



MARIA MONTEZ – the Dominican-born “Queen of Technicolor,” Universal Studios’ biggest moneymaker during World War II. No other person went so far to delineate the difference between a screen appearance and a stage performance. As a result, she has been called the most interesting image ever captured on film. Nevertheless, when working with auteur directors and called upon to “act,” she proved she could: notably in **THE EXILE** (Max Ophuls), **PORTRAIT OF AN ASSASSIN** (Orson Welles), and **THE THIEF OF VENICE** (John Brahm). She just didn’t think acting in movies was the best idea.

ESSAYS

Disputing the Canon of American
Dramatic “Literature”

Deco-dense on the Tamsui

Maria Montez: Anima of an
Antediluvian World

Methodology in Andy Warhol’s Cinema

GORDON SCOTT: THE BEST MOVIE
TARZAN DIES AT 80

VOLUME XIII NUMBER 49 FEBRUARY 1997



NTQ

NEW
THEATRE
QUARTERLY

49

ACTIVISM AND ART IN
THE WORK OF 7:84 (ENGLAND)

BERRY AND RODENBURG
ON FEMINISM AND THE VOICE

WAJDA'S HAMLET
IN THE SOLIDARITY YEAR

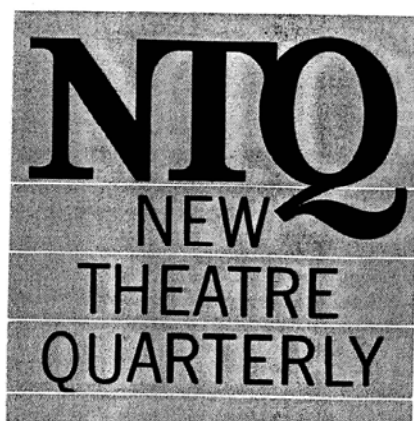
DISPUTING THE
AMERICAN CANON

BERNARD-MARIE KOLTES
CHECKLIST AND ANALYSIS

EMMA LYONS, ARCHEOLOGY
AND THE ATTITUDE

PRAGMATISM AND POLITICS IN
EDITING SHAKESPEARE

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Contents

- | | | |
|--|-----------|---|
| VOLKER SCHACHENMAYR | 3 | Emma Lyon, the 'Attitude',
and Goethean Performance Theory
<i>art, archeology, and the dramaturgy of the living picture</i> |
| RONALD TAVEL | 18 | Disputing the Canon of American Dramatic 'Literature'
<i>pithy ridicule from the founder of the Theatre of the Ridiculous</i> |
| NADINE HOLDSWORTH | 29 | Good Nights Out: Activating the Audience
with 7:84 (England)
<i>politicizing theatre in the changing climate of the 'eighties</i> |
| GABRIEL EGAN | 41 | Myths and Enabling Fictions of 'Origin'
in the Editing of Shakespeare
<i>continuing the debate on the politics of editing Elizabethan texts</i> |
| CICELY BERRY
PATSY RODENBURG
AND KRISTIN LINKLATER | 48 | Shakespeare, Feminism, and Voice:
Responses to Sarah Werner
<i>three leading voice teachers take the offensive</i> |
| TONY HOWARD | 53 | Behind the Arras, though the Wall:
Wajda's Hamlet in Krakow, 1989
<i>a memorable female Hamlet under martial law – and beyond</i> |
| DAVID BRADBY | 69 | Bernard-Marie Koltès:
Chronology, Contexts, Connections
<i>first full English analysis of the major French playwright's life and work</i> |
| | 91 | NTQ Book Reviews
<i>edited by Maggie Gale</i> |

Ronald Tavel

Disputing the Canon of American Dramatic 'Literature'

In this article, Ronald Tavel argues that the commercial American theatre, endorsed by the American educational system and theatrical establishment, has never nurtured a vision of the scripted play as art – and has consequently produced no single example of it. The nation's genuine playwrights who saw their tasks as makers of art have, he claims, been neglected throughout American history, and left to wither in the wings. In the 1960s, Ronald Tavel founded and named the still-extant Theatre of The Ridiculous, and has written forty produced plays, a number of which have been translated into a dozen languages and staged in four continents. He has written and directed thirteen films for Andy Warhol: ten of these have recently been restored for international distribution by the New York Museum of Modern Art, and all are to be collected for publication later this year by Sun and Moon Press, Los Angeles. Ronald Tavel lives in Taipei, but is currently teaching a course on Warhol and the filmmaker-architect Jack Smith at the Art Centre College of Design in California. The American Institute in Taiwan selected the article which follows as the keynote address at the Seventeenth Annual Convention of the American Studies Association of the Republic of China.

BACK IN MY COLLEGE DAYS, Professor William Gerhardt, Department of Philosophy, increasingly irked by a student in the last row who insisted upon conversing with her neighbour, class after class, during his lectures, suddenly snapped: 'Excuse me, Miss Delacourt, what is your major?'

'American Literature!' the chatterbox, a shade puffy, announced. 'Oh?' Dr. Gerhardt responded, 'I didn't know there was such a thing.' 'Really, Professor!' returned the indignant young woman: 'What do you call *Moby Dick* – a fish story?'

Without a moment's hesitation, and smiling all the while, Dr. Gerhardt replied, 'Well, the way I heard it, *Moby Dick* is an allegory. Allegory being the lowest form of literature, since it imposes meaning on its subject as opposed to allowing it to emerge organically, and out of necessity, from the material – yes, Miss Delacourt – if you will, a fish story. . . .'

Regardless of how one views American fiction, film, or poetry, is it ever literature – that is, does any vision discovered there since 1620 raise and answer the questions, who am I? (as an individual), what am I? (in

and as my species: in its definition as 'the possibility of possibilities'), where am I? (the quantum mechanical posit), and what is my relationship to ultimate reality? – the conscientious must at least pause if and when they turn their sights on American drama.

To be precise, does any work in the conventional canon of American theatrical writing, as studied in universities from sea to shining sea, qualify as literature – at least as our professorial continental counterparts define it? Dr. Gerhardt may have spoken a bit in advance of William Burroughs,¹ and not have tarried long enough with Wallace Stevens, but should he have tolerated with patience or studied with enjoyment the likes of O'Neill, Anderson, Rice, Miller, Wilder, Williams, Inge, Shepard, or Mamet? And if he should not have, how did so sorry a gathering come to collect – how did we accumulate and sanction so questionable, if indeed not inadmissible a (dead) body of work?

Is the case merely, and embarrassingly, that American playwrights are, as a large geographical group, minor in scope, depth, talent, intelligence, and ambition? And that needing material to be studied under the

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rubric of dramatic writing, so that we can have, secondarily, positions in, and primarily, salaries for, drama departments that the best of the bad has been exhumed and resuscitated? Or does the problem lie elsewhere, with the exhumers and resuscitators, rather than dramatic writers? And if so, how has this academic, not to say civilized, quandary come about?

Some years back the critic assigned to a volume on theatre theory in *The New York Review of Books* took occasion to note the pleasure of his task, since, he claimed, there were really so few books published in the field. Boldly, he went on to speculate as to why that was so, submitting for our discomfiture his considered judgment that, while the American theatre itself has always had its share of highly intelligent practitioners, those who surround, govern, pass on, produce, and reduce for study theatrical work – the artistic directors, reviewers, teachers, critics, legal personnel, investors, promoters, publishers, editors, dramaturgs, anthologists, historians, and so on – are not equally blessed. He thought, in fact, that the least cerebral in academic service turn their attention to drama.

'Plays, after all, are Mickey Mouse', as Michael Feingold once ironied² – and inadvertently fingered the compost by then observing that pupils cram drama electives to minimize heady credits, while businessmen, after a tiring meal, fill cushy playhouse seats in order to sleep. In the face of this dollar-backed demand for ease – disguised (for the former as study and the latter culture) and accommodated by uncrowded minds and non-serious souls reviewing new plays and recovering old, by which the canon is established – parades brazen as day the most stubborn and supported case of the Emperor's New Clothes in art: before the footlights of American theatre.

Before turning some attention to the most sacred cows in the canon, and at the risk of vanishing from the press,³ theatre reviewers should at least be decried if not named: for they have life and death power over plays, and consign them to courtesies or oblivion, deny that as they may. The daunting *New*

York Times, from whose evaluation no new work hoping for commercial success ever escapes, thinks nothing, in an age when American plays have never been more American, of appointing foreign reviewers to their first-string position. Can the most carefully trained foreigner ever enter into an intimacy with American English that the born American enjoys – or have ticked off the thousands of associations, innuendoes, memories, sorrows, and ecstasies which the American playwright overhears as he composes, and that the best of American actors furnish in their deliveries? I'm only asking.

The daunting *Village Voice*, from whose evaluation no new work hoping for *succès d'estime* escapes, thinks nothing – in an age whose urgencies obligate artists to stasize contemplation of option and not bury our humanity in programme and action – of consigning persons with political axes to grind to head their ever shrinking theatre section, not only to write the lead review, but to select, dominate, assign, dictate to, and edit their lower-stringers. Shall we, in this conscience, have art or advocacy? Learn of our predicament or be polemized? Given vision or division, man's condition or retro-ethnocentricity, confirmative action, multi-insulturation, political correction, policed thought, and platonic poets-in-exile? I'm only asking.

Williams's Shifting Characters

A Streetcar Named Desire is arguably the most famous American play. Now that time has cocktail-lounged (or parlour-roomed) its so-called 'shocking' aspects, it even appears in 'definitive' anthologies of contemporary American literature, the very ones most frequently used in college courses at home and abroad. What accounts for its popularity? To generalize, Williams's plays are about loneliness: specifically, the loneliness of somewhat off-centered people (read, women or persons who project themselves as women).

Since most Americans answer yes to being lonely and slightly set apart from the crowd, they are most probably embracing

with self-congratulation a presupposed mirror image. More to the point, they confuse Elia Kazan's brilliant film version with the play, and the stunningly creative performances of Vivien Leigh and Marlon Brando with the 'characters' Tennessee Williams constructed. The same audiences which claim to love this play are usually disappointed with, not to say bored and bewildered by, seeing it on stage.

What did Williams actually write? A melodrama that about-faces and backtracks on itself. He begins with a deluding, alcoholic nymphomaniac whose indefinitely prolonged intrusion into the happy household of her younger sister, Stella, and brother-in-law, Stanley, degenerates into an iron-willed preoccupation with breaking down their union. Whereupon Stanley sets about to hold his marriage together, as any sane man would: and, one assumes, wins our sympathy in his efforts to exorcise the resourceful menace.

But midway in the play, largely through excluding the scene in which he tells Mitch what he has learned of Blanche's previous semi-demented promiscuity – and, by the way, the exclusion of the even more crucial scene in which he actually does solicit and earn this information – Stanley's centrality is removed, and shifted to, and accepted with relish by, the now straw-clutching Blanche. Furthermore, the two switch characters. Our embattled hero becomes (rather unbelievably) a feelingless villain, while the aggressive antagonist becomes a heroine suddenly struggling for her mind, life, soul, and somehow western civilization (suggested for our purchase as the quaint essence of the effete, pretentious, shallow, and sentimental).

Can such a funny fellow as Stanley be accepted as a systematic sadist and incestuous rapist? Can so silly a quotation of uncredited campy one-liners (picked up in bathhouses and bars) as is the 'character' of Blanche be the serious object of our rooting or a model with which to identify? Had Stella, perhaps, been given reality or personality, these shenanigans might have been entertained to indicate our decline lent through the unborn 'ape' she carries (and

that, admittedly, wouldn't be much); but I doubt this play is saying anything.

Williams's even more anthologized earlier effort, *The Glass Menagerie*, suffers from similar problems. This piece is about fantasy-ridden, self-deluded Amanda and her attempt to find a husband for her awkward daughter. We spend the wordy majority of the opus with Amanda and her memories, dreams, ambitions, and projections, but no sooner does she succeed in drawing Jim, the elusive bird, into her net, than Williams turns the play over to Laura, her daughter, for what proves to be a prolonged and interesting (though sadly dated) conclusion.

In its obituary for Tennessee Williams, the *Village Voice* settled on deciding that in the end he wrote better scenes than plays. While we can't be certain that the obit author knew exactly why, had Williams really anything to communicate in *Menagerie* he should have to have attended to that stressful obligation with Amanda.

A study in production or otherwise of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* reveals the same dilemma. Ignoring for the present the insulting depraved dopiness of his half-created Southern assemblage, how can we trust a playwright who consistently and persistently fails to locate his central character? And, by extension, the authorities who, not in the least unnerved by this, crown him in the canon?

The Embarrassments of O'Neill

Before the desperate decision to describe Tennessee Williams as America's greatest playwright (as in, 'Who else is there?'), there was, of course, Eugene O'Neill. In fact, as Williams's 'exoticism' dates, its sham ever more evident even to the slow, some pedagogues, uncomfortable without the Great American Playwright, have begun to urge O'Neill's reinstatement. While a few of his early one-acters are road maps of construction, and some of his expressionistic work still salvageable by the most imaginative young directors, such as 'Gypsy' George Ferencz,⁴ the famed later labours, on which his reputation largely rests, should be conceded as national embarrassments.

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With a volume of Greek tragedies on one knee and Sigmund Freud on the other, this sad man, incapable of understanding either, whose perspiration not product impresses, struggled to make English sentences and filled a sanitation truck with words: dead words, flat phrases, deaf tones, stuck sounds, trite allusions, sappy images – and repetition. One extrapolates that audiences of his day were hard of hearing, since every point is made not only more slowly than one would have thought humanly possible, but with a frequency most devoted barflies would quantify mercifully improbable. We are told that he elevated the then theatre-going public: where was it before – in the basements of institutions for the retarded?

In fairness, Fredric March and Florence Eldridge made *Long Day's Journey into Night* work the first time around. But no one has been able to since. We commonly proclaim that anything once done theoretically can be repeated. However, this ignores the fact that two magnificent actors can make Sears catalogue sizzle. This doesn't mean it's well written, but at least it isn't a poetry anthology: so why did a playwright, supposedly at the height of his powers, need so extensively to quote everyone else's verse in 'his' work? Did everyone else say it better? O'Neill acknowledges as much: why don't the fathers and fosterers of the canon?

A Fraudulent Americana

Yet no cow is more sacred in the American academy from Junior High on than Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. It is difficult to understand the continuing need for the preposterous mythology behind this dishonest picture of American small-town life.⁵ For it is not only ideally impossible, it is dull; it is not only life as it never was or could be, it is not 'life' at all; and it is not so much that idle reverie many an instructor thinks we should indulge as a dangerously vacuous bourgeois lust for lies – that *will* have blood.

