

Left to right: Beatrice Arthur as Maude; Bob Newhart as himself; Sally Struthers as Gloria; Robert Reiner as Michael. Right below: Norman Lear.

## TELEVISION

# Look who's turning up missing

By now you've probably heard the news: producer Norman Lear "the conscience of television," is quitting TV for the silver screen. He's entitled. But look what's happening at the same time.

Two of the four *All in the Family* stars are leaving the nest. *Sanford and Son* have left the air, *Maude* is on her way out and *The Jeffersons* are barely hanging in there. *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* has lost its leading lady, been retitled and (at least in L.A.) shuffled off to the purgatorial hour of midnight. *Good Times* aren't so good any more.

And these are just Norman Lear shows. Others of the more adult sitcoms—like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Bob Newhart*—have already left or are on their way out.

While draft cards and bras were burning in the '60s, the height of TV comedy was *The Lucy Show* and *The Beverly Hills*

*billies*. Then came the '70s and, better late than never, TV discovered the "social problem." Relevance was in, and some of the shows that dealt most effectively with controversial issues were sitcoms.

But no more. Widening the wasteland today are the likes of *Love Boat*, *Happy Days* and *Three's Company*, to name three of the season's biggest hits. Lear *et al.* are leaving us just when we need them most, and the social sitcom is lost in a deluge of dumb jokes and dippy characters.

Relevance is out and inanity is in.

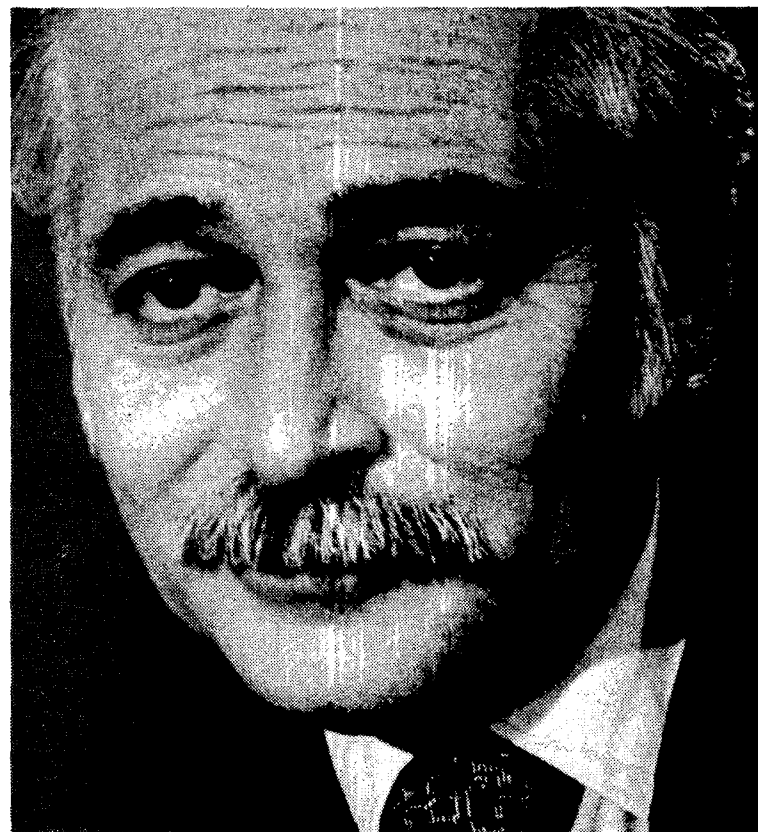
Perhaps TV has finally caught up with and matched its times after all. Tom Wolfe has called this "the Me Decade." Reflected on TV, the emphasis on self becomes an emphasis on easy entertainment without the slightest edge to provoke thought. Easy-viewing to match the easy-listening of

our most popular records.

That's this season. Wait till you see what's coming up next.

