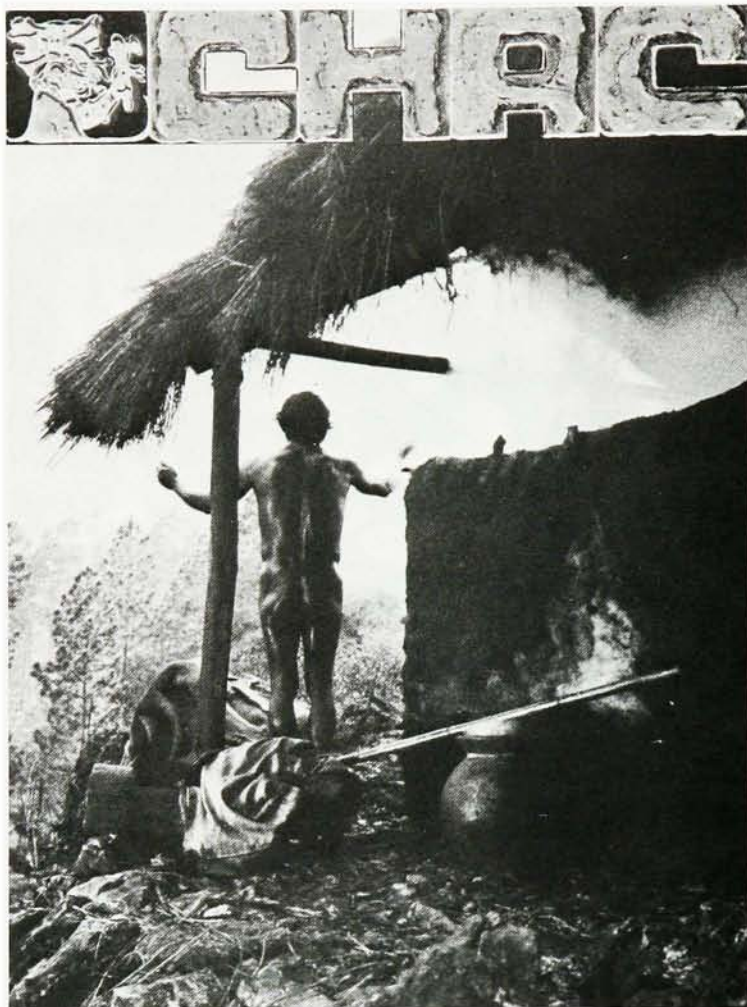


cannes



crumbs

From "Chac"

Filmercrumbs from Cannes

This is the leftover article: the one about films or film areas not covered by either Len Klady or Marc Gervais, and tailored for voracious readers with eclectic taste.

A festival as huge as Cannes allows people to watch scores of movies in or out of competition and wind up with completely divergent views of what it was all about depending on the batch of films they happened to see. Most journalists end their two weeks with frantic searches for a Theme to make sense of this annual madness descending on paradisaical Cannes. So it goes. . . .

The most prevalent phenomena among critics consisted of complaining that there weren't any films worth seeing while spending hours discussing movies with plots like: Stud meets Nymphomaniac with trucksfull of Violence dumped between couplings. Such films are considered Meaningful Statements on Twentieth Century Western Society. Soon, they will replace the "No Smoking" signs with ones requesting audiences to deposit their hearts and minds outside theatres.

Lacking the peculiar insight necessary for appreciating such serious cinema, I nonetheless saw many fascinating, strange, beautiful and exciting films. Some of the most vibrant coming from the "Third World", which still reflects a human contact with life painfully lacking in many western films. From Brazil, *O Amuleto de Ogum* opens with three thugs attacking a blind singer who starts telling a story to save his life. The ballad follows a young man's exploits from the poverty of his village through a gang of hired killers, through becoming a folk-hero (for his immunity to bullets), through joining a spiritual community in Brazil's jungles, to returning to confront crime and corruption, through death, and finally

to resurrection! When the story ends, the thugs resume their brutal attack only to be successfully fought off by the blind troubadour who goes on his way singing, "Those who wish, may learn from my story . . .".

