

**Movies**

**'The Censor Always Loses'**

By AMOS VOGEL, Director of the New York Film Festival at Lincoln Center

**H**ELPING select entries for an international film festival can be unexpectedly rewarding and frustrating. During long sessions in dank projection rooms in the world's most beautiful cities, seeing the best and the worst, one becomes an instant expert on complex political problems in Sarajevo, an archeologist in Peru, a frustrated voyeur be-leaguered by sun-kissed nude bathing scenes and intricate rapes.

One also becomes aware just how inevitable and losing is the battle that censors wage on artists. Since it is the duty of the censor to conserve and that of the artist to go beyond, the censor is forever lagging behind the artist. The censor is always shocked by still further "descents into immorality" and political unorthodoxy, disregarding the historical fact that yesterday's outrage is to-

day's cliché and that all areas of human endeavor are ever being freed of taboos.

Political censorship is universal and seems to operate equally perniciously under all systems. There are Russian films by young filmmakers that no one outside Russia has ever seen; Americans may not see the anti-American propaganda films from China, Cuba, Albania or East Germany; citizens of Eastern European countries are prevented from viewing Western productions; Arabs may not see Israeli films, and Israelis, until recently, could not see German ones; France did not permit "The Battle of Algiers" to be shown and still prohibits the student riot films (clandestine works, apparently shot by Godard, Resnais and Marker), though New Yorkers may see them at the sixth New York Film Festival, which starts Tuesday at Lincoln Center. American experimental films

sent to festivals abroad have been confiscated upon return here; and Swedes can see sex films, but not films of violence. Direct political suppression of films is rather rare now, and this is partly because such censorship occurs prior to production—by the mere withholding of private financing in the West, or of State financing in the East.

Recent events in Prague presage the possible end of the Czech film renaissance—through outright repression, subtle censorship or the emigration of the leading directors (the majority of whom are presently abroad awaiting further developments). Milos Forman's newest film, "The Firemen's Ball," drew fire from the conservatives, since beneath the movie's robust humor lurks a sardonic criticism of the petty-bourgeois. Forman is now in Paris. Another festival entry, Jan Nemeč's brilliant "Report on the Party and the Guests," is a subtle, universal metaphor on human conduct under a repressive system, peopled by cowards, collaborators, sycophants, and rebels. Courageously enacted by leading Prague artists and intellectuals, it was immediately banned in 1966 and only recently released. Nemeč is safe in Paris; his film, sold to an American company, can no longer be "recalled" by Prague and has thus become part of film history. And the bittersweet, sensual, nostalgic opening night selection of this year's festival, "Capricious Summer," directed by Jiri Menzel, of "Closely Watched Trains" fame, may also be viewed as a symptomatic reaction to harsh political realities, suffused with the lush colors of a Renoir and the gentle, compassionate pessimism of the director. Menzel recently departed for Austria.

Outright suppression of a film for religious reasons is rare nowadays; yet it occurred in de Gaulle's France, when Jacques Rivette's recreation of Diderot's famed anti-