The networks have been under strong public pressure to put one of their staples in the deep freeze. Violence is out. But no problem. Executives who follow the Nielson ratings like Moses obeying the burning bush have looked at the success of *Three's Company*, *Soap* and especially *Charlie's Angels* (which could be classified as a comedy). If one show is a hit, can more of the same be anything less?

So sex is in—the type of show privately referred to in Hollywood as "tits and ass" programs. (Or, by those more careful of their language, as the "jiggles school.") Next season you can expect a host of series with titles like *The Cheerleaders* and *Roller Girls*. Buxom, no-talent starlets haven't had such opportunities since *Love That Bob*.



Maybe that's why Lear is leaving TV.

The makers of adult sitcoms fought hard to deal frankly with sexual matters, from *Maude's* abortion to Edith Bunker's lesbian cousin, only to be bested in the ratings game by snickering

bedroom jokes and sexy young women. It was a good fight, but when they brought sex on TV into the 20th century, "tits and ass" wasn't what they had in mind.

—**Pamela Feinsilber**  
*Pamela Feinsilber is a free-lance writer in Los Angeles.*

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**WOMAN BORN SEPT. 10 or thereabout,** in her thirties, sought by male born March 10, 39, scientist, writer, producer, for the real thing: true love, marriage. Please write, enclosing picture. J. Friendly, 203 West 107, NYC 10025.

**I AM PLANNING** to write some political reminiscences about The Shelter Half Coffee House. I hope that some of the GIs who passed through there in 1969-1971 will get in touch. Trust me, I won't treat you like Loose Change. Write to Barbara Garson at In These Times.

**OUR EYES MET** outside the Film Forum (the Chile film). I was wearing yellow boots and an orange poncho. You were selling IN THESE TIMES. It was just a glance and a smile (I was with someone else.) But if it meant something to you too, write to Stephanie, Box 6, In These Times.

**VICKIE DEAR,** thanks for the subscription. Daddy and I have been reading your newspaper and are quite impressed by its seriousness. Daddy thinks it might be nice for you to bring your good friend Jenny home with you this summer. We can change too—but slowly. Please don't be afraid to get in touch.—Mother.

**O.K. ROBIN,** you're right. The Democratic party is a cop out and a trap. But our relationship isn't. Please come back—Noel.



## MOVIES

# A fine new film about love and loneliness

## AN UNMARRIED WOMAN

Written and directed by Paul Mazursky

With Jill Clayburgh and Alan Bates

Bates

Distributed by 20th Century-Fox

*An Unmarried Woman* is a warm and well-wrought film about sex and its relation to love, and love and its place in the life of an independent woman. Its tone is sympathetic, genuine and decent and lends the film a special humor as it tells its story of contemporary manners and anxiety.

Paul Mazursky, who wrote, directed and co-produced, shows an uncanny sensitivity both to the relentlessness of the city and to the surprising ways it lures and changes people. He understands that urban ideals about anything (but particularly love and romance) must be tempered with a realism about human relations. He knows that modern cliff-dwellers have feet of clay, heads in the clouds and insatiable genitals. They value love and friendship but find their lives desperately dry without sex. And although they worship culture and art, they cannot walk the streets without stepping in dog-shit.