When one remembers that Wilder was homosexual, the play becomes even more inexplicable: for Wilder could never have experienced such a reality or even have

wanted to. We would be kind if we said that his motives in creating this astonishing fabrication were purely venal; and less generous if we saw it as intentional, as a subtle revenge. For when you sentimentalize an audience and the nation to which its radii extend to the unrelenting degree that this daydream does, you not only render that nation incapable of dealing with its own reality, but school it as a threat to the world beyond. Putting aside blatant and pathetically conspicuous propaganda theatre, it is hard to find a playwright who ever acted with less conscience than Wilder did in writing *Our Town*. It is crime on a national scale. In the bank of truth this play has no credit.

However, with time it has inadvertently gathered some ironically 'redeeming' qualities. For one thing, it makes all the more naked the works that perpetuate its hazardous deceit – that is, the 'Americana' of Horton Foote, Beth Henley, and Sam Shepard. For another, it has elicited in some quarters a sharp response. Lanford Wilson's small-town epic, *The Rimers of Eldritch*, confronts it manfully, down to its unexpected and chillingly disappointing hero, Robert Conklin. To be sure, Lanford Wilson eventually took the route of many of the starving and starry-eyed – right to Broadway and Wilder's bandwagon – but we have his early efforts with which to console ourselves. Joel Oppenheimer's gentle western, *The Great American Desert*, a one-acter which covers amazing ground in less than an hour, also may be seen as a welcome corrective to *Our Town*, as could Rochelle Owens's aggressive invention, *Futz*.⁶

If Edward Albee slips by (and thus is slipped into) the canon, it is probably so (because it is) without the fossilizers' seizing grasp of his exact impact on American theatre. Like his counterpart in song, Dylan, Albee has moved from influence to influence (Beckett, Ionesco, Strindberg, Ibsen, Purdy, McCullers, Eliot, etc.) seemingly *sans* ever locating his own centre; and altogether too much of him, including, sadly, the hilarious *American Dream*, has dated. But when Albee brought *Zoo Story* to New York,

he was standing straight and tall to remind us that theatre, that tired entertainment, was also an art form – and could and should be so utilized. Dynamically, in the 'sixties he rallied under that banner an entire generation – which has been slow to acknowledge the debt. His continual efforts in the name of innovatory theatre go overlooked, as do his charities in related areas. If he is seen as 'too' serious (as in taking himself 'too' seriously?), it is nevertheless his multipersuasioned long-time seriousness that sentenced him to short shrift – up until, that is, the belated Pulitzer in 1994.

In the 'fifties the reputation of William Inge equalled and even threatened that of Williams and Miller. Today most students don't recognize his name, and that may be just as well. However, I wish to point out that when Hal in *Picnic* tells Madge that if he doesn't claim what is his in this world he will never amount to anything, Inge is rising to a statement at least articulate – an allegation that cannot in all good conscience ever be made on behalf of Tennessee Williams.

And Inge's scenario for *Splendour in the Grass*, with its frightening warning about the dangers of inhibiting deep young love, carries some portent to this day. Inge's shortcomings are all too obvious,⁷ but I am mystified by his disappearance from scripture in the blinding light of Arthur Miller's adhesive visibility.

The Common Slob as Tragic Hero

If the designation 'square' has been earned by anyone in the canon, it surely is Miller. Harping throughout his career on 'moral' values so uncomplicated as to irritate rather than compel, his plays, like his recent public pronouncements (on dramaturgy), seem the censorious admonitions of a premature dotage. Nor need we endure his guilt over mistreating everyone from mentors to Marilyn.

The charge of campiness has not been levered loudly (yet) at Art Miller, but Mildred Dunnock led us down that primrose path with steady Method step and the quaky voice of her definitive, deadpan,

'What happened in Boston, Willy?' and 'It's just like you're on another trip, Willy.'⁸ Only the hardest heart could fight back chuckles here. And the 'verse' of the *Bridge*, with its 'daring' kiss? More camp.

Furthermore, Miller shares along with Williams, Inge, Rice, Mamet, and McNally the discouraging claim for our sympathy and identification with unworthy low-to-middlebrows. What can be said for his Common Slob as Tragic Hero? Probably enough already – but his constant appeal to Greek dramas, though he's shown some awareness of how they were assembled, wants demonstration. He has given thought to writing a domestic, even waterfront tragedy: but it is not competent thought, nor is any of it tenable as regards an American equivalent – aesthetically, socially, politically, or even linguistically – of ancient tragedy. He's not even joined O'Neill in understanding that such an accomplishment, assuming it is possible, will cost a writer everything short of daily breath itself.⁹

Speaking of hyperventilating, amphetamine driven Sam Shepard¹⁰ brought a veneer of chic modernity to playscrambling in order to conceal – as his intro-writer, the poet Michael McClure pointed out¹¹ – his true subject matter: 'Who is going to get the family barn?' Shepard has almost replaced Tennessee Williams as America's most often produced dramatist. Is it the 'quality' that effusive reviewers once imagined in his pastime (he devotes more effort and energy to acting) that won him this popularity, or its deep-seated sentimentality, misogyny, and classism? McClure states that there is nothing like blond hair, blue eyes, and pure luck to kick off a playwright's career,¹² even when his skills are modest, sense of structure lacking, ideas (as *True West* demonstrates) nowhere in evidence, experiments rather arbitrary, and dialogue excessive.

McClure has referred to Shepard as 'King of Middlebrows', though that laurel must have appeared too consciously dropout or *outré* for the bandwagon carrying those first, very influential judges who instead gave Shepard Obies for baldly badly written and boring pieces like *Chicago* and *Red Cross*. But

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if the early one-acters which Shepard now disowns (though they at least shared a convivial liberality with their era) now seem tissue-weight, later dis-plays like *Operation Sidewinder* and what sidestepped playwrighting after it, should give even his groupies pause.

Mamet – and the Academy Game

David Mamet, Shepard's current replacement in the canon as 'best contemporary', is something of a tough or wise guy in 'verse'. While it is trivial to argue about contained prose masquerading as verse – if a playwright feels that contained prose which he thinks is verse helps him to control his dialogue, leave him to it – it is worth pointing out that a staggering assortment of villains outdoing each other in twist after sometimes predictable twist does not substitute for the metaphysics of action or a critique of the inexpedience of psychic indolence. We cannot come to an idea of the desirable (that which is good) or praxis of a moral cosmos if our attention is ever held (supposedly) in the dog-eat-dog offices of higher finance – in which, he is eager to tell us, Mamet's 'success' evidently traps him. (What was he expecting – *Our Town*?)

However, we may profit, if unintentionally, from Mamet's 'success', for he has won some co-operative allies insisting on respectable standards for his film work. He doesn't hold a candle to the Coen Brothers at their best (*Miller's Crossing*) or to Wayne Wang at his (*Chan is Missing*),¹³ or to several lesser known and wisely not 'outspoken' moviemakers, but Mamet does nothing to shorthand Hollywood's current manual.¹⁴ Hope I haven't spoken too soon.

As for those who are to follow Mamet in enjoying canonization these days, legendary critic Michael Smith¹⁵ fumed some cogency in 1991 when he was offered a professorship. 'I won't play that game', he stated, 'I've spent all my life fighting it.'¹⁶ He described the academy game as lining up O'Neill, Williams, Miller, Albee, Shepard, and Mamet as America's major dramatists and then coming up with a secondary list of

six (academically, to match the math), the salient qualification for which is the ethnic and minority status of the honoree rather than their impeccable artistry – roughly two African Americans, an Hispanic American, an Asian American, a Native American, and a professionally gay American, with at least three of these being women.

The unspoken here is that there actually are a comfortable dozen American playwrights meriting university scrutiny, all of them great commercial successes, not to say household words, sanctioned by the democratic aggregate and therefore guaranteed in-line, pre-laundered, and accessible. While Albee might pose some problems in the last respect, the quirks in the others, the soothing synthesis goes, have long since been ironed out by unerring scholars, and a consensual breakdown of what they are about or ever will be is readily available in libraries.

The crop of stage-writers since Nixon's resignation has largely appropriated theatrical form (if not to perform themselves and 'perform' themselves) in order to proselytize,¹⁷ with PC credentials, the stuff and substance of their ambition and achievement – making them less threatening even than their predecessors, more easily ground up, and thus still more welcome to the market-minded fun 'n' games.

People have observed that William Blake often fails to appear in college electives, this being justified by his being not properly an 'eighteenth-century' poet and still less a romantic.¹⁸ The real reason, Virginia, is that he is an exceptionally difficult poet, requiring a deal of application in areas that parallel his work, and that no consensus exists as to what his *oeuvre*, taken all in all, should be taken as.

A remindful dilemma obtains in contemporary American drama, with its significant activity roughly from 1959 to 1974 nearly a blank in universities internationally. The readiest excuse is that texts of the period are unavailable, and to a large extent this is true¹⁹ – and all the more astonishing since no such time span in American theatre produced so many practising playwrights (the *New York Post* thus recording that over six

hundred new playwrights surfaced between 1960 and 1967 in lower Manhattan alone).

To be sure, the era as cultural if not intellectual history receives a contemptuous nod (as also does the American art product of 1909-17). Prestigious national conferences on the 'sixties phenomenon now conclude that its legacy was the Civil Rights movement, the arts (and literature in particular) being scarcely mentioned.²⁰ The radicalism of the age is unavoidably the major reason for the investigation blackout – and longer 'embarrassing' stretches with obvious success are written out of history in the proverbial 'conspiracy of silence'. Yet we should not minimize the reading that its theatrical work, aside from being heavily performance-oriented and therefore problematic subsequently to reimagine, is often, at its best, textually daunting.

Making the Judgements

Not to exasperate or break the concentration of the irresponsible here, but the inheritance in question wants the minds for a moment of those who have turned to cultural, archeological, post-colonial, and gender studies.²¹ Again, admitting that this age discourages a firm grasp, much less containment and definition, it is amazing how few essays it has registered to date. Necessarily unnamed authorities on the period, privileged eye witnesses with proven (published) objectivity, given commissions to record it in detail, took the same and simultaneous vacations.

And left who to sit in judgment? Let me give you precise instance. Being a judge sitting upon state grants in playwriting, screenwriting, and musicals is a job no one relishes. By the mid 'eighties there were *circa* nine hundred scripts annually entered just in New York State, and close to four hundred submitting hopefuls in Massachusetts. It requires months to evaluate these with good conscience – of doing little else at night but sitting up in bed with binders of dream, of going through, as Kenneth Bernard has said, 'three or four pairs of glasses'.²² Given how overworked most serious practitioners of and specialists on theatre are, the real

question is who, of those truly responsible, has the time to invest in being a dispenser of grants – in encouraging, sustaining, and rewarding the worthy writers? The answer, these days, is evidently very few.

I had some time to spare back then, and thought that serving as a judge might look good on my *résumé* – but I was genuinely curious, too, as to what actually was being written out there (and not just produced), what were the subjects, themes, preoccupations, fears (often, strikingly enough, quite similar in a twelve-month span) of writers I'd have no other way of encountering. So I consented to judge first for the New York State grants, and then a year later for the Massachusetts ones.

Ignoring for the purposes of argument the range, nature, and experiment of their offerings, I found, to be sure, in both instances dramatists of unusual depth, of delightful achievement, of impeccable ambition and on occasion the talent to match it, and two or three geniuses – the number you'd expect to discover in any given art during any given year.²³

Why, then, are our stages not resplendent with the work of these stargazers? You know that I shall tell you it was the unqualified judges. And beyond them, the unqualified producers – and the unqualified reviewers before whom they tremble. I'm confronting fact when I report that you will never see the plays of our best playwrights, that they will not reach the stage, that they will disappear as if they never existed, and that their authors in all likelihood, assuming they survive the trauma, will enter other fields.

The awards in both cases (I was voted down) were made according to an openly defended affirmative action in the arts, by which it is assumed that a reader can detect the race and ethnic group the playwright 'represents', whether or not the same is female, gay, or paraplegic – and, surprisingly enough, poor and therefore meriting state funds, or wealthy and therefore not (this latter sometimes called 'grants by zoning').

According to the generally accepted analysis of the acclaimed British theorist,

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Jonathan Dollimore, that there is no such thing as a 'sensibility',²⁴ what then does one do with these judging 'standards'? When this voter objected to replacing their evaluation as art as guidepost with that of the political correctness, period, of the scripts (e.g., Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*), he was informed, in no uncertain and rather aggressive terms, that art, as the effete cultural conclusion of Dead White European Males, died along with them – and none too soon.

Suffocating the Genuine

To end on a positive note lest we also send the youthful second-rate in this discipline scouting for greener pastures of receptivity (and even today's Hollywood is emerald in comparison), here's a quick list for reconsideration.

The work of Rochelle Owens has amazing staying power, enhanced by her actual prophetic endowment (which she, in good seeress tradition, denies any control over or understanding of), so that she trades from consciousnesses that predate the public's by decades. She also gains inestimably from the peculiar poetry of her stage imagery and salty dialogue, both quixotic and ever-fresh, elusive and elusively incapable of staling. *String Game* is a kind of webbed or skeletal 'igloo' which a missionary can neither penetrate nor disentangle; *Istanboul* a sensual, medieval suction pad that absorbs strawing the arousals of the repulsive; and *Belch* an African nightmare barnfired into relief through colonial reverse. Her masterpiece, *Chuck's Hunch*, rewards the closest study.²⁵

Maria Irene Fornes sends half-baked feminist critics into tailspins trying to classify her as 'essentialist', an 'unconscious feminist', a 'political activist,' etc., because the best of this prolific playwright stands quite apart from mundane and tired-theory academic categories. Traditionalists get egg on their face as well – like Ruby Cohn, confessing to having seen nothing of hers staged²⁶ – in their attempts to decipher Fornes's reduced dialogue and minimal stage directions, while missing the auteurship of these con-

structs (Fornes generally directs, designs, dresses, and lights her first productions).

Thus, the heart-breaking *Sarita* is the praxis *par excellence* of costume and space – and, with only Sarita's shawl, the texture of station, arc, and circle. And *Oscar and Bertha*, on her persistent theme of romantic relationships, is life's geometry breathing before us. Her found-pieces, like nineteenth-century pioneer diaries, express not woman's oppression, but the joy of work: 'that it is good to work, period'.²⁷ Her *Fefu and Her Friends*, endearing as it is arresting, should never be forgotten.

