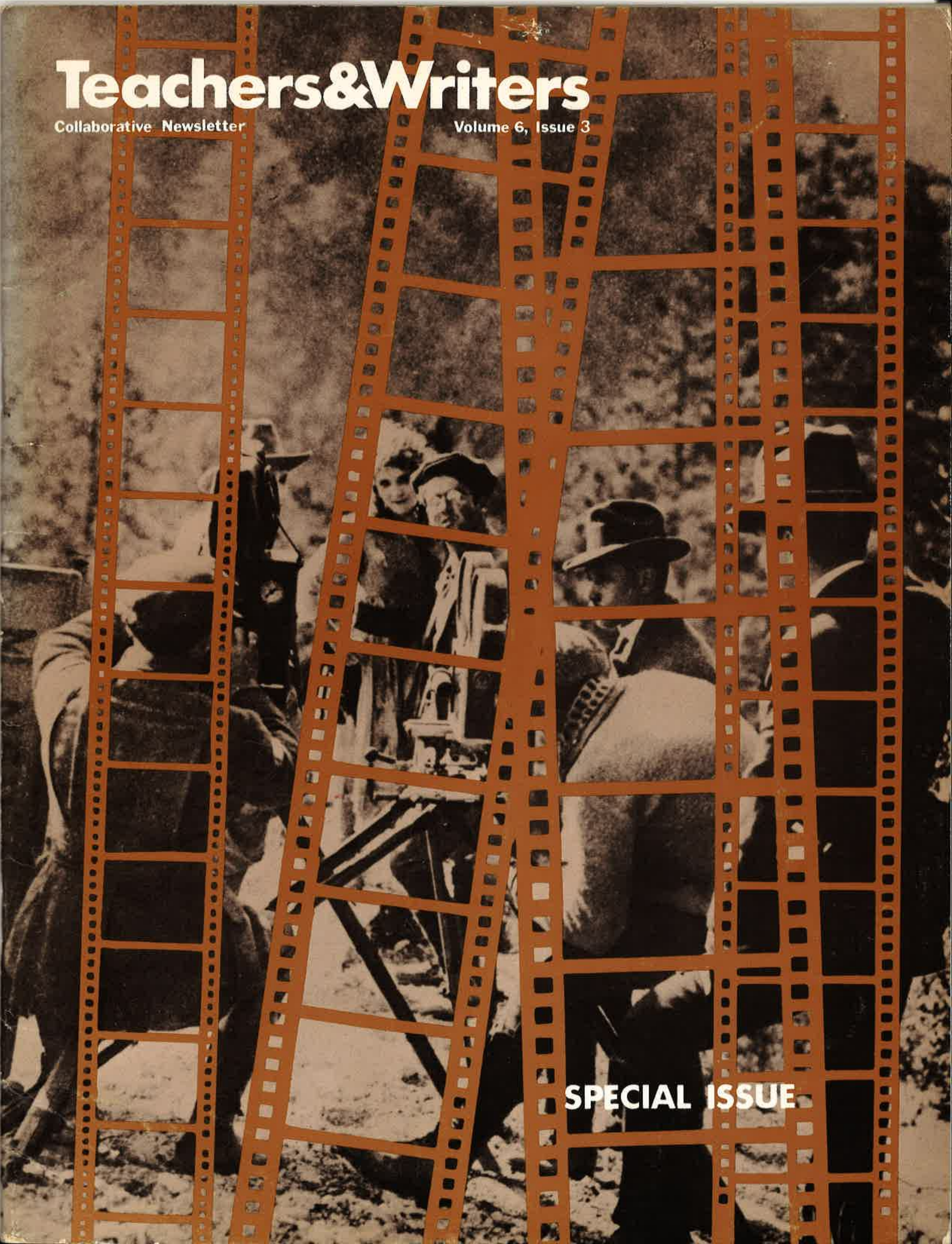
Teachers&Writers

Collaborative Newsletter

Volume 6, Issue 3



SPECIAL ISSUE

Teachers&Writers
Collaborative Newsletter **Volume 6, Issue 3**

Special Issue

This special issue of the *Newsletter* presents some of the experiences of writers working with film and video. These articles explore the connection between drama, as captured by these media, and the writing process with which we attempt to familiarize children. We hope to convey to the reader some sense of how film and video, major art forms of our time, can be used in the classroom to expand the understanding of arts in general.

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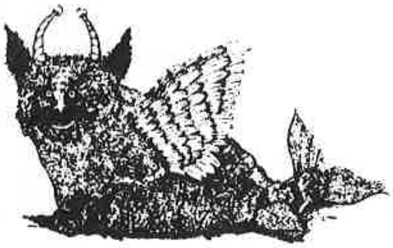

spring '75
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"Maybe we had condescended too long to children feeding them a diet of goo-goo short subjects."

Film History Course–a diary

Phillip Lopate

The idea for a history of films course at the elementary school level took shape the previous spring, when a group of my students at P.S. 75 were making a videotape about witchcraft. They had planned to burn the witch at the stake in the last scene, and to show them how this was done by a worthy predecessor, I rented Carl Dreyer's *Passion of Joan of Arc*. The film was shown to 50 children at once. What amazed me was that they were spellbound and emotionally caught up throughout this long, extremely difficult and demanding silent work. I reasoned that if they could accept a work as difficult as *Passion*, they could put up with anything. Maybe we had condescended too long to children, feeding them a diet of goo-goo short subjects. Maybe they could benefit from an in-depth study of the greatest films ever made: *Citizen Kane, Intolerance, Potemkin, The Gold Rush, Bicycle Thief* and so on. In any case it was worth a try. Karen Sacks of Center for Understanding Media helped me contact the 16mm. houses which distributed these films and they agreed to cooperate with the project, as a pilot curriculum. Then we picked an entire class (Mrs. Betts')and two halves of two other classes to give the course to. We would start with a total of 60 kids, 30 from Mrs. Betts' class and 15 each, picked on a volunteer basis from Miss Brayboy's and Mr. Tempel's. Miss Betts' children were asked to keep a film journal throughout the year, while the other children were to be assigned different projects. Tempel's kids, for instance, would start out making some early moving-image toys.

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November 1, 1973

I was very keyed-up for the first lecture. I had done research on the early discoveries that led up to film by reading Gerald Mast's *A Short History of Films* and C. W. Ceram's *The Archaelolgy of the Cinema*. A fascinating period, full of toys, gimmicks, mad inventors. The three films ordered for the first class were Lumière's "Cinéma en 1895," Melies' "A Trip to the Moon," and Porter's "The Great Train Robbery." All told, they would last no longer than 45 minutes. The rest of the time would be spent laying a groundwork of information and discussing the films.

After so many years of exploring the vague feelings of students through poetry and dramatic improvisation, I was looking forward to the change-of-pace teaching "hard-nosed" subject matter. It struck me that these kids had very little historical consciousness about the media, which seemed to have been handed to them on a platter from birth, and that a history of films might well be the first time they had explored the systematic development of *anything*, film or otherwise.

The children sat down on a rug on the floor and we began. I told them the anecdote about the Governor of California who had bet that all four feet of a horse left the ground at one time; and to prove it hired Eadward Muybridge, who took a series of photographs of horses and other animals in motion. (The nude shots of a woman lifting a vase created quite a stir.) I explained that they were done nude to show the muscles in movement.

The leap from a series of photographs to moving pictures was a short one. It rested on the connection with the phenomenon called persistence of vision: that an object remains on the retina a fraction of a second after it disappears. In other words, the eye completes the movement of several fragmented pieces of action by blurring them together. "It may seem odd to say this, but there are no such things as moving pictures. There are only still pictures, each one lasting a frame, which, run together, produce an illusion of movement."

As examples of this phenomemon, I showed them pictures of the toy circle with a parrot on one side and a cage on the other, which, spun, put the parrot in the cage: also the zoetrope, which is constructed on the principle of a whirling drum. The children were all familiar with the flipbooks that create the appearance of animation.

I mentioned that Lumière had found that 16 frames per second was the optimal rate to create an impression of flow. One kid corrected me, "Isn't it 24 frames?" I told them that 16 frames had been used for silent films, and 24 for sound. It was a good opportunity to explain that the jolty movement one sees in many silent films results from projecting them at the wrong speed—sound speed—not because they were originally made jerkily.

This early discussion was on a very high level of sophistication and concentration. I felt that everyone understood "persistence of vision." A few kids were way ahead of me: they knew about the one-frame-at-a-time problem of projection and the nickelodeons. . . They were scarily well-informed ("My father's a filmmaker," said one, and another told me his father screens silents all the time in his cafe). The gap between these kids and the ones who knew nothing about film technique and had simply wandered into this was immense. Francisco said a number of times, "Quit talking. Let's see the films."

Of the three films, the Lumière documentary newsreels were the least understood and liked. Melies' "Trip to the Moon" was watched with fascination and applauded at the end. But the film which caught them up the most was "The Great Train Robbery." I tried to make those standard textbook observations about the theatricality of Melies and the static use of the camera. But by this time discussion was more difficult; the kids were into a casual moviegoing mood and they gabbed and went to the water fountain between reels. It was interesting that the mere projection of the first movie dissolved the atmosphere of thoughtful film study. Once again they were kids, rolling around and acting silly and wishing there was popcorn. Nothing could be more understandable than this relaxation. They were, in any case, enjoying the film, which is, I guess, the point of it.

I took to commenting aloud while the films were running—that is, interjecting instruction while they were a captive audience instead of between films. The idea that the filmmakers had not yet evolved a style of movement bewildered the kids. "Why didn't they move the camera?" one asked belligerently. This was like their earlier question, "Why didn't they know how to invent a projector?" They seem to have a very poor idea of the slowness of development in any art. They were impatient with the fact that these 19th Century men didn't seem to know what they, only 11 years old, did.

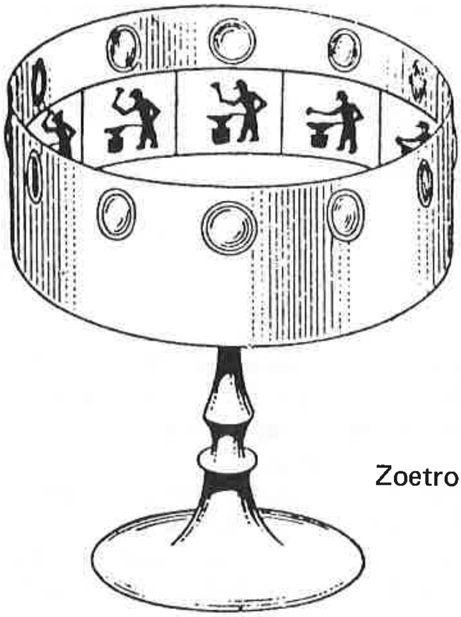
Some of the kids were bursting with the urge to talk about the films, and I wish we had had more time for discussion. Others were eager to cut out. These three early films are endlessly rich source materials. Karen Sacks, Teri Mack and I—all the adults—had loved watching them. We had a little caucus after the class with Lois Betts to discuss how to iron out some of the snags in the operation, which we diagnosed as follows:

1. Too many kids. Sixty may simply be too many to watch a film at one time. Though I don't feel that way, Karen Sacks does. The problem is more that some kids are using the freedom as an excuse to jock around. The more intellectual kids are obviously "getting it" faster, while the poor readers are a little intimidated and making trouble. Nevertheless, I would hate to weed out the latter, leaving only the "serious" students, because the course is supposed to reach kids who would never have thought about these things.

2. The difficulty of alternating film and discussion. I felt it would be better not to fight that tendency to dissolve into a mass kiddie audience. I would rather restrict most of the information to before the films, than try getting points across between films. (This problem won't come up during most weeks because we will be showing features, not three shorts.) As for post-screening discussion, I am for asking those who want to talk about the films to stay for a discussion, on a *volunteer* basis. That will give them a chance to delve deeper into issues without having to put up with the resistance of kids who squirm in discussion.

3. Over-zealousness. Lois Betts reminded me that "after all, they're just kids, and you can't expect them to be angels or to pay attention all the time. Once *you* ease up a little," she said to me, "it should go smoother." Everyone agreed it was a promising start.

"'Why didn't they know how to invent projectors?' They seem to have a very poor idea of the slowness of development in any art. They were impatient with the fact that these 19th Century men didn't seem to know what they, only 11 years old, did."



Zoetrope

The exuberance of the Porter movie when the camera follows the horses and men into the woods. The first pan—it moves!—like a baby walking for the first time.

The kids' commentary on the acting: "That's so hammy!" (clutching his chest). Me: "Of course, because they were still using stage acting, which is very broad and intended for the last row."

The kid who said the third film (Great Train Robbery) was the only one that "had any meaning." What did he mean by that?

Follow-Up

Mike Tempel had his whole class do Thaumatropes—spinning circles with strings on both ends which stress the persistence of vision. A famous example is the one with the parrot and the cage. Some of the kids' things were clever:

A wall on one side, graffitti on another.
A fist on one side, F U
O U
and a finger with C K
Y
on the other.
A prisoner, with bars, on the other side.

The ones that used color had an interesting color-mix effect.

They were also doing flip-books.

Betts' class continued to keep film journals. . .

Tempel plans to build a zoetrope.

I discovered that a lot of kids had been excited about the first program and were looking forward to the second.

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari

November 7

CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI (Robert Wiene)

Intolerance never arrived. It had been sent late so we had to hustle another film fast. After spending a morning chasing one company after another and discovering that most of them had depots outside the city, I was sure we were headed for disaster, but—New Yorker Films had a print of *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. So *Caligari* it was. And everyone loved it. In terms of the complexity of technique, it was not a bad choice to follow our first program. And in terms of entertainment it probably exceeded Griffith.

We began the class with a short videotape demonstration about camera positions. I reminded the group that in the earliest films the camera was static. One reason why the acting tended to be hammy (like someone weeping) was that everything was done in far shot. But if you could move the camera in for a closeup you could show a single tear running down the cheek. I gave a demonstration. I pretended to pick up a knife and advance on someone. Then we broke it up into a closeup of the hand, a closeup of the victim and a medium shot of the killing. I'm not sure how much impact this demonstration had but, as in last week's lecture, one point stood out, one point was learned:

That a closeup was of the face.

A medium shot was from the stomach up.

And a far shot took in the whole body.

Mike Tempel made a good comment about the difference between theatre and film: in theatre you were always the same distance away, but the camera gave you the same freedom of motion as if you could jump on the stage and get two inches from the actor's face, or climb onto the chandelier and look down, or run around the stage. We had a hard time holding their attention any further.

It was time to start the film. I explained that *Caligari* was purposely unrealistic and it had the look of a dream—watch for the slanted, painted sets, the makeup.

The movie was the best part. Many of the comments about the camera position that had seemed so dry when delivered abstractly became intelligible while watching the films. I read each of the titles in a dramatic voice. (Many of the kids can't read well enough.) Teri, Mike and I also added commentary, as:

Look at how it narrows to a closeup.

That's an iris effect. See how the screen opens up? They're selecting what part they want you to see.

Now he's having a flashback. (We explained the term.)

See how dramatic the shadows are?

And the kids would ask us questions, mostly about the plot.

The fun of the film came with those melodramatic explosions: "You will die at dawn!" or "I must-be-Caligari!" And the eerie way Cesare the somnabulist hugs the walls, and the overwhelming doorways.

