

The Gateway fine arts

suicide as a way of life

A commentary on the meaninglessness of life?

An examination of motives for suicide?

"Feu Follet," shown Nov. 16 by the Edmonton Film Society, is happily more than these. Director Louis Malle has gone beyond mere elaboration of ideas or situations—that would have been boring, since his ideas are not new—to recreate in filmatic terms the unique vision of the hero, Alain.

Malle puts Alain (Maurice Ronet) in the existentialist situation of a world without meaning and offers him, in the course of the film, three ways out.

First, he can adopt the values society presents readymade: women, books and bank robbing. Alain has tried at least some of these, and found them worse than no values at all. Secondly, it is implied that one can attempt to create, independently, authentic values. But Alain, an emotionally impotent will 'o the wisp who can neither touch nor hold people and who prefers passive existence to acting, fails here as well.

All that is left is withdrawal from living—tentatively in the clinic and irrevocably in suicide.

"Feu Follet's" strength lies in the fact that instead of contrasting Alain's alternatives in traditional dramatic style, where each is given a fair say, Malle chooses one—suicide—and presents the others in terms of it. The result is a single, unique view of the world; Malle's chief aim seems to be to show us the world through the eyes of a man who has decided to kill himself.

Thus there is no conflict between "normal" values and Alain's aberrated vision after his rejection of Lydia and decision to commit suicide; he goes to Paris, not to search for a way out, but for a last scathing look at what he has already rejected.

Malle manages a phenomenological reorientation that forces the viewer to adopt Alain's viewpoint and shifts "normal" values into a perspective where they are subject to Brechtian distancing and amenable to critical observation.

In communicating Alain's vision, Malle eschews gimmicks like accompanying narrative or images of thoughts by means of which other directors have attempted to take us into the subject's mind. He restricts himself to the camera's undisputed forté, the portrayal of physical reality.

Through rigorous selection, economy, and subordination of all to the desired end, he makes a coolly detached, completely "external" approach yield a hermeneutically personal vision.

All non-essential elements are omitted; much background material, as well as trips between the clinic and Paris and transitions between visits, is deleted.

Correlatively, each scene, each detail, counts in terms of the final effect. Scenes are developed with the same economy; potentially exotic or melodramatic sequences are toned down so as not to attract individual attention to the detriment of the total impression. Acting is handled with similar re-

straint; not even Alain achieves virtuosity.

To fully appreciate the importance of Malle's disciplined restraint, one need only compare "Feu Follet" to another recent film devoted to presenting a peculiar mental outlook, "The Collector".

Instead of Malle's methods of subordination of all to the total effect, "The Collector" wrings a maximum of sentiment and melodrama out of particular scenes and features virtuoso acting performances. Yet it is less successful in presenting the hero's unique way of seeing things than is "Feu Follet".

Yet Malle never lets precision and control degenerate into mere formalism. Perhaps due to Nouvelle-Vague "naturalism", he allows his characters human, unrehearsed gestures; they rub their noses and slouch most untheatrically. Moreover, the tempo of the film as a whole is relaxed, flowing with the characters rather than formal plot line.

"Feu Follet" leaves little doubt as to Malle's ability to say things with film. His choice of what to say, however, is more questionable.

If the mood occasionally fails, it is probably because a phrase like "emptiness" or "touching people" has been heard so often that we doubt its sincerity; we become conscious of the too-familiar content in its own right and separate it from form.

But such moments, it must be emphasized, are few, and do not detract from the synthesis of Bressonian discipline and Nouvelle-Vague naturalness that make "Feu Follet" an important film.

—Beverley Gietz

where are all the unisymphs

The University Symphony Orchestra acquitted itself well in its first concert of this academic year, Nov. 15.

Professor Claude Kenneson showed his musical versatility in his able conducting, and the orchestra on the whole was an improvement on last year's group. As a radical departure from previous years, the concert was prepared under professional conditions with only six weeks of rehearsal.

Opening well with a vigorous Intermezzo by Kodaly, (played with a youthful and obvious zest), the performance faltered during Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony. Unfortunately, the Eighth is such a well-known piece that errors and inadequacies in its performance are noticeable and often embarrassing to even the neophyte concert-goer.

It is to be hoped that the orchestra will respond more readily to the conductor's tempi in future.

However, the audience empathized with the musicians, and hoped for the best along with them.

An appreciated innovation in the orchestra's repertoire was the final scene for "Kalmár", a ballet composed by the conductor, in a late Romantic style.

Also attractive and easily enjoyed was the "Capriol Suite", a series of dances arranged from old French tunes by the modern English composer Warlock. As the

strings were the strongest section of the university orchestra, they performed the Suite relatively well.

However, the evening's highlight was the Beethoven Third Piano Concerto, in which David Sagert, a B.Mus. student from Edmonton, delivered an excellent reading. The audience responded well to the performance; it is only unfortunate that the paucity of the audience left Con Hall half empty.

Music such as this deserves more attention from the student body at large.