Jeff Weiss, if he can re-create his *That's How the Rent Gets Paid, Parts I and II*, should have it videoed for the model of high entertainment that it is. *A Funny Walk Home* – actually anything but – is a masterclass in audience participation, psychologically shrewd beyond all other auteurships claiming to represent theatre of audience participation. *The International Wrestling Match* travels miles farther than the numerous works anchored by this same image. And, best of all, there ought to be a making public of his home performance when a woman mis-dialled him for a pizza (Weiss had a number a digit off from a nearby pizza parlour, and was subjected as a result to nightly annoyance) to end laughing insanely and insane.

Lanford Wilson's terrifying *Home Free*, an agoraphobic doubly (and deadly) projected displacement as Marshall Mason imagined and mounted it, must always be performed for the chilling warning it is: 'a lesson to whoso can profit from lessons'.²⁸ Act I of *Gloria and Esperanza*²⁹ finds the late Julie Bovasso writing in what I can only call a fourth dimension: it's unlike anything outside Burroughs. And the sustained humour of that act's second scene is unmatched in American literature for its intensity, build, and daring length.

Aside from their hip, terse, and muscular dialogue, a number of Murray Mednick's plays (*The Hunter, The Deer Kill*) raise the standard (to which all after must appeal) for a perfect first act. Anthony Ingrassia's *The Island*, with not-for-profit theatre's most successful every-syllable-fully-articulated-

everybody-talk-at-once (outdoor banquet) scene, has vanished utterly,³⁰ as also have Donald Brooks's visionary hallucinations, *Xerxes: the Private Life of Jesus Christ and Infinity*,³¹ and Harry Koutoukas's *Tidy Passions*, with off-off-Broadway's unquestionably greatest single line.³² And Daryl Chin's thought-provoking deconstructive 'space designs'³³ need periodic revival lest, inadvertently, ignorant fledgling playwrights appear in their endeavours to be pre-1910.

In fact, the suffocating of America's genuine dramatic writers in favour of resuscitating O'Neill, Williams, and company has its most insidious effect on the newcomers, hurled thereby backwards by decades. The above list is only for starters, but none such ever should exclude the American-as-apple-pie legend, Mae West, an early feminist who went successfully after the religious jugular in *Klondike Annie*, the sheer sham of the western in *My Little Chickadee*, the antinomies of social climbing in *Goin' to Town*, historical anti-revisionists in *Catherine Was Great*, and the synthetic *a priori* nature of cause and effect itself in her bawdy folk classic, *Diamond Lil*³⁴ – an eternal model for apprentice scriptwriters: who always left 'em laughin'.

Notes

1. Norman Mailer has called Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* the only work of genius in American fiction.

2. In a speech given at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center National Playwrights' Conference, Waterford, Conn., August 1977. Feingold, a senior reviewer at the *Village Voice* and a professor at Yale Drama School, was a dramaturg at that conference. He frequently translates from the French and German, notably the version of *The Threepenny Opera* which starred Sting.

3. Responding to the hatchet job done on his brazen *Man with Three Arms*, Edward Albee published a memorable article in the *New York Sunday Times* in which he devoted a paragraph apiece to the influential newspaper reviewers, skewering each with a deft thrust and leaving him pinned and wriggling on the wall. Predictably, Albee would not be favourably, even charitably, reviewed for years to come. That neglect has been rectified somewhat by his 1994 Pulitzer Prize for *Three Tall Women*. (Lord Byron, reacting to the unfair and personal criticism of his first volume of poems, *Hours of Idleness*, set the standard for these jolly, authorial responses with his classic 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers'. He, of course, did not exactly vanish thereafter.)

4. Ferencz was given a well-deserved Obie Award for directing for his revival of *The Hairy Ape* in the early 'seventies.

5. Peterborough, New Hampshire, is the actual site labelled under the famed Grovers Corner *nom de guerre*.

6. *The Rimers of Eldritch*, *The Great American Desert*, and *Futz* can be found in Albert Poland and Bruce Mailman, eds., *The Off-Off-Broadway Book* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972). My own musical drama, *Boy on the Straight-Back Chair* (Obie Award, 1969), included in Bonnie Marranca, ed., *Word Plays: an Anthology of New American Drama* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1980), was originally entitled *Their Town*. Enough said.

7. It has been remarked of Madge that she is beautiful so everyone can want her, dumb so everyone can have her. And her home town in home truth seems to be largely populated by women, nearly all of whom respond ravenously to a calendar boy's physique with or (preferably) without something above the clavicle. Similar importance, embarrassing today, is given to the centrefold appearance of the leading duo in *Bus Stop*.

8. Preserved, for our eternal delectation, in her filmic reprisal of Linda.

9. We may be rescued from this quandary in the future by American screenwriters: a genuine, or at least competent, idea of (at least, existential) tragedy is sought out and sorted out in *Miller's Crossing* (Coen Bros., 1990).

10. Robert Coe, 'Saga of Sam Shepard', *New York Times Magazine*, 23 November 1980. Quoting Shepard: 'I don't go to the theatre . . . my cultural appetites are kinda narrow. . . . [New York's] not the cultural centre of America. . . . New York's about as provincial as the smallest town in East Texas.' And on Shepard: 'This recluse from the theatrical mainstream has emerged in recent years as the second most produced American playwright in the country (after Tennessee Williams) . . . what [Clive Barnes] called the "disposable" plays of his early career, most of which he finds embarrassing today. . . . In the mid-1960s, Shepard became the drummer for the Holy Modal Rounders, and wrote the first of several rock-influenced plays. The Rounders, basically an 'amphetamine' band, drew Shepard more deeply into drugs – a part of his New York life style and free-form writing habit from the beginning. He escaped the draft in 1965 by pretending to be a heroin addict. In the summer of 1967, Shepard completed his first full-length play, *La Turista*, written in Mexico under the influence of amphetamines. . . . Under the pressures of growing notoriety and an increasing drug problem, Shepard fled New York "for good" in 1970. He began to ascribe most of his "so-called originality" to ignorance. . . . He has not touched drugs or seen the Empire State Building in five years.' New York stage directors often describe a certain type of hyper and superficial emotional and/or word association in scripts as 'amphetamine-drivel'.

11. Conversation with the writer at McClure's hilltop San Francisco home, May 1981.

12. In his 'Introduction' to Shepard's first anthology, which Shepard personally asked him to write (New York: Winter House Press, 1971).

13. *Chan is Missing* (1980) is the very low-budget, handheld-camera, independently-made first film of Wayne (The Joy Luck Club) Wang. A search for a cabbie who disappears with a sizable (borrowed) down payment on a private taxi, it develops into an intriguing speculation on epistemology.

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14. *House of Games*, which Mamet wrote and directed, must win kudos for its refusal, against all Hollywood protocol, to mitigate the seamy treachery of all its characters. It holds our interest because we do wish to see the betrayed 'heroine' exact her revenge. It drops big points, however, when we get the idea two-thirds on and learn to out-think Mamet; and our 'heroine's' revenge seems, finally, too good to be true.

15. Michael T. Smith, b. 1935, lead reviewer and editor of the Theatre Department, *Village Voice*, 1960-72. His charming and highly influential column was called 'Theatre Journal'. He is also a playwright and novelist.

16. Conversation with the writer at Smith's West Street apartment, New York, June 1991.

17. For courageous exceptions, other than the high-minded but not quite artistically arrived Richard Nelson (*Jungle Coup*, *Conjuring an Event*, *The Vienna Notes*, *The Killing of Yablonski*, *Scooping*, etc.), see below.

18. This is one of the most wonderful divinations for letting a master slip through the cracks that has come to our attention. Woe to the artist who eludes category.

19. To beg the question, 'Why not (re)publish some?'

20. *The Times Literary Supplement*, London, January 1983, covering the Modern Language Association's (MLA) 1982 convention on 'The Sixties: a Reassessment', reported: 'The panel . . . agree[d] that the main achievement of the 1960s in the United States was the civil rights movement - literature was hardly mentioned.' Aside from the disastrously successful effort to gloss over the real American drama of this period, there has been, among other successful efforts to date, the glossing over of New York's Coffeehouse Poetry movement, academically speaking the last leg of the Beat Generation and generator of the documentably most varied (also arguably the most interesting) verse of the time.

21. Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). The book, which any thinker might be proud to have managed, is a case in point. It is marred by the paucity, datedness, and inferiority of too much of the literature it recalls for paradigm. The noted scholar displays his ignorance of 1960s American theatrical literature (and is none too conversant with American fiction of that period) - my point being that it is precisely within this body of work that Dollimore could have found what he needed to strengthen his arguments, clarify his assertions, and pinpoint the advances and progress he otherwise finds wanting.

22. A playwright, novelist, short-story writer, fiction editor, and Professor of English at Long Island University, who served. His plays include, *Night Club*, *The Moke-Eater*, *King Humpty*, *Mary Jane*, and *The Magic Show of Dr. Ma-Gico*.

23. By binding contract, I may not name them: only winners are announced, and I am enjoined to publish no specific disagreement with the choice.

24. Dollimore, op. cit., warily concedes that the only possible sensibility is camp: and only if it is seen as that sensible sensibility dutifully existing to expose and destroy the fraudulent notion of sensibility. One of the scripts in standing for a New York State grant envisioned a highly romantic seascape o'er which the mysterious and ethereal wraith of a *femme fatale* demolished to a man a shipful of lovelorn sailors. It was defeated (by the other judges) for being obviously

the work of a super-reactionary, fossilized, yet somehow still breathing, male chauvinist pig. When I insisted that the list of (anonymously submitted) runners-up be read aloud after the votes were taken, the playwright turned out, sure enough, to be a woman. 'All of you owe me a drink!' I inveighed.

25. *Chucky's Hunch* is a chain of unanswered long letters addressed to an ex-wife that are recited to the audience by a middle-aged man. Occasionally, he is interrupted by a woman's monologue on tape. It is best understood if the speaker is entertained as the author's first husband, and if it is remembered that Owens sometimes images a duel all but to the death, as here with the snake and the porcupine, as the precursor to sex. Rochelle Owens has published several books of poetry and two volumes of plays: *Futz and What Came After* and *The Karl Marx Play and Others*.

26. Ruby Cohn, *New American Dramatists: 1960-1980* (London; Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982). Professor Cohn is known for her work on Beckett, and for this reason perhaps was approached by Macmillan to survey new American playwrights for their 'Modern Dramatists' series, clearly intended as college texts. Besides seldom having seen the performance-oriented plays about which she writes, she has no 'touch' for the era - its tone, intentions, thrust, or flavour - and manages to misconstrue virtually every piece she attempts to interpret.

27. Conversation with the writer at Fornes's Greenwich Village studio, New York, 1983.

28. Under various pen names, Lanford Wilson has dispatched more episodes for popular TV sitcoms and dramas than one could comfortably list. Invariably, in writing manuals for specific TV shows, a script of his is singled out as the model for beginners. The quote is from Richard Burton's translation of *The Thousand Nights and a Night*.

29. Albert Poland and Bruce Mailman, eds., *The Off-Off-Broadway Book* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972).

30. Ingrazzia made his appearance, largely in the Bowery and off-Bowery theatres, for the most part after mid-1973 - i.e., at the point that audiences and critics were turning their attention away from innovative theatre and towards Hard Rock, Serious Contemporary, the Punk phenomenon in general, and the hi-tech, high-priced restaurants mushrooming in Manhattan. As a result, this accomplished dramatist received little local recognition. Ingrazzia accordingly went to Berlin in the late 1970s, and there enjoyed not only public but state support. He expanded his efforts into radio and thought better of returning to the new theatrical philistinism.

31. Donald Brooks, whose life as actor, striptease artist, hustler, relapsed and reconverted Catholic, set designer, and director reads like nothing so much as a chapter in the grand tradition of the Maudits, earned even less recognition as a playwright than Ingrazzia. In Brooks's *Xerxes*, set on the Deuce (42nd Street) and in the torment one knows it was lived, a pale chiffon and wire angel suddenly flights a tightrope vaulted above the audience from atop a towering tenement on one side of the depraved, honking drag to one on the opposite side. I'd call it the enviable epiphanal moment in American theatre, were it not for an even more reduced, simultaneously heart-breaking and transcendent half-minute in a later Brooks piece, *House on the Pier*, in which a small cardboard cruise liner, its tiny dining area lights blinking, crosses on the simplest of pulleys a Jersey dusk skyline shallow-depth backdrop

not three yards wide. Worth every Broadway play I've ever seen.

32. 'Every twenty-eight days, four hundred people get laid offa work: anybody wanna — a star?'

33. Daryl Chin, 'An Anti-Manifesto', *The Drama Review*, XXIV, No. 4 (Winter 1983), p. 36. Although the essay degenerates into a plea for government support, I find the 'formalistic, structural, epistemological' concerns discussed admirably sutured into and projected through his work. More 'genuinely' deconstructive and certainly clearer than Richard Forman, Chin, sadly, appears, so far as the public is concerned, to have been a flash in the pan.

34. This play has half-a-dozen cause and effect subplots in manic competition for our attention, but West blocks our ability to concentrate on all or any of them with her distracting frontal assault. Only a handful of stars share so dazzling a repertoire of distracting qualities, which render us helpless before linear intricacy, but West employs hers — intellectual and, of course, verbal as well as physical — to consistent and conscious iconoclastic purpose: she is nothing if not ambitious. The auteur-author-actress did not permit her plays (*Sex, Sextette, Doin' the Bear, Catherine Was Great, Ring Twice, Come Up, Mae Goes West*, etc.) to be published, but *Diamond Lil*, radically abridged, survives as the wonderfully concise film, *She Done Him Wrong* (1933). When the American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco, sought to revive *Diamond Lil* in the 'eighties, it took them years to locate a script. Then they found a number of different ones and, after piecing them together, felt that the 'original' must have been too long for contemporary taste. Actually, like the Elizabethans, West used different versions and scenes for revivals, or even the same run. Her films for Paramount and Universal (which she scripted and starred in) are: *Night After Night, She Done Him Wrong, I'm No Angel, Belle of the Nineties, Klondike Annie, Go West, Young Man, Goin' to Town, Every Day's a Holiday, My Little Chickadee*, and *The Heat's On*. Myra Breckinridge was for Fox and *Sextette* (based on her play) was an indie.

