

## Films: Fashion of the Fashionable

By AMOS VOGEL Director, New York Film Festival

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THE striking success of Lincoln Center's New York Film Festival reflects and itself contributes to a new cultural phenomenon: the belated official acceptance of film as serious, though not necessarily solemn, art. Long designated as "entertainment" by foe and friend, this most modern of all the arts has finally become the passion of the young, the challenge of the intellectuals, the fashion of the fashionable.

The most significant revelation of the first two New York festivals has been the presence and informed loyalty of this new, predominantly young audience. It is not a Times Square film audience; it does not hanker after bikini-clad starlets; it fails to be excited by the ordinary. Instead, passionate, opinionated and vociferous, it testifies at the Festival to its commitments by applause, hisses and unswerving presence.

### Those Who Care

These are the people who discuss film at their parties, read the new film magazines, loyally attend art and repertory theaters and are often found at the more specialized museum showings or midnight conclaves. Together with the Festival organizers, they share a concern with the new metaphors, instrumentalities and preoccupations of modern cinema.

Welcome or not, film has joined 20th-century art. With most of the serious contemporary directors, realism and the simple narrative cinema are on their way out. Artists and poets are invading the medium, seducing the financiers with their Arabian fantasies and, as is their wont, playing havoc with long-established, not-so-eternal truths. How else explain the growing pre-eminence in commercial cinema of experimental, semi-surrealist, neo-dadaist, existentialist, absurd, improvised works such as "A Hard Day's Night," "The Silence," "What's New Pussycat?," "The Knack," "8½," "Woman in the Dunes," "Red Desert," "The Trial," "Dr. Strangelove," "Alphaville," "Help!," "Before the Revolution," "Repulsion," "Mickey One."

### Still Searching

These spiritual children of "L'Avventura," "Breathless," "Hiroshima Mon Amour" testify to a stylistic, thematic, technological and ideological liberation of film from 19th-century art. Realistic narrative structures, clearly defined plots and characters are increasingly displaced by visual ambiguity, poetic complexity, restless improvisation. Editing is explosive, elliptic, unpredictable; camera movements are frequent, free, fluid; time and space are telescoped or destroyed; memory, reality and illusion are fused until, in a flash of frightful revelation, we realize that the totality of these uncertainties and discontinuities reflects nothing less than the modern world view in philosophy (existentialism), physics (relativity, indeterminacy, quantum theory), psychology (the subconscious, myth, dream) and art (Beckett, Ionesco, Artaud, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet, Rauschenberg, Rivers, Johns).

Thematically, the simplifications of the neo-realists have been left behind, but not concern with the human condition. Sexual titillation is displaced by an increasing acceptance of eroticism, and tragedy as well as comedy has become casual, neither heroic nor sidesplitting. Far from having withdrawn into empty estheticism, these are the "committed" artists of the 60's, themselves anguished configurations of the



Anna Karina shields Eddie Constantine from a strange menace in Jean-Luc Godard's "Alphaville." The new French import will open the third annual New York Film Festival on Tuesday night at Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall.

alienation and deeper wisdom they portray. The simple answers of the 1930's are behind them. Instead, and on a higher plane, they have returned to the questions. Ultimately, the message of absurd art is that we must first realize our personal and societal absurdity before we can transcend it.

It is the aim of the Festival to reflect these international trends in a cross-section, not of the largest and most commercial, but of the most interesting new works, carefully selected from the other festivals. Unencumbered by the usual box office considerations, its function is to act as a catalyst and witness. It reveals (and discusses, in accompanying symposia) new trends as they occur, accelerating their assimilation by American critics, film artists and audiences.

### On the Ball

It frequently presents films long before they would otherwise have been imported and many the trade would fail to import. (T.V. inroads, mounting costs, new exhibition patterns, insufficient critical support are seriously limiting art film exhibition in America, except for Sophia Loren and luscious sex films).

Realist and avant-garde, East and West, \$10,000 feature and million-dollar production, the newest films and classics never or not recently seen here—it is the very nature of the New York Film Festival to present a diversity of styles and approaches and to "cohere" solely in terms of filmic quality and originality. It does not claim to present an unbroken succession of masterpieces (an impossibility in any art) but rather strikes a coldly objective balance between mature achievement and what seems most capable of growth.

On this exalted, adventurous plane, the Festival perpetuates its errors and, hopefully, its triumphs, thereby providing the mysterious satisfactions of art, the strange delight of truth parading as illusion, created within a white rectangular space by pure light and strips of celluloid.