For background music I used, first, Chopin's Nocturnes, then escalated to the incredible piercing Berg's String Quartet. If people thought the Chopin piano music went well, they were startled at the matching of the Berg with the visuals. Several kids asked me if that music had been written for the movie.(Not surprisingly: Berg's and *Caligari's* anxious art came from the same historical moment and milieu.) It was amazing how much muscle the music gave the visuals.

Teri was sitting among a group of kids on the rug and said most of their comments were about the film. They were really engrossed.

When the movie ended I asked them who was actually crazy? Some said Dr. Caligari, some said the one who was telling the story. I pointed out how rare it was for the person who is telling the story to be not telling the truth, or crazy. The subjective narrator idea may need a little underscoring later on.

Lois loved the film. The Assistant Principal stood inside the door for 10 minutes and watched. The adults really dug it. Me too!

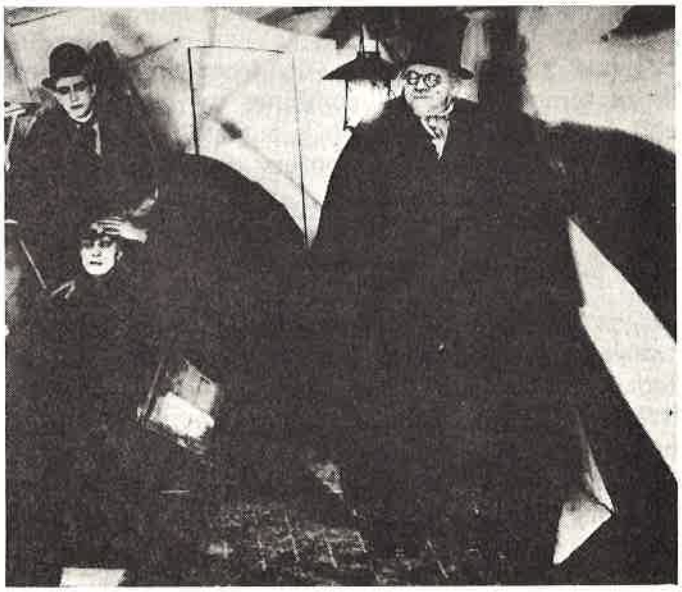
Karen, Teri and I had a feeling of elation when it was all over. "It went well!" Some of that euphoria may have been the will to have a good experience translated into diagnosis. But I still think it was great—you had to have been there.

Maybe they could benefit from an in-depth study of the greatest films ever made. . . .

Follow-Up

Lois has started an amazing project. Her class is working on a silent movie. First she had them pantomime emotions—the whole class became happy without uttering a sound. Then she worked with them on a story. The kids have been rehearsing the scenes and have started mapping out the shots on paper. Lois wants to do it first in videotape and second in Super-8—a terrific chance to compare the two media.

The story is weird enough. In the first scene wife and lover plot the death of husband. But the children overhear. Second scene—the murder. Third scene is the funeral, where wife acts grief-stricken but is secretly frightened that children may know. (A perfect setup for the silent language of eyes and suspicion.) The story sounds like Clytemnestra and Agamemnon. Maybe it's true that children unconsciously discover all the archetypes.



November 14

INTOLERANCE (D.W. Griffith)

Intolerance was a drag. An essential, cultural, worthwhile drag, but a drag nonetheless.

We showed only the first and third reels, because it went on forever and was intolerably long. (No pun intended.) The kids fidgeted on the floor, pinching and squealing. They picked up during any of the color sequences, which were gorgeous. I had never seen the tinted version before—those lilacs and browns and ambers gave such opulence to the images. And how much richer if we could have gotten the damn school projector to focus!

The opening lecture was quietly received. I told them the film dealt with the problem of things happening simultaneously in different places. How do you show the idea of "meanwhile" in films? Not only did Griffith mix four stories, but also ranged from century to century. "Before his films it was as if the movies were a little hut. Afterwards it was like living in a mansion with rooms and rooms."

All very well, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating. And *Intolerance* is plainly a wrongheaded masterpiece which engages few adults—why should it enthrall children? We pointed to the quickening of the editing and the travelling shots. These technical points had to suffice in the absence of any emotional engagement. The basic question, *Why* did he switch all the stories and make it so confusing, never got answered. Kids are used to looking at films as an involving fantasy that sucks them right in; *Intolerance* required the sober detached eye of a museum goer. The thrills were not so much for the film as such, as for what an impressive achievement it was *then*.

Even so, I liked the movie. It was sumptuous in a gaga way. And I'm glad I gave them the chance to see Griffith and be part of this pious history of film.

Next week, God willing, Chaplin!

I had a writing idea to try from this shambles. Write something which combines two stories, back and forth. This alternation is actually the principle behind most great 19th Century novels. I gave it to Mike Tempel to try out.

One funny thing: I was talking to Hannah Brown, a twelve-year old, about the movie we were to see today. "Someday," I said mistily, "people will say, 'Who was it who showed you *Intolerance* when you were only in the sixth grade?' "

Hannah answered: "And I'll say, 'I have a picture of him right here.'—'My God, it's the axe murderer!' "

November 22

POTEMKIN (S.M. Eisenstein)

Chaplin didn't arrive so we had to do *Potemkin.* Not the best choice for the day before Thanksgiving holiday—the kids would be ready for fun—but I had no choice.

The kids came in all in one bunch and squeezed together on the rug. After explaining to them that they would be seeing neither the Dracula movie (*Nosferatu*) nor Chaplin (they took it philosophically) we began. I had a sense that this would be my most difficult lecture in the series, because the concept of montage is rather abstract, so it was all the more important that they get completely quiet before I began.

First I asked them how many knew about the Russian Revolution. None of them seemed too sure. I told them a bit about the aristocracy and rich people controlling the country, and the poor people and workers having no power. "How do you think the rich people were able to keep so many of the others who outnumbered them in line?" I asked. No one could guess. "The army and the police," I answered. It was a rather partisan account, only enough to get them to see that the events in the film were part of an enormously important period in human history. I would hope that the classroom teachers would someday find time to teach them a little about the Russian Revolution.

I passed around a book by Michael Mayer, *Battleship Potemkin*, which gives a shot-by-shot analysis of the film with lots of stills.

I explained that after the Revolution there wasn't much money in Russia to make films. So they began by studying films that had already been made, and took them apart and put them together again. They got hold of a print of *Intolerance* (the film we saw last week, remember?) and ran it off hundreds of times and even re-edited it. What do I mean by editing? I asked. Editing is taking individual pieces of films, shots, cutting them up and gluing them together. When you go to a movie, mostly you're unconscious of its being edited, you look at it as if it were a dream, but actually a film is made out of dozens of separate shots, pasted together in a certain order. And what determines the order, what makes you stick one piece of film next to another, is the emotions that telling the story demands. For instance, the Russians did a famous experiment where they took a shot of a man's face—the man had a blank expression and they put it next to a shot of a baby. They ran it off for an audience and what do you think the audience thought the man was feeling?

"How cute!"

"Right. Goo goo, how cute. Then they took the same man's face and put it next to a pretty lady. What did the audience think the man was thinking then?" – "That he wanted to kiss the lady?" – Right, that he was interested in the sexy lady. Still the same blank face, but they thought now he was after the lady. Then they did the same thing, putting the man's face next to a pot of gold. And everyone thought he wanted the money. So what they realized was that you can show an emotion not just by what happens inside the shot, but by putting it next to or juxtaposing it with something else. Put one shot next to another and the audience does the work of connecting the two in their brains and making a third thing. They make a story out of it. For instance, they did another experiment –" And I told them how the Russians had assembled a shot of a man walking down the street, then a woman walking from the other side, then they meet and shake hands, the man points to the white steps of a building, and then you see an entire white building. The fact is that the man was shot in one part of town, the woman miles away, the stairs had nothing to do with the building, which was the White House, and yet people connected it into a logical story that all happened in the same place.

I must say that I thought my delivery very lucid. The kids were paying extreme attention and I was trying to keep their attention by acting out everything I said with movements and gestures. I ended by making a point about cutting on an action—a shot ending in mid-action and the next one beginning in mid-action—giving more of a sense of adventure.

Finally I said that *Potemkin* was different from most movies they saw in that the typical movie had a hero—a man who wanted to rob a bank or marry a girl—but here the hero was a whole people.

POTEMKIN

The movie surprised me in being much more visually beautiful than I had remembered. The peculiarly muted lighting in many scenes contrasted with one's clichéd sense of the film as stark documentary photography. Again and again the lyrical took me by surprise. It seemed that Eisenstein used key images, stepping-stones in the film, and worked with these physical presences lovingly, like a poet, not leaving any image until its mass and shadow had been sensed in the viewer's mind.

Eisenstein the poet:

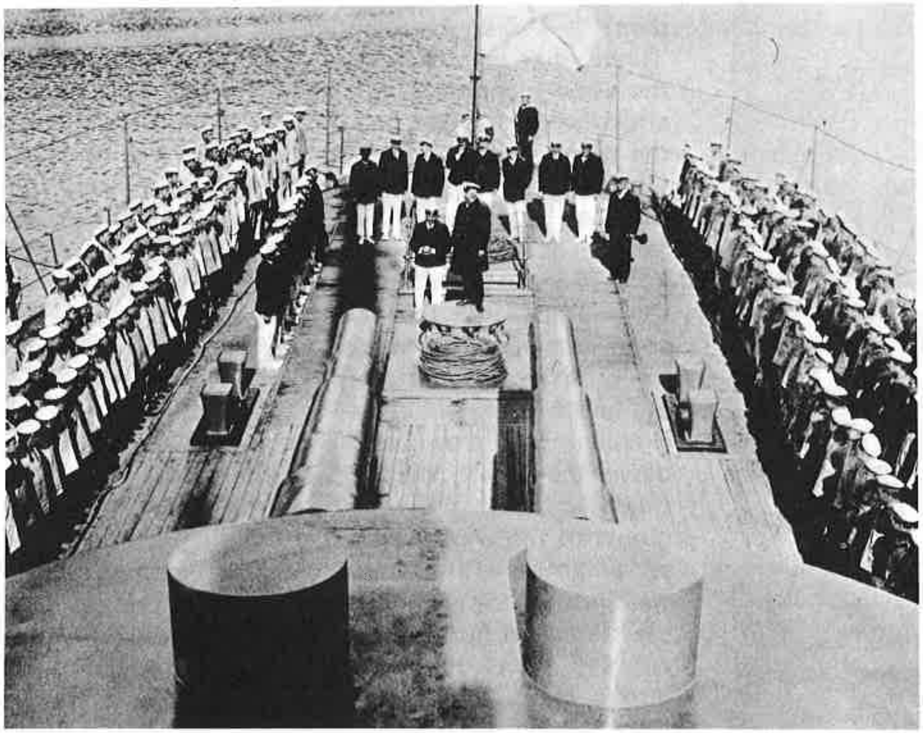
The weight of sailor's behinds in hammocks (the soft moving light as it falls across the hammock).

The swinging mess tables.

The doctor's monocle.

Maggots in the meat. (An image of a whole society in the stages of degeneration).

The tarpaulin over the sailors lined up to be shot, later shown alone, flapping on the deck after they



"Finally I said that *Potemkin* was different from most movies they saw in that the typical movie had a hero—a man who wanted to rob a bank or marry a girl—but here the hero was a whole people."

had escaped (objects have a life of their own apart from the drama). Eisenstein compares the tarpaulin to a "large bandage".

The cannons pointed toward us in phallic symmetry; highlights on the metallic surface persuading the audience to love machinery. Metallic taste, as if you and the camera were licking the cannon.

Sunset—the boat's prow, from left to right bringing the body into port.

The serpentine masses for miles and miles.

Vakulnichick's calm, somber face in death (that violent swing of long shot to closeup—always).

The baby carriage.

The student's face.

The marching feet and backs of soldiers(never their faces—a machine). Pointing to a contradiction. How can we love machines and not love men who turn into machines?

Problem with the last section: no overpowering, dominant image.

* * *

I played Brahms' Piano Quartets 1 and 3 as background music. It worked very well. The kids were engrossed throughout the tense first two sections. Less so during the long, tedious Scene 3 of mourners visiting the bier. This is Eisenstein's intention, to let the drama slacken in Section 3—he calls it "a caesura"—before the climactic Odessa Steps, and so I think it is his fault if the kids paid less attention. I stopped the projector before the Odessa Steps sequence could begin, and got them quiet again, and reminded them that this was perhaps the most famous and celebrated sequence in the history of film.

My buildup of the Odessa sequence was not wasted on them. And fortunately Eisenstein came through more fantastically than one could imagine. No matter how much anyone thinks that no film sequence can live up to that advance publicity, the Odessa Steps makes believers of us all. Esther Rosenfeld, who had dropped in to visit, was amazed, as were all the adults, even more than the children.

Then the inexplicably dull last section, the finale of what Eisenstein called a "classical 5-act tragedy". I knew as it began that it could not possibly top the high of the Odessa Steps, and was tempted to spare them the last ten minutes. But then I thought: who am I to tamper with Eisenstein's conception? Better to show them the whole bloody thing instead of giving them abridged classics.

The general consensus was of a film alternately fascinating and boring, i.e. an art film.

As I said before, I don't think you can blame the kids for not responding enthusiastically to every second of it. Some of the fault must rest with Eisenstein for his notion of building tension by padding, which sometimes boomerangs.

One good part of this course is that it is forcing me to re-evaluate the films I am showing. Thus, *Potemkin* seems to me much more beautiful and painterly than I had remembered (seeing it at the age of 17), if more flawed dramatically.

Teri was enraptured by it. Most of the adults had never seen it. (I wish all the adults were more selfish in their desire for good viewing experience, instead of worrying so much about "How the kids were taking it.")

He thought the last two films had been 'too heavy' for many of the kids—way over their heads. He told me it was imperative that we bring in something light and entertaining. . . .

I called a meeting of the three teachers, Karen Sacks and myself for lunchtime, to discuss the course. While it was agreed that it had been very worthwhile so far, all agreed that the kids needed more concrete experiences to solidify the concepts that were being introduced; otherwise the teaching would slip away. I had jotted down a few ideas I wanted them/us to try:

1. One-shots. Replicating the Lumière-type films, where you couldn't move the camera. Advance choice of subject and framing would become all the more important. Lois called these not so much film as "studies," a happy word-choice. The three agreed to make a homework arrangement asking the kids to come up with ideas for one-shots. One good reason for doing this, I explained, was that the kids saw the large narrative sweep of films but were as yet unable to go out of their way to focus on specific details. One-shots would teach them the art of seeing.
2. Replicate Kuleshev experiment—juxtaposing one shot (blank faced man, or something else) with different shots to create different emotions. One suggestion was to use a still photograph, film it and splice parts of it next to different shots. Lois objected that the whole project was too hard for her. Mike thought he might be able to get one or two kids to work on it.
3. Editing old footage—Mary said she could get an old Abbott and Costello movie, and we might be able to pick up a newsreel or cartoon. The idea here is to edit several films together to create weird effects—also just to give kids the manual experience of working with pieces of film as shots that they could touch and see. An 8mm editor and a pegboard would be necessary. Every kid could take turns at this.
4. Training Film—a film made by kids which would demonstrate and explain every kind of shot: medium shot, long shot, close shot, pan, tracking shot, 360°, bird's eye, worm's eye, hand hold. . . Again, two or three kids (very bright) would have to do this.
5. Comic strip analysis, shot by shot, in terms of the artwork's "camera angles."
6. The other two classes should join Lois's class in keeping film diaries, since the results she has been getting are encouraging and the idea deserves to be spread.
7. Visits to a color video lab.
8. The silent movie idea which Lois's class started, with pantomime, continues to be moving along at a good pace.