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VOL. 45 NO. 8 FALL

HISTORY IN PHOTOGRAPHS
BY CHENG SANG-HSI

MORE FOREIGN INVESTMENT
IN THE TAIWAN STOCK EXCHANGE

AN ESSAY ON CITYSCAPES:
DECO-DENSE ON THE TAMSUI

TAIWAN GEARS UP TO BECOME
A REGIONAL OPERATIONS CENTER

SPECIAL SECTION ON
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS



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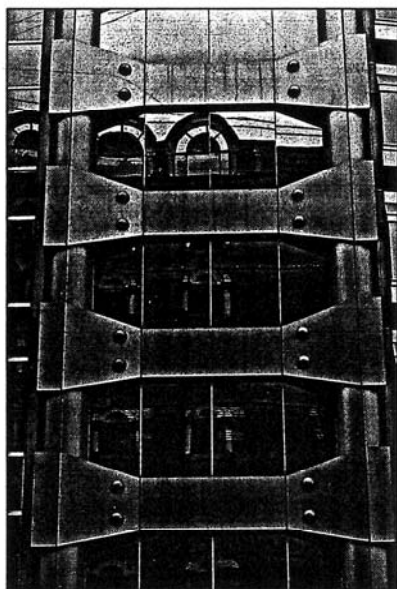
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ESSAY

DECO-DENSE ON The Pleasures of

"Only Warhol and you could like the look of Taipei."
—David James, film theorist

*"Yet that things go round and again go
round
Has rather a classical sound."*
—Wallace Stevens, *The Pleasures of Merely Circulating*



What you want to do in the midst of all this controversy about Taipei's architecture, is get on a bike and get off the main drags.

Residents of this congested capital may be proud of its New York "feel" on Nanking Road and the way stretches of Tunhua South conjure up a Park Avenue that never was, or how Jenai Circle glitters in the evening like a pricey plaza in Rome or Madrid. But in the main, like any modern metroplex, Taipei's thoroughfares are for getting, or trying to get, from place to place, and have those qualities of the practical that die for the eye on reviewing. Furthermore, they have given the city its reputation as an architectural hodgepodge, a mad mix of the old, the new and the pointless, and everything but the kitchen sink so long as it makes no aesthetic sense.

The metroplex, singled out by theorists as the quintessential Postmodern conglomerate, is even ballyhooed as a warning of what's to come for urban centers the world over. And people have used several somewhat less flattering epithets for the megamushroom in times gone by.

But in all these criticisms is explicit the attention the city gets, its cynosural and hypnotic effect, the importance of its look. In fact, that is what commentators

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agree upon: its visual importance. So we might do everyone concerned a favor by taking an actual look at the habitat.

Since driving requires several sets of peepers peeled to that oncoming lava called Taipei traffic, and walking is disgruntling in the close "air" and/or surround of unconscious peds, neither is a satisfactory get-around for a clear idea of the city. But if you don't mind the rumble seat of a motorcycle or scooter or, better

*"The Gotham City look
is in the newer highrises
dotting the town's east side."*

*"If the incomprehensibly odd is your
time-off intrigue, then the gigantic
seafaring-lad high reliefs here and there
about town should be on your agenda."*

THE TAMSUI or, Merely Cycling

BY RONALD TAVEL
PHOTOS BY CHANG SU-CHING



yet, the hard saddle of an old-fashioned pedlar, you're in business. And while the cyclist looks truly intrepid in this traffic to those who don't themselves indulge, every bike owner knows it's the quickest way across town in rush hours—and at all times safer than it appears, as evidenced by how easily you can make eye contact with any motorist near you: meaning that unlike cities where cyclers are rare, drivers here almost always have you in their sights.

So off we go round the fairly compact metropolis—among major world-destinies, Taipei's city proper is relatively modest—to discover that its heterogeneous appearance boasts a unity of scale, and a human one at that that may well be the envy of many a look-alike skyscraping new Baghdad: and which scale has much to do with unifying what might otherwise be disparate styles. Nor is "style" adequate designation for the sev-

eral civilized ideas that comprise and compete amongst its components: an almost too quaint Cathay that Hollywood painted for the world much as Joseph Conrad before it had given Europe and the States their notions of Asia, Russia, Africa, and Central America; a Gotham City springing whole from the pages of Batman Comics like Athena from the head of Zeus; and Japanese box-architecture as likely to move widthwise as highrise. And these components, relaying each other for the sheer pleasure of it, often come down to a late deco look in insistently simple, yet overwrought, circles in a square and squares in a rectangle, a decodense as it were.

One of Hollywood's duties during its recruitment in World War II was the encouraging of Americans to identify with the invaded Mainlanders against the common enemy. Several filmed versions of Pearl Buck novels had gotten this effort off to a good start. But one propaganda feat limned among my lasting impressions for its adroit alacrity is an entry called *China* (a title none could accuse of false modesty) with Alan Ladd, William Bendix, and Loretta Young. No sooner have the credits rolled than we are confronted with a panting Bendix dodging through a northern village under heavy blitz, only to stumble upon a howling, orphaned toddler. With bleeding heart, Brooklyn Bendix swoops the babe up

from the rubble and goalposting toward some shelter or other is from this point unquestionably on the rough and tumble if bungling foster dad.

But the genius of this extended, minimal-take sequence (a standard tour de force procedure for opening films in that era) is not so much the jump-start it gives to the plot as the ethos of peace, beauty, and tradition in flames which its extensive, busy set summons and illustrates: and which its charm and brushstroke detail define as "China" for a generation of exotica-hungry (read, escapist-prone) Americans. One of the surprises of Secret Taipei, and a well-guarded if senseless secret it is, is that the city is prototyped with enclaves redolent of this Hollywood's very vision of the Orient—a vision imagined, storybook and utterly invented one would assume were he or she not to venture into Taipei's back streets, there to discover that Tinseltown knew indeed whereof it spoke.



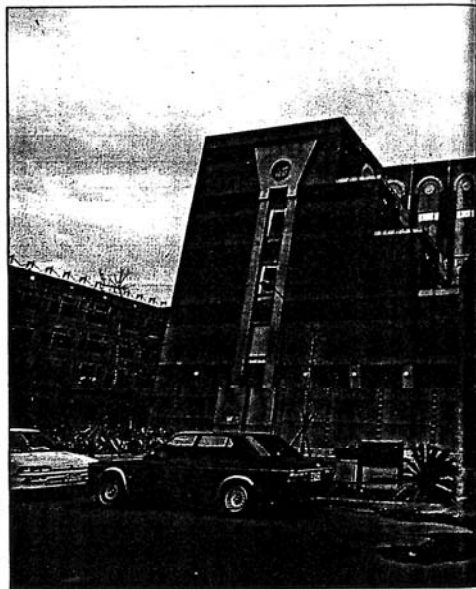
"On Tihua Street, Section 1, you'll want to look up, at the top floors, for graphics and roof-fronts traceable to Southern China in the Sung dynasty."

Try for samplings, for starters, the wall-to-wall restaurant rows ostensibly still standing (on expensive real estate) to accommodate the students of National Taiwan Normal and National Taiwan U's. Lungchuan Street and the lanes between it and Shihta Road, from Yunho to the wall of NTNU, have a movie-set facade so *in extremis* as to appear constructed for a big-budget musical rather than mere true-life adventure. One tries to memorize every cobble, storefront, neon and nameplate.

Or the diagonal Lane 286 with its Sichuan, Shandong, and Honan eateries that cuts through Kungkuan from Roosevelt Road, Section 4, to Tingchou Road—a kaleidoscope of impression, aroma, and design so extravagantly articulated as to be incapable of staling, even if one gets a chance to pedal down it every night. But if you do, it's worth taking your bike to the end of Tingchou and halfway over Fuho Bridge: for the mid-bridge commands a dazzling view of Mt. Goddess of Mercy, which is to say a landscape painting of you-choose-your-favorite dynasty, rising from the banks of the Hsintien, terrace by garden terrace, to the temple that crowns this climbing village, truly the pastoral of a bygone era.

Or to single out but one narrow lane among hundreds that hark back centuries but are directly off a main artery, try Lane 51 on Linsen North Road: it needs a Delacroix to do it justice.

When you pedal past North Gate into the Tihua Street historic district, the oncoming, forking and converging streets appear to construe no known logic. To find them a map, futilely you collect them in your thoughts. Still, their appeal is irresistible, a topography of the unconscious, and your progress, block after block, is fulfilling, is satisfaction, the pacifications of a voyage toward infancy, the sense and normalcy of a backthen and the urge to relive it, and/or the pleasure of just quite accidentally doing so. On Tihua Street, Section 1, you'll want to look up, at the top floors, for graphics and roof-fronts traceable to Southern China in the Sung



dynasty. No. 73 boasts a ginseng root in all its potent glory, but you don't want to miss buildings 84, 88, 133, or 146 either. Best of all is 234, an empty but living collage with a tree growing out of its third floor facade like a horn, leafy, unicorn and defiant.

Then, if you turn your bike onto Kueite Street, which hugs the Tamsui River, just below Minsheng, the street's

"It is in an armored, squat and confrontational, almost military-deco structure like the Department of Computer Science and Information Engineering Building at NTU that one feels the unmistakable spirit of *Blade Runner's* architecture."

east side will reward the most tiring bike trip. There you'll spy several outdoor drains vertical to the buildings which for purely eye-pleasing reasons have been sculpted into giant bamboo stalks!

Elsewhere, among the startling historical oddities, is the decadent concoction on the southwest corner of Hengyang Road and Huaining Street, directly opposite New Park's northwest gate. And a few blocks from here the shabbily romantic vestiges of a kind of second-class colonialism still stand, notably the original NTU Hospital replete with a European cupola-ceilinged rotunda lobby and tropical pool-garden atrium encircling a spouting fountain.

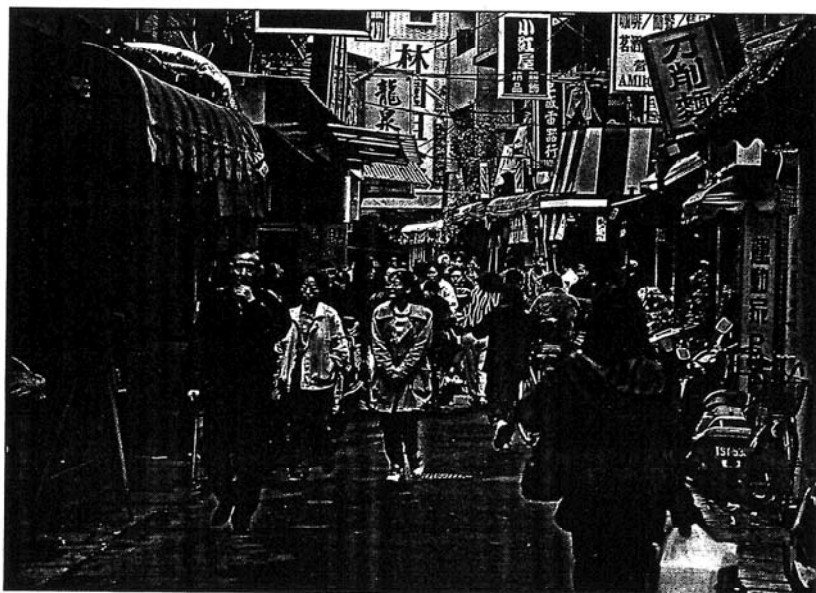
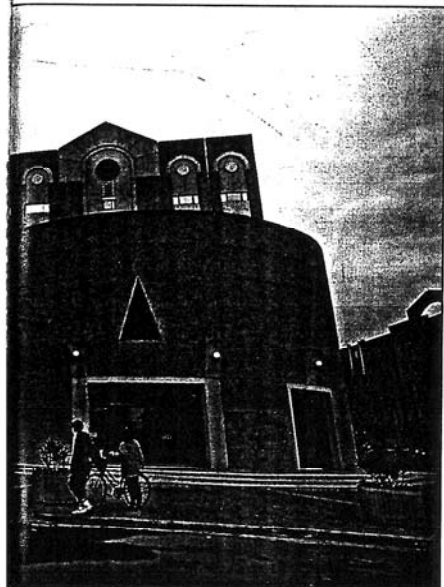
But if the incomprehensibly odd is your time-off intrigue, then the gigantic seafaring-lad high reliefs grimacing ferociously here and there about town should be

alley in Hsimenting, or the humongous defenestration on Sungchiang.

The Gotham City look is in the newer highrises, of course, dotting the town's east side. Some of the most recent towers, like Taipei Metro, obviate comment, being as they are so very intentionally their imposing selves (read, money). But it is in the more approachable edifices, like 41-43 Hsinhai Road, Section 2, with its Babylonian hanging gardens and the batmobile eccentricity on the southeast corner of Nanchang Road and Hoping West Road, or an armored, squat and confrontational, almost military-deco structure like The Department of Computer Science and Information Engineering Building at NTU that one feels the unmistakable spirit of *Blade Runner's* architecture. That is to say, an idea of the modern seeming to leap from Batman strips and

Following Fredric Jameson's attendance at a National Tsing Hua University conference, he produced an article, "Remapping Taipei," that is largely responsible for the city now being read as the essential Postmodern metropolis and a forecast of the whole world's future appearance and problems. In good theoretical follow-up, the island capital has become a vortex of international spacial attention, interest, and controversy. But I say the controversy may be largely a professional invention and to put it aside for the moment, unlock your bike, take it to the Parisian ambience of Hsimenting's malls on a Sunday, and go round and round the postmodern pavements immersed in the pleasures of merely cycling. ■

Ronald Tavel is currently a Fulbright scholar assigned to National Taiwan



on your agenda. In trying to invest them with purpose, one thinks of China Sea pirates: but these are so distinctly Nordic and Caribbean that one is unnerved, and that's to say nothing of their menacing quality. Try the huge, slightly cross-eyed Viking head on Roosevelt opposite NTU and the mocking Treasure Island types threatening you from the Two Lions Building in the Lai Lai Department Store

spiral forever toward the poisoned night sky in the aforementioned film. Though the film's sets were more than likely inspired by Tokyo (for Taipei would not have assumed its characteristic appearance by 1980 when *Blade Runner* was shot), yet this box-architecture, relentless and peeling but grittily-here, a standard contemporary Japanese convenience, is the city's majority look.

University. He founded and named *The Theatre of The Ridiculous*, the only extant theatrical movement of the American 60s, and has written forty produced plays. He was Andy Warhol's screenwriter and in that capacity wrote and usually directed a baker's dozen films. Seven of these films were recently restored by The Whitney Museum of American Art and are now in international distribution.

"Try for samplings, for starters, the wall-to-wall restaurant rows.... One tries to memorize every cobble, storefront, neon and nameplate."