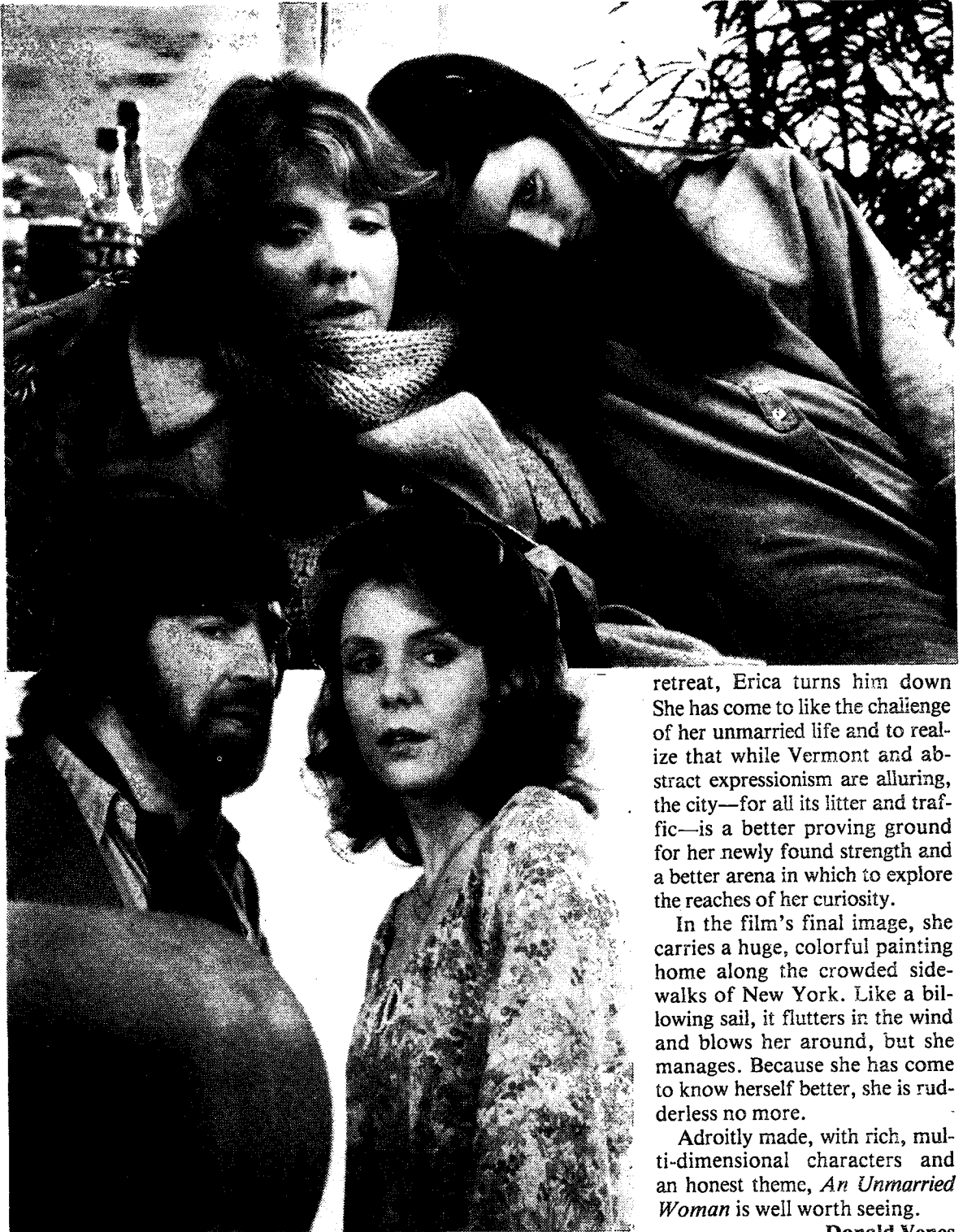
Because he knows urban psy-

chology so well Mazursky's characters always seem like people we have met. When they are bitter, they are also lonely. When they seem domineering and aggressive, they are still capable of sexual tenderness. Even the most gentle among them get into fights. The city scars them, but it feeds them too. It is the best place for them to stage the drama of their lives.

Within this context, Mazursky give us Erica (Jill Clayburgh), who is in the process of becoming unmarried and must redefine her place in love with new lovers. Out of her initial depression she seeks to find a new balance between her urge for independence and her need for intimate experience.

A chance encounter with an abstract expressionist painter (Alan Bates) is the acid test of Erica's evolving sense of self-esteem and confidence. The man is utterly fluid and natural, bemused by life, intelligent and loving. The two have a passionate affair. But their love is not larger than life, and Erica begins to sense that there is much in common between her failed marriage and his developing romance.