Reminiscent of Jamaica's excellent *The Harder They Come* in fast pacing and pulse, *Amuleto's* flavour is distinctly Brazilian. When asked whether his film was a popular success, the director replied, "Until recently, you still had to wear a black tie to go to the cinemas in Brazil — and this in a country where 90% of the population has no shoes!"

Another Latin American feature depicting the confrontation between native culture and Western pressures was Mexico's *No oyes ladrar a los perros?* (Don't you hear the dogs barking?) A Chamulas Indian is carrying his son through the mountain villages looking for a doctor to save the boy's life. To keep him conscious, the father teaches his son the basic truths handed down by the Mayans while the life the boy would have had as an Indian in a major city is intercut. Past and future tenses, fantasies, legends and delirium, traditional Indian life and the squalor in Mexico's major cities are all skilfully woven in this challenging film.

A deeper insight into Mayan traditions is presented in Rolando Klein's fictional feature, *Chac — A Prayer for Rain* (Chac being the Mayan god of rain). Klein lived in the Mayan village of Tenejapa for several months before bringing in his film crew, and all the roles are played by the Tzeltal Indians themselves. The result is a beautiful, fascinating film creating reality from within the Mayan's esoteric heritage. The themes of the story are universal, highly dramatic and so believable that I broke into tears during the climactic ending. There have been very favourable responses around the world

to **Chac**, and it has played in several festivals already, so there is a good chance that one of these days it will get to Canada. (Note of caution: some of the most wonderful films I saw in 1973 at Cannes have not yet made it to North America. For a detailed and slightly despairing look at why this happens, please refer to Gervais' article in this issue.)

This year, a new section was added to the festival — joining the Official Competition, Critics' Week, Directors' Fortnight and the overwhelming Marketplace was *Les Yeux Fertiles* for features combining other art forms with cinema. (For avid filmfreaks — novels, music, dance, painting, opera and poetry are also considered 'art').

The most terrifying in this series was Christopher Miles' **The Maids**, based on Jean Genet's play and part of the American Film Theatre's new season. Sussannah York and Glenda Jackson masterfully portray Genet's world — descending to the vilest regions of our humanness to rise to our highest and most beautiful aspects — pure metaphysics of the soul. Our dark sides were chillingly revealed with an intensity worthy of Genet, proving that cinema does not have to be labeled "entertaining" to be valuable.

One of two films focussing on dance was François Weyergan's **Je t'aime tu dances**. Internationally acclaimed choreographer Maurice Béjart was filmed while working out a *pas de deux* based on Tristan and Isolde with ballerina Rita Poelvoorde. The finished dance is never shown, since this is basically a love ode about artists at work. Three themes unfold during the course of the film — the film itself, the dance and the dancers' love for each other (*pas de deux* being the most intimate form of dance). Combined, they make **Je t'aime tu dances** a loving, inside look at the process of creation.

The other dance film was Russia's **Anna Karenina**, directed by Margarita Pilikhila and starring Maya Plissetskaia and the magnificent Bolshoi Ballet. The choreography was often so breathtakingly executed as to evoke spontaneous applause and the musical score brilliantly underlined this treatment of Tolstoi's epic of passion: A visual feast marred only by the low quality lenses causing most wide shots to seem fuzzy compared to the sharp close ups.

Described by Marguerite Duras as being about her obsession with a character and with death, **India Song** centred around a mysterious woman (played by Delphine Seyrig) who is slowly and systematically being poisoned by a nebulous force seeping into her being. The pacing is painfully slow until one lets the theme song and thick ambience envelop and embrace the senses to float in Duras' subtle, haunting and ambiguous realities. The overall effect is mesmerising, and disturbingly beautiful.

