

# Brudnoy's Film Index

■ **The Abdication:** Why (maybe) Sweden's Queen Christina left her throne in 1654 to find happiness as a Catholic chasing after the Vatican cardinals. Liv Ullmann and Peter Finch, back from that *Lost Horizon* hokum, meandering through a tiresome lot of philosophical and (tee hee) sexual discussions leading nowhere. The real reason the Protestant Swede left home to become an R.C. in Rome? The weather was better.

■ **Amarcord:** Fellini's magnificent reminiscence of his 1930s boyhood. A lusty, loving, wry, and tender ramble through the four seasons and the many conditions of humankind. No sloppy sentimentality, but much sentiment; no holds barred, yet without the excesses of retrospective of his most recent film before this, *Roma*. A joy throughout.

■ **Airport 1975:** A disaster a day keeps the pilots at play. A massive clinker with everyone from Moses (Charlton Heston) to the Exorcist girl (Linda Blair), and cross-eyed Karen Black, that warbler in a habit Helen Reddy, Sid Caesar, Myrna Loy as a lush, and Gloria Swanson as Gloria Swanson, and everybody's favorite: the 747, with a big hole in its cockpit; a good man to fly it is hard to find.

■ **California Split:** Segal and Gould as two gambling freaks devoted to the tables night and day. Robert Altman's film captures the compulsive spirit of gambling and the off-hand ease of the dialogue is at times superlative.

■ **Death Wish:** Bronson's biggest, a frightening fantasy about today's New York succumbed to muggers, avenged by the widow of one mugger. The visceral reaction is: go to it, baby! Git them bastards! The cerebral reaction is: we're all cooked if the vigilante mentality catches on. But then, maybe we're all cooked as it is?

■ **Gold:** Roger Moore, on leave from his James Bond role, saving a South African mine from a flood brought on by the meanies. Lots of sweat, groaning natives, sinister sneers, and mud up to here.

■ **The Gambler:** James Caan as Axel Freed, who's got everything including the goyische chick of the decade. He also has this thing about gambling. Heavy and insistent and dreary, but with some superb supporting work from such as Morris Carnovsky and Lauren Hutton.

■ **Harold and Maude:** This one will last throughout the seventies. May-September romances? Yes, sure, but this is the May-September romance to beat them all. Ari and Jackie have nothing on this pair.

■ **Juggernaut:** A technically excellent disaster flick; how to save H.M.S. *Britannic* from explosives while denying the ship-jacker his \$1.5 million. Gripping throughout, escapist fare for those who would rather worry about a cinema disaster than their own problems.

■ **Ladies and Gentlemen, the Rolling Stones:** Culled from their '72 tour, the entire film is Mick and Co. singing, gesturing, perspiring, and turning themselves on. No interviews, backstage blather, audience hysteria scenes; just the most exciting rock group in the world doing its best numbers.

■ **Law and Disorder:** Carroll O'Connor and Ernest Borgnine as two grown-up men wishing they were little boys. They organize an auxiliary police force to protect their apartment building, get carried away with it all, and end unhappily. New York shown in all its grimy splendor, tough talk, and paranoia; a few deft moments from Karen Black (out of the cockpit and into the beauty salon) and some others, but on balance a dismal flop.

■ **Lacombe, Lucien:** An absolute triumph from Louis Malle. The story of a young French peasant boy who becomes a collaborator in 1944, finds happiness doing the Nazis' business and more happiness loving a Jewish girl, and then. . . . Beautifully directed, acted, and conceived. It refuses to preach, communicating its message subtly and by example, not by moralisms.

■ **The Night Porter:** Tender is the sadomasochistic night. Liliana Cavani's bizarre film of a sort of Grand Guignol Hotel

of kinky sex. Max (Dirk Bogarde), now an anonymous night porter, formerly did his thing as an SS sadist in a death camp, his favorite toy being one Lucia, his "little girl" (Charlotte Rampling). Now it is 1957, and who turns up at the Hotel zur Oper in Vienna but Lucia, and incredibly they take up where they left off. However, a ghoulish group of ex-Nazis intervene to spoil the s-m fun, but not before the audience is treated to the most explicitly sadistic sex scenes of any commercial film in memory. Bogarde is, quite simply, magnificent; the film is terrifying, draining, nauseating.

■ **The Odessa File:** Nazis are always in season. Now it is 1964, and former SS officials plan to help Nasser destroy Israel, except that Peter Miller (Jon Voight), a German journalist With A Conscience, works to foil them. Preachy, talky, and dull, a terribly disappointing cinematization of Frederick Forsyth's terribly exciting book.

■ **Scenes from a Marriage:** Ingmar Bergman's seemingly endless investigation of a modern alliance gone sour, distilled from his 300-minute six-part television series into a massively powerful movie starring Liv Ullmann. Claustrophobic photography, sophisticated and chilling dialogue, a phenomenally fine work. Not advised for those whose marriages are rocky.