The meeting was productive. The teachers recognized the need for additional classroom arrangements during the week to cement information. They did not even bristle at taking orders/suggestions from me. However, Michael Tempel was more skeptical than the others about the amount that the kids are really taking in. He thought the last two films had been "too heavy" for many of the kids—way over their heads. He told me it was imperative that we bring in something light and entertaining next week (not too long, either). I defensively explained that Chaplin *had* been scheduled but the films didn't get here in time. Lois thought it was good for the kids to have their minds stretched by something a little more difficult for a change. Mary expressed no opinion.

November 28

THE GOLD RUSH (Chaplin)

In my opening remarks I spoke about how Chaplin built up a character that remained the same throughout most of his movies, like Bugs or Road runner. What were the aspects of this Chaplin character? They answered:

1. A tramp.
2. Mustache.
3. Walks with feet pointed out.
4. Always gets into difficult predicaments.
5. Funny
6. Ordinary—not a great hero; sometimes good and sometimes bad.

To this I added that Charlie was an outsider, always a stranger, wanting to belong but having a hard time fitting in. (No movie of his could have made this point better than *The Gold Rush*, with its shot of Charlie looking in at the window at frolickers or people eating).

I explained that he had begun as an actor in English music halls, and that many of his routines derive from the theatre. He made a number of shorts as an actor, which were very popular, and by that time he was ready to produce and direct his own films. But—since he was first an actor—his films were actor's films. I explained. The films we had seen so far were mostly director's films. The director was the man who put all the pieces together and had the vision behind the film. Like Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, which we had seen last week. I asked them if they remembered any specific pictures or shots from that film. Their answers were fast and thorough—the maggots/ the man under the tarpaulin/ the cannons pointed toward us/ the priest/ the cross sticking in the floor/ the baby carriage/ the woman walking upstairs with her baby/ the soldier's feet/ the peasants bringing chickens to the sailors/ the money dropped in the dead man's hat. They remembered much that I didn't remember, so much that Lois Betts groaned comically and said: This could go on all day! It was an interesting testimonial, and it made an impression on Mike Tempel, Mary, Lois as well as myself, who had doubts about how much they were absorbing. ("I realize again," Mike Tempel said, "what I keep seeing in other ways: how much these kids absorb even when they look inattentive.")

Anyway, to get back to the list, I said that Eisenstein worked very carefully to set these images in our mind. The film was like a string of pearls and each image was another pearl. But Chaplin would never put in a shot like the boats moving into port at sunset. Chaplin was an actor's director, and what interested him was getting on film himself and the other actors. He was not only a great actor, he was a great dancer, and his films capture that dance, the way he moves his body or his face. And he makes everything else dance too—like the olives or the dance with the forks. Everything he touches come to life and dances. This is Charlie Chaplin.

We started the film. I played a Fats Waller record and a Django Reinhardt, which was excellent for Chaplin. It was a nice, easy film-watching experience.

The kids were arguing whether he was dead.

"He's alive," I said. "In Switzerland." It seemed a stupid answer, if true.

"He must be very old by now. How old?"

"Fifty," one kid guessed.

"More like 75 or 80," I corrected.

"When he sees himself now the way he was then, it must make him cry," said Yolanda.

The majority of kids loved it. The sophisticates shrugged. "I've seen it before," said David Fried.

"I liked last week's better." Maya told me (to please me?) Maybe they're picking up my snobbery? Matthew said he didn't like Chaplin. "Sometimes he's witty," he admitted.

The adults picked up more of the rejection aspects, perhaps, the painful scene when Charlie waits in vain for the girl to come to his New Year's Eve party. Matthew didn't like the sentimentality of it. "That's supposed to be real sad," he said. "That could only happen in a Charlie Chaplin movie."

Feedback

Beth Brayboy and Tempel have given the one-shot assignment for homework and will be getting the results in a few days. Brayboy's class has already done the analysis from the point of view of camera angles. Some of the results are so charming! Mary Worth vs. Dondi. I'll have to steal a few.

Lois Betts' class continues to forge ahead on her silent movie, the Love and Hate of Mrs. Jones. She said today's film was helpful.

Oh, I forgot to mention—the kids seem to love the course.

The Expressive Detail

One thing that interests me and I've learned from the course: that many of the scenes in great films turn on a single image, a gesture that embodies or expresses the full emotion of the scene. This is always true in *Potemkin*, where that one expressive detail—whether it be the maggots in the meat, or the cross in the ground—is given two seconds longer exposure than a hack would give it, or three more camera angles. Anything necessary to underline the point. Eisenstein moves on only when he is sure one of these central images is fixed in the brain.

Chaplin builds his comic routines out of the same kind of attention to single details, except often he cuts away, then returns for the sake of building laughter. This alternation ends up underscoring the repetition—like the dog attached to the rope holding up his pants. Chaplin keeps showing that dog from different angles so that you can't possibly miss the point.

Certainly the discovery of the full evocative use of the closeup by silent film directors like Eisenstein and Chaplin has a lot to do with using a single image as the axis of a scene. But I would think one would probably find the same technique in later directors. The way Raoul Walsh keeps returning to the electric ray of the garage door in *They Drive by Night* to convey an obsessive anxiety about passing through into danger. The good poet doesn't spray images, he fixes at least one in the mind so that it can gnaw away, before going on to the next.

It's precisely this attention to physical detail as the symbol of an action sequence I find missing in kids' videotapes. Kids will film a fight by showing two kids fall on each other and rolling on the floor. They would not think to epitomize a character's wishes or fate by isolating a part of his costume after the fray (as in the case of Potemkin's ship doctor: a broken monocle). This may seem corny but in fact it is not, it is the cinematic form of a literary device called *synecdoche*, or substituting a part for the whole (as Eisenstein himself himself remarks in *Notes of a Film Director*).

All of art is substituting a part for the whole.

Children have trouble making that kind of substitution, where the detail becomes a rich stand-in for a whole reality. I like kids' art, but it interests me to consider what they can't or don't do as well as what they do do. And what they don't do so well is focus on detail.

They have a fine feel for the epic sweep of action. Frustration sets in when they realize that sweep has to be broken down into tiny component units.

What I want to do is to teach them *to look*.

In writing, filming, theatre, anywhere. It's the same process. How to look closely.

What I am after is not one-shot movies, Lumière movies, but the powerful image!

Instead of their making movies out of genres, like last year, they can make them grow out of images.

I would love to edit a string of these one-shots, unrelated, into a flow, like a Warren Senbert movie.

Bill Zavatsky's idea

Assemble ten human gestures. Person lying on floor person with knife; person beating his chest; person weeping in corner; a pencil; a spilled glass of water; broken bottle; outstretched hand; intercut human to human, human to object, object to object.

Dec. 3, 1973

NOSFERATU (F.W. Murnau)

This film went over so well I don't know how to explain it. Many adults find it tedious. Yet the attraction of the Dracula story is so powerful with these kids that it was an enormous hit.

I asked them before we ran the film why they thought the Dracula story was so popular. One kid said, "Because of the bites." Another thought it was because you could keep changing it and telling it different ways. (In other words, myth).

I spoke a bit about texture before the film, asking them to be aware of the way the surfaces of things were photographed. Crumbling walls, wool, skin. Murnau has many great scenes where the stone architecture of the medieval town is used to invoke a nameless horror. I also spoke again about the power of certain images to stay in the mind—and hoped that some of their one-shot projects would have that kind of power.

The movie began in sound speed. I had forgotten to bring phonograph records and was afraid the pace would be too slow; I wanted to get it over with. The characters were prancing around and there was something silly about the whole enterprise. I decided to switch it to silent speed. A magical moment occured. Suddenly we were given time to see the movements unfold in their languid fullness. An elegiac, fateful quality took over—that is to say, Murnau's constant message: the destiny that lies in wait for all humans. It was particularly impressive in transition shots that placed the figures in architectural context. A stairway with no one on it, at the top of which the husband and wife who are about to separate suddenly appear, to descend with all the gluey reluctance of two halves of a whole parting. Then the waiting carriage with horses. I noticed how many cutaways Murnau used—to closets, foliage, barns, houses, little villages. All giving you a sense of something larger awaiting the hero. The long shot as Destiny.

The equivalence between sunlight and good, nightfall and evil was very clear. So much that I remarked to the kids that the film was "about Light and Shadow," So many shots of the woman yearning in front of an airy window, protected by sunlight, that very daylight which is poison to the vampire. In fact all the characters in *Nosferatu* are drawn to windows—Nina Harker, Jonathan, the mad agent who serves the count—as if to prepare us for the wonderful climax when Nosferatu himself is atomized by dawning window light.

Windows and archways. Inside the castle of Nosferatu the figures emerge from shadows, pass under archways and into the light. The archways are like a cupola of Destiny surrounding and prefiguring their fate. There are also bridges that one must cross—bridges, windows, archways, the faces of abandoned warehouses with dark, half-moon holes for windows like a mouth with black teeth. What is one to make of all this architectural detail?

For a film which dwells so often on the drama of light and shadow, there are a curious number of scenes set outdoors in story night-time which were clearly shot during the day. It puzzled the kids who kept asking, Why is it so light when it's supposed to be night-time?

Was it sloppiness? An inability to simulate outdoor night scenes in 1922? (The indoor scenes have none of this ambiguity.) Or a purposeful confusion of night and day, like Hitchcock's mixing of murder and sunlit places. Most curious is the image in full daylight of Nosferatu carrying his casket through the streets, as if he were a piano-mover. The mundane and the spectral coalesce.

Lois Betts said, "He's bringing his sleeping bag with him."

Fredi, "It's a movable apartment."

The kids were particularly engrossed by the shock scenes where Nosferatu emerges from the coffin in stop-time trick photography, or hovers over a victim with monstrous fingernails, or remarks upon seeing a picture of Harker's wife: "Your wife has a lovely throat!" Yet, if they came alive most at the scary scenes, I think they appreciated the whole ambiance which was much subtler than typical horror films. One quiet kid, Erica, I heard murmur to herself: "I like this film." Matthew was also terribly impressed with everything. During the scary parts the kids hugged each other and got a sexy charge out of the whole thing. I saw one boy fling his arms around another and the second say, "Hey, quit it!" The teachers were turned on, too—including myself, I wanted to go over and bite one lady in the neck.

When it ended there was great cheering and applause. They were so excited talking about the film that for the first time, Lois told me, they forgot about going to gym!

December 19

THE GENERAL (Buster Keaton)

Getting Buster Keaton's *The General* projected was a Keaton comedy in itself. The one functioning projector in the school blew when we plugged it in. The film arrived 45 minutes late. I ran in the snow ten blocks to borrow a projector from Bette Korman. When I came back and plugged it in, it mysteriously refused to operate. Mike Tempel submitted that the fuses in our room might be blown. I was prepared for machine failure but not for the walls to give out on me. We tested the phonograph in another room and sure enough it worked—so it was the circuits! The custodian was called in and he fixed it. By now the classes were in recess and it was too late to show the movie before lunchtime. Lois kept encouraging me to forget it—"If it was me I would've quit long ago"—but the fanatically persistent part of my personality had taken over and was disregarding signs from Above. After we were all set up, I learned that Lois's class was going away for a trip during the afternoon. By now I had promised Mike and Mary, so we went ahead anyway, inviting Burns', Soroka's, and Deitchman's kids to sit in on the class, since all of these teachers felt that their exclusion from the course had been unfair, and wanted their kids to have a holiday treat. (No one was into teaching.)

I had to cut short my lecture since there wasn't much time. I did note that Keaton differed from Chaplin in that his comedy had less to do with individual personalities (viz. the poker-face) and more with man and his environment. Keaton seems like a fairly normal ordinary guy in a world gone crazy, and most of the time he is just trying to cope. A lot of his humor is based on trying to do two irreconcilable tasks at the same time.

My impressions of the film as it unwound were mixed. *The General* had never seemed to me as keen as *Steamboat Bill Jr.* or *Our Hospitality*. I had in fact booked *Steamboat Bill* but the distributor sent me *The General* (beggars can't be choosers). That *The General* has come to be considered Keaton's greatest comedy in film books seems to me one of these accidents of history which, once stated, is repeated by all without much reflection. (In the same way that people think of *Madame Bovary* when they hear the name Flaubert, though *Sentimental Education* may well be the better book.)

The General has little of Keaton's tart, poignant understanding of human nature, like the father's rejection of the son in *Steamboat Bill*, or the curious sidekick relationship of *Battling Butler*. (The girl in *The General* is not to be taken seriously.) In place of that psychological dimension is an obsession with mechanical solutions as represented by the locomotive. Thus, I find the film colder than Buster's other works—more cranked-out conceptually, more repetitive, like a child playing with toy trains. "Let's see how far we can take this one prop. . ."

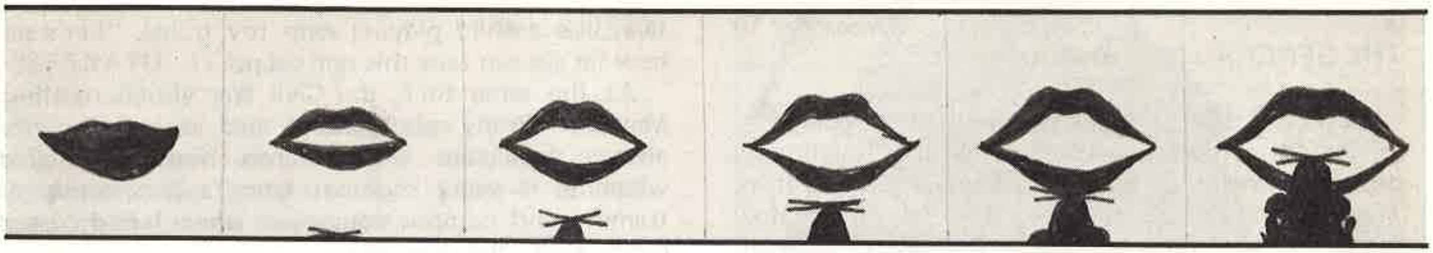
At the same time, the Civil War visuals recalling Matthew Brady photographs had a lushness not always associated with Keaton films. I enjoyed watching it every moment from a perspective of framing and composition, even when I had ceased caring about the dilemmas.

After having made that stray remark about Keaton trying to do two things at once, I was myself surprised at how many gags revolved around this one idea. Trying to carry a load while jumping onto a moving train, trying to stoke a furnace and avoid a gush of water. The ending itself, when he is kissing his girl and keeps being interrupted by soldiers saluting him, is successfully solved by a procedure which allows him to kiss her while returning the salutes. The resolution fittingly shows that now he can do two things at once.

It's interesting how hard Buster works in his films. How much of the time he is occupied in sheer physical labor. Chaplin takes a moment out for sentiment, as in *The Gold Rush*, when he starts to set the table, awaiting his New Year's Eve guests. (That deliciously heartbreaking moment.) Keaton cannot dawdle over his hopes; he must be off, chasing a runaway machine. A furious worker, Keaton.