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敬啟者：

美國文化中心誠摯邀請您撥冗出席，六月十二日（星期日）在南海路五十四號美國文化中心大禮堂舉行，美國研究學會主辦的「邁向二十一世紀的美國研究」研討會。這個研討會是配合該會第十六屆年會而舉辦。有關議程如下：

0830-0900 報到
0900-0905 劉理事長興漢博士（政大總務長）報告
0905-0915 美國在台協會文化新聞組唐古晞組長，代表AIT台北辦事處貝霖處長致詞
0915-1000 Fulbright Professor Ronald Tavel 演講【美國的戲劇文學】
1000-1005 美國文化中心圖書館和美國教育資訊中心簡介
1005-1030 餐點時間 -【影帶自由欣賞-美國劇作家Edward Albee】
1030-1200 分組座談討論

【1】美國少數族裔文學：台大文學院林院長耀福主持

引言人：李有成博士（中央研究院歐美所人文組長）
單德興博士（中央研究院歐美所）

【2】美國政治外交：亞洲美國研究學會聯合會主席李本京博士主持

引言人：陳毓鈞主任（文化大學美國研究所）
李本京博士

評論人：周昉教授（政大外交所）

曹俊漢博士（中研院歐美所）

專文發表：柯林頓總統爭取國會批准「北美自由貿易協議」之策略分析

發表人：裘兆琳教授（中研院歐美所）

【3】（1）美國式管理：台灣工業技術學院企管系周主任賢榮主持

引言人：黃營杉所長（中興大學企研所）

【3】（2）美語教學與電腦應用：全國英語教師協會戴會長維揚主持

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文化科科長 敬啟
五月





Maria Montez:

Anima of an Antediluvian World

Ronald Tavel

Enact anger, hauteur, and disappointment was what she *could* do. That anger that perhaps is the most accessible platform for the amateur actor, but which contributed so promotionally much to her fiery image. That riveting brand of Spanish hauteur, imperial and insolent, which would cast her more often than not as royalty, nobility, or gentry. And that disappointment—which she knew so well, obstructing her brief, somewhat underrealized life in the guise of colleagues with a congenital failure of imagination—that lent depth and dignity to her touching screentale moments.

The anger:

She flies into a fit at a perceived slight on the parts of cowboy Johnny Mack Brown of Boullion City and gunrunner Rod Cameron in *Pirates of Monterey*, and at Billy Gilbert for merely “calling time” in her first, but long-built-up-to, star-making minute in *Arabian Nights*. She unleashes her wrath at Robert Barron, a bearer of evil tidings, and Mary Nash, a matriarch pulling rank on her in *Cobra Woman*, and at a drunk, love-sick Jean Pierre Aumont testing her patience with his naiveté in *Hans le Marin*. And she kicks off one of filmdom's furniture-smashing, all-time epic tantrums on learning of Turhan Bey, her regal brother's debt-mounting and face-diminishing debauchery on Coral Island's white trash waterfront, to mark her tempestuous, barge-borne entrance in *White Savage*.

The hauteur:

Not our peer, she peers disdainfully down at us and her fellow players from the topless tower of her unshakable, photogenic self-confidence, whether that distance is measured by a throne, as in all the island idylls, or as a climb to the throne through her five desert Aeneids, or by Castilian, French or Rumanian title in *La Donna del Corsaro*, *Pirates of Monterey*, *The Exile*, and *Gypsy Wildcat*. Speculating on this persistent impression, director Robert Siodmak observed: "She believed completely in her roles. If she was to play a princess I had to treat her like one all through lunch ... It was twenty-four hour method acting before its time." But even as a displaced war orphan (*Tangier*), taverner in the clutches of the Grand Inquisitor (*Il Ladro di Venezia*), or duplicitous prostitute (*Hans le Marin*), hers is still majestic mettle being tested, and we're assured that terror, torture, execution itself must leave it intact.

The disappointment:

Her stare stark with silent bitterness, as a dancer who thought she would be queen the day before (in *Arabian Nights*), she descends from the slave pens to mount the auction block into an all but unreachable, irreversible despair ... Her realization that the lives including her own which she jeopardized and/or lost to win the titular rogue, Paul Christian, in Inquisitor *Il Ladro di Venezia*, was all for naught, is given in the last sad last take a disturbingly detailed close and deliberate zoom to final frame by a possibly guilt-ridden John Brahm atoning in the cut for posthumous release. Guided by Max Ophuls, she delivers the definitive interpretation of the Feldmarschallin character in *The Exile*: a great court beauty who makes her last pitch and

loses, to take it on the chin in an ineffably extended scene of grace, gallantry, and then letting go.

Behind that grace was the experience of the inability of Walter Wanger, then president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Jean Cocteau, and even Orson Welles, who one after one second-thought themselves in a failure of nerve to find the art equivalent for the pristine magic she placed at their disposals.

Having said all this, that is, what as a performer she *could* make memorable, we have to add that her thespian accomplishments are perhaps only of secondary interest in an account of her impact on the arts, dramatic and plastic, of the American sixties-seventies; and of her fascination for a number of the ground-breaking artists of that period, among them Jack Smith, fascination that crossed over and beyond the obsessional into the *literally* continuous preoccupation with the woman on all but a religious and mega-adulatory level. Mantling himself in her, laying claim to her in fandom's name and nature of both wholly identifying and being violently possessive, Smith saw her as the maker of all art and, in a process of projection, revisited her in the series of women and men he was to love and all the beauty he intended to create in his life. Thus at times, metaphorically, every pertinent phenomenon was screened through her. And yet, this *was* entirely the result of her work in film. That being so, the precise character of her work needs a language aimed at least at the beginning of demystifying her cult, the altar-building, and her creative legacy. That any consensus thus far has been academically calcified by so often referring to the work of Maria Montez as a logical impasse, inaccessible to the uninitiable who, born with scales on their eyes, must go through movie-viewing icon-

blinded, a prevailing no little contributed by Smith himself—forces the attempt to navigate from as well as out of this impasse to resort to one's sense of the rapturous as much as the rational.

Still, we must return to, or dispense with, the question of her acting ability—or inability as tiresome, lowbrow mainstream as observers would have it—for, emphatically enough, her inoculative influence may be coaxed from the shadowed corners of her period, tropic, or medieval sets if *that* impression, her inability is scrutinized.

For the record, Montez is not up to her roles as convent-bred Linda Calhoun in *Boss of Boullion City* or the murderous, boulevard musical star in *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, however undemanding either is, nor to certain key emotional scenes as symbolic of a scapegoat in *Gypsy Wildcat* or vengeful spy in *Tangier*. But no one else in the annals of impersonation could have been so right for the playful Princess Melahi in *South of Tahiti*, ambitious Sherazad in *Arabian Nights*, allegiance-conflicted Lady Amara in *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* or, of course, the phallic-threatened schizophrenia projected as twins in *Cobra Woman*.

But if she isn't emoting in ways acceptable to establishment journalists, what *is* she so successfully doing? Modeling? What? Herself? her charismatic personality? Walter Wanger, in 1942 also in the triad of powerbrokers at Universal, who cast her as Sherazad after an abashment-defying, impromptu audition she sprang on the unsuspecting mogul and his friends in the studio's commissary (a Dance of the Seven Veils flaked by two iodined, nearly nude Nubians), confided to Geraldine Fitzgerald, convulsed with laughter as were the rest of the lunchers except for Wanger—that watching her display taught him a lesson central to

filmmaking. For three years he'd been looking futilely for a woman to enact the character, a role as written evidently notactable in terms anyone up to that point had been able to decipher. But here before him, dropping veil after veil to reveal a sensuously collected damsel indeed, was the secret to doing it: and a clue to the independent film and counterculture stage still two decades off: a woman who could believe, right out in front of the pedestrian world, that she *was* Sherazad! "I'm going to become quite rich," Wanger told Fitzgerald.

Impressively, it was *this* photogenic quality, i.e., her lensable belief, that triggered Smith's ambition in film. Again, precisely, that the woman's belief, and exactly what that belief embraced, was filmable. What, then, did it embrace? A world as fantastical, dazzling, lush, surprising, and crowded with beauty as some children find it to be. And that her's was a central role in that kaleidoscopic daydream—importantly, this, too, filmable—as the princess *for* whom it all exists and *by* whom, i.e., by whose imagination, it all does.

And that this passion, he contended—this painterly ecstasy, the Delacroix and Chateaubriandian of her soul *could* register of film, *could be recorded* on stock—was what made her a star.

And megastar she certainly became during the darkest days of our century for a never neverland-hungry, daydream-craving world, garnering for Universal in 2 1/2 years proportionally more profit than Marilyn Monroe did over her entire career. Her status might best be imagined if compared to Arnold Schwarzenegger's recently, international nova-grosser, perhaps because of, certainly with, similar appeal: an unfamiliar, storybook accent, evidently suitable limited imitative acting skills, a persona exemplarily driven and commendably focused,

a seductive voice, a commanding appearance. (Significantly, Jean-Claude Van Damme has replaced Schwarzenegger as the world's leading grosser and, to be sure, with these same attributes. Before either, Bruce Lee was the exemplar in this obvious progression.)

In overnight twelve-hour sessions that date back to 1962, Jack Smith and I often sat up together enjoying her occurrence. We speculated on why and how she made the glittering chimera mirrorland that enveloped her available for lensing, the neurological aura of her body heat, her custom-made, Kirlian cobra headdress. Her thought is film. Within a decade, Jack would say, "Thinking on stage is interesting."

Most behavioral transcription for movies, then, has had too much upholstery. If we settle for what performing usually means in theatrical terms, then what we're asking the camera to capture here cannot be that. By extension, it's been self-defeating to draft theater terms like "actor," "director," "writer," and especially "auteur" to speak of films.

The consensus, even among screenasts with small professional stake in her determination, is that she is mesmeric: "smoldering," "bizarre," "hallucinatory," "fabulous and unique." At times, so distracting she prevents one from following the plot (a complaint during her Hollywood days, an obvious priority now.) Just how, just why? And through which channels does she make available her salability? What *is* her salability?

To an extent her appeal is psychological—to escapism, cross-dressing and transvestitism, and exoticism; her enfranchising, specifically, the disfranchised; and her compelling ability to bring an abstraction of self to an epiphanal symbol—Antinea as Destiny, Fate.

The escapism is of a timeless, universal sort, which is why it was so readily encased in timeless fairy tales, and not just of that period repeatedly cited (World War II) that magnified that antecedent in her appeal. And crucially was to the always second-class citizen, to those who, watching a cowboy and indian movie, identified with the indians, and with third-world persons, be they Islander, Arab, or Asian; with women, blacks, Jews, Gypsies, Armenians and Amerindians, and Aborigines of every unspoiled track in mercifully distant places. Of those, who in their soul—in the center of their earliest memories—felt different, their memories unbroken pain: not of a majority, not of they who say what shall be.

This injured gathering's largest group, women in history, identifies the cross-dressing, for the escape involves a game of triumphant women, as in the eventually, sexually solvent cobra twins, Tollea and Nadja. It is images for a temporary enigma created by men, hence *created*, unreal to a certain extent, and which Montez pretends at being: therefore, also always gaming and a fantasy level of living. And in her jocularly, her pretend, her seventeenth century, Arabian, or flung-far-as-Java garment and gown ineluctably become "pass-on" costumes: if and since she could don them to key into or kick off the hajj, she does so to show you how. And Smith understood that perfectly: "what worked for her, could for you," being an important part of the message for him. And so, his lifelong attention to the meticulous in costume, the costume that are your ticket or comp to victoryland, not just which and how many sequins, but the which and how many fold in the gown when you sat posed for the still camera, and poised for the moving one. He could be fanatical about such things.

Inescapable in this escapism, or, if you will, the unbearability of this, your-time and place, is the marriage of the sexual and exotic, for it is the escape of the (secretly) Sexual Other to the other-than-this. And here there is universal agreement about the diva's double qualification:

"Voilà! Avec l'exotique Maria Montez!" as the voiceover in a French documentary on Albert Camus has it, explaining that in the immediate postwar years he spent time in Paris, "much of it in the company of the world's most *glamorous* people.

She was poster-copy marketed, above all "Tempting, tempestuous... Daughter of Eve with the soul of Satan," "Temptress of the tropics... Ravaging the souls of men with the lash of primitive hate... and the call of pagan love," "Primeval priestess in a temple of terror!" "Wicked in the wilds! Pagan witch, no man could tame—or resist!"—as an exotic treat. And the thrust of her own real life, repeated attempts to escape through the use of her sultry allure, so inherently and unavoidably filmable, played neatly into Hollywood's hands.

Inevitably, to West Indians, her mystique stretched even beyond poster-copy promises. As the Dominican Republic's only international spokesperson, she was honored with the Order of Juan Pablo Duarte, and the order of Trujillo, the highest awards for furthering United States-Dominican Republic relations and for outstanding feminine achievement (that nation's first). Dominican dictator Raphael Trujillo turned her birthplace into a museum and named streets and avenues in several cities after her. In Martinique and Puerto Rico, she was believed to have medicinal powers: her films could cure the children of diphtheria, depression, and rickets.

Enfranchising the minorities, the loner, the sexual outlaw: in the seven epics for which she is most remembered by Americans, as well as in the generation-spanning show-biz yarn Universal wedged midway into these (she is charming as a European stage star in *Bowery to Broadway*), the white male powermonger comes into his own, e.g., discards the shackles of slavery, ascends the throne, or succeeds in business—from shark fishing to producing musicals—only when and if he paints his own parameter by winning her as wife. True, she then must

transfer the power natal to the all-desirable object to the male, but there's been a term as corporation president for her/us. And a term, or tentative taste, of power is all we think we're entitled to/can get.

Empowering the powerless is the psychology behind her most famous scene: the ritual dance in *Cobra Woman*. At an attendance-required, ophiolatry ceremony, she upbraids the cowering populace for tithe-defaulting, is divested of blood-red, Quetzalcoatl-feathered cloak and cobrahood headdress by her half dozen blue chiffoned handmaidens and, after completing the initiation mysteries—mesmerizing (phallically immobilizing) the cult's mascot King Cobra—rushes out onto a ramp in an orgiastically choreographed delirium to point, furiously-ecstatically-sadistically, at the spellbound, lapsed-worshippers, one after one. And the luckless witnesses at the wrong end of her finger are then lifted up screaming and hauled off to a holding pen to await their thousand-step climb to the mouth of Cobra Island's smoking volcano and "the fire of everlasting life"! Decked out in every imaginable, thrill-packed pulp fiction, comic book and strip, and kid's adventure trip from H. Rider Haggard and Dumas to Edgar Rice Burroughs, Kipling, Stevenson, De Foe, Malraux and Stan Lee you can shake an Aaron stick at, and hence finger-lickin' good down to her ophidian, form-fitting S-M costume. What's going on here is ultimate power to the disfranchised: we've no more than to point to our enemy by the scores, 200 in a single shot to be precise, and they instantly dematerialize. It's matched only by the common dream of suddenly rising like an eagle and gliding low over the rooftops when attacked by one's foes, and is ever so more colorful and sexual than that.

