

The cult of violence in films

by Ken Burke

When a movie gains acceptance as a 'cult film' this generally means that it represents a kind of 'ideal' to the group of people that delight in it, as is the case with cult films such as ERASERHEAD (weirdness), PINK FLAMINGOS (grossness), THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW (rock'n'roll abandon), etc. Playing at the Greenwood on December 1st and 2nd are two films that I suppose have such qualifications, having been singled out as the "ultimate" of the genre they use - **Friday the 13th**, and **Friday the 13th Part 2**. These films have reached this height for no reason other than symbolizing the apex of senseless schlock violence.

Both films are basically plotless - the entire point is to arrange as many sadistic technicolour massacres as possible. Having seen Friday the 13th, I can easily state that it is without any redeeming qualities. The characters are cardboard cut-outs, the film is completely ripped-off from sources such as CARRIE, HALLOWEEN, PSYCHO, and others, and no theme or central idea exists save crowding the screen with elaborately dead teen-agers. It isn't even mildly frightening: after each murder I was only glad that there were less characters left and the film was nearer its finish. PART 2 is more of the same (though supposedly more pointless).

So why do they have this appeal? Because the cruelty of

these films appeals to the cruelty of their fans natures.

In this new series of 'horror films' the tendency towards a stronger sadistic streak has been apparent, and nowhere is it better demonstrated than in the ads for the films (after all, men know what sells seats). Historically, the general method was to emphasize the "monster" - see he/she/it/? and be scared. Next came the greater emphasis

on the scary story (this isn't by any means a historical last word), and now, plain and simple mutilation has the day. Friday the 13th Part 2's ad read "the body count continues". HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME promised some "of the most unusual murders you'll ever see".

This doesn't mean that I am stating that violence in the

Cinema is inherently bad - it's a very real part of life, and even when a lot of it is shown, it can be justified IF THERE IS A POINT TO IT. Most of these movies are the film equivalent of the novels pumped out by the Ministry of Truth's novel writing machine in Orwell's 1984 - they are pieces of all that has gone before, regurgitated in random order with the bloody volume increasing each time.

What disturbs me more than the films is the idea behind going to them. It's almost the modern-day counterpart of a public flogging, to put your brain on hold and witness 90 minutes of slash & slobber (apologies to R. Merritt). Nobody remembers that only two people died during PSYCHO - it was film not a freak show.

Even first-rate films that are quite violent are often admired not for the violence itself, but only for the violence contained within. The best illustration of this is A CLOCKWORK ORANGE. The movie is excellent, but ask a fan why they admire it and more than likely the answer will be the coolness of the droogs or the ultra-violence rather than the powerful social message. When I saw it again this summer at the Scotia Square Cinema, sitting behind me was a group of respectable-looking college folk, obviously not first-time viewers. When head thug Alex broke into "Home", and the scene where he enters the film frame with a leaping boot to the face of the house's occupant occurred, applause and shouts of encouragement rang out behind me. Just thinking about that made the terror of the film more realistic than it had ever been before. At one time, I had thought Anthony Burgess and Stanley Kubrick were too pessimistic in Clockwork. In the light of the Cinema today, I'm not too sure.



Blues sensibility: Cotton is tough and gutsy

by Michael Brennan

James Cotton isn't the major blues musician or stylist that Muddy Waters is. In fact, he started as a sideman with Waters playing harmonica and subsequently headed his own band, making a respectful name for himself with his harp playing and strong voice. But his music, as heated and driving as it could be, was too much like the hard urban blues of Waters with only a slightly undistinctive, common sound to it. He just doesn't bite it like the great bluesmen. Nevertheless, Cotton is a tough, gutsy and satisfying blues performer who is always worth catching, if for his harp playing alone. And last weekend at the Misty Moon he and his band belted out an incessant flow of blues and rhythm-and-blues that would rock anyone.

After waiting expectantly, it was nice to hear the M.C. announce in his Chicago ghetto slur, "Ladies and Men, from the East Side of Chicago, The James Cotton Blues Band!" as the band laid into a great blues-funk riff. And could they play: their professionalism was immediate and stirring. Everyone got a chance to solo, each stretching it out for a good ten minutes. But not a second of it was wasted. Drummer Kenny Johnson kept right on top of the beat with a snappy, tight rhythm adding simple but perfect fills and the highlight

was Doug Fagen on tenor sax with his gritty, deep sound. All his solos moved with a striking intensity. As the last strains of the song ran through, bassist Harmen Applewhite was given a chance to hammer out a great James Brown funk pattern.

After half an hour, Cotton himself finally came out but went on to play a good hour

and a half of mostly swinging, loud uptempo blues standards. He came on wailing and slurring on his harp as the band fueled his energies on the spot and there was no stopping him. He continually poured out his vitality and vigour, with that honest black intensity that so many white bands distort unmercifully. He was constantly playing

off the sax, guitar, and pianist Eddie Hart, trading licks and working the soloist hard. Guitarist Michael Coleman delivered fluid lines and his exchanges with Cotton really sang out.

There is a good deal of blues sensibility to James Cotton's blues. However, there isn't that definite sting to his music, that

emotional power that there is with original Chicago bluesmen. Too many of his numbers lacked distinction and became, at times, tiring and bland boogie-rock jams. No matter, Cotton is a damn good musician and to catch a good band jiving along with glee, as he and his band did at the Moon, is a pleasure. Don't pass him by.

Galileo's 'rights of knowledge' are dramatically portrayed

by Richard Neftin

Stillman Drake, in his excellent lecture, "Galileo's Explorations in Science," given on November 12th at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium, brought up some very interesting points. It then dawned on me that night that I had read a play or better yet, drama, concerning Galileo which raised some of those very same interesting points.

Brecht's **Galileo** is not so much a quick history of his many diverse achievements but rather an argument (in dramatic form) for the "rights of knowledge" and against the moral sin called the denial of "truth" (in whatever form). In the play, Galileo's character is weakly portrayed, except as a victim of

heroism. He is simply thought of as a stubborn yet clever scientist who had discovered irrefutable "truths." Galileo's "truths" were, however, based on experimentation and observations made through the recently created telescope and not through deductive-reasoning or logic, as had been the method used from Aristotelian times to the 1600s, roughly 1000 years.

Galileo wanted all of Europe to know of his "discoveries" but, needless to say, as history has shown, the times were not right, and his ideas were "repressed." Brecht points out, as did Dr. Drake in his lecture, that Galileo had no qualms with the Church. In fact, Galileo sought to show that science was an independ-

ent faculty, divorced from religion after a long and stagnant marriage. Some of Galileo's closer colleagues were members of the Order. His major "brick walls" were the philosopher-scientists of the 15th Century. These "scientists" would refuse to glance into the telescope at Jupiter's three new moons, while Galileo paced and fumed. They were comfortable with their system and had not had to spend endless hours making doubtful observations from a sight-distorting machine.

It is when the Holy Church does realize that some of Galileo's "ideas" would actually change the way people viewed themselves, the universe, and in turn, their religion, that the

Pope, Urban VIII, decided that enough was enough. The "faith" of the people cannot be lost, even if it is to be at the expense of a scientist's ideas. Galileo is warned! He does continue to publish his scientific discoveries, and is eventually proclaimed as "a heretic" by the Cardinal Inquisitor, and finally placed under house arrest.

Brecht warns, in short, that it is a "sin," if you will, to withhold knowledge, scientific or otherwise, from people, as much as it is to not allow people the freedom to **choose** between the "faiths." Looking back today at Galileo's predicaments, I would have to say that these are still valid arguments.