—Seth van Newgyn

shopping centre architecture

It is gratifying to find that, in one's search for good architecture in Edmonton, one need not go further than the Westmount shopping centre. I am referring, of course, to the new Johnstone Walker store.

Architects, like mathematicians, are concerned with the most efficacious solution to any given problem. The problems of the architect are: the given space, the function of the building, and the range of the budget.

The architect must choose between two extremes: should his building impose upon the landscape, existing as a monumental sculpture (like Saarinen's TWA terminal), or should the structure emerge, Frank Lloyd Wright style, as "an organic entity"?

The Johnstone Walker store appears to be the ideal, albeit tongue-in-cheek, solution. Canadians, it seems, have a low tolerance of imposing structures, as testified by the over-all design of the Westmount shopping plaza. The architects of the JW store have created a structure concomitant with the unassuming style required by the site.

Their building is subdued, even comforting on the exterior, but the interior literally explodes! Pure genius—it exists as a great sculptural labyrinth. This represents a daring but entirely legitimate architectural prerogative, that of subordinating structural virtuosity to design.

The effect of sculpture depends almost entirely upon controlled tension. In the JW store, this tension is created by the juxtaposition of textures. Sprayed plaster complements brick; a monolithic sculptured wooden screen (hand-hewn beams from an old textile mill in Ontario) is counterpointed against reinforced, ribbed concrete.

The conventional post and beam construction receives inspired treatment. The impact of massive overhead beams is both alleviated and heightened by the reiteration of mellow wood tones in the circular counters and in the magnificent suspended staircase.

A rotund, hanging firehood of beaten copper, surrounded by chairs of luxuriant black leather, is the focal point of the mezzanine floor.

The principles of good architecture are harmony, light, and movement. Harmony, as I have pointed out above, frequently exists in the balance of opposite elements.

Movement, too, often relies upon the application of its opposite: stasis.

The negative use of light produces, of course, shadow, often a vital element in the total effect.

The lighting in this building is superb. The use of natural lighting, in the form of transparent domes, is highly advantageous for display purposes; it eliminates the ghoul-effect created by fluorescent lighting.



—Blackmore photo

A NEST OF SINGING BIRDS—We thought we were going to get a rehearsal picture from Studio Theatre's current production "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof". Instead, here's another kettle of fish: rehearsals for "The Unsinkable Molly Brown", one of the wettest musicals of modern times.

The display bays consist of circular recesses in the walls, illuminated indirectly. Tinted glass in the doors and windows allows for more natural light, diffused but not distorted. The economical use of lighting focuses merchandise and allows for intriguing interplay of shadow, light, texture and colour.

This building is a triumph. The disaster is, one can tell where the architect left off and the management took over. Anyone who would festoon a masterpiece with plastic garlands should either be treated for a Lupercal fixation or demoted to the Five and Dime.

—Jackie Foord

two (count them) good concerts

Well, last week was certainly a winner, at least from my point of view. The first bright light on the musical horizon appeared last Wednesday, when Chamber Music time rolled around again.

The group performing was the Edmonton Chamber Music Players, and the program was a satisfying one. It consisted of Beethoven's First Violin-Piano Sonata, Mendelssohn's D Minor Piano Trio, and the Schubert C Major String Quintet. The playing was inspired in each work, and I think that it was the most enjoyable evening I have witnessed this year.

The audience, while of a reasonable number, was nevertheless disappointing for such a rewarding concert.

Each of the pieces was so well performed that I am at a loss to

distinguish between their merits. But the highlight of the evening was the Schubert Quintet, a work of unflinching melodic inspiration and faultless structure.

All of which goes to prove only what has been unavoidably apparent for a long time: viz. that the Chamber Music Society is the best musical bargain we are ever likely to see.

The second happy occurrence of the week was the concert of the Roger Wagner Chorale on Thursday. While not so unmitigatedly admirable as the Chamber Music concert (the tickets were a good deal more expensive), the Chorale's appearance was definitely a Good Thing.

The Roger Wagner Choral is beyond doubt one of the leading choral ensembles in the world. (Just witness the blurbs in the Celebrity Concerts program if you don't believe me.)

They sing with amazing accuracy and dynamic balance, and these qualities were evident in abundance in the first half of their program, devoted to works of the Renaissance, and to Respighi's "Laud to the Nativity".

Some of these pieces are breathtakingly beautiful when properly performed. Others are full of zest and brilliance. I especially liked Michael Praetorius' "In Dulci Jubilo", and an "Alleluia" for triple chorus by Jacob Gallus-Handl, either of which would keep any music-lover happy for a week after hearing it.

Somewhat unhappily for us purists, the second half of the program was made up mainly of slick settings of popular songs, such as "Shenendoah", "Allouette", etc., etc. But even the most fanatical of classicists could not in conscience say that these were not well performed.

I will say nothing of the outrageous sequined dresses in which the female chorists appeared for the second half of the program. Nothing whatever.

—Bill Beard