Delphine Seyrig (who I'm becoming a hopeless fan of) portrayed yet another fascinating woman in Liliane de Kermadec's **Aloïse**. The film is based on a woman who spent most of her life in an insane asylum after suffering a complete breakdown during the First World War. Aloïse subsequently became famous for her painting and poetry, and although she died in the late sixties, her work is still widely exhibited in Europe. The film explores both her character and artistry while playing around the hairline dividing sensitivity and insanity. The portrait includes studies of her painting, as well as her poetry — "Doctors discovered the virus of love. They put the blindfolded infant in a jar and the Greeks frowned to see their bottled-up Eros . . .".

Although previously mentioned (see Gervais' article), Joan Micklin Silver's **Hester Street** starring Carol Kane deserves another word of praise mainly because it's one of those lovely, unpretentiously human films everyone needs to see once in awhile. (Especially during marathon festivals . . .). Adapted from a turn-of-the-century novel and gently probing the difficulties so many immigrants encountered with culture shock, this film is not only relevant to Canadians, it will actually be shown here — at least at this year's Filmexpo in Ottawa. Isn't that wonderful?

In a completely different vein but sharing in gentle humour was **Take it like a Man, Ma'am** from Denmark. Among its notable achievements is a section which finally explains the intricacies of those "trivial" sexist slurs women have often complained about — this was done by keeping our societal structures and realities intact but switching the sexes around. Thus, women executives take male secretaries to nightclubs where men perform stripteases, men spend hours adjusting fake hairpieces on their chests, women go to work carrying attaché cases while men hurry home with shopping bags to make dinner. . . . It's hilarious, well done, and has been playing quite successfully in Copenhagen — a Box Office Hit, no less — all of which should result in **Take it Like a Man, Ma'am** getting picked up by the North American market fairly soon.

(Have you noticed that the last five features were all directed by women? Nobody at the Festival did, either. These films weren't treated as Movies by Women Directors — just as movies. . . . Sigh. . . . Isn't that the way it should be?)

While on this wonderful subject (which shall remain nameless) another observation: my favourite post-women's-liberation-bonus is that women have regained their quality of mystery in films and have become far more interesting and believable than in their bad old days not so long ago. . . .

Which brings up an interesting bistro-discussion — it's getting high time for men to explore their own roles (and thus to change them). We've all become familiar with the quiet desperation of women — trapped in loveless marriages, alienated from their children, isolated in the ever-settling dust of dead dreams cluttering up sterile lives — but what about their husbands? Isn't it time to look at life as most men live it — becoming paycheques by age 30, supporting wives and children they neither love nor know through jobs they detest but are afraid to leave, surrounded by acquaintances who rarely become friends? So much has changed for women since we looked at our lives and decided to start changing the rules. The pain of self-discovery not only produces fine cinema but is offset by new horizons. How about it, guys?

Jumpcut: Being Canadian, I naturally side with the underdog, and since there are far more women than Canadians (except at Cannes) here are some equally foot-in-mouth observations about our species:

It was a great year for us — everyone was riding high! Journalists were OD-ing on films, businessmen were dancing down the dollars, directors were glowing in limelight, and "Cinema Canada" parties were the Best. Add to that Michel Brault's triumph of winning the Best Director Award and you can begin to comprehend Canadian jubilation levels at Cannes.

But being Canadian also means being cautious when everyone else is screaming Yay Team. . . . Both Klady and Gervais voice the seeping fears of many of us — with Québécois films experiencing major artistic and economic crises and Canadians doing well on genre and gringo-style products — where is our own cinema emerging? And how?

Favourite Possibility for Survival: we have to start developing each other's countries for our films. That means everything from reversing the propaganda in our schools and mass media to immediately and automatically subtitling or dubbing ALL CFDC-financed films to ensuring quotas and levies in every province to seriously starting to believe that we have something to say to ourselves and to each other.

Movie addicts in Cannes can't save our cinema. If Québécois won't watch indigenous Canadian films and Canadians won't watch indigenous Québécois films — who will?

And on that unusually cautious (for me) note, please note that there are only 302 days left until next year's Cannes Film Festival.

—A. Ibranyi-Kiss