The principal threat of the cobra is in its fangs—in Rorschachs coiled, i.e., oral, rather than phallic as unavoidably proposed by the staunch upright position its forequarter assumes before striking. But *Cobra Woman* is planted liberally with erotic fixations from every developmental

stage. Not the least attention-getting here are George Robinson and Howard Green's sweeping trackshots through and around the Polynesian/Asian/Indian potpourri dream-symbol sets Alexander Golitzen and John B. Goodman had themselves a field day concocting. Siodmak had given them the slack to design, light, frame, and shoot environs for this subversive Oedipus spin-off that no other director had ever allowed them to imagine: but which from their most uninhibited Oedipal secretions they'd always longed to create by way of expiating for their hack, Hollywood lives.

But her appeal to, and fascination for, the aesthetes in Europe e.g., Jean Cocteau, Albert Camus, Max Ophuls, Dario, Eric Von Stroheim, as well as in the states, James M. Cain, Richard Brooks, Douglas Sirk, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Orson Welles, and the innumerable still-children, ultimately would appear to stem from the independently produced art film shown variously here and abroad as *Atlantis*, *Atlantis*, *The Lost Continent*, and *L'Atlantide* but best know under the unforgettable, lurid title, *Siren of Atlantis* (1947). For as siren, legendary sea creature luring men to their death by drowning, does she find her adored and most lasting anagogy. Jack Smith's first performance piece was *Rehearsal for the Destruction of Atlantis* (December 1965), and from then on till his last appearances forthcoming: *An Average Afternoon in Atlantis* (film), *Capitalism of Atlantis*, *Socialism of Atlantis* (performance), *Atlantis/Coney Island Slide Show*, etc.

Her family's ancestral estate was actually on Tenerife in the Maghreb Atlantic, where the obstreperous, high-toned, and trouble seeking little rebel spent part of her youth a virtual convent prisoner. The Canaries are one of the four or five locations claiming to be the remnants of Atlantis, and the tall, blond Guanches the Conquistadors discovered there in the fifteenth century sometimes are referred to as the last of the beautiful Atlantians described by Plato.

With orange and violent strands in her long auburn hair, her hazel skin and eyes, the statuesque Maria Montez could be said to most resemble these African Islanders, if indeed one thinks she satisfactorily can be identified with any specific ethnic group. According to the myth, Atlantians were the spawn of Poseidon, and Maria's grandmother explained to her that all the sea god's descendants bear the mark of his triton somewhere on their body. The triton appeared on the ambitious listener in the form of a small brown bruise above her waist but, being a highly superstitious astrology fanatic, she shied from pressing this water-doomed, mythological connection in her later promotional frenzies, preferring to make more of Goya's paintings and Queen Isabella's gem collection (optimistically connecting the old and new worlds) that constituted part of her inheritance and by implication pedigree's circle.

Siren of Atlantis based on the novel *Atlántida* by Pierre Benoit of the French Academy, was a remake of producer Seymour Nebenzal's 1931 epic, shot in Europe. Maria played Antinea, a queen of ineffable longevity, but actually the point toward which all men odyssey in the maelstrom that sucks them circling to their predetermination, stripped of the ethics, honor, sense, and sanity. In her role—an allegory of entropy—she lent the desire to be rapturously reduced to one's inevitability an irony that culled its shading from the bewildered indifference of that phantasmagorical force.

It was inventors seeking filmic symbol for their metaphysical concerns like Sirk, Brahm, Cocteau, and Ophuls, who were most impressed by Montez's accomplishment, her success in concretizing illusive abstraction with her lovely, flickering image. The work was my own first encounter with art and sponsored my decision to spend a lifetime in its service; and Smith

agreed that *Siren of Atlantis* was Maria's primary achievement. His evaluation: "Stunning."

And, in the early eighties, in an expeditious mood, he stated that, despite the commercialism of her films, Maria Montez was able to deal with both intellectual and aesthetic issues.

But for Smith personally, the ends of art were less heady. In 1965 he told me he was fascinated by my study of her as a human being, because his study, he proclaimed, was purely visual. He wasn't taken with how she revealed in shot to unprotected shot her anxiety (*Bowery to Broadway*) or carelessness (*Gypsy Wildcat*) or unhappiness (*Sudan*) or joy (*White Savage*); how few hours of sleep she'd had (*Arabian Nights*) or how few hours had passed since an argument with studio heads, a publicist, or director (*Tangier*). He thought that as sculpture seeks the perfect three dimensional object, and presumably found it in the Venus de Milo, film must seek the perfect two dimensional object in motion, and finds it in Maria Montez: the warm butterfat of her shoulders, the swaying generosity of her unrestricted breasts, her ever narrating features, her complexion exemplary for Technicolor, her walk that turns a tacky, trodden track (in *Cobra Woman*) into a mnemonically primordial garden.

Jack was altogether innocent of the lore of her day encoding tantalizing, and especially foreign, brunettes as Free Sex, (i.e., "You don't have to marry 'em"), not very curious about Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy that played no little part in promoting her career, nor particularly traumatized by her record breaking number of film baths eerily adumbrating her demise. He was not interested in seeing my freshly taken photo of her tomb. Rather, his attention was concentrated on how her enfeeling contour or aural silhouette ignited the composition in which you placed her, whether it was the above mentioned park, or a city of

tents (*Arabian Nights*), or woodland lakes (*Gypsy Wildcat*, *Pirates of Monterey*), desert pools (*Ali Baba*), island pools (*White Savage*, *Cobra Woman*), port-polluted channels (*Hans le Marin*, *Marie Roget*), or Baghdad or Bhasra or Marseille, Palermo or Venice: where-imaginary-ever you set her, the physical force of her fantasy life caused its soundstage or on-location to sparkle—like the iceland in the yard in *Curse of the Cat People*—caused it to come into a celluloid habitat of the individual's, the artist's, the common man's mind. A Midas of the Imagination. That she as a moviehouse object was a wand that touched a steel-grey, hostile world into a shelter for the sensitive, a bearability. He called it "Montezland."

And, in a sense, Montezland was the Lower East Side Jack lived in, when we walked-a-nightaway SoHo before it was called that, silhouette-wet and deserted, or to the abandoned synagogue below Houston and beyond Norwalk, a Levantine carpet-borne enticement unbelievably there, with minaret window niches, gilt crescent arches, blue mosaic walls with artfully domed, empty recesses. He took me there when the moon was full, and he'd rush ecstatically down and up the dark, broken staircases into the breathless romance of its shattered towers.

But it was all in a state of decomposition by the 1980s, that East Village, a Samarkand untended, and fraught with doorstep-lurking danger from the Caribbean monkey people who had "a tenuous connection with reality" and absolutely no idea of what New York was about. So he referred to it as the realm of "Yvonne De Craploads, Queen of Monkeyland." Yvonne De Carlo, of course, was *The Wonderful One's* replacement in Hollywood; she had cherished no secret "art" ambitions and gave the studio few headaches. And, if she had no magic, no tangible passion, no legendary superstructure, well, that was the age Hollywood was moving into. But at a point even before then, sometime in the mid-seventies, following the Great

Underground Diaspora, Jack felt Manhattan had stepped down into that De Carlo age and was stuck in the gummy cobwebs covering the real thing. I also had the feeling that he said Miss De Carlo as one says “Gee” rather than Jesus, or “Gosh” and “Golly” rather than God. And when I’d confront the neologist with that suspicion, he’d shyly, even humbly agree. It was not wise to tempt the minatory gods with continual familiarity.

Finally, when he named even himself Jack De Carlo or Uncle De Carlo, as in his photo-comics that depict his willing sacrifice of himself upon the altar of landlords, he not only appeared to come to terms with a second-rate America, but actually to relish the inferior De Carlo product, “whose early films have the fluidity wanting in the dead-on confrontation of those knee-to-head midshots in Miss Montez movies.”

So in time, 21 First Avenue, gagged or repetitious and more self-conscious, the golden age of his singular imagination indeed did seem distant, always in some other room of that railroad apartment, a space beyond the cobwebby one where we, stuck, waited for the giant, salivating arachnid like a diminutive Johnny Sheffield in *Tarzan’s Desert Mystery*.

I could become uncomfortable then. My father walked in his sleep on a roof’s low railing in that very neighborhood, and I have a fear of somnambulism.

It is easy to point to *Normal Love* as a work that draws its look, its feel, its colors, images, and backyard fairy moth sheen directly from *White Savage*. *Buzzards Over Baghdad*, some of the earliest footage we have from Jack, retells the climactic sequence Ford Beebe helmed for *Arabian Nights*. *Flaming Creatures* alludes to the earthquake in both color island epics, the

processional in *Ali Baba*, MM's personal Nubian slave in *Arabian Nights*, the juxtapositional idea of what he confessed he adored, etc. And when he took on the persona of dagger savvy Jungle Jack, he was rear-projecting Johnny Weissmuller's "Jungle Jim" (a B-series based on the comic book) as another De Carlo-like spin-off on MM. The numerous, languorously posed ladies and gents posing as ladies in *Flaming Creatures* are lesser printouts of the poster art for her films, and in particular of the most popular ones for which she invariably modeled, whether painted or photoed, in alluring recumbent positions. "Nobody could recline like Maria Montez," Jack observed. And, of course, her non-acting of characters in place of yet another perfectly adequate, pointless performance was paramount in his thoughts: it stoked up crucial energy for his countercapitalistic impulses, is the inspiration for some of the more breathtaking urges in the live one madman shows especially—urges that would impel Jack to self-critique under his breath, "Gilded, gilded..." Why should a camera trained on persons inclusively mean it is persons acting? Waxing near distraught after a New Yorker Theater screening of *Cobra Woman*, he exclaimed, "Those reviewers always spoke about her bad acting. Yet, you cannot rip your eyes off her! What she's doing is what acting is substituting for!"

Jack confided that her husband, Jean-Pierre Aumont, informed an interviewer once that Maria had a private chapel built in 1100 Tower Road, Beverly Hills, to safekeep a statue of her patron saint, San Antonio, to whom she spoke daily, admonishing him to give her countless things: furs, hats, honors, the adoration of L.A. and all Europe. So in imitation Jack built an altar to her, his Christian Science saint, on which he set her photo to oversee and share his confidential life; and he literally prayed to her daily for artistic inspiration, and claimed it was she who instructed him to place her altar itself at the center of *Normal Love*... "Hearing is obeying," he intoned.

Other stars have provided an image in which to live: Maria Montez provided a vocabulary in which to robe and narrate the more memorably vanguard and radical art of our time.

But her ultimate influence on Smith, and his ultimate tribute to her was the rebuilding of Baghdad/Babylonia into his apartments, a city, a world, a wall, a building. He had duplex lofts in SoHo and removed the floor between them to construct, virtually by himself, and ostensibly for a projected picture called *Sinbad*, a cathedralesque set that reminded me of Fairbanks, Sr.'s silent, *Thief of Baghdad*, but which got its seed from Maria's *Raiders of the Desert*, *Arabian Nights*, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* and *Tangier*. And later, in his 6th-floor walk-up on First Avenue, he reworked each of the five consecutive cubicles into a different realm, among them, the Egyptian room inspired by *Sudan*, a nouveau sci-fi/pre-ark Vale of Euphrates reimagined from *Atlantis*, and a most incredible bathroom with a cabriole antique tub (i.e., palace pool-size in *Ali Baba* or hooded iron hand-pour, as in *The Exile* or, to be sure, deathset for Miss Montez), and space for just enough potted palms and succulents to allow him to squeeze-set them into an impenetrable Melanesian jungle tipping its hat to *Moonlight in Hawaii*, *South of Tahiti*, *White Savage*, *Cobra Woman*, and *La Donna del Corsaro*. An open Arabian niche cut into the wall that the bathroom shared with the (Persian) sitting room provided an unavoidable view from the latter into the sacred pool bath. But this, Jack explained would enable him to excuse himself at propitious moments, leave his company, and spy on them from inside the bath. Conversely, one might peer through the niche from the Persian room and through buttonholes in the tropical density beyond, to where some (hopefully, tempestuous) beauty might well be bathing. His dwelling reconstructions or devotion to architecture consumed years of his life, and were of application and seriousness that would appear to have utilized his concerns and obsession with the "late lovely" more than any other of his many and wonderful outlets, whether film, criticism, collage, sketching, set designing and

building or performance. And they were it was most directly related to his political thinking as well, and in a way so straightforward as to make recent commentary on Smith from the left seemed forced and dishonest. As he explained in a 1984 college lecture in Toronto: "I've put almost 9 years into it now (21 First) and it still isn't anywhere near finished ... I did a thing that I believe in in putting the art back into the architecture of the apartment, and after I die it will still be used and lived in and have a good influence on whoever is living in it, civilizing influence It's my theory and I might as well do what my theories are ... mirrors are inset into the walls in architectural arches, introducing and interrupting lighting without giving up anything medieval ... medieval, which I think is the peak of human history ... the middle ages were bringing in ... Arab medieval art- and altogether, it humanizes the rectangle which is oppressive and dysfunctional. There's nothing you can do with rectangles but turn them into spaceships.... I will then invent architecture for modern times, and it must be round buildings, and the fire must be in the very center ... the water should be in a ring around that and then I would have something like a dance floor."

She was born María Africa in Barahona, La República Dominicana, at 8pm on June 6, 1912, the illegitimate daughter of Regia Teresa María Vidal Recio, an immigrant from La Hispaniola whose family had fled Spain under political persecution. The "Africa" was meant to indicate or implicate her sire, Isidoro Gracia García, a wine merchant and Spain's Honorary Viceconsul to the Caribbean isle, a native of Isla de La Palma in the volcanic Canaries to the west of the Sahara, and whose line ultimately is ancestored in Aragón.