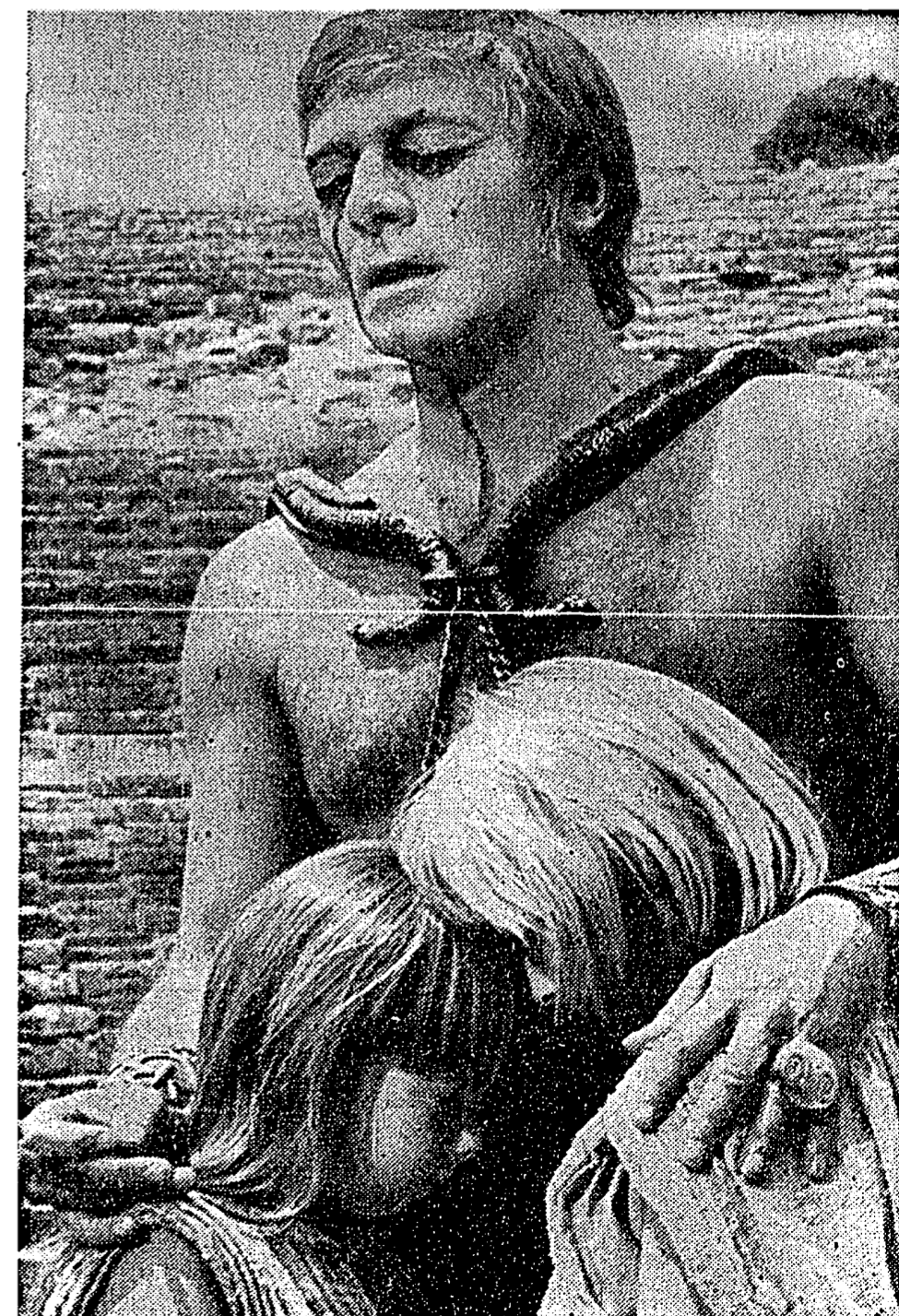
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**"CAPRICIOUS SUMMER"**—Jana Drchalova, a carnival girl, has a disappointing romance with Vlastimil Brodsky, a retired army major who is out to prove himself a great lover. Jiri Menzel's Czech movie—his first since "Closely Watched Trains"—will open the 6th New York Film Festival at Lincoln Center Tuesday.



**"LA RELIGIEUSE"**—Anna Karina, a tormented nun, tells a priest she wishes to leave the convent. Jacques Rivette's film, once banned by the French Government, will be shown next Saturday at the festival.



**"OEDIPUS THE KING"**—The blinded Christopher Plummer bids an anguished farewell to his daughters in the adaptation of Sophocles' tragedy. It opens Wednesday at the Kips Bay. Lilli Palmer is Jocasta.

# In Art, 'The Censor Always Loses'

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clerical novel "La Religieuse" was banned. Only the insistent protests of European intellectuals and critics finally induced Malraux to lift the ban, giving us the opportunity to see it at this year's New York Film Festival.

