

cepted wisdom. And what is accepted wisdom in the late 1970s? Fishman ends his book: “‘Tomorrow,’ observed Samuel Johnson, ‘is an old deceiver, and his cheat never grows stale.’ Howard, Wright, and Le Corbusier believed that the twentieth century would be a period of social reconstruction crowned by the creation of magnificent new cities. They were wrong.”

Samuel Johnson quoted approvingly? Charismatic Pied Pipers who only yesterday led enchanted kiddies forth to Delectable Mountains—all, all quite put down in the most natural, offhand way? What a transformation of the intellectual climate this represents!

Only yesterday, it seems, anything in the nature of an attack on fundamental principles of utopian planning (as distinct from constructive criticisms of this or that detail) put the offender beyond the pale of respectable academic society, doomed to publish in obscurity. Thus, almost everything Fishman says has been said before, 10 or 20 or 30 years ago, but in places where he could be excused for not finding them: for instance, in Gören Lindahl’s 60-page essay of the late 1950s, “Von Zukunftskathedrale bis zur Wohnmaschine,” in a series from Uppsala University; in a collection of essays, *On Art and Architecture in the Modern World*, published by the American Life Foundation; and in Donald D. Egbert’s *Social Radicalism and the Arts in Western Europe*, published by Knopf in 1970, but quickly remaindered.

But just in the last half-dozen years, it seems, antiutopianism, or at least a healthy distrust of utopian planning, has become an open movement, with the likes of Lewis Mumford, Peter Blake, Wolf von Eckhart, and Stanislaus von Moos among its prominent adherents. So abrupt a shift of mind is it, that there are signs a facile optimism is about to be replaced by a pessimism comparably unwarranted.

THE SOLUTION—FOR THOSE not dazzled by the luminous genius of planners or teams of planners—is there. One begins with where people *are*, rather than where some authority thinks they ought to be. Instead of providing Great Architecture in a Great Plan, one works toward an architectural environment of shapes that are familiar, proportions that are “right,” space that is livable, forms that have broadly intelligible symbolic associations for the people who must live in and with them. Such an urban

environment alone can provide roots, the sense of being part of an enduring community. And only when they have that sense of belonging will people want to intelligently use, instead of exploiting and barbarizing, their cities.

That kind of humane environment is not to be had from Great Form-Givers. What Great Form-Givers give is *their* ideas of aesthetically pleasing forms (Howard and Unwin’s medievalized villages), *their* behavioral space (as Wright scaled all his architectural world to his own stature), and *their* symbolism (the story is told of Le Corbusier’s angry reaction to Indian workers at Chandigarh perpetuating their age-old custom of imprinting a wall with their hands; he ordered the wall torn down and reset with his image, the Modulor). In contrast, the forms of a humane environment are *found*. How? Just by looking around, at what forms have already been generated by a community of people living, solving problems, creating a culture.

Through all the years of utopian dreaming and planning, ordinary people have gone ahead putting up ordinary buildings to serve their everyday needs, in what can best be called a popular-commercial style. To the planners, these have been vestiges of a discredited past, soon to vanish. They would be replaced by concrete creations with strip windows and steel *pilots*—like the house Gropius built for Breuer at Lincoln and the house Breuer built for Gropius at Concord (or was it the other way around?). Fifty years later, academic art historians continue to believe and teach this, and are still waiting for it to happen. Meanwhile, speculative builders, like bumblebees zipping about happily unaware of violating the laws of aerodynamics, go on producing split-level ranch houses, colonial shopping centers, chuck wagon diners, mock Tudor condominiums, log cabin taverns. And, what’s more, selling them in the face of all respectable opinion. Why? Because people want roots, and this kind of building, however crudely and crassly, provides them with roots—or at least an acceptable semblance and substitute, until such time as sensitivity, style, content, and form are reunited in the art of architecture. Now that the urban utopian fog seems to be lifting, perhaps architectural thinkers can get on with the urgent business of helping people create a humane environment, not through Form-Givers, but through form finders; not tomorrow, but today. □

THE WICKED STAGE: A History of Theater Censorship and Harassment in the United States, by Abe Laufe. Frederick Ungar, 190 pp., \$11.00.

Three centuries of banality

NOEL PERRIN

IT TAKES A DEGREE OF TALENT to write a book as bad as this. Anyone can write a book with no insight, no structure, no development, no style—and thousands do, annually. Some of them even get published. But to waste as much good material as Abe Laufe has wasted here can’t have been easy.

