

## Films

A couple of weeks ago, I watched on the late movie John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. It's a Western—the same genre, nominally, as *The Wild Bunch* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. But the differences in style, conception, and world-view, are immense. The West ain't what it used to be.

Ford presents a world which is united, homogeneous, in which every line, every character, has its appointed place in a secure mythology. When John Wayne says to the heroine, "You know, you look real pretty when you're angry", it is a moment of pure joy. Everything is as it should be: women cook steaks and keep quiet while a man gets drunk or gets shot. Lee Marvin, as Liberty Valance has to be excluded from this world, not because he is evil (morality scarcely enters the picture) but because his *style* is discordant. A world closes against him and comprises to get rid of him: the course of the drama is the restoration of unity, the re-establishment of natural order. It is perhaps not altogether fanciful to compare it to the later plays of Shakespeare.

But in *The Wild Bunch* and *BC&SK*, the essence is disunity. Both films are, in one sense, elegiac: they present the continuing fascination of heroic characters caught at the end of an era, living anachronisms. (In this, they are perhaps closer to the hero of Shakespeare's middle period, Hamlet, for whom "The time is out of joint.") Both films are set at the very end of the "classical" Western period: the bicycle and the motorcar are taking over. *BC&SK*, with its extensive use of old films and browned photographs, is more quietly nostalgic, and its heroes register their defiance through their ironic, self-deprecating humor; and it is wholly in tone with the film that the ending should refuse to depict the full horror of their death.

*The Wild Bunch* is the obverse of this picture: without humor, but rather a kind of doomed, reckless joy, its heroes register defiance through despair, and a savage acceptance of their fate. Hamlet said, "The readiness is all"; more concisely, these doomed heroes ask "Why not?" It is essential to their tragedy that their last, bloody stand is futile and useless.

It is the split between the characters and their environment which generates the intensity of the conflict: gently understated in *BC&SK*, but exposed in horrified paroxysms of violence in *The Wild Bunch*. The fascination with violence, like the fascination with powers at the end of an era, has obvious contemporary significance (as exemplified in *Easy Rider*, or in the thinly disguised Viet Nam references of *The Wild Bunch*), and derives from the best two American films of recent years: *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Point Blank*. These are the sources, certainly, of the already overworked convention of the slow-motion death scene (which is, however, well used in both films under discussion). *BC&SK* also has obvious debts to *Bonnie and Clyde* in its use of pastoral setting, and humor shading off into seriousness.

These films also have this in common, that all their heroes are outlaws—a fact which, right from the start, makes impossible the positive unity and homogeneity of Ford's world. This could be seen as a statement that society is so corrupt that heroic are personal values are only possible outside it, etc. (which is the view of *Easy Rider*). But this, I think, is too simple an idea of these films. These films in fact trick the viewer into a sympathy which is amoral, then force that sympathy back into a clash with conventional morality. The heroes are, after all, criminals, and their actions are harmful to innocent people. (The fact that the forces of law and order are also corrupt does not alter this.) This moral dilemma is felt by the viewer on an emotional level, as a division in his own total consciousness; and it is only through the intensity of the emotional experience (the so-called "extreme" violence of the final scenes) that resolution can be achieved. And this resolution takes the Aristotelian form of catharsis: the purging of pity and terror.

In other words, these films are essentially tragedies, whereas the classical Western was closer to comedy. Comedy is the process whereby a breach in an essentially unified world is healed; whereas tragedy achieves its resolution only through the intensity of its contemplation of disunity. It is this intensity which the cinema, perhaps more than any other contemporary art form, is capable of generating.

—Stephen Scobie

# Encounter groups—rot sets in

There is something rotten in the state of Cold Mountain, and before the miasma spreads to even more people than it already has, the institute would be wise to do a little housecleaning.

Cold Mountain (for you unfortunate but richer people who have never heard of it) is the Canadian branch of the Esalen Institute on Big Sur, California, where people have been flocking like lemmings to learn body and emotional awareness. Also called the Human Potential Movement, it puts its emphasis on getting rid of hang-ups and encouraging greater perceptivity and understanding of self and others.

