

"Jesus!", and Olivier's explanation for the turnstile outside his wife's bedroom: "One way or another, one always pays to get in." The piece of resistance, however, was Michael Caine's line, "I screwed her first." Similarly in *SLEEPER*, ABC permitted "cosmic screwing." As far as I know, no network previously has allowed "screw" in these contexts. Then again, ABC also allowed "orgasmatron," "nymphomaniacs," "My brain—it's my second favorite organ," several humorous references to frigidity and impotence, and most of the other jokes about sex to remain in *SLEEPER*.

Unfortunately, this liberalization is very tentative, and as inconsistent as everything else regarding censorship. And while highly-paid executives spend hours debating over every "son of a bitch," they permit a variety of risqué jokes, double entendres, and outright vulgarities on talk shows, soap operas, game shows, and Norman Lear comedies—programs that in fact depend largely upon daring language to build up ratings. A typical question on *Match Game*: "Arnold says, 'My wife looks like she was painted by Picasso. Both of her (blanks) are on the same side.'" Answer by four panelists: "Boobs"—a word that would automatically be cut out of a film.

Almost any segment of NBC's *Saturday Night* also contains such material: for instance, a skit in which Buck Henry as a lonely Lindbergh reads a dirty magazine, causing his hand to move rapidly under the frame line and the plane to shake, as a narrator says that Lindbergh's activity "jerked the plane off course." ABC's new series *Soap* is expected to have dialogue that even relatively liberal ABC wouldn't allow in films. Commercials, which rule TV, are of course permitted to have lines like the one in the razor ad: "I got stroked this morning."

Perhaps, as Michael Ritchie believes, networks are stricter with movies largely because film showings are one-shot affairs and not ongoing network ratings builders. In any case, as long as networks continue censoring films, if they really had integrity they wouldn't buy ones that depend heavily upon strong language (or sex, nudity, and violence). Films like *THE LAST DETAIL* and *MEAN STREETS* derive a substantial portion of their meanings from the language, and make little or no sense on TV; and in most of the other films I've mentioned, explicit dialogue is important at least for character and atmosphere. I doubt that anyone, including a child, would become at all damaged by hearing "God-damn," or even "fuck," on TV. There is no doubt, however, that the policy of changing or removing words, using out-takes, and otherwise re-editing sequences is extremely damaging to a film's artistic integrity. ❄️



## HERZOG IN BERLIN

by Amos Vogel

Since independent cinema is international—profound observation!—let us glance at this year's 27th Berlin International Film Festival, where a significant face-lift has taken place. Berlin itself remains a metropolitan center brutally cut in two by the infamous Wall. Two entirely different worlds live in intimate, hostile embrace articulated by this deadly concentration of anti-personnel traps, electrified barbed wire, a border control system difficult to stomach. West Berlin is actually an incarcerated enclave, hemmed in on all four sides by the Wall. Nevertheless, it glitters uneasily in the splendors of a (now stagnating, demographically aging) consumer society, a strange, almost twenty-first century Century city (in terms of architecture and futuristic satellite highrise cities as its new suburbs), a city that was almost seventy percent destroyed by 1945 and now sports huge glass buildings, wide boulevards, and streets that carry the same famous names as during the Weimar Republic but bear absolutely no relationship to them.

In June, Berlin's Champs Elyssée, the elegant and fairly wild Kurfuerstendamm (with its myriad of restaurants, vendors, whores, street cafes, pavement painters, and a new Buergerking) suddenly is infiltrated by several thousand film journalists, professionals, hangers-on, agents, TV representatives, students, and burghers who attend the Festival.

The Festival has changed. For the first time this year, the director is Wolf Donner, respected German film critic of a major paper who is moving the main event in the direction of greater quality and has added several new information series and retrospectives; welcome and necessary improvements.

But the Festival consists also of Ulrich and Erika Gregor's International Forum of Young Film; for cinéastes, an indispensable, equally important "festival within the festival." Started as a direct consequence of the events of the Sixties, it annually provides an unsurpassed cross-section of the less commercial,

more committed type of films from literally the entire world, ranging from fiction to politics and avant-garde. Their program notes are models of scholarship, their audiences predominantly young Germans, light-years away from Hitler, whose discussions with visiting directors fill American visitors with jealousy at their seriousness, knowledge, and lack of cynicism. Where else but at the Forum (with six different programs a day at three different locations) could one, within one week, see the latest works of important directors from Turkey, Peru, Iran, Senegal, Mexico, the Philippines, Mauretania, as well as from the Western countries?