The book pretends to be a history of censorship and “harassment” in the American theater. It is a subject ripe for treatment. While there has never been a national censorship of the drama here, as there was in England until just the other day, and as of course there is in many countries right now, there have been literally hundreds of local censors. At one time almost every American city had a mayor or a police commissioner or a district attorney busy passing judgment on what could be shown or said on the stage. There has been at least as much harassment. New York, for example, had a law on the books from 1927 to 1967 which sounds like something out of the Middle Ages. It specified that when a play was convicted of immorality, the unlucky theater in which it had been produced could, as punishment, be closed by the city for a full year. Such a law is going to produce a rather cautious breed of theater owners. The history of the American theater is full of such episodes, and many of them appear in Laufe’s book. They just aren’t dealt with adequately.

History in the sense of movement in

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time the book certainly is. It opens with the arrest of three young Virginians for putting on a play in 1665 and plods on up to some of the troubles *Equus* had in Texas in 1976. En route, the reader (if he chooses to plod on) learns a number of quaint historical facts, such as that in October 1778, Congress passed a resolution that any officer of the United States who acted in or even attended plays was to be dismissed from his office. (That was the Continental Congress, presumably, though Laufe doesn't say so.) In the second, and less bad, half of the book, the reader gets a fairly lively account of what progressively has been allowed on American stages over the past 50 years. The history of miming what Laufe calls "the sex act" is documented, for example. There ought to be at least *some* interest here. There isn't.

Laufe's central problem—well, one of them—is that he hasn't the faintest idea what censorship is. He has it hopelessly confused with mores, with taboos, even with fire laws. If the Pulitzer Prize is not given to a "controversial" play, Laufe thinks the play was censored. If a Boston audience in 1966 walks out on Genet's *The Balcony*, that's censorship, too. When an off-Broadway theater is closed by the fire commissioner (who is counting exits, not sex acts), that's at least harassment, even if the play's move into a new and safer theater gets the commissioner's blessing.

Laufe not only doesn't know what censorship is, he doesn't know whether he's for it or against it. On the whole, he tends to be against it when it is quaintly in the past, or when it's thoroughly provincial, such as a disputed Albee production in a high-school auditorium in Rockport, Massachusetts. He tends to dither and wriggle when it's big-city productions of the last 20 years. (The final chapter is called "Can New York Solve the Problem?" The problem is not censorship or harassment, but "obstacles in cleaning up the theater district.")

Worst of all, Laufe simply doesn't see the significance of most of the events he narrates. No, I retract that. Worst of all, he simply can't write. Here is a typical sentence from his account of a 1972 musical: "A number of women objected to *Grease* because the earthiness and vulgarities were spoken by girls as well as by boys." The *earthiness* was spoken by girls? The copy editor was asleep?

This book should not be called *The*

Wicked Stage. It should be called "A List of Theatrical Controversies in the United States, Together With Plot Summaries of the Plays Involved, Number of Performances Given, And Some Discussion of Whether the Actresses Were or Were Not Wearing Flesh-Colored Tights."

The conclusion I draw from reading it has nothing to do with the theater, but with publishing. And it is a very cheering one. We have been hearing for 20 years that it's harder and harder to get a book published, that publishers don't take risks any more, that books (except the lucky few taken by clubs, or those written by politicians) are a fading form. Here is living proof that it's not so. Take heart, young writer. If Abe Laufe can get published (and this is his third book!), there's every kind of chance for you. □

Far side of the pantheon

THOMAS RUSSELL III

THE MOST INFLUENTIAL American critic the young art of the cinema has yet produced was the early Andrew Sarris. As a book that almost single-handedly changed the way we look at movies, Sarris's *The American Cinema* (1968) is the *Sacred Wood* of film criticism, and the extent to which Sarris falls short of Eliot is a measure of the limitations of film criticism itself at this point in its history. But what other art has elicited such a rich apologia so early?