I pointed out during the movie that Keaton preferred long and medium-long shots (another difference from Chaplin) in order to show the interaction between man and machines or the business around him.

I'm not sure if this comment stuck. The kids seemed to enjoy themselves. The Erik Satie music I played alongside went pretty well. The adults were having a great time—entire reading clinic staff, Deitchman, Tempel—I was too frazzled from the morning's misadventures to surrender to it. At three o'clock the movie still had ten minutes to go and most of the kids left, but about 10 returned to see the bridge blow up and Buster promoted. A happy ending.



Tempel's class has made a zoetrope out of an old barrel and cut holes in it. They have mounted it on a record player turntable and run it at 78 rpm to give it an even flow of images. Several kids have taken long narrow strips of cardboard and drawn simple actions on them. They are getting better and better at it—they realize now that the action must always be in the center of the "frame" (that is, the cardboard) because it will be overlooked anywhere else. Also, it must be drawn boldly. The more "supergraphic" the idea, the broader and larger the strokes, the better it works.

Most successful so far is Nola Lopez's of a pair of big red lips swallowing a mouse. It has the pop art boldness of a Tom Wesselman painting.

". . . the pop art boldness of a Tom Wesselman painting."

In the week after Xmas vacation, the kids were brimming over with film projects. They kept coming up to me with scripts of one-shot films. We had already begun shooting the first of the one-shots and got them back from the lab and everything was OK.

Jared Crawford, a kid in Brayboy's class who had been experimenting with drawing directly on film, went through a series of painful errors and finally hit on a good method. The resulting film employs colored magic marker, punch holes, scratches, "stray" shapes—a lot of techniques. We let Jared take home the moviescope one weekend and that was when most of his breakthroughs occurred.

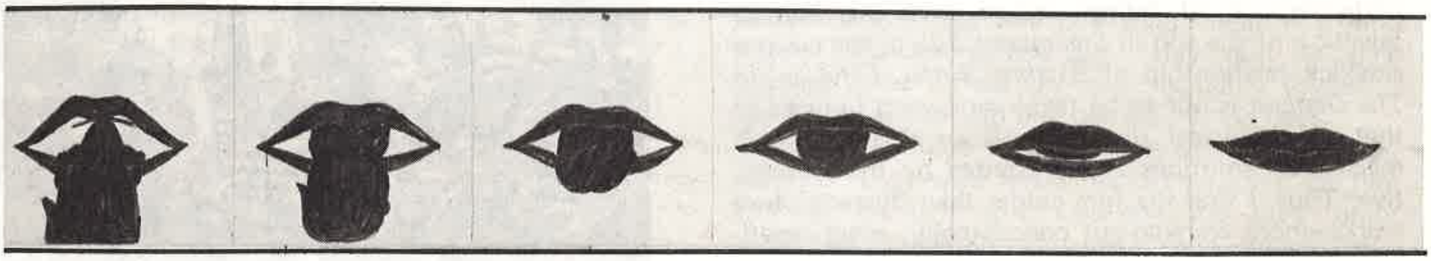
Several of the kids in the course have started coming around the Writing Room, entering into another, easier relationship with me. It's different from the beginning of the year. They seem drawn to the place: sometimes to discuss a film project, transact business or just talk about movies. They often go over in their minds all the films they've seen so far in the course, which they liked, which they didn't—I'm pleased at the cumulative historical memory.

But also, we talk about current movies. For instance, Eric loved *The Sting*, which I disliked—we argued pros and cons. Danny Rosen thought *The Odd Couple* was "boring the way it looked, even though it was funny." Several kids delivered a tirade against love scenes in movies. They all agreed they hated it and when I asked them why, they gave such reasons as "Too slow," and "It's not realistic: men going 'I'll love you forever' to women." It interested me that they objected on the ground of excessive idealism. Nobody mentioned what I take to be the real reason: that sex is denied them, and they are jealous.

The film course has generated an ambiance which allows for relaxed discussion even on days when no film is being shown. The kids are getting more interested in the mechanics of filmmaking. Next week, I will start teaching them editing.

I bought an old Bell and Lowell 16mm projector of my own so that I won't have to rely on the school warhorses. At least I'll know what condition it is in at all times, because I'll be the only one to use it. The $150 investment is a sign of my growing commitment to the course.

I also wrote a silent film script over vacation.



January 9

MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA (Dziga Vertov)

Man With The Movie Camera was, I announced, our last silent film. Next week we would begin the talkies. "This film by Dziga Vertov (Spinning Top, his name means in Russian, and the film is like a spinning top) has all the freedom and sureness that characterized silent films at their very end. The camera goes everywhere, sees everything. When sound came in they were more restricted because the heaviness and noise of the cameras prevented mobility and forced them to put the cameras in soundproof studios. But in 1929, when this film was made, the silents were in their last exuberant bloom."

Teri Mack had seen the film the night before, and said a few words about the metaphoric technique in it. The film is about one day in the life of a city. The city is compared to the human being, so that in the morning a person washes his face, and the streets also get hosed down.

Man With The Movie Camera began. I had seen it many years before, and was astonished, unprepared for its visual excitement. The film works on an associative, intuitive, poetic level, making connections that transcend narrative and standard plot. The chief connections are based on similar movements: the eye blinking, the venetian blind closing, the camera iris shutting. . . But there are also geometric metaphors: a pentagonal shape, and a busy streetcorner with traffic feeding in from five sides. Then there are the sequences organized around place: the beach, or the factory scene. Always the connection between interior and exterior, filmed and filmer. At one point we see a woman bending over a Singer sewing machine, and in the next shot a filmmaker bending over an editing table: the implication is that filmmaking, as all intellectual work, is like any other work, no more and no less. The filmmaker is a worker. The movie was also way ahead of its time in its Godardian insistence that the audience see the process of production that goes into cinema. It is no wonder that when Godard went political his collective chose the name, The Dziga Vertov group.

I was worried about the possibility that the film might be propagandist but I was pleasantly surprised. Rather than being specifically communist it was more a poem to life, to energy, movement, enthusiasm. A film about society which connected social organization to cosmic patterns: a forerunner of Riefensthal's athletic *Olympiad* perhaps. Vertov struck me as a seer of Whitmanesque expansiveness, who could take into himself the power of oceans and dams, of telephone switchboards and people smearing their bodies with mud, and show how all these forces were really expressions of the same, one, energy flow. The breadth of the film is religious.

At the same time it was clearly hard on some of the kids, who had no emotional pointers to go on, no plot, no expectations. Every other second the image changes. Someone complained of a headache. . . There were about 20 defections. The hardcore stayed on to the end, engrossed. David Romanelli described it well:

"It was fragmented and that was what was interesting about it."

I found it not easy to watch, but eminently worth the effort. More than any other film, it teaches you the essential detail, it teaches you how to *look*. Vertov is the Cartier-Bresson of films. I'm very glad we showed it.

Some of the images proved controversial. There was a shot of a child being born, and one could see his mother's vagina. Allison was in an outrage about this. Then a shot of barebreasted women at a beach. "Why didn't they show naked men?" Allison objected. "They're a bunch of male chauvinist pigs!" The mud beauty treatment also revolted some kids. Others, who had looked away to chatter, were mad at themselves for missing these sensational high-points.

Most of the teachers liked the film. Lois surprised me, though, by saying it was all propaganda.

What do you mean? I asked.

"Weren't they taking people and putting them in prison camps at that time? You can't make me believe that that's what life in Russia is like—all fun and games. I still think it's a good film, I'm just saying it's propaganda."

The film had not been explicitly Red. I was puzzled. Was every movie that showed ordinary people carrying on an everyday, untortured, workaday existence propaganda? In that case, how many American films made at the same time would *not* be considered propaganda? Could one agree that both were propaganda?—or was it too much to ask Americans to accept that Russians also took baths, played checkers, had their quiet moments? I agree that the first step toward getting people to accept one's point of view is to convince them that one is, first of all, a human being. Witness *China Today*, or *Russia Today*—the glossy pictorial magazines made for foreign consumption, with their human interest photographs in the style of *Life*.

Still, I think Vertov was a prophet, not a documentarist. The secret of the film is that, by gathering and editing scraps of images from real life, a social vision is expressed which, in its harmoniousness, is Utopian. It seems to point forward to that day that Marx talked about, when politics could give way to ordinary life. The film is really Futurism or science-fiction rooted in the mechanical frailties of the present. *Man With the Movie Camera* was years ahead of its time when it first appeared and is still ahead of its time.

January 18

SINGING IN THE RAIN (Stanley Donen)

A bit of formal lecture on the invention of sound, which the kids attended very well, a quick show of hands as to how many of them liked, hated, or felt indifferent to musicals, and . . . Singing in the Rain.

I had jumped chronologically to 1952 because this movie was *about* the transition to sound, showing some of the problems of the period graphically (stationary cameras behind glass booths, hiding the mike, dubbing of actors who were beautiful but spoke awfully, even the flood of diction coaches). However, since the film is ultra-fluid in visual terms it certainly conflicted with what I had been saying about the static visuals of early sound film.

In any case, a good historical look at the late 20's Hollywood and a very charming film, with a great Comden and Green script.

A group of girls who had groaned at many a silent were ecstatic with this film. Jane thought it was "so pretty." Her friend wanted to know would we please, please show *The Sound Of Music* next week?

(Are they in for a surprise! *Zero de Conduite* . . .)

Many of the boys, like Matthew, were also taken by it. He "wished there could be three more reels."

Jared said a beautiful thing. "This movie shows how all movies are just an illusion."

So true. In fact the pre-film discussions had revolved around the unrealism of musicals, with serious kids like Hannah and Nola objecting to the way people burst into song. I defended musicals, saying that was the point of them—that they were unreal and you should sit back and enjoy them.

This film had enough whipped cream for ten musicals. After a fairly coherent buildup which alternates story and song, it suddenly plunges in the last reel into a gigantic fantasy extravaganza with Gene Kelly singing *Gotta Dance* and flinging himself on Cyd Charisse's outstretched seamed stocking legs. The kids were puzzled — "What's this part of the story? Where did she come from?" Actually it is meant to be the scenario Kelly is telling the producer of his next picture. Then Gene Kelly chases Cyd Charisse's long white scarf over a Salvador Dali landscape . . . very peculiar. Strangely, I remembered just this part of the picture from the time I had seen it as a boy. Its gratuitousness in relation to the rest stuck in my mind. Which is what the Hollywood musical at its technicolor gaudiest is all about—gratuitous gorgeousness; beauty for its own sake.

I should note that its sexiness had stuck in my mind, too. The Cyd Charisse type had a strong influence on my later years, probably for the worse. Debbie Reynolds emerges as the Good Sport, a type of heroine one is grudgingly willing to accept could win Gene Kelly's heart until Cyd Charisse comes along and almost wipes her out of one's memory. Here Kelly suffers genuine passion—of the destructive kind. The 50's dichotomy of good girl and bad girl was never clearer. You can "love" a nice clean girl, but not the way you can LOVE a pretty, bad girl.

Many kids told me they found this the best movie so far—or second best, next to Dracula. Some of them were wriggling around as they watched the screen, itching to dance. And afterwards there was talk by Midori of wanting to do a musical.

January 23

ZERO DE CONDUITE (Jean Vigo)

A gamble. They might love the rebelliousness and kid-theme, or they might find it boring. After *Singing in the Rain* anything would be a disappointment. "Is it color? Is it color?" No. "Is it sound?" Yes. This sort of bargaining dismays me. I want them to be grateful I got them anything.

On the other hand, they must sit through my hunches, utterly powerless to affect a change in programming. Discreetly, some of them try to persuade me they want to see movies like "in the theatres. Can't you get us *Paper Moon* or *Fists of Fury*?"

"You can see them in the theatre any time—"

"But we have to pay money there."

"The movies I show you, you can't see anywhere else."

In fact one of the kids' fathers, Manny Kirchheimer—a filmmaker—came today expressly to see *Zero* because he'd never caught it anywhere else.

The Talk

"This movie by Jean Vigo was made in 1933, five or six years after sound was introduced. It uses a lot of natural sound—the cries of children in the yard, etc.—so it isn't as restricted as the first sound movies. It's also one of the first movies to be made on the subject of children. As you know (ahem) most films are about adults. This one was an attempt to make a film through the children's eyes and to sympathize with their point of view—an early form of Kids Liberation.

"The title comes from the fact that in French schools they would give out zeros as bad marks whenever kids misbehaved. When I was in school I used to have a French teacher who would say, "Zero, Monsieur Lopate!" every time she caught me doing something wrong. She had a sharp way of saying it—Zero, Monsieur Lopate—so it came down like a whip across my back. Until one day I kept right on talking and she kept giving me zeros, double-zeros, and by the end of an hour I had about eight zeros. I didn't do very well in that class. . .

"This film is mostly a documentary but it also has elements in it that are dreamlike or funny—like the Principal of the school, the one with the most power, is a dwarf. So it's a combination of realism and poetry. Anyway, you'll see. It will be interesting to compare how school life was then to how it is now."

Seeing It

I had seen it last when I was 17, 13 years ago. I thought it then a fair but overrated, pretentious film—in short, a "classic" in the worst sense. I was never quite sure what the fuss was about. Yet many great directors and critics swore it was a masterpiece, so I was eager to see it again.

I realized right off it was in the silent film tradition. The first scenes—of the boys in the train—are all pantomime with musical background. And the visual details—the closeup of smoke from the train engine—all come from that strangely expressive silent movie vocabulary which people forgot after 1930, except for those directors who had started in the silent era (Fritz Lang, Ford, Hitchcock, Vigo).

The lighting was luscious. The boys in their white

night-shirts passing through the dormitory darkness and standing in front of the teacher's opaque screen. The rich chocolatey blacks and whites of Sunday, in the scene where the teacher (followed by almost 20 kids) trails a pretty girl. I was so entranced by the quality of the visual image; the screen was *smiling* like the glimmering surfaces of silverware. I wondered if the kids could appreciate this opulence. I suspect instead they felt the film was impoverished, because of the commonplace objects in it. It seems to me that they respond immediately to production values—expensive sets, velvet costumes, color—every extra dollar gets soaked up by their eyes, true American consumers that they are. They appreciate chrome.

Zero is a rich, dense film not by nature of its budget but by its compactness and complexity of psychological suggestion, atmosphere and fantasy. The result is a *layering* effect, reminding me of the narrative prose of Pasternak and Mandelstam, which seems to suck the reader into a subjective inner vision even as it keeps insisting on physical concreteness. This pulsation slows the reader, throws off his narrative expectations, forces him to *submit* to the peculiar poetic priorities of the author which may dawdle over a store window for three pages and announce an important death in one sentence.

This monkeying with Time is exactly what happens in *Zero de Conduite*. For a forty-five minute film it takes itself as leisurely as if it were five hours long (and the unexpected longeurs make you wonder if it isn't). Both too much and too little happen to suit the metronomic tastes of moviegoers fed on James Bond thrills. The film was not popular with the kids. Several whose diaries I read went into tirades of "awful, bad, crummy, stupid, boring." When I asked them to be more specific they had a hard time. One, struggling, said it was unreal—"the way they got in the train and the next minute they were there." He had detected a new rhythm or a new priority for representing flow of time, without realizing that *all* films are unreal in these matters. It is only that we are conditioned to accept certain conventions of film-time.