Judging by Berlin's voluminous display of independent films, social concern and social criticism today are their predominant characteristics. The innocent "entertainment" film (never innocent, of course) has disappeared. Instead, problems of self, relations to others, sexual



The "last survivor" from *LA SOUFRIERE*.

identity, social exploitation, the efforts of their world countries, the dangers of war and of the despoliation of nature, the recording of failed or successful rebellions, the realities of poverty and alienation: these are the themes. If one finds them boring, one can always return to *JAWS* and *THE EXORCIST*, those marvelous paradigms of our society.

The term "Independent Cinema" must be used flexibly. Given the realities of international production, it includes not only self-financed works, but also those which—though at times financed by public subsidies or TV—are characterized by the filmmakers control over his work and absence of thematic or stylistic compromise. A few names stand out, in success, or, in one surprising case, in failure; Godard, Herzog, Bres-

son, Export (Austria), Taviani (Italy), Kopple, Gueney (Turkey), Sembène (Senegal).

Godard, one of the greatest avant-gardists of international cinema, provides an important surprise; far from being "washed up" (as feared even by many of his devoted followers unable to accept the muddles of his Dziga Vertov period), bounces back with *ICI ET AILLEURS*. To learn to see; to learn to connect; that is his intention. Ideologically still dogmatic, it is intellectually and aesthetically his most stimulating recent work (more so than *NUMERO DEUX*). Strongly reminiscent of his experiments in visual/aural dialectics in *GAI SAVOIR*, it raises them to an even higher level of sophistication: a cascade of exploding paradoxes and contrasts, a most revolutionary use of images, sound, and montage in counterpoint, delivered at staccato speed, with didactic/propagandistic intent; a master in complete

the peak of his creative life, Herzog is a person who will not compromise, who deliberately remains "unclassifiable," hence attackable by those who must classify. His profound creative and human commitments are finally, after more than ten works, becoming apparent even to his earlier detractors. The peerless, steely, inexorable depth and infinite seriousness of this proud and somber archeologist, his painful and compulsive exploration of the boundaries of the human condition (and how to go beyond them) already assure him a unique position in film history.

*LA SOUFRIÈRE*, a thirty-minute "documentary" of what occurred in Guadeloupe in 1976 during the internationally predicted volcanic eruption (which led to the sudden mass evacuation of its populace) is still another of his masterpieces. Having read in a newspaper that one inhabitant refused to leave though faced with certain death, Herzog within one

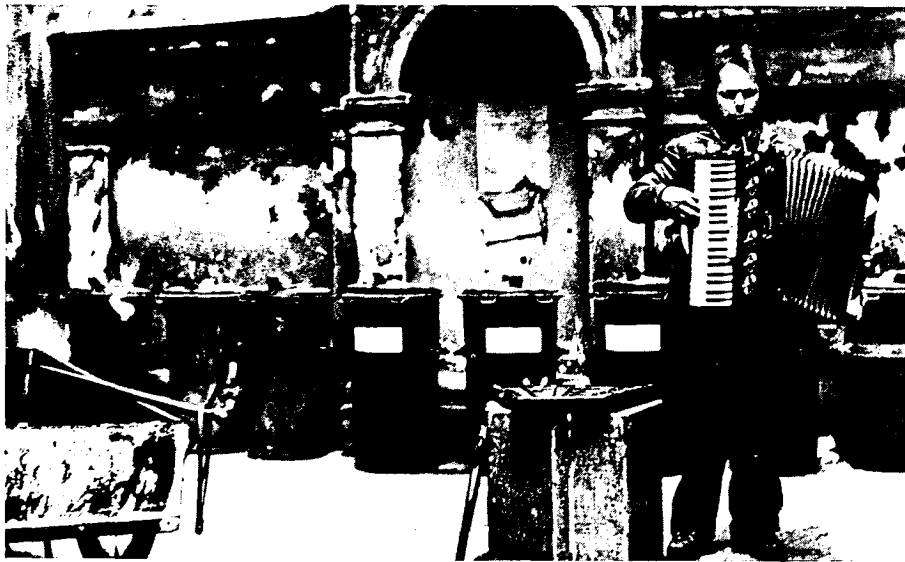
razor's edge, to the brutal extremes and mysteries of the human condition. He specifically welcomes the absence of the police, the presence of turned-on TV sets, the ghostlike houses; he dutifully takes their "last photographs"; he tells of a previous volcanic catastrophe on the island during which everyone was killed "except" (and he shows us a faded photograph) "the most evil man in town"; he survived in his heavily fortified underground prison—only to become a circus attraction afterwards.