Sadly—and for his admirers a good deal more than that—Sarris's recent work, as a critic for *The Village Voice*, has not matched his early inspiration. Although he can occasionally rouse himself to the event, as in his reviews of Bresson's *Au Hasard, Balthazar* and Hitchcock's *Topaz*, far too much of latter-day Sarris has been enervated and flabby, seemingly written more to satisfy deadlines than in response to the pressures of real thought and feeling. Many critics, in fact, do their best work

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when young; later, they tend either to retire (Max Beerbohm, Richard Gilman), make the jump to practicing the art itself (G. B. Shaw, the *nouvelle vague* critic-directors), or rush out to save the world or die in Spain. Whether Sarris's problems stem from failing to make such a break, or from more private demons, I do not know. But disappointingly few of his recent pieces have inspired clipping and collecting, or make one long to see them widely anthologized. It is to the early Sarris we must turn for real illumination.

Sarris is probably best known as the American apostle of "the *auteur* theory," which is a loose translation of François Truffaut's *la politique des auteurs*, the guiding policy of the influential French journal, *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*. Basically, the theory suggested that the director was the person most responsible for the success or failure of his film, and that a history of directors would be a roughly adequate history of the cinema. *The American Cinema* (Sarris's first major book, originally published as a 1963 issue of Jonas Mekas's magazine *Film Culture*) was in essence little more than an annotated ranking of American sound-film directors, grouping them (with brief essays on each) into such fanciful categories as "Pantheon" and "Expressive Esoterica," all the way down to "Less Than Meets the Eye." The first and third of these—Sarris's implicit first and last places—were the most controversial. Elevated were such directors as Ford, Hawks, Lubitsch, Griffith, and Welles; consigned to the outfield were such critical favorites as Huston, Kazan, Wyler, and David Lean, directors responsible for what little critical respectability was then accorded American films, in those days when Art was supposed to be in black-and-white-and-Swedish. Sarris's elevation of popcorn over espresso-in-the-lobby amounted to a radical revaluation of the canon.

But it wasn't the theory that changed minds so much as Sarris's incisive analysis of the work of his favorite directors, both in *The American Cinema* and in the first collection of his weekly criticism, *Confessions of a Cultist* (1970). Sarris has always seemed especially strong in three areas, in what might be called context, contrast, and precision (the three are of course related).

Sarris's best perceptions always had an exquisite precision, teasing a point until it became as sharp as cut glass. Thus, for instance, his comment about the opening of *Marnie*, Hitchcock's film

His implied elevation of popcorn over espresso-in-the-lobby amounted to a radical re-valuation of the canon of cinema.

about a compulsive thief:

The first shot of *Marnie* focuses on an enormous yellow handbag, receding to a rear view of a leggy brunette on a railway platform. Hitchcock's syntax is not "brunette with yellow handbag walks on platform" but "yellow handbag with brunette walking on platform." We know what before we know who. We are cued to money before *Marnie*.

That kind of contrast is frequent in Sarris's prose, and it is essential to his particular kind of precision. Contrasts in Sarris (often between two apparently similar things) range from the simple to the metaphysical. The former are often expressed in his constant punning—the frequent polarity of "cosmic" and "cosmetic," Graham Greene's "causal" Catholicism posed against John Ford's "casual" brand. Occasionally, this definition by opposition can get a bit manic, as when Sarris tells us that:

The difference between Keaton and Chaplin is the difference between poise and poetry, between the aristocrat and the tramp, between adaptability and dislocation, between the function of things and the meaning of things, between eccentricity and mysticism, between man as machine and man as angel, between the girl as a convention and the girl as an ideal, between the centripetal and the centrifugal tendencies of slapstick. . .

But most often his distinctions are genuinely provocative, as in his discussion of Truffaut's romantic *Jules and Jim*:

In fact, romanticism is not concerned primarily with love but with a theory of character that excludes accident. *Last Year at Marienbad*, for example, is an antiromantic film because, in its materialistic universe, man is imprisoned by the accidents of time and space. It makes no difference who or what you are or where you have been. There is no causality in *Marienbad*, no pattern of character. By contrast everything that happens in *Jules and Jim* is psychologically inevitable. At the end you understand the

beginning, and even if external events had been rearranged in time and space, the outcome would have been the same.

The point, of course, is that you don't have to accept Sarris's definition of either "romantic" or "materialist" to see the usefulness of his distinction between two kinds of art, whatever we may choose to call them.