From the start María Africa defied social and gender expectations and restrictions, and so was sent to the Sacred Heart Convent in Santa Cruz de Reverito, Tenerife Island, close to her

father's parents. Finding the experience a nightmare, she frequently ran off and hid in the jungle before being found and forcibly returned, a scene reproduced in five of her films. After Isidoro Gracia married Teresa and was appointed to consulates in Paris and Belfast, the teenager was permitted to visit him and from there toured Europe in the company of the day's Eurotrash, learning French and Italian on the way. In 1932, she was married off to William G. McFeeters, an overseas executive for First National City Bank of New York, who was nearly twice her age. And this new circumvallation proved prison-like as well. Immersed in screenzines from a tender age, Maria Africa calculated she could conquer the capitals of cinema as well as the next beauty, and during the company's lengthy relocation in Puerto Rico announced her intentions to do so to McFeeters, which intention she made plain, needing non-nuptial unencumbrance, could not include him. She arrived in New York alone on July 3, 1939, took the town by storm high-fashion modeling through some upper crust contacts, and from there made sure to be seen to the best advantage with the right people in the right places every day.

A McClelland Barclay oil painting of her brought RKO screen tests, but Universal outbid them and dropped RKO's (hated) English lessons clause. She stole 6 programmers and serviced 3 features for Fox and Universal in '41-'42 before Wanger guided her every gesture and glance, her very blinking, to movie history. Some of these teeth-cutters are of scholastic interest. More than one historian, citing the flawless framing of the cameraman's cameraman, Stanley Cortez, calls *Bombay Clipper* the paradigmatic B-feature - though an ambitious MM does some uncontrollable upstaging for him. Playing the lead in *South of Tahiti*, she replaced Dorothy Lamour as Hollywood's resident sarong girl and won an enviable position (as the Bra Girl) among the top G.I. pinups. But the contract writers, puzzled by her free-range funning in this budget romp, had no idea (end of '41) of where to take her from there. Then Wanger, after

fitting her out as the epitome of glamour with her title but supporting role in Edgar Allen Poe's *The Mystery of Marie Roget* in the fall of '42, gave her its star billing in order to raise her profile for the Christmas-packaged extravaganza, *Arabian Nights*, correctly predicting it would put Universal in the black, earn her megastar status and him megabucks. She reigned the undisputed Queen of Technicolor till the end of the war and then made serious demands on Universal to cast her in art films.

But when Ophuls sought her services for his first U.S. turn, *The Exile*, she held the studio, against all their warnings and to Ophuls' dismay to the letter of their agreement for top billing - with her name alone above, and twice as large as the title, though she propels only a self-contained, 18 minute sequence in the lengthy, sepia-toned recount of the Restoration. The think tank was accurate in predicting an adverse public reaction: it expected her to play the lead, not feature, in Technicolor, not sepia, and in adventure, not art films. So they forced her into the lavishly mounted, color western, *Pirates of Monterey* and though it has its startling, outlandish moments as crafted by idiosyncratic Alfred Werker, MM saw a string of horse operas in her future and preferred to free-lance rather than renew her standard 7 year contract.

That's when *Atlantis* was put together with her second husband, box-draw Jean Pierre Amount. And before its long-delayed release, the two flew to Europe to join the burgeoning Hollywood colony there - among them gods and goddesses whose careers world-weary postwar cynicism and a TV-shrinking Tinseltown could no longer support.

When Cocteau made the stupid decision not to cast her as Death in *Orphée* ("You are too beautiful, too young, too joyous to be Death"), the Aumonts played to each other for a film noir

with Jean-Pierre's brother directing, *Hans le Marin*, that is that rare work which seems to improve each time you see it. Shot on location in Marseilles, it is artful, eye-filling and to the point. Her next film found her with top billing and the title role, holding her own quite successfully against the awesome appeal of Eric Von Stroheim, Pierre Brasseur and the legendary Arletty. The famous *Portrait d'un Assassin* is a strange, psychological melodrama and the kind of movie that André Bazin would quickly call her best, but I'm certain that if she had made no other she'd not be the subject of very much inquiry today. Orson Welles, initially recruited to handle the role that Brasseur doubtless did much better than he ever could, left early in the shoot for Morocco to create *Othello*: but evidently stayed long enough to direct some of Maria's scenes as a subdued, though thoroughly insane, sadistic seductress.

Il Ladro di Venezia, an effectively lensed take on the Italian Inquisition directed in the grand manner of John Brahm, afforded Mme. Aumont one of her best, and certainly saddest, roles (20th Century Fox). She next appeared as a singer of equally easy virtue and violence in *Amore e Sangue* opposite Massimo Serato, and then as a noblewoman in Maracaibo in *La Donna del Corsaro*, where her close-ups reveal her to be no longer in good health.

Working at a backbreaking pace in the summer of '51, she was cutting both *Sensuality* and *Messalina* in Italy, and had signed for her first Spanish language film, *La Maja de Goya*. The mind boggles at these three prospects.

She said, "I can hide a thousand diamonds in my hair. But I fear my heart will play me a dirty joke."

Through her long-term agent, Louis Schurr, she had contracted to return in the fall to Hollywood, there to go immediately before the cameras.

Smith on Montez:

I met Jack Smith through Joel Markman and René Rivera, and served as a set engineer for *Flaming Creatures* and still-model for many an s.s. ("shooting session"). He in turn constructed the sets for my first two plays and designed the costumes for the third. Only his erraticness stood in the way of his becoming my official director, but I appeared opposite him in his own play, *Clash of the Brassiere Maidens* (1984). He hoped I would develop the writing of intertitles into an art form and so engaged me to create a set of them for *Buzzards Over Bagdad*, which he intended to plate elaborately, but alas never did. Appropriately, the last time I saw him we attended together a Film Millennium screening of *The Exile*.

At the time of the star's death, Jack was nearly 20 and an usher at the Orpheum Theatre in Chicago, which took advantage of the headlines to cash in on a festival of her films. This was his introduction to the woman who, "flaming and raging," would guide his future creativity. Below, some of his observations on her; in quotes are what I remember verbatim.

"People who say Maria Montez couldn't act are the same people who say Marilyn Monroe can't sing."

"The difference between *Arabian Nights* and *Gypsy Wildcat* is the difference between art and camp. I keep telling you people that Miss Montez has a great sense of humor."

"Those myna (minor) birds they always had doing her Lochinvar! Didn't even know how to comb their hair."

"Turhan Bey was the only man she ever seemed to see. The others were mere pasty novelties on her charm bracelet. Ever notice how when he's in a scene, she gets smaller, more feminine?"

"Art is one big thrift shop."

"The Miraculous One was raging and flaming. Those are the standards for art."

"Shall we seek the sanctuary of my den of cutthroats and thieves, and see how much mileage we can get off a dead star tonight?"

"The scores of the Marvelous One's movies are symphonies. But you know that."

"*Ali Baba* is the worst!"

"The sets for *Ali Baba* are my favorite. The processions—when I was a kid I loved processions."

"That tent set for her seduction in the stronghold of the slaves (*Sudan*) - God! Cowhide thongs and cardboard. Universal was the cheapest!"

(*Sudan*) "She should have been more involved in the climax."

(*Cobra Woman*) "She isn't in it enough. That 20 minute prologue is Hollywood at its worst.

Its the best and worst Hollywood movie ever made."

In *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, cameraman Elwood Brendel editorializes on MM's o.s.

murder a few minutes further on in the film by shooting her extended arms while waltzing from

behind with a gold candlestick in the foreground: "Did you catch that crucifixion image of

Miss Montez at the ball? She *drew* cameras to her."

(Referring to the dairy restaurant on Delancey) "Ratner's is done in *Sudan-deco*."

On stars: "The average life span of a star is 5 years. A star is someone who produces delight.

They produce delight by being continuously interesting on screen. Someone is interesting

when they reveal a truth about human nature. And they never repeat themselves. Giving a good

performance isn't the safest way to do that."

Suddenly standing up in a moviehouse to upbraid those in the audience laughing at an

outrageous moment in *Cobra Woman*: "I suppose you'd like it better if her performance was

plastic!"

On models: "A model is someone who always has a specific idea on their face. That's what

you shoot."

"Her flicks always had to have a scene with someone up on the torture rack. In *Thief of*

Venice, they strung her up on it. Such bad taste."

Recalling an unintentionally funny moment in the climax of *Ali Baba*, when Turhan Bey begs MM to "open the gates for your people, my Lady!": "Did you see her open the gates for your scum of Baghdad? They nearly ran her over!" Thereinafter, Jack would refer to the public at his live shows as "the scum in Baghdad." The phrase actually is spoken by Kurt Katch midway in the intrigues: "...and he will rally the scum of Baghdad to his cause!"

We'd gotten the Cinematheque to agree to screen some MM films (June '67), but all they could rent was *Tangier*. As soon as the credits rolled for the last feature on the program that night, the audience rose as a man filed out. Jack rushed to the exit as if to stop them somehow and, furrowing his brow at me, he wrung his hands and cried out: "You can count the scum in New York by the number of people leaving this theater now!" -Come, let's go sit - down in the front row, and watch in delirious solitude!"

After the screening ended:

"In one way of looking at it, it's a bad movie; and in another way, it's very good."

And as if she were a pair of glasses, sometimes all things were seen through her:

"O Maria Montez, give socialist answers to a rented world!"

"Well, Ronnie, we accomplished one thing in our lifetimes...Took 20 years, but we rescued The Holy One from oblivion."

And on my informing him that her daughter Tina was born on St. Valentine's Day, and that she herself is buried in Montparnasse:

"Everything about her was a poem."

Enough has been said about the Theatre of The Ridiculous for me not to have to note that the paradigm she breathed breath into by being, in no conventional reading of the phrase, a professional performer, was crucial to my decision to come to theater, and to what I'd have of it. What makes her so obsession-fomenting, and so the wellspring of iconoclastic and humanistic speculation is what she can do, display, and reveal in the "surround" of acting; it held and still holds whatever interest I have in theatre, or need to have in film.

Nor to note the disappointment I felt all Jack's life in his fixation on backtracking to a brilliant decade, and in our many incompleted projects. Complaining steals from creativity. So does envy, paranoia, and the cultivation of ill-will toward others. The ungrateful Apple and the narrow-minded who made it their trap fostered a great deal of his negativism, but we are meant then to use that - as when we tell an uneasy actor to "use" his stagefright, and insecurities and misgivings, to make them "work" for him, for his performance. But taking to New York like the proverbial fish to (Atlantis) water, Jack berated fate all his life, acknowledged but indulged his madness, ate up his energies in poison-pen letters, poison telephone messages, and fury at every runway hit and arts grant on the grapevine as his private, paranoid mythology well implies - tombstoned with minor birds and panders ("Andy-Panda"), landlords and vampires and crustaceans insatiably snatching up his "pasty" concepts and "moldy" notions in their firehouse-orange and boiled-red chela.

But on sufficient occasion he saw and let us see those greedy crustaceans shuttle through the cerulean gaze of gilled Lamurians; he let us glimpse all that "gilded" gimcrackery as the anima and animus of his antediluvian recall.

I was living in New Orleans and trying to rouse a roommate too dissolute to go out on the street and get a job when Penny Arcade called me to tell me Jack had died. I dropped the phone, and ran away from it, sobbing and jabbering, "No! No! No!"

And I was a kid in Coney Island gathering my courage to conquer a fearful fantasy by getting on the cloud-topped Wonder Wheel, when it's loudspeaker, tuned to a radio station, blasted a news bulletin: the death of Maria Montez, she'd drowned in her bath in far-off France. It made no sense. Like every little boy on my block, I was set on growing up to marry her. What would happen now? I couldn't process the information. I decided to dismiss it. By then no one had spoken about her for a while, anyhow. I boarded a car on the Wheel and it took me up haltingly farther off the ground than I'd ever been in my life. From the windows of the car when it reached it's height, the quarter-million people on the beach, the great gray Atlantic beyond them, and the world's largest amusement park seemed small.

Filmography

LUCKY DEVILS

(Univ., 1941. Small role. Dir., Lew Landers. Adventure. BW.)

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

(Univ., 1941. Walk-on. Dir., A. Edward Sutherland. Mystery. BW.)

BOSS OF BULLION CITY

(Univ., 1941. Female Lead. Dir., Ray Taylor. Western. BW)

THAT NIGHT IN RIO

(Fox, 1941. Bit role. Dir., Irving Cummings. Musical. C.)

RAIDERS OF THE DESERT

(Univ., 1941. Supporting Role. Dir., John Rawlins. Adventure. BW.)

MOONLIGHT IN HAWAII

(Univ., 1941. Supporting role. Dir., Charles Lamont. Comedy. BW.)

SOUTH OF TAHITI

(Univ., 1491. Lead. Dir., George Waggner. Adventure. BW.)

BOMBAY CLIPPER

(Univ., 1942. Feature role., Dir., John Rawlins. Espionage. BW.)

THE MYSTERY OF MARIE ROGET

(Univ., 1942. Feature role. Dir., Phil Rosen. Period mystery. BW.)

ARABIAN NIGHTS

(Univ., 1942. Lead. Dirs., Walter Wanger, John Rawlins, Ford Beebe. Adventure. C.)

WHITE SAVAGE

(Univ., 1943. Lead. Dir., Arthur Lubin. Adventure. C.)

ALI BABA AND THE FORTY THIEVES

(Univ., 1944. lead. Dir., Arthur Lubin. Adventure. C.)

FOLLOW THE BOYS

(Univ., 1944. Guest appearance. Dir., A. Edward Sutherland. Musical. BW.)

COBRA WOMAN

(Univ., 1944. Lead. Dir., Robert Siodmak. Adventure. C.)

GYPSY WILDCAT

(Univ., 1944. Lead. Dir., Roy William Neill. Adventure. C.)

BOWERY TO BROADWAY

(Univ., 1944. Feature role. Dir., Charles Lamont. Musical. BW.)

SUDAN

(Univ., 1945. Lead. Dir., John Rawlins. Adventure. C.)

TANGIER

(Univ., 1946. Lead. Dir., George Waggner. Espionage. BW.)

THE EXILE

(Univ., 1947. Feature role. Dir., Max Ophuls. Historical. Sepia.)

PIRATES OF MONTEREY

(Univ., 1947. Lead. Dir., Alfred Werker. Adventure. C.)

SIREN OF ATLANTIS

(Independent., United Artists release 1949, filmed Spring 1947. Lead. Dirs.: There is no directing credit on the film, but participants claim the honors were shared by Douglas Sirk, John Brahm, Arthur Ripley and Miss Montez herself. Adventure. BW.)

HANS LE MARIN

(Discina, 1948. Female lead. Dir., Francois Villiers. Film Noir. BW. In French.)

