



## Lights, Camera, Action!

By DAN MERKUR

WUSA paints a cynical picture of mid-western America, which is rather a strange thing for anyone to attempt these days, since it hardly seems worth the effort involved to show Agnew's Amerika in an unfavourable light. Anyone whose eyes have been open these last years knows how bleak the mid-west is; everyone else seems unlikely ever to see it.

It is to Paul Newman's credit that he backed the production of WUSA, because WUSA is a film that aims another blow at awakening the sleeping dragon of revolution in America.

Unfortunately the film is quite maudlin — dull, slowly paced, contrived to the point of being forced, full of gimmicky camera-work, and with a soundtrack that is often hard to follow. The scope screen and colour, Newman's baby blues and Joana Woodward are all very nice of course, but Stuart Rosenberg has managed to turn out another flop.

Yet WUSA has merit because it does have something significant to say, and it manages to say it clearly, though not too well.

It is a bit much to find Newman an alcoholic Newscaster-DJ, shacking up with Woodward, an ex-hustler; Pat Hingle, a radio tycoon and political aspirant (and Newman's boss); Perkins (Newman's neighbour) a welfare survey taker and self-righteous goody-goody out to foil Hingle; a trio of hippies, also Newman's and Perkins's neighbours, just so we know how the other half thinks; good and bad blacks in the ghetto area of Perkins' concern; and \$100,000 yes-man executives. And then we are told by all of them what their respective philosophies of survival are. Too much, too much — and then there is a Playboy Bunny yet!

There is a phenomenon in the theatre called a closet drama, which is a play that should never be performed, but only read, often because it is a philosophical dialectic that makes for entertaining reading but lousy entertainment. Essentially, WUSA is a closet film.

Still there are some worthwhile points made, all captured best in the film's final exchange. Hippie-type neighbour tells Newman not to worry, "Everything's dying anyhow, man." "Not me," says Newman. "I'm one of the survivors." Then sarcastically he added, "Ain't it great?"

Get the picture?

### Bird With Crystal Plumage Dull

The Bird With the Crystal Plumage is a badly dubbed foreign-made little mystery, with some terribly gruesome and cheaply suspenseful murder scenes designed to jolt you out of your chair.

The reception for The Bird With the Crystal Plumage has been very warm, which means only that there has been nothing made in the suspense-thriller genre of any merit in a long time (excepting of course Hitchcock's Topaz and John Huston's The Kremlin Letter.) It is all capably done, the acting is alright, but when you come down to it, an escapist film's only validity is the degree of escapism afforded the viewer, and so when the mystery is insufficiently mysterious, or when a thriller isn't properly suspenseful, the film isn't much.

Which is what The Bird with the Crystal Plumage is: not much.

I can't say I didn't enjoy it, which I did. But I can say if I had known what The Bird with the Crystal Plumage was like before I went to it, I don't think I would have gone. I would have seen The Secret Life of Walter Mitty, with Danny Kaye, which is playing at The Cinema (T-D Centre), a terrific 1940s comedy, which makes for a very fine evening's entertainment.

If you've nothing better to do, and a lot of time to do it in, and money to blow, and you really like popcorn, lotsa popcorn, you might go to see The Bird. You might.

Videotek is a nifty little operation going on in the basement of Cinecity. There are about 100 lounge chairs, very comfortable, clustered around TV sets which play films on videotape; closed circuitry.



Mick Jagger is in Godard's film.

Drawbacks are the TV lounge atmosphere that gives people licence to yap all the way through the films, the tiny screens, and the imperfect sound systems. The comfort of the chairs, the hours (until 4 a.m. on weekends) and the programming policy are definite advantages. Admission is only a buck after midnight.

Basically Videotek wants to cater to concerned college-type. But then who doesn't?

Currently playing is Jean-Luc Godard's Sympathy for the Devil which stars The Rolling Stones — a lousy film if all you want is the Stones, but one of Godard's best political films to date.

What Videotek might do, if enough people ask them (this is your cue) is to run BBC documentary material and the like — the-made-for-TV films of significant social importance, which are designed specifically for projection on a tube — stuff like The War Game, say, or maybe the Civilization series.

By JOHN OUGHTON

William Burroughs may well be the best living American writer. Norman Mailer described Burroughs as "the only living American writer who might conceivably possess genius". The methods and concerns of Burroughs are uniquely contemporary: he comments on drug experiences, the death of America, the use of technology by fascist forces for the purpose of controlling humanity, and modern man's preoccupation with images rather than reality. He uses a non-linear style throughout. In an age in which movies and television have considerably lessened general interest in reading, Burroughs writes in an extremely cinematic and visual style. Despite his critical pre-eminence and contemporaneity, however, his work is still largely ignored by mainstream (establishment) critics, contemporary lit. courses, and the reading public.