When the artist proposes that she leave New York to share a summer with him in a Vermont



Above: Erica (Jill Clayburgh) with her daughter Patti (Lisa Lucas)  
Below: Alan Bates as Saul, the painter, with Erica.

retreat, Erica turns him down. She has come to like the challenge of her unmarried life and to realize that while Vermont and abstract expressionism are alluring, the city—for all its litter and traffic—is a better proving ground for her newly found strength and a better arena in which to explore the reaches of her curiosity.

In the film's final image, she carries a huge, colorful painting home along the crowded sidewalks of New York. Like a billowing sail, it flutters in the wind and blows her around, but she manages. Because she has come to know herself better, she is rudderless no more.

Adroitly made, with rich, multi-dimensional characters and an honest theme, *An Unmarried Woman* is well worth seeing.

—Donald Venes

Donald Venes is a free-lance writer in Chicago.

## Bergman's achievement: hermetically sealed despair

### SERPENT'S EGG

Written and directed by Ingmar Bergman

With Liv Ullman, David Carradine, James Whitmore, Heinz Froebe, Glynn Turman

Paramount release, Rated R

Ingmar Bergman's new English-language film is the most bleak he has ever done. It goes far beyond the claustrophobic cynicism of *The Hour of the Wolf* or *The Passion of Anna* to achieve a hermetically sealed despair—a despair so thorough and so continuous that it finally attains the status of a moral posi-

tion. Any kind of hope, in this view, is a form of corruption.

The only mitigating circumstance in the surrounding gloom is that no one can make films of Bergman's visual and intellectual power without an almost mystic faith in the intelligence of people and their ability to receive and decode the message.

There is a scene with a priest that echoes a similar scene in *Cries and Whispers*. Manuela (Liv Ullman), an out-of-work circus performer and part-time prostitute, goes to a priest (played by James Whitmore with his peculiar combination of the fustian and the sensitive) and asks him to

pray for her, to help her calm her inner fears.

"We live far away from God," Whitmore tells her, "so far away that he probably doesn't hear when we pray for help. So we must help each other, give each other the forgiveness a remote God denies us."

That is as cheerful as *The Serpent's Egg* ever gets. It is all downhill from there.

The people in *The Serpent's Egg* have befuddled and corrupt faces like George Grosz paintings. David Carradine's, in particular, seems in a state of decay.

Carradine plays Abel Rosenberg who, with his brother Max

and his sister-in-law Manuela, once formed a circus trapeze act. Max injured his arm, the act can no longer perform, and the circus has gone on, leaving the three stranded in Berlin.

Very early in the film, Max commits suicide by shooting himself in the mouth, leaving an incoherent note that advises Abel and Manuela that "they are poisoning people." Several other people die mysteriously, all of them known to Abel. The police question him. They wonder if he is a Jew.

These events take place in 1923 in the atmosphere of political and economic turmoil that character-

ized the ineffectual Weimar Republic. Inflation is rampant. Cigarettes cost four million marks. People struggle to go on although they are driven almost crazy by their burdens.

Manuela somehow retains her optimism, even though she must work at night in a murky cabaret and by day in a brothel. (The cabaret, as you might imagine, dispenses entertainment in the Kurt Weill mode.)

Bergman's cinematographer and long-time associate Sven Nykvist, has lighted and photographed the film to accentuate its physical reality. People are diminished by their surroundings (hallways, streetcars, public buildings). The stark actuality of things creates a gruesome counterpoint to the perishability of flesh.

Near the end of the film, the brilliant but morally deformed Dr. Vergerus (Heinz Bennent) reveals to Abel the cause of the mysterious deaths: he has been conducting experiments to test the limits of human endurance, as though life weren't doing that every day.

As Vergerus shows films of his experiments, the police are pounding at his laboratory door. He evades justice, however, by swallowing a cyanide capsule and dies watching himself in a mirror.

Needless to say, there is not a happy ending. Abel merely blends into the lumpen proletariat, and from our historical vantage point we know the worst is yet to come.

—Barry Brennan is a film critic in Los Angeles.



The stark actuality of a Berlin street in 1923 contrasts with the perishability of the people who walk along it.