Some of the rage against the film (they were civil and attentive enough during the showing, and only criticized it afterwards) can be explained by a peculiar phenomenon: they do not like to see school life and the life they ordinarily have to lead on film. Their lack of sympathy for the French children

was immense. Not, I think, because the milieu was too foreign, but because it was too close. Two years ago we made an excellent videotape about the school cafeteria, which showed what a mess it was, and the kids' reactions were uncharacteristically antipathetic. "Get that thing off the screen." They kept saying it was cheap, badly shot, poorly made, whereas in fact it was quite a decent documentary. They associate the media with escapism.

I should note here that several girls told me they had liked *Zero* very much, and could I get more films like that.

One more reflection on Vigo's style.

He uses long long shots, often from high up to get the bodies of children rushing: camera at one end of the dormitory room, looking down past rows of beds and a few kids at other end. The long shot approach is a good solution to the handling of groups, and prevents the film from getting sticky. As it was, I suspected in one lingering shot of a kid's behind and in the slow-motion processional, where the rebellious children are seen as archangels, a tacky fondness for children. But in the end you accept Vigo's tribute as quite sincere: to him, the closest thing we have to angels in this world are children, who are innocent.

Too bad they themselves are too impatient to receive the tribute of this film.

The editing group has been set up: an editing table and moviescope in Brayboy's class. The kids are looking over all the out-takes, annotating them and coming up with schemes for re-edits.

Janaury 30

AVENUES OF COMMUNICATION (Rudolph Burckhardt)

Stuck with a hole in the schedule, I asked avant-garde filmmaker Rudy Burckhardt to visit the class and show his film, *Avenues of Communication*. Rudy and I worked out a routine beforehand whereby I would introduce him as a patient from a mental institution who had made this movie which shows the workings of a crazed mind. He then came on and proceded to explain a little about information theory in a thick German accent, pacing nervously back and forth until I said, "Please, Dr. Burckhardt, stop pacing, you know how it upsets you." At which point he glared at me, and after I interrupted him again he hit me over the head with a rolled newspaper, which happened to be the signal for the lights to go off. The film began.

It was a wild and woolly movie with Taylor Mead cutting up as a pair of twins, Professor von Hudson and his brother, who are fighting over a secret formula, bogus "scientific-educational lectures," and Liebnitz stepping out of a painting frame to dance a minuet. It was pure New York dada, refreshingly zany. I found it very liberating. The kids did too, mostly because of a shot of a nude model posing before a painter. James Lucas kept saying, "Where do that girl live? Give me her telephone number."

Afterwards I took Rudy around to the various rooms and he answered questions. The kids in Lois Betts' class had written lots of questions in their diaries and Rudy wrote the answers in and signed autographs. He was really lovely. Then, near the end, he seemed to run out of oxygen and wanted to leave. . .

I was half-expecting the parents to be up in arms, but nothing came of it. Safe again.

February 6

CARTOONS

I showed an anthology of cartoons: *The Three Little Pigs* and *The Band Concert* by Disney; *Blitz Wolf* and *Red Hot Riding Hood* by Tex Avery; *Ready Set Zoom* (Road Runner) by Chuck Jones; and *I See Spots Before My Eyes* by Jared Crawford.

(This last was made by Jared, a kid in Brayboy's class, by painting directly on film.)

I had only recently learned that serious film scholarship had been done on the animated cartoon, and that Tex Avery was being touted as a genuine American surrealist and Chuck Jones given the *auteur* treatment. Disney seems to be going in for a devaluation. I made a few remarks to the kids about the nicey-nicey world of the Disney cartoons compared to the more violent action world of Warner Brothers and MGM. Disney uses children's storybook backgrounds, whereas Avery goes in for garish Abstract Expressionist artwork. Nevertheless, I didn't want to infect them with a fussy film critic's attitude towards cartoons. I knew this would be an enjoyable showing for them, which it was, and so—on with the show.

The two Disneys amazed me. After I had spoken disparagingly of him I was really impressed by the invention in *Band Concert*. He is a real artist who managed to create a self-enclosed world with its own inner consistency, a world which was alive at least for a while before it got studio-fied to death.

Avery's *Blitz Wolf* is simply a masterpiece. The Three Pigs story recast into a plea for national defense, with Hitler as the wolf and references to war bonds and rationing. It isn't just the sophisticated word play but the unflagging energy which hangs together gags, metaphors (human ears for radar), dialect humor, and some of the most daring red-orange art work I've seen in a cartoon. The kids were euphoric during it. The teachers (Fredi, Mike) were appalled at the brutality and aggressiveness. At the moment when an atom bomb blows up Japan, Fredi objected, "This is totally racist." It is probably racist. On the other hand, it doesn't make fun of Orientals but simply shows you the Japanese flag being blown to smithereens. It's about war, about wiping out the "enemy" and the way those emotions are generated, through patriotism and ridicule of the Other. The fact is that the U.S. *was* once at war with Japan (I wonder why Fredi, who is Black, swallowed the parody of Germans so easily, but leapt up at the one reference to Japanese). In any case, I'm against suppressing history, and *Blitz Wolf* is as good an indication as any of the mood this country was in during World War II.

"But what do you think Midori was thinking when she saw that shot come on the screen?" Fred asked about a girl of Japanese descent.

Mike Tempel gave a lot of homework based on the cartoon show.

Feb. 13

HOLIDAY (Cukor)

If one can define a movie which separates the adult sensibility from the child's, *Holiday* is it. Even Hepburn and Grant failed to attract or charm.

The kids were bored silly. I had to stop the projection to get them quiet. Things went better after I'd "invited" those who were not interested to leave.

All the emotions, the heartaches, seductions, verbal jokes of Phillip Barry's script and subtler visual style of George Cukor (a waltzing camera, or a shot that mounts the stairs parallel to the actors) were lost on the children. Not on the adults. For the 30's upper class screwball genre I recommend *Bringing Up Baby*, which I wasn't able to get; but even that might not go over with city kids.

Feb. 20

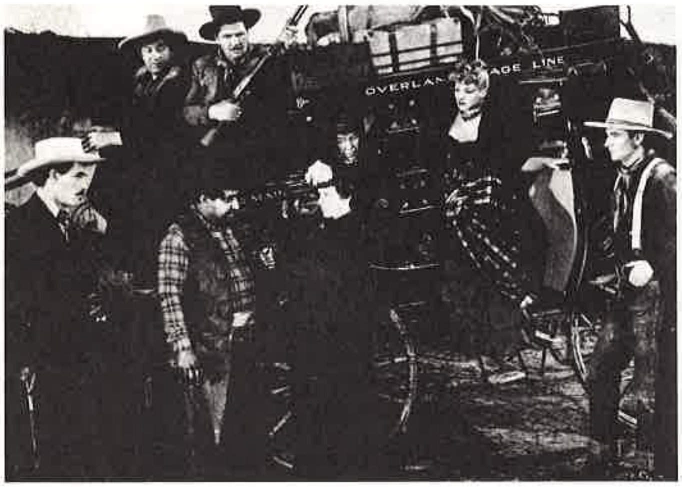
STAGECOACH (John Ford)

Controversy over John Wayne. Controversy over Indians being killed. When they attacked the stagecoach, every time an Indian was shot off his horse the kids cheered. This freaked Fredi and Mike. Later in the classes both Mike Tempel and Lois Betts conducted discussions in which they tried to draw out the distortion in this portrayal of American history. Lois said her kids seemed to know that the Indians had been wronged, that it was their land first; but, as Matthew Goodwin explained, "I was just cheering because someone got killed. I would have cheered if anyone got killed."

Tempel noted how his kids had applauded the white man being shot when the situation was reversed in *Little Big Man*. This was a good opportunity to think about the setup of a movie; how it manipulates you into certain emotions. Lois had the kids draw a large mural on "Stereotype Movie Characters," which ended up including the Western villain (grizzled), the Indians attacking the stage and an Italian gangster.

I'm pleased at the way the movies have begun to spark off social studies discussions in the classes afterward. As for my own pre-film talk, I stressed that the Western is "a drama of space," where the long shot was more important than the closeup, and the gunfight is composed in a single vista. The long street.

The movie itself was good—not quite as beautiful as *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon* or *The Searchers*—but very solid. I think that the Ford-Hawks style of Western which alternates tense action with slow, leisurely development scenes in the frontier town, is certainly the best, but the kids would have preferred more shootouts and less character delineation. They just don't see the reason for it.



Citizen Kane

Feb. 27

CITIZEN KANE (Orson Welles)

Well, I showed *Citizen Kane* today. I wouldn't have missed trying it out for the world. Now I know definitively what the children of P.S. 75 think of *Citizen Kane*.

The film had generated advance excitement, especially among those children whose parents had told them they were in for something great. I added to this by telling them *Kane* had been voted the best film ever made by a poll of international critics. In my talk, I prepared them for the fragmented storyline of the film: that it dealt with the problem of a life, as seen from the perspective of everyone around that person; that to some degree we are the sum total of the way others see us, but there's a part of each of us that maybe others will never understand; and that Kane's life had something mysterious about it which the reporters were trying to solve—what was at the real core of the man, what was he really like? They had to piece the answer together like a jigsaw puzzle, and so the film kept jumping from one character to the next, back and forth in time. The style of the film was very experimental and complicated at times, but don't let that bother you, just hold on tight. . .

They hated it. I have rarely seen such dissatisfaction directed toward the screen. Side-conversations and a mediocre projector speaker added to the problems, because the sound track is monumentally complex, with dialog overlaps, interruptions, echoes, and the kids weren't up to following it. There was very little physical action to clue them in. They had a hard time unscrambling the identities and functions of the different characters. But even those children who "got" the story shook their heads. What was all the fuss about from critics? It seemed to them long, slow, boring, dark. Frequent complaints were heard about the lighting: "Why is everything so dark?"

And this irritation with the somber lighting provides the key to their antipathy. I was trying to watch the film with a double vision—negatively, through their eyes, and admiringly, through my own—and I came to the conclusion that Citizen Kane *is* a very gloomy, dark, depressing movie. Of course. It was meant to be. Watching it is like walking through a chilling hollow tunnel surrounded by cavernous echoes, gathering darkness and a feeling of hopelessness. The theme is one which has little appeal to children of that age: the emptiness of success, selling out, a life gone sour. Not its elliptical style or even its confusing time-jumps would have put them off in themselves, so much as its chill of hollowness and defeat. I suspect that children can relate better to sudden death and catastrophe (or jubilation) than to that gradual diminishing, dwindling, parceling out of one's vitality and promise, which is the daily obsession of so many adults, for whom this great film was made.

March 6

THE END (Anderson, Brown and Crawford)

Today three of my students—Maya Anderson, Hannah Brown and Jared Crawford—showed their film. For several months they have been editing this work, which is actually a collage of 16 mm. out-takes, audio-visual films and unlabelled rolls which were donated to the project. I had given them vague instructions to make something new out of it, hoping that some sort of intriguing Dada mishmash might result, and they did not disappointment me. The labor they put into this film was staggering: first screening and labeling every foot of film, then coming up with an editing plan, then making hundreds of splices by hand.

It is called *The End* because the first shot is an "End" title from an educational film, and this is only the first of several false-promise end titles strewn throughout the work. Innocent sequences from a how-to-read teaching film called *Mittens The Kitten* are intercut with explosions, brawls, a cartoon selling life insurance, angry telephone calls, an instructional film on table manners and chunks of Pare Lorentz's classic documentary, *The River*, which they mercilessly sabotaged. Most of the transitions are based on visual punning, like a shot of a kitten in front of her milk dish being urged, "Drink," followed by a shot of a drunk clutching his bottle in an alley. The calibre of the humor (precocious, sophomoric, maliciously cynical as only sixth graders can be) can best be understood by this example: they had managed to get hold of some footage of a young man standing before a toilet with his back to the camera. As he flushes the toilet, there is a cut to the flood sequence from *The River*, with the narrator ponderously intoning in his best The-People-Yes voice: "Down the Mississippi, down the Monangehela. . . . Down the Tennessee and the Arapahoe—" The audience split their sides at this, and the whole film, to Anderson-Brown-and-Crawford's amazement, was very well received by their peers.

The one technical problem was that, since the film is composed of old pieces of positive stock spliced together, hundreds of splices had to run through the projector, which meant that the film was bound to go out of slack and blur. But Jared was right there and, with sure fingers, stopped it from blinking. All three kids have become experts at film projecting and film editing, and I must say I was very very proud of them today.

March 13

BICYCLE THIEF (Vittorio de Sica)

This was a beautiful film. Everyone liked it. I was deeply impressed. I have nothing more to say about it.

April 3

REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE (Nicholas Ray)

I'm spending a few weeks on the 1950's: *Rebel Without a Cause, The Big Heat, Point of Order, The Checkers Speech* and *Pull My Daisy*. I would like to make some connection between the political atmosphere of the time and the personal forms of art, deviancy and non-conformity that grew up partly in response to it.

I spoke a bit about tests of manhood or womanhood, rites of passage, and teenage styles in the '50's. Mike and Mary helped me out with the details. They remembered it well. The teachers were really up for this film. The kids adored it. The teenage gang fights, the young lovers—it had everything that could excite them in the way of fantasy about the adolescence they are soon about to enter. They embraced it in the very personal way they had West Side Story a year earlier.

I thought the film still holds up beautifully. Nicholas Ray's direction has visual grace, integrity and heart—and classical wide-screen intelligence in the handling of space and backgrounds (the observatory scenes especially).

Afterwards Mike Tempel had an interesting discussion with his class, comparing *Rebel* with *American Graffitti*, which many of them had seen.

April 10

THE BIG HEAT (Fritz Lang, 1953)

This film went down fairly well with the class as a Grade B tough revenge thriller. But not much more. I doubt if the kids realized how many fine, subtle, cinematic touches went into it, since Lang handles the genre so perfectly and appropriately that in a sense his style seems invisible. And the homicide squad ambiance has been so completely absorbed by TV police shows that the film must look now like one of its imitators. Nevertheless, it held their attention.

It interested me that the two greatest shivers of violence are never shown, just suggested: Lee Marvin throwing the scalding coffee in Gloria Grahame's face (he reaches for the coffee pot then—cut—hear her scream); and the dynamiting of Glenn Ford's wife, Jocelyn Brando, in the car (again the sound track carries most of the shock, while the screen has Ford's face reacting). Maximum shock is produced by imagination and suggestion, rather than the gory buckets-of-blood explicitness of a 1970's Peckinpagh shootout.

Lang does a lot of graceful things with the scarred Gloria Grahame, photographing her "good" side with a meaningfulness that has probably never been attached before to a profile; then letting us see the whole mess again, by degrees. Even when she is dying she says, "I must look awful to you.": she's vain to the last. But what a tender, bittersweet ending, when she, in her last moments on earth, asks him to talk about his wife, and he gives in to that obsession, the little ways his wife had of loving him—talking past the time when his listener has frozen into death (we just see Ford's face, but we know she can't be alive any more).

The film is full of these alternations between sweetness and brutality, like the bedtime story he reads to his daughter before we hear the explosion from the garage. It softens the audience and makes it more vulnerable for the real shockers which are cleverly distributed in each reel (the opening suicide of the cop in reel 1, the car explosion in reel 2, the coffee in reel 3). I explained this idea to the kids: the principle of alternation, and how it worked far better than unrelieved violence, where the shock wears off.