It sounds like a Very Good Thing, and, theoretically, it is a very good thing—especially for people in the university environment, where over-intellectualizing frequently causes people to become emotionally up-tight.

What is to be questioned, then, is not the value of sensitivity sessions (although valid objections have been raised, especially about their long-term effects), or the sincerity of the Esalen founders, but the reasons for the developments in Edmonton.

### MOVEMENT GOES MERCENARY

The movement began genuinely enough with Dick Weaver, who is now president of Cold Mountain, doing week-end workshops for a relatively low fee and using encounter methods with his English 380 classes. However, since its small and optimistic beginnings, and apparently sincere efforts to bring more and more people to see the light, Cold Mountain, calling itself a "non-profit organization" offering "relief from superficiality" has settled into good old-fashioned corruption, cheerfully mercenary and increasingly more concerned with institutionalization and less with individuals.

It now costs \$50 to do a week-end workshop and \$150 for a five-day residential. Surely such prices are unreasonable, and discouragingly out of reach for many people who would benefit most from workshops.

Even Esalen itself charges only \$65 for a weekend, and this includes room and board. Certainly the SUB Meditation Room is not to be considered a more aesthetic and expensive location than that of the Big Sur. It is worth noting too, that Derrill Butler of the English Department can offer out-of-town residential workshops for only \$15. Whatever reasons in terms of future expansion Cold Mountain may have for its high rates, there is no justification for overcharging people at present.

High as these local prices are, however, they might be acceptable if the Cold Mountain leaders kept to the principles by which encounter or T-groups should be formed. The groups should be small, if possible not in excess of a dozen people (earlier groups were this size) and the male-female ratio approximately equal. In the week-end workshop I did, there were 21 people, including the leaders, and almost twice as many women as men. The next weekend, Cold Mountain put 35 people into its group. That, to put it in cold, hard, save-the-children's-fund terms is \$1,750 for one ten-hour weekend, in which, as one participant said, "we didn't even bother to introduce ourselves."

If the group process is really to prove more effective than the old one-to-one psychoanalysis, it will not be through submerging the individual in an overpopulated group, which is precisely what he has come to the workshop to avoid.

This is not, of course, to discount the claims of the many enraptured fans of Cold Mountain (I having been one, too) that the sessions have been of great value and have made "new persons" of its participants; on the contrary, it is precisely because so many people have benefited from workshops that the present Big Business outlook of Cold Mountain is to be disparaged, for it is disillusioning more and more people who had initially applauded the movement.

The Cold Mountain drop-outs—and there are many—may not have lost faith in the human potential ideals, but they have lost faith in Cold Mountain. The institute, and those other many who have not broken faith with it, need a seri-

ous reevaluation of its motives and objectives. For if the ultimate aim is simply to "establish" Cold Mountain in Canada instead of to help the individual, then it certainly is a "rotten" state of affairs. If Cold Mountain is sincere in helping the individual to better awareness, then it owes its participants an explanation of the present group activities which make its motives questionable.

When Han Shan said "try and make it to Cold Mountain" he meant something quite different from what goes by that name in Edmonton.

—Leona Gom

### leftover

Yes, Virginia, there is an Art Gallery, despite the students' union's hatchet job on the arts as they continue to bring down new budgets.

The proof is in a wild new addition to the Art Gallery's permanent collection, located at the east end of the theatre lobby. The painting, on four separate canvases, was exhibited in the recent Gallery showing of the work of Virgil Hammock.

The painting was commissioned by the Gallery from studies Hammock made last year for a similar work. Another new addition to the permanent collection, a diamond-shaped painting in grey and blue, is now on show in the Art Gallery.

Luckily, both paintings were commissioned through last year's Gallery budget. The current austerities of students' council may well, in the weeks to come, kill everything except more \$4,000 bombs like the Cowsills.

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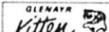
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