

ARTS



Photo by Bill Hughes

Superb acting highlights the latest Citadel production.

Jump Cuts

by Jack Vermeer

Two of filmdom's most insightful, articulate, and outspoken critics are the focus of today's ramblings. Due to space restrictions these ramblings will be somewhat shallow and oversimplified. Both the E.P.L. and the Rutherford have more extensive info.

Pauline Kael is thought by many to be the "best" film critic in America. She has a (just) reputation for toughness and is presently writing for *The New Yorker* magazine (a very high-brow, right-wing favorite of New York neo-fascists and former Arts editor Jens Andersen).

Andrew Sarris, self-confessed "middle-class cultural guerrilla" and film "cultist", presently rests his poison pen amongst those at *The Village Voice*, also a New York publication. These two have been reviewing movies since the mid-50's and, together, represent the most consistent and opposing voices in American film criticism.

I say "consistent" because from Day 1 they have been evaluating and criticizing films according to their own reasonably well-defined criteria. I say "opposing" because they heartily disagree on what makes a good film.

Pauline Kael has remarked that "the role of the critic is to help people see what is in the work, what is in it that shouldn't be, what is not that could be." Also, "... it is the wealth and variety of what he (the critic) has to bring to new works that makes the critic's reaction to them valuable." It seems to me that two of Ms. Kael's most important presuppositions are contained in these quotes.

First, Ms. Kael seems to prefer content: "what is in the work", to form when deciding on what to evaluate in a film. Admittedly, form must be considered to some extent, but the "content over form" generalization holds up throughout Ms. Kael's reviews.

Second, Ms. Kael feels that the subjective experience of the critic should play a large role in the evaluation of a film. That is, a film should be looked at from a personal point of view, and a critic's reaction to it should be a personal expression, be it emotional, intellectual or whatever. This is beginning to sound like a speech on artistic expression, and, indeed, Ms. Kael has suggested, (and I agree) that criticism is an art unto itself.

If Kael can be labelled "content-oriented" and "personal" then the opposite may be said of Andrew Sarris. Sarris was the first American film critic to embrace the "auteur" (author) theory of film interpretation, as espoused by the French

critics. To simplify, the "auteurist" critics held that "directors usually are and always should be the principal creators of films, and that those directors who leave the strongest individual stamp on their work are to be most 'valued.'" Of primary importance to an "auteurist" critic is the director's technical competence.

Hence, we come to the first bone of contention between Kael and Sarris. By placing the emphasis on a director's technical skill a critic must, naturally, evaluate form (camera movement, lighting, editing technique, lens choice etc.) in place of content (social issues, themes, etc.). This does not rest well with Ms. Kael.

Sarris has also suggested three criteria for directorial authorship: (1) technical competence; (2) distinguishable personality; and (3) interior meaning, "extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material". What this amounts to is a means of evaluating a film more objectively than before. If the director fulfills the requirements, he is an auteur and his films are good. This again brings Sarris into direct conflict with Kael, who values the critic's subjectivity. It goes on and on and on...

Okay, enough, I guess the point of this whole thing is this: the next time you disagree with a critic, know why he says what he says BEFORE you call him an asshole.

For your viewing pleasure:
Before the Revolution (1964)-Bertolucci's second feature, completed when he was twenty-two, brought him international recognition. Always conscious of politics, class struggle, and personal relationships, Bertolucci has been described as a leftist, Italian, intellectual film-maker with a "bold painterly style" (oh yah?). Sept. 30 (9:30) at the Princess.

Tritiana (1970)- Director Bunuel was one of the original surrealists working with Dalí in the late 20's on bizarre silent efforts. His perverse vision is always fascinating, sometimes humorous, and often disconcerting. Sept. 29 (7:30 pm) at the N.E.T.

The Saintman- A delightfully wild and weird film that was originally deemed unfit for human consumption by its own production company! Peter O'Toole is a film director gone mad and Steve Railsback (Charlie "God, look at his eyes" Manson from Helter Skelter) is his dupe. Oct. 2 (7:00 pm) at the Princess.

The Conversation (1974)- There's NO WAY I'm missing this one again! Francis Ford Coppola's tribute to the genre known as "film noir" with Gene Hackman in the lead role. Oct. 5 (9:00 pm) at the Princess.

Dresser ironic, acting superb

The Dresser
Citadel Shoctor Theatre
Until October 17
by Lorie White

This season's opening play at the Citadel, *The Dresser*, celebrates one night in the life of an actor's valet. It is set in January 1942 in a theatre somewhere in England. This is "King-Lear-night" and the touring company's star (played by John Colicos) returns from a confused day of undressing himself on the bomb-cratered moors of the local marketplace.

The plot: an audience spends one evening trying to separate reality from allusion. The conflict: playwright against audience in a war over the boundary between profundity and nonsense. The weapons: unguided missiles cleverly disguised as irony, allusion and foreshadowing. Luckily, the actors take sides with everyone. The acting is superb. John Colicos plays "Sir" as if he were King Lear, and he plays King Lear like a howling Grizzly Adams. Norman, the Dresser, is Sir's Fool. He is a flippancy, contemptative, Felix Unger-ish Fool who whines his lines in the royal "we". Like Lear's Fool, he directs his master: "shall we put our make-up on now, Sir?"

Like King Lear's Fool, Norman is the deliverer of much of the foreshadowing in the play. And there is plenty of it. In fact, the foreshadowing is applied so generously that the biggest surprise at the end of the play is the absence of an air raid siren which has tiresomely accompanied all the subsequent comings and goings of the acts.

A good play needs some good irony, so Mr. Harwood puts in a double helping of it. You see, Sir is writing a book which will be his only memoir. It is called "My Life" and he can't begin it, (that's irony). Every page is empty, (more irony). He tries to work on his book but he is only sane when he is acting, (heavy dose of irony). Later, Sir addresses his British audience, thanking the ladies and gentlemen for their gracious reception of this, the greatest tragedy of our time. I couldn't resist exploring this statement for meanings on other levels: Is *The Dresser* the greatest tragedy of our time? Is the war in England the greatest tragedy of our time? Is the life of a man, driven (like Sir) to destruction by his own aspirations, the greatest tragedy of our time?

I couldn't help feeling that Mr. Harwood had sat down with his playwright's notebook of collected wit, one-liners, and three-legged stools determined to fit them all into one play. Perhaps this is why Norman is perpetually making irrelevant quips like: "I need quiet, as the deaf-mute told the piano tuner." Or perhaps Norman's humor is intended to parallel the comic relief of King Lear's Fool. Was the Fool's memory like a policeman; never there when needed? Although I couldn't pick out the relevance of most of the play, yet I did figure out why Norman informs us that "they also sing who only serve and wait." It's so that we won't be confused by his gaudy chorus of "Hey Nonny Nonnies" at the end of the performance. Isn't it?

My apologies

There are two very important apologies I must make this issue in order to clear my conscience. First, for those who may have wondered, the review of *Return of the Secaucus Seven* printed in the

Thursday, September 16 *Gateway* was mistakenly taken from the rough notes of the author, and was in no way intended to be a final product. Karen, I am sorry for printing it under your name and hurting your feelings.

Second, to all those of my dedicated reviewers whose material was bumped on Thursday last for lack of space, I am once again sorry. I hope today's expense makes you up for it.

Dave Cox



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