I must say the acting was wonderful. And the lighting. Lang loves to begin a scene in semi-darkness and then have a character turn on the lights. Most of the scenes had a gritty quality of five o'clock shadow, American night-time. A great *film noir*.

April 17

POINT OF ORDER

One of the valuable by-products of the film course has been that it reveals areas of historical ignorance, gaps in the children's knowledge. The Depression and the Russian Revolution have been first mentioned to many of the children in the film course. Today I discovered that the Cold War and McCarthyism was another blank. I had not thought we were so far removed from the period of witchhunting that all traces of it should be wiped out from popular consciousness as it filters down to children. Yet in this era of fragile detente between the US and USSR or China, children are obviously not taught the facts of recent history.

That all three areas of conspicuous ignorance (the Depression, 1917 and McCarthyism) should be tinged with social struggle is no accident, I think. I had not thought of myself as a left propagandist and reluctantly stumbled each time into explaining these phenomena . The school curriculum has moved on to current crises—ecology, the energy crisis—and suppressed (either through consciousness or laziness or the desire to evade unpleasant memories) the social upheavals of the past. Children are taught George Washington (the glories of democracy) and not Joseph McCarthy or Sacco and Vanzetti (the threats to the democratic system); with the result that every 30 years, if not oftener, a highly gullible public becomes fair game for manipulation in support of injustice, and wars, highly susceptible to fanatical patriotic arguments—as if such stunts had never been tried before.

I wonder what part the Reichstag fire plays in the modern German school curriculum. I told them I was showing them a film about Joe McCarthy. When I asked the children who he was, one girl said he was one of the Beatles and got very excited. A boy said with definitive and accurate if misguided certainty, "He was a great manager for the New York Yankees."

I talked to the group about the Cold War; the climate of fear that McCarthy exploited; the Red Scare; the imprisonment of people for their beliefs; and McCarthy's final blunder of taking on the Army. The group was interested and attentive. Then I alluded to TV as a "medium of faces"—contrasting it with cinemascope. I ended by saying that the McCarthy hearings were a Big Stink, watched by millions of people—trial by television. I feel I only scratched the surface of TV aesthetics.

If the children were attentive during my remarks, watching the film was a different story. They lost patience almost immediately and made so much noise it was hard to hear the cross-examination, complex and difficult to follow even in a quiet theatre. After 25 minutes a huge bunch of them bolted—fled—the room with great gusto, the way kids run to see a fight. This left some 20 children watching with assorted adults.

The children who stayed were most likely still mystified by the maneuverings and machinations of the hearing. Several asked me: "What is this film *about*?" Jared said: "I hope they get to the point soon." I was not annoyed at them for their lack of interest, in fact I felt quite well and relieved after the majority had left. It seemed to me that their being bored with the film was quite understandable. At the same time this approach of theirs to everything as entertainment, this inability to balance complex information and defer judgment, this impatience to have the thing in black and white, is a troubling sign (in retrospect) for their value as citizens.

Meanwhile, far from being bored, the adults were hanging on every word with their mouths open. The incredible rhetoric of anti-communism ("brutalitarian", duped, soft, treason, front organizations) struck our ears as odd. Moreover, the positions were so ironic given the present Watergate perspective: McCarthy the rightwinger, calling for opening the files, Eisenhower exercising the Presidential prerogatives of secrecy and national defense, and backed by the liberals in doing so; Welch, the supposed hero of liberalism in afterglow memory, insisting that every suspected communist be hounded out of government "before the sun goes down."* The reversal of tactics and interchange of dirty tricks and false arguments showed most strikingly that once the battle is joined the good guys will use the most putrid weapons, while the obvious villains will make many sensible points.

Other ironies: that Welch's junior partner, in addition to the suspected pink Fisher, was James St. Clair, now Nixon's attorney. And RFK listening silently in the background. McCarthy saying—and being the only one to dare to say it after Ike's intervention—"Gentlemen, presidents come and go, but we have to do the best job as we see fit."

An altogether gripping film.

I was curious that, even in the high points, like Welch's famous speech, "Have you no sense of decency at long last, sir?" when the decorum of public men was breaking down and the veneer of civilization cracking, in front of *millions*, the adults were spellbound but the children didn't pay much attention. Could it be that the political passions are so late developed that it means nothing to children? The game of watching the mask of propriety disintegrate an adult pleasure? I should think the sheer display of passion would have held them: yet it had nothing to do with a murder or a gun or a love scene, it had only to do with the political philosophy of an entire nation altering dramatically on the basis of these televised hearings.

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* Liberal Senators arguing that the President must know more than a Senator—involving Presidential infallibility.

". . . cheap movies that open at neighborhood theatres can sometimes be better than the ones that cost millions to make and get all the publicity."

May 9

CHECKERS SPEECH and PULL MY DAISY

Good attention. Checkers speech jeered and howled at. We timed this showing well! Nixon a great eyebrow-lifting actor for the camera, touching in a way, as he keeps trying to dramatize his own sincerity.

Pull My Daisy—rapt or polite silence? Kids were definitely puzzled, which is good. They went around repeating Kerouac's commentary—"Is your mother holy? Is the pencil holy?" as if it were the silliest thing in the world. Myself, I had a more negative reaction to the film than the first time I'd seen it. It struck me as definitely self-indulgent and limiting of the universe (pretending that we're all lost and there's no other way)—though seen from another perspective, it was a good accurate documentary of the beat way of life.

May 16

HOUSE OF USHER

Utterly hammy Vincent Price closing film, "just for fun." First two-thirds of show, kids were having a great time being noisy. Last third had them screaming in their pants. A very popular film. When it was over several kids slapped my hand ("gimme 5") and they wanted to see it all over again! Everyone assured me they would have dreams about it that night.

I made a preliminary speech about Grade B to Z films, saying in effect that cheap movies that open at neighborhood theatres can sometimes be better than the ones that cost millions to make and get all the publicity.

A good picture to discuss color filters and technicolor effects, as I later realized.

Weeks later, the kids wanted me to show it again.

Final Note

Some of the by-products of the History of Film course deserve to be mentioned. In addition to *The End*, several long film projects were carried out: most notably, *The Love and Hate Of Mrs. Jones*, shot in Mrs. Betts' class, and *Dole Man*, done by Ms. Brayboy's students. These student-made Super 8 silent films showed a sophistication of camerawork, lighting, acting and storytelling that seemed directly inspired by the great silent classics (*Caligari, The Gold Rush, Nosferatu)* seen at the beginning of the course.

The cooperation of the classroom teachers was a very pleasing side-effect, and a model of its kind for joint writer-teacher projects. By seeing that the film-viewing experience followed through to the classroom, the teachers brought out a lot of the potential learning dividends in the project.

I would like to thank the officers of several 16 mm. distributing companies for helping me obtain prints and assisting me in every other way. They shared my belief that young children would benefit from exposure to great film art, and they made it possible:

MacMillan—Audio Brandon Films
34 MacQuesten Parkway So.
Mount Vernon, N.Y. 10550

Media International
30 East Johnson Street
Madison, Wisconsin

Museum of Modern Art
Film Rental Dept.
11 West 53rd Street
N.Y., N.Y. 10019

New Yorker Films
43 West 61 Street
New York, New York 10023

DEFINITIONS: CAMERA ANGLES, SHOTS AND MOVEMENTS

by Teri Mack

FRAMING,—What you see when you look through the camera. What you *frame* tells you what kind of a shot you have. "Watch your framing"—make sure that you show in the frame whatever is important to your shot (the top of someone's head; what someone's hands are doing.)

ESTABLISHING SHOT—Usually a wide angle or long shot, it shows you where the film takes place, who the characters are, whatever is important for the audience to know as the film starts or a new scene begins.

WIDE ANGLE (W.A.)—A shot which shows a large area, such as the street or a whole room. It lets you see where the characters are and what they are doing.

LONG SHOT (L.S.)—like a wide angle, but also showing something from a great distance, such as buildings that are far away from the camera.

MEDIUM SHOT (M.S.)—This shot shows you something particular in your scene, such as a sofa where two people are sitting, or one person sitting in a corner. It brings the audience's attention to something special without getting too close to your subject.

CLOSE UP (C.U.)—This shot shows an important detail. A kiss, a face, a knife fills up the whole frame. A close up can really add to the emotion of the scene by showing a wrinkled brow, a clenched fist in a fight, the feet of an approaching murderer.

CUT—A cut is the most common way of moving from shot to shot. It is a sudden change from one shot (such as a medium shot of a man) to another (such as close up of the man's face). You can make cuts in the camera (as you film), or when you edit—by splicing (taping) two pieces of film together.

ZOOM—By moving the zoom (a push-button or a ring on the camera lens), you can slowly move "in" from a wide angle to a close up, or "out" from a close up to a wide angle. Use the zoom *only* when you want to bring special attention to something by changing your framing in this way. A lot of zooming in and out for no good reason will give you a dizzy feeling.

FADE—This is a gentler way of moving from shot to shot. The screen goes soft and dark at the end of one shot, then brightens as another shot begins. A fade can be used to show passing of time, or movement from one place to another in the film.

JUMP CUT—A very sharp cut from the middle of one scene to the middle of another without an establishing shot, so that it takes the audience a few seconds to figure out where they are.

IRIS—a circular frame added to the camera lens to change the frame from square to round. IRIS IN or OUT: A scene can begin with a small circle of light that opens up to show the whole screen, or end with a circle closing up till the screen goes black. Try adding different shaped frames—triangle, oval—to change the feeling of your film image.

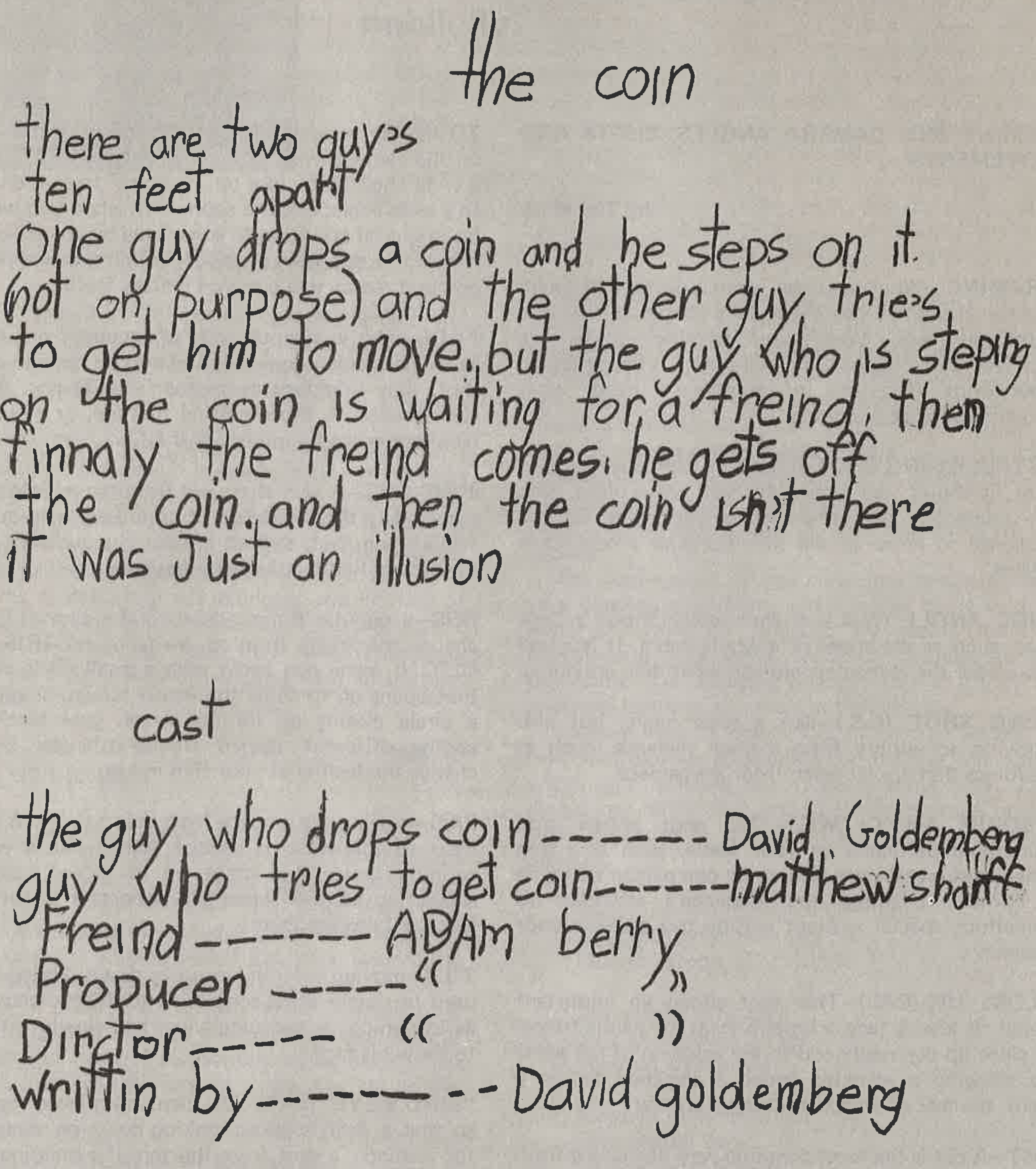
PAN—moving the camera from side to side. A pan is used to follow some special action—like a woman running down the street—or to move from one subject to another when it's important to show the space in between them.

TILT—moving the camera up or down. Tilting can be used to slowly show something to the audience, such as beginning on someone's feet and slowly tilting up to show his face.

"BIRD'S-EYE" VIEW—the camera is placed very high so that a shot is taken looking down on something; for instance, a shot from the top of a building might make people look like helpless ants.

"WORM'S-EYE" VIEW—the camera is placed very low so that it looks up at something; this angle might make a person look tall, over-powering, evil.

Film Script



the coin

there are two guy's
ten feet apart
One guy drops a coin and he steps on it.
(not on purpose) and the other guy trie's
to get him to move. but the guy who is steping
on the coin is waiting for a freind. then
finnaly the freind comes. he gets off
the coin. and then the coin isn't there
it was Just an illusion

cast

the guy who drops coin ------- David Goldemberg
guy who tries to get coin------- matthew shaff
Freind ------- ADAm berry
Propucer ----- " "
Dirctor ----- " "
writtin by ------- -- David goldemberg

Ulyse Hoyoz

Nov. 28, 1913

Comic strip frame

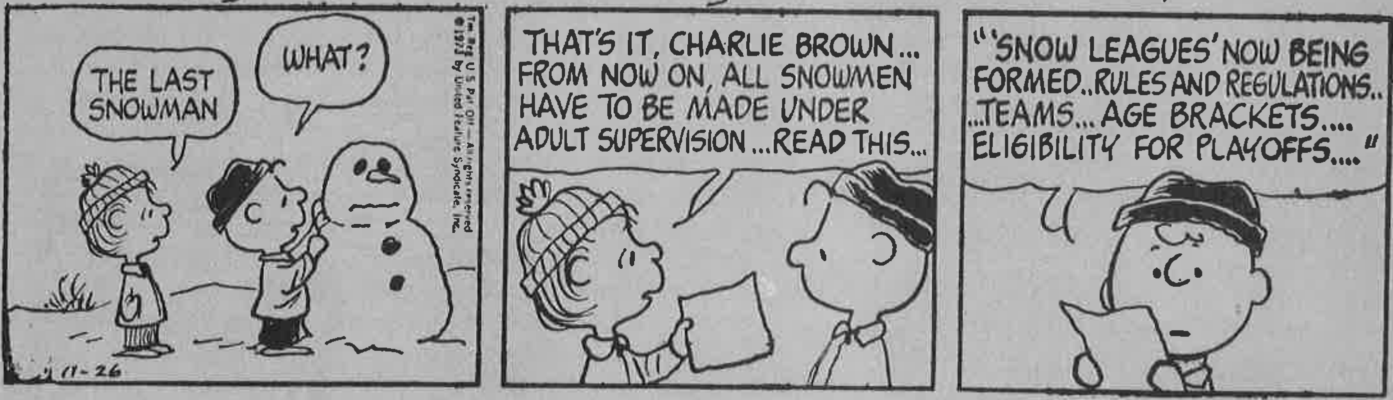
What type of shot is each frame.