SIMILAR CONTRASTS ABOUND, all of them with an eye toward precision. I think, for example, of his discussion, in *The American Cinema*, of the war between the sexes in Bergman, Antonioni, and Max Ophuls, part of an especially lyrical tribute to the greater subtlety and maturity of Ophuls. Or of his analysis of the difference between John Huston and that *auteur* favorite, Nicholas Ray. Sarris's remark that Huston tends to cut between static compositions, while Ray cuts on movement—Sarris calls it the difference between sculpture and dance—does much to explain why Ray is so much the more exciting director, as well as the more cinematic.

And in fact it is precisely Sarris's search for (and love of) the "cinematic" that seems to be at the heart of his sensibility and of his criticism. It is this that explains his preference for a director like John Ford, to whom the medium comes naturally, and whose entire being, one feels, is expressed there, over a man like Bergman, who has directed some 30 films "without," as Sarris says, "even beginning to suggest an instinctive affinity with the medium." It explains, too, Sarris's championing of Jean-Luc Godard, for some critics an arid and intellectual director, but redeemed for Sarris by the overwhelming sensuousness of his images and the depth of communicated feeling, of what Henry James called "felt life." And Sarris's disappointment with the later Godard was that the director turned to "saying what he meant, instead of showing what he felt."

Sarris's feel for the "cinematic" is also responsible, I would suggest, for his extraordinary sense of *context*, which works in many ways, but most frequently to enlarge our awareness of the multiplicity, the vastness, of a director's career. He reminds us that von Sternberg made films before and after his "Dietrich period," that even if "all the dollies and cranes in the world snap to attention" when Max Ophuls's name is mentioned, he is nevertheless much more than the sum of his fabled

camera movements. And it is Sarris's sense of perspective too that inspires comments such as the one on Jean Renoir, that "the conventional American line on Renoir is that everything he made before *Grand Illusion* in 1937 is primitive, and everything he made after it is decadent." Or that lets him say of *To Be or Not To Be*, Ernst Lubitsch's comedy about Hitler, that "for Lubitsch, it was sufficient to say that Hitler had bad manners, and no evil was then inconceivable." And I think it is this larger perspective that is also responsible for many of Sarris's *bons mots*, dazzling not so much for their wit as for their extraordinarily economical summing up of the essential, as in his reference to Huston's directing *Fat City* "with the shrug he has long since polished into a style," or his statement that "Federico Fellini is the Busby Berkeley of metaphysics." (The precision is in the writing too; how much weaker would that sentence have been had Sarris merely omitted the Italian director's first name. It's the double alliteration that makes it work.)

That kind of clarity and sense of context is balanced, unfortunately often, by Sarris's frequent recourse to the Delphic, like his comment that in a Don Siegel film, "New York is a city where the future is always colliding with the past, and the moral arithmetic never quite adds up," or, of *Marnie*, that "Hitchcockian suspense alternates between crime in future conditional and guilt in past imperfect." I find that last statement extremely evocative, but of exactly what, I couldn't really say. And sometimes the gnomic is redeemed by an intense lyricism that conjures up the subject with so much feeling we don't ask him to explain, like his reference to Ford's most frequent camera angle as "below the horizon-line of history," or this description of Sarris's beloved Max Ophuls:

There is no escape from the trap of time. Not even the deepest and sincerest love can deter the now from its rendezvous with the then, and no amount of self-sacrifice can prevent desire from becoming embalmed in memory. "Quelle heure est-il?" ask the characters in *La Ronde*, but it is always too late, and the moment has always passed.

As author of moments like these, as creator of the most impressive synthesis of American film yet written, as a man who single-handedly changed the way we look at movies, and even the canon of films we choose to see, Andrew Sarris early in his career earned his own place in the pantheon of film criticism. □

CAT AND MOUSE, directed by Claude Lelouch.

DEAR DETECTIVE, directed by Philippe De Broca.

WE WILL ALL MEET IN PARADISE, directed by Yves Robert.

Cinema à la mode

STEPHEN HARVEY

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN quite a while, American moviegoers have recently been treated to a varied spate of French imports, all aimed at cultivating the taste for Gallic gaiety which *Cousin Cousine* discovered almost by accident two summers ago. If nothing else, such frothy *divertissements* as *Cat and Mouse*, *Dear Detective*, and *We Will All Meet In Paradise* should serve to disabuse everyone of the notion that the French cinema consists solely of an annual Truffaut charmer, the occasional elegant Chabrol thriller, and the sporadic, austere *chef d'oeuvre* from Robert Bresson.

