning brings corpses and rubble.

Laschen is angry with the moral injustice of the situation. He has been sent to report the facts, not write about the senselessness of the war. He sees each side fighting to purge their God of its rival. He sees his fellow journalists toasting champagne in celebration of their scoops of battles, and photos of burning corpses sent home to live