Peanuts

This shot is a long shot

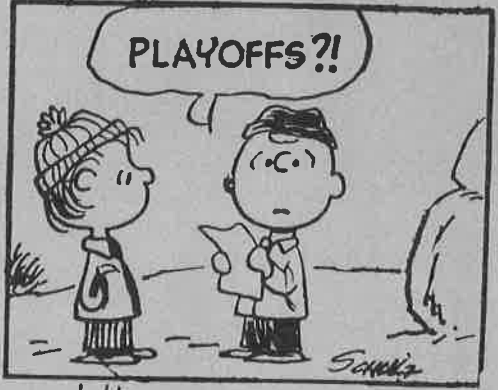
This shot is a mid-range

This shot is a close-up


THE LAST SNOWMAN
WHAT?
Tm. Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.—All rights reserved © 1973 by United Feature Syndicate, Inc.
11-26
THAT'S IT, CHARLIE BROWN... FROM NOW ON, ALL SNOWMEN HAVE TO BE MADE UNDER ADULT SUPERVISION ...READ THIS...
"'SNOW LEAGUES' NOW BEING FORMED..RULES AND REGULATIONS.. ..TEAMS... AGE BRACKETS.... ELIGIBILITY FOR PLAYOFFS...."

The camera is level all through the scene.

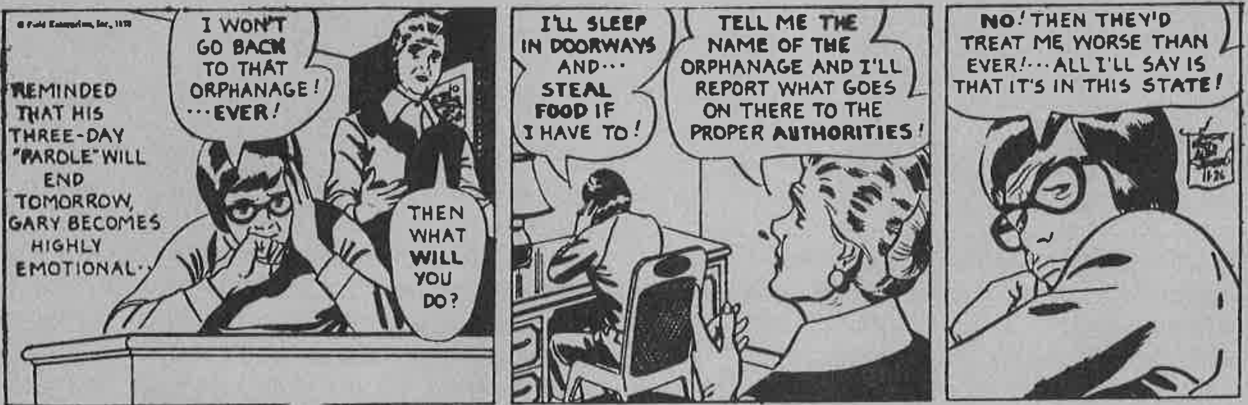
and this shot is a longshot


PLAYOFFS?!
Schulz

Mary Worth is different from Andy Cap (which is on the back page) because in Mary Worth the first frame is a shot below the action and the second is above the action and the third

Mary worth

turn over →


© Field Enterprises, Inc., 1973
REMINDED THAT HIS THREE-DAY "PAROLE" WILL END TOMORROW, GARY BECOMES HIGHLY EMOTIONAL..
I WON'T GO BACK TO THAT ORPHANAGE! ...EVER!
THEN WHAT WILL YOU DO?
I'LL SLEEP IN DOORWAYS AND... STEAL FOOD IF I HAVE TO!
TELL ME THE NAME OF THE ORPHANAGE AND I'LL REPORT WHAT GOES ON THERE TO THE PROPER AUTHORITIES!
NO! THEN THEY'D TREAT ME WORSE THAN EVER!... ALL I'LL SAY IS THAT IT'S IN THIS STATE!
11-26

This is dedicated to Bill Wheeler, Man from A.U.N.T.I.E., Mittens Kittens, The Helena Rubenstein Foundation, and Jason Welcher, wherever you are, and special thanks to Angelo for opening the door.

And maybe to Phillipppppppp!!!!!!!

Anderson, Brown & Crawford

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning when God created Adam and Eve . . .

He left them a roll of film and a camera but no projector. Many moons later the splicer and the editor and the projector were invented.

Our attempt to make a movie set movie-making back 200 years. . . .

Phillip Lopate wanted some kids to work on a project that would involve splicing up some 16 mm. films. We (Anderson, Brown, Crawford and Rosen) volunteered, having no idea what it would involve. Our real project is 700 feet of film, but Brayboy wanted a written project.

SPLICING AND EDITING

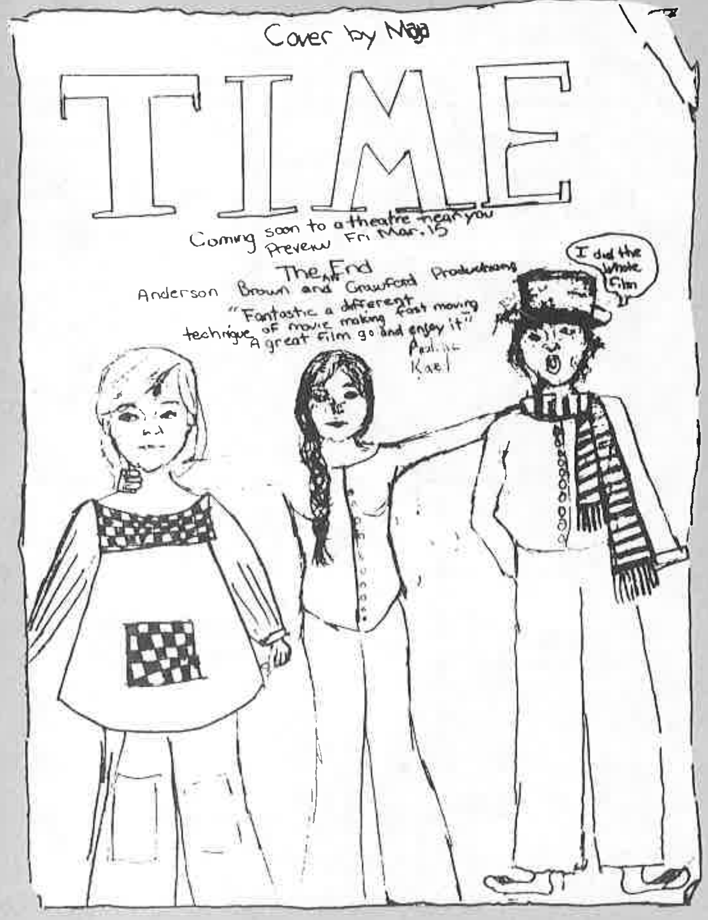
Splicing and editing are very simple. To screen (or look at) some film, without using the projector, you run it through an editor.

How to use the moviescope . . . Well, you put the reel on the cranks and then you put it through the moviescope then you turn it on. Turn the cranks and then, pop, a moving picture.

When you see what you want to cut out, you take a splicer. It has metal sprockets and you put the film on them so the sprockets go through the sprocket holes. Then you bring the top part of the splicer with the blade down on the film. It cuts it. Then you do the same thing to the other end of the piece of the film you want to splice to it.

How to tape a film together . . . You take a reel of tape, (splicing tape of course) and then you take some of the tape and put it on the film, making sure it doesn't go over the holes. Then you turn the film over and do the same thing to the other side.

That's all the equipment and how it's used.


Cover by Maja
TIME
Coming soon to a theatre near you
Preview Fri Mar. 15
The End
Anderson Brown and Crawford Productions
"Fantastic a different fast moving technique of movie making A great film go and enjoy it"
Pauline Kael
I did the whole film

THE DIFFICULTIES WE HAD IN MAKING OUR FILM

The first difficulty we had in making our film was that we had 50 unlabelled films. At first we just hung around the Writing Room on Wednesdays, and saw some films on the projector. Then Phil said, "Why don't you work in your classroom and use the moviescope." We said, "Sure, fine." Difficulty No. 1 was keeping kids away while we were working, and keeping them away from the films while we weren't. Now the problem about the unlabeled films was that the films were unlabeled. And Phillip Lopate wanted us to label them. So we had to label them. So we had to look at all the films, and we made up crazy names like so: Drugs, Buildings, Walking, Running, Guy

Running Around a Tree and other interesting things like that. There was a film called nothing until we labeled it. We labeled it The Aggravating Phone Calls because there was a boy getting up and answering the phone, getting up off the toilet that is. When we first saw the film we immediately got an idea. We had him flushing the toilet and then we had the flood that came from the river.

Another difficulty making this film. No. 2, Phil has no take-up reel so he told us to unravel our film so we did, but after the film course we had to ravel it all up again. We had films all over the class. Phil came in when it was half done and said, "What a mess." Then he left. We worked all day until it was done. That day Danny quit. There were never as many difficulties as there were then. But it was fun.

Another difficulty was the fact that many people in the class were becoming interested in our equipment. They started fooling around with the editor. Then some kids started showing films on it. One day we found our prize film, *Mittens the Kitten*, all over the floor. Some pieces had been so badly damaged we couldn't use them. Naturally, no one saw who did it. We told Phil about it and he said we shouldn't work in the classroom any more. That brings us to the chapter of:

THE CLOSET

The first day we started to work in the closet, we began to put the film together. Every day we worked in the closet. We began to have a routine. Part 1 of our routine was called: The Ritual of Getting the Key. Every morning we would go to the Writing Room to see if someone was there. Nine times out of ten there wouldn't be. So then one of us would check the third floor, one of us would check the second floor, and one of us the first floor. Usually we wouldn't find anyone. So then we would go to Mr. Kelly and ask him to write a note to take to Angelo. Then Mr. Kelly got tired of writing notes and he told us to have Phillip give us the key the day before. Naturally, Phillip wouldn't. So we started getting notes from Miss Brayboy.

One thing we didn't know about was that every week at the film course we would have to run the projector. But one day Philip's projector busted (guess who broke it) . . . Anderson.

So Philip got Trit's projector and that comes to the chapter about

THINGYS

While we were rewinding a film on Trit's projector it busted and you know who did it? Anderson, Brown & Crawford. So along came Tempel, and started fixing it (he couldn't fix it so well). Well, to find out how to fix it he used Phil's projector. He took it apart and 11 little things came out. We picked up all the little things about 1/4 of a 1/2 of an inch. Finally we got them all. We had to put all 11 inside this tiny little circle. The next day we found out that the rewind didn't work and guess who Phillip blamed? Anderson, Brown and Crawford!

(Later) One day when we were working (hohoho) there was a knock on the door, it was Rosen. We let him in. We asked him if he would like to take part in our film. He said, "Sure, what else is there for me to do?" We showed him our film and Phillip came up and we said, "Danny is going to be in our film." He said, "No he isn't," and threw him out. We got mad, so the next day when Phillip came we hid him in the closet and he was scared.

LAST DAYS WORKING ON THE PROJECT

The three last days we worked on our project we were very sad. Jared started crying. We put the project on and saw our film. We all did the last splice the day we saw the film. When we saw the film we had to bring in the projector while Phillip watched another film and we had to set up the chairs and the projector and when we asked Phil to move a little Miss Balzano said, "You can't expect him to do everything."

When we saw the film we thought everybody would hate it but when they clapped we almost fainted.

Dear Ms. Brayboy,
Any compliments about our film are welcome.

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Introduction—we made it up
Splicing and editing—from Phillip Lopate
How to use the editor—Phillip Lopate
How to use the splicer—Phillip Lopate
How to tape film together—Phillip Lopate
How to treat the projector—Phillip Lopate
Difficulties in making the Film—Anderson, Brown, Crawford
Our last sad days working on the Film—US!

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VERA, M.D.
HOW TO LIVE
WITHOUT A FATHER

Theresa Mack

How to Live Without a Father: The Making of a Videodrama

"This is the grandmother, who takes care of her family and sometimes is very mean. This is the mother, who is quiet but knows what she's doing. She is happy living without her husband, but her daughters want their father back. These are her daughters—Jacqueline, Judy, and Margaret."

They were a giggly, babyish group of girls. Rocio, always pinching or hitting someone, then running around in circles and laughing hysterically. Heidi, one moment sensible and calm, the next, chasing Rocio and squealing with abandon. The other girls—Migdalia, Margaret, even the older ones, Norma and Elizabeth—all slipped into this silly distracted behavior whenever they were together. Which was most of the time. They sat next to each other in class, forming a club of whispered make-believe within the more sophisticated atmosphere of their fifth-sixth grade class. Diane, the smartest and most cynical, hung on the edge of the group, at times ingratiating herself, then scornfully avoiding the group and their infantile ways.

Often when I wandered into their classroom, the girls were making dollhouses out of cardboard boxes, fashioning little pieces of furniture out of paper, and dressing paper dolls with scraps of material. Or else they were playing "house"—one girl taking the part of mother and the others playing very young children. The object of the game was for the children to be outrageously naughty, then be spanked and scolded by the mother.

I didn't like this baby stuff at all. Their behavior, which I associated with kindergarteners, made me strangely uncomfortable. I could work with impudent, snotty, or rough kids much more easily than with these children, who retreated into a world of dolls and family make-believe. Yet, in spite of my disdain (my feelings were similar to Diane's), something in me was drawn to these girls, and in January we began spending one morning a week together, working on a video project.

When we first talked about what kind of videotape to make, it didn't surprise me that a family drama was what appealed to them most. Their first idea was to make puppets and act out a little story for the video camera. But their love of playing out family scenes made it clear to all of us that they should act out the story themselves.

This was my first venture into video drama, and I felt unsure of where to begin. "What's the story going to be about?" I asked the group, hoping that someone had a simple interesting plot tucked away in her mind. "Well," said Heidi firmly, "we're going to call it *How To Live Without a Father*, because we're all girls." And instinctively they knew their roles. Elizabeth would be grandmother, Norma the mother, and Heidi, Rocio and Migdalia their daughters. Margaret and Diane would double as small walk-on parts and video crew.

I was impressed with how effortlessly they decided on these important basics, and how sure they were of their decisions. I really liked the title. *How To Live Without a Father*. It was simple and direct, and at the same time poignantly evocative. In the weeks that followed, as the project went through countless transformations, this title was to be our main source of stability and inspiration.