The fact is, of course, that there, as here, most of the yearly output is devoted to undemanding time-killers made with an eye cocked in the direction of current popular tastes. Even now, what we're seeing is only a fraction of the potboilers that crowd the screens of provincial Odéons and Gaumonts week after week. The great majority are left to unspool at home, on the accurate assumption that we have enough of the native variety ourselves.

Nevertheless, based on what has arrived here lately, a few conclusions can be drawn concerning the ways French filmmakers differ from their opposite numbers in Hollywood when it comes

to giving the local public what it presumably wants. Here much of the usual commercial fodder can be divided into two categories: the apocalyptically grandiose (everything from *The Towering Inferno* through *Star Wars* and *Omens I and II*); and the raucously juvenile (*Saturday Night Fever* and practically every other movie this past spring).

On the other side of the Atlantic, however, the main impulse seems to be to overwhelm moviegoers with charm by lathering everyone on-screen in a creme rinse of geniality. At their best, these movies operate on the admirable assumption that the ticket buyers are actually grown up enough to sit still and watch other adults conduct themselves in a reasonable facsimile of human behavior, without having to be goosed with special effects or cacophonous soundtracks. At their worst, the moviemakers responsible for them are so entranced by their creations that they have made them all smiles and no spine.

CLAUDE LELOUCH, PHILIPPE De Broca, and Yves Robert all share this infatuation with geniality to varying degrees, but they also have considerably more in common than that. All these prolific directors are more or less the contemporaries of the New Wave graduates of the early sixties; yet they've never displayed the intensity of vision one associates with Rohmer or Chabrol, much less the audacity and rigor of the likes of Godard and Resnais. If they resemble anyone, it's Truffaut at his most slapdash and softhearted. Each of their current efforts focuses on the comfortably middle-aged and upper-middle class, whose *luxe* trappings are observed almost entirely without irony. The existence of a younger generation or of any political problems is hinted at only peripherally; at most they're regarded as a minor nuisance, and in the end simply irrelevant to the subject at hand.

Using these basic ground rules, Lelouch's *Cat and Mouse* is unquestionably the most successful. As with such Truffaut films as *Mississippi Mermaid* and *The Bride Wore Black*, it might be defined as a kind of homage to Hitchcock. Reduced to its essentials—no

mean feat considering the intentionally bewildering detours it takes—the plot deals with the purported homicide of a philandering industrialist (Jean-Pierre Aumont) and the simultaneous theft of his Impressionist art collection. The authorities assign their ace inspector (Serge Reggiani) to the case; immediately, the disconsolate widow (Michele Morgan) appears the prime suspect. The investigation proves politically indelicate, and Reggiani is forced into premature retirement; undaunted, he continues the search on his own, prompted by professional curiosity and his attraction to Morgan, although his belief in her guilt remains unshaken to (almost) the end.

Everything is resolved rather neatly at the finish, yet I'll wager that many people are still likely to stumble out shaking their heads with bemusement, distracted by all of Lelouch's fancy filigree work along the way. Red herrings, flashbacks both "real" and conjectured, and satirical snippets of heist flicks within the film casually segue into a bewildering network of subplots, both amorous and humorous. This welter of narrative is presented via Lelouch's usual array of visual pyrotechnics—here he's particularly fond of subjective camera shots, climaxing in a freewheeling car and motorcycle race from the Arc de Triomphe to Morgan's opulent suburban villa.

Miraculously, Lelouch's control never falters; as with all skillful whodunits, *Cat and Mouse* is so divertingly intricate that one neither notices nor cares how essentially trivial it is until after the final fadeout.

Best of all, at the center of the hubbub Lelouch sketches the developing rapport between Reggiani and Morgan with a firm yet leisurely hand, which grants the film just the focus it needs. In movies from *A Man and A Woman* through *Another Man, Another Chance*, he has proclaimed the truism that fate conspires to unite the unlikely of couples, and embellished it with sentiments best left to the House of Hallmark. Here the romance is unforced and rather matter-of-fact, and the restraint he's finally mustered makes the crucial difference. He's aided immeasurably by the low-keyed skill of his costars—Reggiani's rumpled wryness beautifully complements the introverted warmth Morgan has exuded so effortlessly ever since she debuted in *Port of Shadows* 40 years ago.

But whether intended as a tribute or not, *Cat and Mouse* isn't really on a par

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