This tacit "Burroughs boycott" is doubtless due to the fact that many of the images and scenes in his early work such as *Junkie* and *Naked Lunch* are drawn from sexual perversion, violence, and the uglier types of drug usage. These qualities repel many potential readers. The images are not, however, as important to Burroughs as is the theoretical framework underlying them: the previously mentioned concerns, and the recurrence of thoughts and patterns in differing space-time sets. Another feature of Burroughs' works which can make them very difficult for some readers is his tendency to base sections of novels on sophisticated mathematical and philosophical concepts. For example, part of *The Ticket That Exploded* reads "any number can play wittgenstein said no proposition can contain itself as an argument the only thing not prerecorded on a prerecorded set is the prerecording itself."

His most recent published work is a film script: *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz*. In an introductory note, the author states: "This is not just a film about Dutch Schultz. It

# LAST WORDS OF DUTCH SCHULTZ.

is a film about Dutch Schultz and the sets in which he lived and operated. Success in any line is a question of being on set." Although the plot of "Dutch Schultz" is therefore based on a type of set theory, the book provides a unique opportunity for savouring Burroughs' genius for anyone who missed or was unable to stomach his previous work. As a film script about a 1930's gangster and the "sets in which he operated" it contains a fair amount of violence but few references to perversion and drugs.

The dialogue and scenes provide a fascinating series of evocations of early 20th century America. Although Burroughs sees American society as a dying monster poisoned by sickness and hate, there are flashes of his distinctive humour throughout the book. "Cut to 1929 stock market crash. A white Rolls Royce drives up in front of the stock exchange and Aba Daba gets out. He is dressed in a polar bear skin. The chauffeur hands him a bear mask. He puts the mask on and enters the stock exchange. Brokers (shrinking back): "It's the White Bear." Old runner: "I haven't seen him since Black Friday. They say he hibernates between crashes!"

Unfortunately, I have no in-

formation on whether a movie is presently being made from the script. It will be an unforgettable film if anyone with talent makes it. However, the book stands on its own as a literary text due to the language Burroughs uses to convey cinematic concepts: "colours flicker into rainbow over a stream, Niagara Falls, Yellow Stone Park, Pikes Peak, an orgasm of post card colours."

Plot in the film is more linear than plot is in Burroughs' novels. It employs to a certain extent his famous "cut-up" method of intermingling scenes with each other; Burroughs, nonetheless, always maintains a subtle qualitative relationship between disparate scenes and thus is simply surrealistic.

The Last Words of Dutch Schultz is available downtown (and, soon, in the York Bookstore) in a beautifully designed and set Cape Goliard Press paperback edition. It should be read by anyone interested in the modern novel, film or American society. The brilliant prism which is Burroughs' mind casts light on all of these. If there is any posterity after us, Burroughs will probably be placed somewhere between Swift and Joyce on the literary spectrum.

## The Mothers are inventing

By PAT KUTNEY

The Mothers of Invention, who played to a packed Massey Hall audience November 18, have evolved into and evinced quite a radical change from other, earlier bands. When the Mothers of Invention made their first inroads in the pop music culture, they were a satirical group playing relatively simple music. Later, they became frustratingly complex both in lyrics and music.

Although leader-writer-guitarist Frank Zappa was surrounded by fine musicians, there was a disconcerting chopiness and lack of flow to their music. A sizable portion of their lyrics were lost to all but the most learned devotees of dada rock. Either you liked The Mothers and didn't know why, or disliked them and didn't know why. To the audience's benefit, Zappa has made drastic changes in personnel. Only Ian Underwood, on electric piano and, occasionally, soprano saxophone, besides Zappa remains from previous bands. Drummer Aynsley Dunbar, who rose to prominence with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers and his own group, The Aynsley Dunbar Retaliation, has joined. A bass guitarist, organist-trombonist, and the two lead singers from the Turtles, Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman, round out the present Mothers.

Of special note are Kaylan and Volman, since they are probably the most responsible for the new direction The Mothers have taken. In the past, Zappa wrote almost all the material and ruled The Mothers with an iron hand. Zappa hated his audiences and demonstrated this with his sarcastic nature and caustic wit. Kaylan and Volman have effected a mellowing in Zappa's attitude and have been

given free reign to create their own material.

The Mothers' routines are circus-like in nature, as opposed to the heavy experimental theatre they used to be. No longer does one have to ponder for minutes trying to understand what The Mothers are trying to convey. At the concert, they did parodies on Three Dog Night, soul singers, soul groups, girl duos and trios from the fifties, and all else that is laughable in pop music. But The Mothers used original material, thereby keeping a sense of freshness in their performance. The Mothers' humour is now easy

to grasp, paced just right, and utterly hilarious.

Ah, but The Mothers are so great as an instrumental group now. Their music is still filled with a lot of dramatic time changes (although not as many as before) and key changes, but it doesn't leave the listener uncomfortable anymore. The music rolls along like a well-oiled machine.

The Mothers of Invention will probably remain as they are now since I think Zappa has abandoned his holier-than-thou attitude and has realized that honest and comprehensible material will be better appreciated.



The Mothers of Invention belly-up.