Sex, of course, remains the most sensitive area. In Germany, a recent scandal involved Helmut Costard's film "Especially Valuable," a "pornographic" attack on a reactionary new film law. Already a landmark in boldness and crudity, the film was selected for the 1968 Oberhausen International Short Film Festival by a committee of leading German critics, then banned by the social-democratic city government, causing the withdrawal of almost all German directors from the festival.

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We Americans are protected by ancient customs regulations from "insidious" foreign influences. While we may see American nudes, we may not see Swedish ones. Vilgot Sjöman's "I Am Curious-Yellow," a cinema verite-psychodrama of a young girl's coming of age, political-

ly and sexually, in today's Sweden, was confiscated by the United States Customs Service upon arrival and is winding its way to the Supreme Court. This utterly serious work by a well-known director ("My Sister, My Love" and "491") contains graphic, at times, humorous, scenes of sexual intercourse.

The conquest of this final taboo is an undeniable goal in film art today; and the evolution of filmic conventions in the sexual area indicates the censor's unenviable task. We have come a long way from love scenes with discreet cut-aways to sunsets, nature scenes and, later, the more "daring" use of wildly waving bushes, gushing waters, virginal flowers bending under wind thrusts. Today's love scenes involve nudity, motion and rather vigorous sound.

The treatment of sexual deviation in film has also changed. A few years ago, the delicate homosexual ambiguities of Autant-Lara's "This Special Friendship" were as far as filmmakers dared to go; since then, we have had the middle-brow cause celebre "The Fox,"

carefully tailored to lure some and not shock others too profoundly. But Warhol's icy dissertations, Genet's beautiful "Un Chant D'Amour" (legally unshowable in America), and Chabrol's sensual "Les Biches" make "The Fox" look like a nursery tale.

It is the far greater freedom available to contemporary literature and theater which is accelerating developments in cinema. In the case of "I Am Curious-Yellow," we have the unprecedented spectacle of a film under litigation for obscenity while its full script, accompanied by copious stills, is freely on sale as a paperback. And however "daring" this film or "Chant D'Amour," they do not go beyond William Burrough's novel "Naked Lunch," Rochelle Owens's play "Futz," Lenore Kandel's "The Love Book" or Larry Rivers's construction "Lamp Man Loves It." The relative "backwardness" of cinema may be due to the greater potency of visuals and hence the greater fear provoked among guardians of morality. (This is probably why pornographic books are now publicly available while porno-

graphic stills and motion pictures are not.) But the Underground, "Blow-Up," the nudists with their now entirely unretouched film, Emswiller and Brakhage, "The Silence" and "A Stranger Knocks" have set the stage, with a vengeance, for cinema's coming of age.

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Three of the American films at this year's festival point the trend: James Broughton's best work, "The Bed," in which a nude cast, including leading West Coast artists, playfully enacts a vision of the human comedy; Norman Mailer's controversial "Beyond The Law," a sardonic comment on violence in a not necessarily fabricated metropolitan police station, which unleashes a barrage of artistically valid verbal obscenities unprecedented in frankness; and John Cassavetes' "Faces," an extraordinary, painfully honest examination of middle-aged sexuality, in which clumsiness, lust, and failure of communication are portrayed as inevitable components of sex.

But the rapid liberalization of sexual mores in an otherwise not noticeably freer so-

ciety may indeed be partly suspect; much evidence points to an increase in mechanical sexuality at the expense of eroticism, growing commercialization of sex in the guise of sexual freedom, and the availability of instant, guiltless sex to help insure the smooth functioning of society. Significantly, American films have simultaneously grown increasingly apolitical and less concerned with moral issues.

Nevertheless, the basic questions remain: Is the portrayal of nudity, love, or radical ideas damaging to anyone? Must we apologize for sex in art by discovering socio-political justifications for it? And may not the elimination of all social, sexual, political, and religious taboos be one of the indices marking the end of mankind's prehistory?

"LE VIOL" — Bibi Andersson yields to the advances of her captor, Bruno Cremer, in the French film, Thursday at the Cinema Rendezvous.