Herzog's tense, "objective" narration—actually filled with beautifully unexpected twists and baleful phrases ends with a rather unforgettable line typical of him in its devilish, surreal simplicity; "This, then, is a report about an inescapable catastrophe that did not take place." And, one should add, a not-so-tongue-in-cheek comment on science and civilization: a group of international scientists had confirmed the impending event, then hurriedly departed; never before had all meteorological signs so uniformly predicted a huge explosion without it then actually taking place. For the new outsiders and anarchists of our day, this kind of metaphysics (slipped in gleefully and without mercy) may be just what is needed to counteract the somewhat soiled yet still triumphant ideology of technology and rationalism. To reveal a metaphysical element in life or art without becoming a reactionary is one of the challenges of the day: and Herzog, compulsively, and whenever possible, rubs salt into this particular, festering wound.

There are no interviews with those who had been evacuated; Herzog is interested only in those "who stay." He examines the Holy Fool in *SIGNS OF LIFE*, *STROSZEK*, *AGUIRRE*, *WRATH OF GOD*, *FATA MORGANA*, *THE GREAT ECSTASY OF THE SCULPTOR STEINER*, *EVERYONE FOR HIMSELF AND GOD AGAINST ALL*, *LAST WORDS*—the person considered a fool because outsider and eccentric, the one who dares more than any human should, and who is therefore—and this is why Herzog is fascinated by him—closer to possible sources of deeper truth though not necessarily capable of reaching them.

Herzog's cinematic mastery, significantly, lies not in flashy techniques but in the reverberations his deceptively effortless style and thematics set up in us; in his impeccable timing, his choice of radically offbeat subject matter in the guise of showing us skiers, auctioneers, volcanoes, dwarfs, mysterious foundlings, eccentrics in African deserts. There is no doubt that precisely in these extreme situations and characters does Herzog intuit a possibility of illuminating the nature of our condition.

(*ICI ET AILLEURS* not yet in distribution; *LA SOUFRIÈRE* available from New Yorker Films, 43 West 61 Street, New York City 10023)



Bruno S. In *STROSZEK*.

control of all technological and aesthetic tools at his disposal. Arab guerilla revolutionaries intercut with a France sedated by television; repetition of images, blank frames, Godard's machine-gun voice, brutal visual transitions, caligraphic runs, flicker effects, political wipes create a verbal/visual structure that veers between genius and pretension and constitutes one of the most advanced current examples of avant-garde political cinema, so talmudically cerebral that its political efficacy for its intended audience remains in doubt. Those concerned with film theory, linguistics, structuralism, and a genius's painful struggle to create a new type of political film will be fascinated.

Represented in Berlin by several of his works is the magisterial Werner Herzog, the most important director now working in Germany. One of the great film talents of our time, not even at

day gathered and brought an international crew to the island after the populace had already been evacuated: a rather "full" commitment on the part of a filmmaker. This straining beyond permissible limits, this search for a deeper truth (here looked for in the man who stayed behind) is expressed ever more openly in all of Herzog's work (see his masterful *STROSZEK*). He finds and shows us an entire city abandoned; packs of wild dogs have taken over the empty streets—the new masters. No one is left, but the traffic lights are on; never has the red signal looked more ominous. The man who remained behind is found; a poor black, he talks and sings to us, he tells us with a complicated smile that death and life are eternal; all get it; and he has no fear. The volcano belches smoke but fails to explode; hordes of dead snakes lie drowned and tangled in the harbor's water; and Herzog once again exposes himself, as if on a