■ **The Taking of Pelham One Two Three:** Subwayjacking in Spraypaint Village, with the mayor (Abe Beame-ish rather than Lindesayesque), the Transit Authority, the cops, and everyone else rushing frantically to meet the one-hour deadline of the baddies, who promise a hostage shot every minute if the ransom money doesn't arrive on time. Alas, it moves nowhere and spoils a super story by virtue of bad pacing.

■ **The Widow Couderc:** Simone Signoret and Alain Delon in a pallid treatment of the Georges Simenon story of a middle-aged peasant woman sheltering and loving a young city fellow on the lam from the law. Signoret somehow convinces us that she could attract Delon and could tolerate his frolics with her nitwit niece.

world, as Hegel claims. On the contrary, changes in the material world cause changes in human consciousness. Hegel confused cause and effect.

The material world for Marx is, simply and without qualification, the economic world—the world of material production. In each stage of history the material dialectic consists in the conflict between two aspects of production, the means of production (the level of technology) and the relations of production (the system of ownership). The culmination of history for Marx is full communism, a world without material scarcity and hence without political conflict.

Communism is possible, says Marx, because of the virtually limitless productive capacity created by modern science and technology. Herein lies one of the major differences between Marx and his latter-day disciples in the West. The Western Marxists

are hostile to science, technology, prosperity, and even to thought. The West has inherited "Marxists" for whom "materialism" is not the foundation of their doctrine but an epithet to be hurled at the bourgeoisie.

The remystification of Marx has not resulted in a simple return to Hegel. The Western Marxists have rediscovered Hegel's concern with the primacy of consciousness but not his concern with the primacy of reason. Consciousness has come to mean little more than "will" or "wish" or "desire." This development finds its fullest exposition in the drug-sex dreams of the New Left of the 1960s. One need only imagine a new world, untroubled by the distinction between the possible and the impossible, and that world can be created. In the thought of Herbert Marcuse, one finds Freud's "reality principle" blurred with Marx's "capitalist repression." It is not the nature of things but the economic system

that prevents the endless gratification of infantile fantasies. The very attempt to be rational (Marx's attempt included) is dismissed as the product of false consciousness or ideology.

Mr. McInnes is a careful and most knowledgeable student of Marxist theory. His work is an intellectual history of Western Marxism. It is a scholarly work, indeed an erudite work, and if it shares the weakness of all projects in intellectual history, it is stronger than most. It is virtually impossible to write a history that is faithful, on the one hand, to the intricacies of other people's thoughts and, on the other hand, to the thought of the author. Mr. McInnes is commendably fair to the Marxists whose thought he chronicles but does not share. Indeed, the detailed discussion of the roots of Western Marxism (in chapters 2 through 5) is too much for the general reader. Scholars familiar with Sorel, Lukacs, Gramsci, and Marcuse may find these chapters use-

ful; the general reader will find neither a readily accessible exposition of their doctrines nor any reason to seek to understand them more fully.

According to Mr. McInnes, two developments contributed decisively to the rethinking of Marx by Western Marxists. One was the failure of Marxism in the communist world (to achieve harmony and freedom), the other the failure of Marxism in the non-communist world (to make a revolution or even to create a revolutionary proletariat). As Mr. McInnes points out, the ideologists of communist countries have also had to undertake considerable remystification of Marx. (This is especially true of Chairman Mao, whose significance for Western Marxists receives surprisingly little mention from Mr. McInnes.) One may take the next step and say that Marx had to be rethought because Marx was an inadequate guide; that is, Marx was wrong.

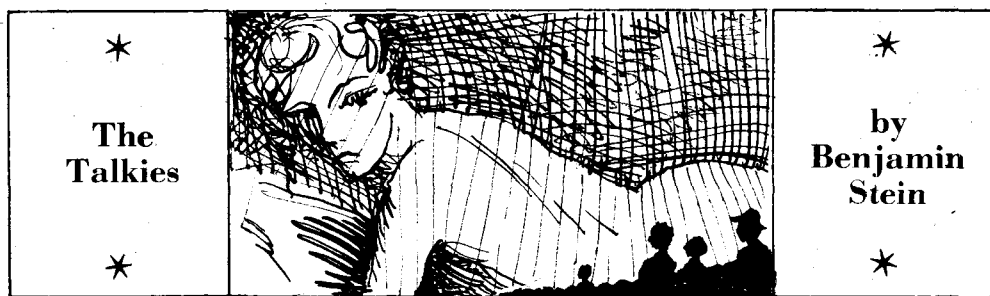
Mr. McInnes does not quite say that Marx was wrong. Even less does he say that Hegel was right. Mr. McInnes does not like such judgments. He frowns on the philosophic

attempt to explain the world comprehensively. He condemns Marx and Hegel equally (and, by implication, most philosophers) because they try to distinguish the real from the illusory, the eternal from the ephemeral, the natural from the artificial. Every such effort resembles, to use his favorite example, the Socratic attempt to distinguish *physis* (nature) from *nomos* (convention). This philosophic project itself, he implies, reveals a dogmatic or authoritarian cast of mind. Everyone who believes that the world is a rationally comprehensible whole is denounced by Mr. McInnes as an adherent of a misguided or dangerous doctrine called Totalism.