PORTRAIT D'UN ASSASSIN

**(S.E.L.F., 1949. Female lead. Dirs., Bernard Roland, Orson Welles.
Drama. BW. In French.)**

IL LADRO DI VENEZIA

(Fox, 1950. Lead. Dir., John Brahm. Historical. BW. In Italian.)

AMORE E SANGUE

**(A.B. La Querica, 1951. Lead. Dirs., John Wolff, Marimo Girolami.
Drama. BW. In Italian.)**

LA DONNA DEL COSARO (LA VENDETTA DEL COSARO)

**(Athena Cinematografica, 1951. Female lead. Dir., Primo Zeglio.
Adventure. In Italian)**

Attention: Catia Riccaboni
Warhol Cinema Book
MNAM
Musée national d'art moderne

METHODOLOGY IN ANDY WARHOL'S CINEMA

1. THE "OFF-CAMERA" WORLD DURING THE SHOOTING OF WARHOL'S FILMS

A certain number of people, not directly involved with the movie, generally were present during the shooting of Andy's films. Some were there for promotional purposes: journalists, gossip-column writers, and agents; or jet-setters, the idle rich and societal hangers-on, who felt lucky to be present at such an "in" and "hip" event, and were sure to carry word of it far and wide. Others were the familiar frequenters of the "factory" and their friends, who had nothing better to do and for whom the "factory" often functioned as a second home. Most persons were respectfully quiet during the 70 to 105 minute shoot, but photo-taking was seldom prohibited -- in fact, it was encouraged, the various performers having long since learned that such was minor amongst the numerous distractions with which they must cope.

Certain films, however, required greater privacy. In the case of SCREEN TEST, the touchy and troublesome actor Philip Fagan, whom Andy at the time looked upon with special favor, insisted that only Andy, himself, and myself, who provided the off-screen inquisition directly from my own, very note-cluttered, script, be present. This demand forced Andy himself, against his inclination, to work the camera. And a number of the films featuring extensive nudity also, obviously, dispensed with voyeurs. KITCHEN, which was shot in cameraman Buddy Wirtschafter's own loft, had few on-lookers partly because it was early in the day and partly because the space giving onto his kitchen was limited. Norman Mailer, however, made an appearance to give the undertaking his blessing.

On occasion, the on-lookers served another purpose: some one or thing amongst them might provide Andy with a last-minute inspiration -- and he would insist that I incorporate that person, object, or idea into the filming without concern for the work's possible, even vague, integrity. Since he never objected to any script or directorial alterations which I, without warning, might make during the shoot, I learned to adjust to his interferences.

2. WARHOL'S "DESTABILIZATIONS" OF A SCENE OR SITUATION ALREADY IN PLACE BEFORE THE CAMERA

Andy's notorious destabilizations of planned shoots sometimes served a highly creative purpose, and sometimes a destructive one.

THE LIFE OF JUANITA CASTRO was written to be realized by directly facing, and relating to, the camera. But Andy, scrutinizing the composition, myself and Marie Menken comfortably embedded in the huge chorus, became dissatisfied with it. With a bold stroke of genius, he re-set the camera to the actors' left so that we thereby were seen in 3/4 profile, but requested that we all still relate to the camera as if it were yet directly before us. A good percentage of the film's energy and tension derives from this simple angle-shift, and the script's ideas are enhanced, almost frighteningly, by such results hence necessitated as Marie's moving out-of-camera for her major monologue and the general impression of

misdirected, but impending doom.

For VINYL, Andy worried that a week of my rehearsing Gerard Malanga might end in his giving a too-conventional performance -- or, some say, one that might be too-good, for at the time he and Gerard were quarreling. So Warhol invented reasons to keep Gerard out late at night, and on unimportant deliveries all over town during the day, so that he could not memorize his lengthy role. This forced me to use the 30s-film ploy, a spooled, revolving idiot sheet: which accounts for Gerard's, and some other less-excusable actors', constant gaze off-and-down-right (where the spool was rotating). In this film, "innocent" on-lookers were drafted to famous advantage: true-life sado-masochists were invited to enter the picture and "do their thing" at the last moment, and Edie Sedgwick herself, who "just happened" to drop by that day, was asked to add her silent presence to the proceedings. She was well-advised to consent, for her insouciant, recumbent chain-smoking made her an overnight star.

The celebrated moment when the camera jump-cuts from its long-held frame to a head-shot of Gerard, however, was the result of a technical failure. The camera broke down in mid-shoot, and the best Buddy could do was to refocus it in a head-shot from which he, in time, zoomed out. Andy was not pleased (in advance of the film's reviews) since this movie predated his intention to use multiple frames.

My own "destabilization" of a crucial scene in HEDY, OR THE 14 YEAR OLD GIRL also was not intentional, though critics have subjected the sequence to much speculation on the meaning of the scenarist's sudden appearance on-camera to "save" his work from runaway sabotage. In this film, Andy actually worked the roving camera, often with startling results: e.g., the famous panning away from climactic action to examine, and equate it with, the ceiling. This innovation confused the actors during one of the movie's four-set scenes, and inadvertantly they began to railroad the through-line toward an opposing conclusion. I stepped quickly onto the set and redirected them, but got caught in the unpredictably-roving camera's eye, assumed a character to account for my presence, and "died" on film, planning to crawl off-set under the lens. With more humor and disinterest, perhaps, than malice, Andy shot me crawling off and let the metaphysicians make what they would of it.

3. OTHER OBSERVATIONS ON WARHOL'S FILM-MAKING METHODOLOGY

When I began working for Andy he used an unmoving sinc-sound 16 mm orcan camera, feeling that the immobile picture was his (and Edison's) special contribution to filmmaking. When he asked me to perform in 50 FANTASTICS, he set up the camera and went away for the designated 3 minute run-of-film, requiring only that I not go away, but otherwise do as I would before its uncompromising gaze: i.e., define myself. (A still of this session is often used as my "author's portrait".) Nevertheless, he became restive with this technique because it did not sufficiently "remove" him from the creative process: for, as yet, he still arranged the scene and studied, via the lens, his composition. This led him to use Wirtschafter to replace himself. (The latter's technical know-how was welcome as well since the out-of-focus early work was unintentional and, shortly, deemed undesirable.) Partly because my script greatly interested him, and partly because he

wished to guide Edie to a staying stardom, Andy undertook a co-directorial position with me on KITCHEN. And he appeared to enjoy this job very much. Unfortunately, when Edie proved recalcitrant in the follow-up film, SPACE, Andy abandoned his dabbling in conventional directing; and, angered with both Edie and Gerard at the time, (I believe) unintentionally made me very uncomfortable during the shooting, so that I could not think my way creatively out of the many problems that kept arising during the making of SPACE, a finally unsatisfactory work. Then he commissioned me to write WITHERING SIGHTS (sic) and JANE EYRE BARE (sic) because these Bronte sisters' tales were the subjects of two of his favorite Hollywood films. Here, obviously, he wished me to compromise the heretofore abstract nature of the scenarios in favor of "goofy" line-throughs. Part of the silliness which registers in the first was due to the gross ineptitude in the new stable of actors; and the latter, a major 3-hour movie, due to legal tie-ups with angels, never was shot.

New inspiration came in the form of the Garbo-like charisma of now-Hollywood actress, Mary Waronov. Unhappily for me, she would appear in only two of my Warhol scripts, the "Hanoi Hannah" and "Toby Short" sequences of THE CHELSEA GIRLS, although she later performed with great effect in a half-dozen stage plays of mine. Though Mary struggled to interpret her roles and deliver her lines faithfully in these films, she was manacled by "supporting" actors apparently incable of not only learning lines, but even reading English. Here, the method of burying script pages on the set was resorted to, but such incompetence usually rendered ineffectual even this extreme measure.

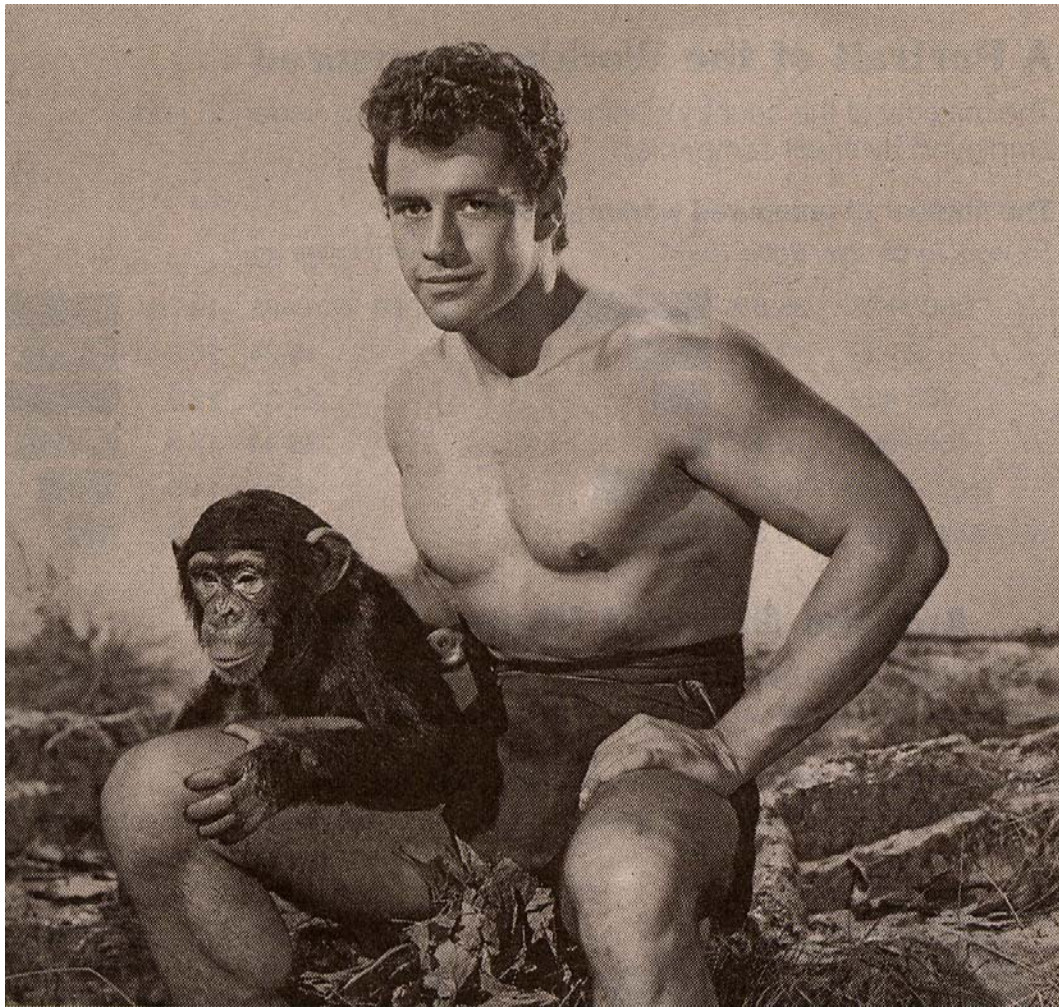
3/13/90. Ronald Tavel.

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Gordon Scott in the 1957 movie "Tarzan and the Lost Safari."

Gordon Scott, 80, Film Actor Best Known for Playing Tarzan





GORDON SCOTT: THE BEST MOVIE TARZAN DIES AT 80

By Ronald Tavel

Gordon Scott, Hollywood's Tarzan from 1955 to 1960, died in Baltimore on April 30, 2007, from complications following heart surgery. He was 80 years old.

Though most reference books list the appropriately titled, *TARZAN'S GREATEST ADVENTURE* (1959) and *TARZAN THE MAGNIFICENT* (1960) as the two best Tarzan movies, beyond citing their "mature" or "adult" scripts and on-location shooting, they neglect to examine the instinctual fortune involved in why these movies so "transcend" the norm. At the time of the first one's release, a critic said the only complaint you could have about this entry is that it is more Joseph Conrad than Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Is that a complaint?

Actually, this film owes a debt to both authors. On the occasion of the reprinting of all Burroughs' Tarzan novels, *The Washington Post* noted that they are so poorly (and stupidly) written as to be a notch above illegibility. They nevertheless remain quite popular and they inspired filmdom's longest series. These tales articulate a tired businessman's daydream as he stares through his office window on a slow afternoon. They are an Idea. A daydream of Adam before the Fall from Grace, at home with his uncomplicated surroundings, at peace with the animals, even when he must kill them, animals he not only dominates, but which he named into existence and can therefore speak to. This Idea was grasped by just a few men, notably J. Allen St. John, an illustrator for the pulp fiction rags which published them serially (see his cover-art painting *Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle* (1929); and the American actor, Gordon Scott.

In so far as the Joseph Conrad infusion goes, *TARZAN'S GREATEST ADVENTURE* blatantly raises the question of what people both seek and want in life, and why they venture into the extremes hidden in their hearts.

Briefs bios of Scott refer to his handsome face and physical attributes, 6'3", 210 lbs, 19-inch biceps. None inspects the seriousness of that intense face, the solidity of its gaze, the judgment in its stare: its complete understanding of - and comfortableness with - the idea of a Tarzan. Included in this Idea is the moral ambiguity of action, the nearness of death, the inevitability of isolation. Most of all, and what makes Gordon Scott a genuine film image, is his ability to project this seriousness in total; to add the dignity of his presence, the economy of his acting. A fan noted

that Scott did not walk: his body did that for him. Neither did he have to exert himself acting: his soul, in its entirety, did that for him. He is virtually the embodiment of Burroughs' daydream and Conrad's conflicts. Rinsing his face after destroying the villain and being rejected by his lady-love in the final sequence of *TARZAN'S GREATEST ADVENTURE*, he evaluates his reflection in the small pond on a boulder and knows who he is: alone, naturally driven to achieve justice, truthful to a fault, and, above all, serene.

Gordon Scott's personal and real-life harmony with nature is wonderfully realized in a sequence, shot as possible filler (for *TARZAN AND THE TRAPPERS* and repeated in *TARZAN'S FIGHT FOR LIFE*), in which, while passing a group of wild giraffes in Africa, he suddenly, and on impulse, seized the sloping neck of an adolescent giraffe, deftly hoisted himself, and rode the giraffe bareback – a feat captured by an alert cameraman and considered by film experts to be not only unique but one of the most amazing moments on celluloid.

Scott went on to make 18 sword and sandal epics and spaghetti westerns after Sol Lesser foolishly retired him from Tarzan (more family-oriented flicks would gross more), and lent that same steadfastness to each of them. Delicious rumors abound concerning his life after 1967; but, estranged from his family, little is really known about his last forty years. His mesmeric image would go largely undervalued, and unused, by folks who make films.