Mr. McInnes tells us that "there is a plurality of rational ways of living." Perhaps so, but it does not follow, as he suggests, that there is a plurality of rational ways of understanding. He says, "It is not mere values and inventions that provide the variety of ways of living but social movements." This insight does not come from social movements, however, but from thought, in this case from Mr. McInnes' own thought. The study of politics, understood as "social

movements" or anything else, requires a standpoint outside of politics. Except for the irrationalists whom Mr. McInnes justly condemns, every student of politics, including Marx, Hegel, and McInnes, describes politics not only by the standard of politics but by the standard of reason. If there is a "plurality of rational ways of living," then it is possible and necessary to distinguish the rational ways from the irrational ways. It is not a mark of dogmatism but of sanity to attempt to distinguish reason from unreason, truth from error, sense from folly. Mr. McInnes, to his credit, makes these distinctions and makes them well. If he is tempted to deny it, he sells himself short.

Marxism understands itself as a theoretical critique of the liberal West. Therefore Marxism can not be understood or adequately countered without non-Marxist theory. Liberal eclecticism of theory, not to mention rejection of theory, is insufficient. If Western liberalism is superior to Marxism, then that superiority can and must be explained. Mr. McInnes' account of the varieties of bad theory stands as a reminder of the need for good theory. □



### Amarcord

A HEAVY SNOWFALL descends upon an Italian seacoast town. The local young men pour out of the cafe into the town square to watch. Suddenly there is a strange sound from out of the sky. Everyone looks up to see the peacock of the local count fluttering down. The bird sits on the frozen fountain and majestically lifts and spreads its tail feathers. It creates a magnificent image of color against a lushly white backdrop.

For some reason which I cannot yet understand, that scene, and many others like it in Federico Fellini's latest masterpiece, *Amarcord*, seem to go straight into the unconscious.

There they generate enough excitement that a feeling of undefined admiration and awe emerges through the conscious part of the mind. Fellini puts enough of these scenes together so that the experience of watching *Amarcord* is one long series of "oohs" and "ahhs," as if the audience were being taken on a tour of the Grand Canyon.

*Amarcord* is Italian dialect for "I Remember." The movie is Fellini's remembrance of one year—around 1935—of his adolescence in the seacoast town of Rimini. It is important to realize that it is not an account of one year—it is a remembrance of one year. As such, it is not a detailed diary, but a highly subjective recollection of high-

points, suitably romanticized and jazzed up to have been worthy of recollection.

The movie begins in the springtime, with the townspeople making a huge bonfire to chase away the winter's chill. Almost immediately we are introduced to the townspeople and to the usual, repetitive, but always brilliant and evocative Fellini conventions.

There are the high school students bursting with lust and energy, eyeing the town beauty, Gradisca, who swings her hips in a marvelously provincial imitation of Jean Harlow. ("Gradisca" in Italian means "Please do," a phrase she used in seducing a local nobleman.) There is the town rake in camel's hair polo coat and neatly clipped moustache; the people call him "Ronald Colman." There is the lunatic, bedraggled town sex bomb, Volpina. ("She even has sex for breakfast.")

Everywhere there are processions of people walking tilted backwards, walking bent forwards, with the camera moving beside them almost, but not quite, at their speed. People are jumping up and down in a synopated rhythm as if to a beat known only in Fellini's memory.

A lone motorcyclist roars up and down the streets with people leaping out of his way. No one pays any attention to the driver. He returns throughout the film, al-

ways passing in and out of the action without any apparent reason—like the peacock, an evocation of something moving yet not readily explicable.

The movie goes on through the year. The schoolboys are shown with their constant imitations of crepitation in the classroom, and their hilarious fantasies of love and adulation.

Family life in the Fellini household has a chaotic quality as the father and mother each threaten to kill each other over the other's misdeeds. Later they take a mentally ill uncle on a ride into the countryside. He climbs up a tree and cries out that he wants a woman, and he refuses to come down until a midget nun from the insane asylum climbs up after him.

It is a small town, and everyone's idiosyncracies are known. Because Fellini's father makes derisive comments about Mussolini, he is made to drink the Duce's health with castor oil.

Also because it is a small town, events of any significance take on a magnificent importance. When the ocean liner *Rex* is scheduled to sail by the town, several miles out, the whole town turns out in small boats to watch it pass by. It does not come until the middle of the night and when it appears it is like a schoolboy's fantasy of a great liner. It is bigger than a mountain, with more lights than the milky way has stars. It is overwhelming and overpowering—not a ship at all but the concentrated essence of a small-town boy's imaginings about the world outside.

The high school boys are in a state of constant agitation because of lust. The young Fellini especially has a mad crush on the beautiful Gradisca ("Compared to her, Garbo is nothing.") and on the incredibly fat and buxom tobacconist's helper. The boys gather secretly in a garage for masturbation while calling out the names of their favorite movie stars. —