Unsure of how to proceed, yet feeling the responsibility of adult organizer, I assigned Heidi and Rocio to put the group's story ideas into script form. The two girls labored over a script for a few sessions, but were unable to get beyond the first petty fight among the sisters. They kept rewriting the dialogue, and recopying page one to make it neater. I decided to drop the script-writing. Since the group seemed ready to act out their story, we left the writing-room and moved to the auditorium.

The girls adored the stage and immediately became theatrical. They dragged old furniture from off-stage to create homey sets, and divided the action into scenes, closing and opening the curtains between acts. I sat in the front row and watched, awestruck, as they acted out a complex scenario about a family of women dealing with a divorce between the mother and father. Much of the action was typical "playing-house-style": petty fights, spankings, running away from home. But certain scenes were exceptionally good, for instance, the scene in family court. Norma, as mother, told the judge her husband had left her because he wanted sons, and she had borne daughters. I sat bolt upright as I listened to that dialogue, and felt convinced that a dramatic structure which allowed the girls to explore their feelings about being deserted by a father/husband would result in a powerful dramatic work. But I still didn't know how to weed out superfluous action so that the focus of the play would be the emotions and relationships within the family.

After a few sessions of acting out scenes on the stage, I felt we were ready to start working with the video camera. But by now the girls had fallen in love with the stage, and wanted to do a stage-play rather than a videotape. I talked to them about using a camera to make scenes more dramatic; about the power of on-location shooting, and the advantages of taping a scene over and over again until it was perfect. Still they were unconvinced, and I realized they had no experience and therefore no understanding of what "making a videotape" was all about. But I had a strong sense that the subtleties of their family situation would be best reflected through the eyes and ears of the video camera, so I argued forcefully for video. They grudgingly gave in and we moved into production.

Before we started to tape the play itself, I felt the girls needed a chance to become familiar with being taped and seeing their own video images. I also wanted to have a chance to be alone for a while with each of the girls, so I could get to know them better as individuals and they could get better acquainted with their own characters. The family members in *How To Live Without a Father* still lacked complexity and individual identity, and blended into one group of hysterical females. So one at a time I brought the girls into the Writing Room with me and sat them down in front of the video camera. I asked each one to talk about her character—what she was like, what she loved and hated, how she felt about her family.

This was especially difficult for Rocio, Heidi and Migdalia, who played the three daughters. It was apparent that they hadn't thought much about who their characters were. Migdalia sat silent in front of the camera for three or four minutes before she began to talk haltingly about herself as Jacqueline. Their confrontations with the camera were valuable. They struggled with the question of who they were and, though they giggled at the playback, they liked seeing themselves on tv. Now I no longer got blank looks when I talked about making their story into a videoplay.

For Norma, the mother, and Elizabeth, the grandmother, this monologue exercise was especially rewarding. A depth of acting emerged during the exercise which excited all of us. Norma, the quietest member of the group, who always smiled softly at the others' silliness but rarely joined in; Norma—who had struck me as painfully shy—now sat in front of the camera with dignity and ease, talking about herself, her desires and her frustrations. As I watched her, I forgot that she was twelve years old. I saw a depth of awareness and sensitivity that I'd never noticed before. I wondered whether she was identifying with an older family member—her mother, a cousin, an older sister? Or did she already feel within herself the seeds of frustrated

womanhood?

Norma had asked that Elizabeth stay in the room during her monologue. Elizabeth—loud, melodramatic, hyperactive—watched carefully and was obviously impressed with Norma's acting. Then she sat in front of the camera, eager to do as Norma had done. But as soon as she faced the camera. Elizabeth began to giggle and squirm with discomfort. She struggled to maintain her role as grandmother, but her mind kept going blank. I prompted her with questions about herself and her family, but still her monologue was empty and awkward.

These two monologues, though different in content and style, revealed the importance of the relationship between the mother and the grandmother. Phillip Lopate and I had been working on a project using monologues as lead-ins to improvised scenes between related characters. The improvisations really seemed to benefit from the monologues, which gave the characters a chance to develop their individual identities. So I decided to carry Norma's and Elizabeth's monologue exercises a step further.

I asked the two girls to act out a scene together—to forget about the storyline of their drama and just talk to each other about the things on their minds. They nodded, quickly established a lunchtime setting with table, chairs, and a few cups, then slipped into their characters and acted out an intense scene of conflict. It was as if they'd lived through it before. The grandmother picked at her daughter for not wanting a new husband to replace her divorced one, and chided her for being more interested in keeping a job and maintaining her independence than running a proper home. The grandmother was often hysterical—shouting, talking rapidly, cutting off her daughter mid-sentence. The daughter spoke quietly and firmly, explaining that she would marry only if she met the right man, and not just for the sake of stability or respectability. She accused her mother of always trying to run her life, and in her forcefulness seemed to be struggling to gain independence from her domineering mother.

When Norma and Elizabeth had finished, we invited the rest of the girls into the writing-room to watch the playback. We gathered around the little tv and, as we watched the scene, excitement rippled through the group—little gasps of amazement and excited little jumps. The acting was beautiful and the scene was very powerful. All eight of us agreed that it was time to begin taping the "real" play.

The next week we took the video equipment to Heidi's house to tape the first scene. It was an incredibly chaotic day. The excitement of being out of school, and the adventure of being in a strange apartment was too much for the girls. The actresses began "playing house" with gusto, and paid little attention to the camera and mike, making it difficult to tape anything effectively.

With all the distractions of a real home—kitchen, bathroom, piano, cats, Heidi's baby sister—the action became very fragmented. The girls seemed to loose their sense of character, which we'd struggled to develop over the past few weeks. I also realized that they had little sense of scene development and 'denouement.'

Their approach to making a "movie" was a very literal one—to leave nothing implied, assumed or suggested, but to have everything happen in front of the camera. Since they wanted to follow the person who, in the middle of an arguement, left to go to the bathroom, then return later to the argument, their scenes lacked focus or a central dynamic. And their improvisational acting, which on stage and in the writing-room had been so powerful, now wilted in front of the camera's cold eye. Scenes rambled on, dialogue became repititious, arguments seemed interminable and boring, and the ending of a scene was often awkward and inconclusive.

After three weeks of this, I felt we had reached an impasse. The work was not good. The acting lacked intensity and energy, and the play was going nowhere. We still had not resolved all the specifics of the plot. We had all hoped that once we started videotaping, the plot would resolve itself. But this wasn't happening, and we were all getting very discouraged. I was beginning seriously to wonder whether this project would ever come to fruition.

Phillip and I went for coffee at a nearby Nedicks, and I blurted out my concern for the project. "This dramatic structure just isn't working," I moaned. "I get so angry with them because they can't condense the action into scenes. But none of us lives his life in scenes, so why should that kind of structure come naturally to them."

"Look, why don't you use your own apartment for the taping," Phillip suggested. (I had mentioned that we were all a little tense about messing up somebody's mother's house.) "And, since these girls really seem to want to play house, then *let* them play house. Give them the run of your apartment, and have the video crew tape whatever they do—in real-time. In other words, make a documentary about the family with the camera following them, instead of asking them to act out dramatic scenes *for* the camera."

I thought about Phillip's suggestions, and began to get a sense of new guidelines to offer the kids that would better direct their energies toward producing a good dramatic work. Suddenly the whole structure of *How To Live Without a Father* became clear. The video drama would be one day in the life of this family—from rising in the morning to going to bed at night. There would be one key event—the arrival of a letter from the absent father agreeing to a divorce, a scene the girls had already developed as central to their drama. But nothing else about the day would be predetermined. All action would take place within the apartment, thus resolving the question of outdoor scenes which might distract from the important family dynamics, and imposing a focus of time and place on the actresses. Within this rather tight structure, I now felt sure that the wealth of material they had developed—through the improvisational acting on stage, the monologues, and the abortive taping in other people's apartments—would be transformed into a rich videodrama.

I described the new rules of the drama to the girls. They all immediately understood and accepted them—a good sign that the structure was a right one. Then I took everyone to my house so they could get familiar with their new set. They ran around the apartment—opening closets, jumping on beds, giggling—then suddenly quieting down, overwhelmed at having this liberty in someone else's home. I assured them that I wanted them to become familiar with my apartment so that next week, when we did the taping, they would be comfortable living a whole day in my house, as if it had been their home for years. We discussed costumes, props, and breakfast and lunch menus. Then I prompted them for a few more skeletal details. Since it was now a few weeks before Easter, they decided the story would take place on the Friday before Easter. We discussed how the family would spend the day—the children playing, watching, dyeing Easter eggs; the grandmother and mother cleaning house, fixing meals, and talking. Everyone agreed that the father's letter should arrive when the family was sitting around the lunch table and that the story should end with everyone going to bed at night. Other than these few details, the specific sequence of events and the conversations among family members would be left to improvisation.

The final preparation was to compose the letter from the father. Norma dictated the letter to me: "Dear Mary, I have received your letter, and if you want to get a divorce it's all right with me. I'm sorry but I just can't accept the responsibilities of being a father." She signed it with her father's name. We left my apartment, feeling tense and excited about next week's taping. If things went well, the taping would be done in one long shooting session. If things didn't work out . . . well, I wasn't sure where we would go from here.

By now we had all spent a lot of time together—one morning a week for almost three months. I had come to know each of the girls individually; I really enjoyed spending time with them and no longer saw them as simply a pack of silly girls. When we left school and walked to people's apartments to videotape, family matters were the main topic of conversation. Everyone talked about deaths, divorces, births, and marriages. We talked about these things casually yet seriously as we walked along Broadway. I never started the conversations or probed very deep, or formalized the talks into "rap" sessions. We simply all shared some of the pain we'd gone through with our families and some of our fantasies about what family life could be. A few of the girls had new, foster fathers, but still idolized their real fathers in spite of their mothers' attempts to convince them they were no good. Others came from very stable two-parent families. *How To Live Without a Father* was an amalgamation of their family experiences and concerns. The story was never directly autobiographical for anyone. Like all good drama, it came out of and yet transcended personal experience. Our talks brought us closer, and the intimacy of sharing family experiences helped the girls take each other more seriously, especially as they acted out their drama.

The shooting day arrived, and we left school early for my apartment. While the actresses bustled around, fixing up rooms and changing into pajamas, Diane, Margaret and I set up the video equipment and talked about the taping. Their role, as documentarians, was going to be very difficult, because they had never done it before. They had been working with the equipment over the past few weeks, and Diane especially was familiar with the camera. But today they would be taping live-action, deciding when to start and stop the videorecorder as the actresses kept on living their day; trying to work smoothly and unobtrusively so the actresses would not lose concentration or fall out of character because of some technical complications.

"From that moment on, something was happening that seemed larger than all of us. Elizabeth, Norma, Heidi, Rocio and Migdalia became a family."

I sat with the whole group for a few quiet moments before the "day" began, reminding the actresses one last time that they should try and ignore the video equipment and live their day non-stop, from rising in the morning till going to bed at night (in reality, from 10 a.m.-3 p.m.). Then the actresses crawled into bed, giggling with tension. Diane, Margaret and I left the apartment, then walked back in with the video machine recording. Diane panned the living room, then walked slowly into the bedroom, followed by Margaret with the mike. And me holding cables so they wouldn't trip. As Diane panned slowly around the quiet bedroom, the radio alarm went off, as planned. Grandmother, Mother and Judy rolled out of bed. Soon the whole family was hurrying around, brushing teeth, combing hair, and fixing breakfast. The day had begun.

From that moment on, something was happening that seemed larger than all of us. Elizabeth, Norma, Heidi, Rocio and Migdalia *became* a family. They chatted, bickered, scolded, played, cleaned up, and passed the time. They moved around my apartment with ease, as if they'd lived there all their lives. Each person's character emerged, stronger and more defined than ever before. Elizabeth, as grandmother, ran the house and disciplined the children, yet was strangely unsure of herself and thrown off balance by the slightest crisis. Whenever an argument developed, she wanted to escape or soothe things over. Norma, as mother, was quiet but firm in all her words and actions. She was the center of strength and understanding in the family, and at the same time was the most isolated.

Even the daughters, who until now had always acted in unison, became individuals. Migdalia, as Jacqueline, the oldest, was most like her mother—quiet, very perceptive, sometimes pitted against her mother whom she observed so closely. Heidi, as Margaret, the middle daughter, was still wrapped up in a childish world, had a streak of quiet reblliousness, and was often sullen or snotty with adults. Rocio, as Judy, the baby of the family, was incorrigible, but always loving and lovable.

This family of five women literally possessed the house as they lived through their day. I worked closely with the video crew who followed the family around, taping most everything, unless one activity—such as a meal—went on for a very long time. We had to stay finely tuned into the emotion and action—especially when the family split up into different rooms. In the scene transcribed below, the crew was in the daughters' bedroom recording them at play, when we overheard an argument start up in the next room. We rushed to capture this scene between mother and grandmother.

Grandmother: Well, how come you're going to get a divorce?!

Mother: Because I *want* to.

Grandmother: Well, what, who . . . anyway, I know you ain't seen him a lot of times, but . . . Who wants to get a divorce, you or him?

Mother: I do!

Grandmother: Oh Lord! . . . Okay, you want to do what you want, go ahead, because I ain't going to stop you. I ain't going to stop you because you are right. You should get a divorce because he doesn't come to see the girls, he doesn't come to see nobody, he doesn't bring money or nothing. That's all right with me . . .

(Girls enter suddenly)

Judy: You're gonna get what???

Mother: A divorce.

3 daughters: Why?!

(They all sit down around the table)

Grandmother: Ohhhh I need some pills. Give me some aspirin, give me something. . .

Mother: (to daughters) I'm getting a divorce because your father's not giving any money. He doesn't want to see you, so what can I do?

Jacqueline: (softly) We're not some kind of a monster, so he should be scared of us.

Mother: (shouting) Well, I know you're not some kind of a monster. He just doesn't care about you! Can't you get that through your head?

Grandmother: (overlap) None of us care about him, none of us. (She is working on some typing during this whole discussion.)

Jacqueline: Because Mommy, you never talked about it till now.

Mother: (coldly, with finality) He doesn't want to see you.

(Pause)

Jacqueline: Maybe it's because you've done something to him.

Mother: I did not *do* anything to him. Maybe I brought up three girls because he wanted some boys! Well, that's not my fault.

(Judy gets up to leave the room. Grandmother is moaning in the background.)

Mother: Judy, come back here! (she comes back and sits down)

Jacqueline: So we'll get dressed as boys. You would like us to do that to bring him back?

Mother: No. Nothing will bring him back.

Grandmother: If she wants to get a divorce it's her problem. I'm not going to get into this fight. So don't come and tell me nothing. I just want to do my own work.

Judy: (low voice to her sisters) Let's go, come on, let's go. (they start to leave the table)

Mother: Girls, come back here! (they all sit down again)

Jacqueline: If I knew you were going to do this, I should have stayed in that room like I was going to do!

Mother: (shouting) Look, young lady. You don't tell me what to do. I tell you want to do! (she's standing now and pointing down at Jacqueline)

Grandmother: (covering her ears) Don't Scream!

Jacqueline: (at same time) Don't scream at me!

Mother: I scream at you anytime I feel like it!

Margaret: (Wailing) I want Daddy home.

Mother: (cutting her off) Shut up! (silence for a few seconds)

Grandmother: (under her breath) Oh my Lord. (heavy breathing and gasps from everyone)

Mother: (still yelling) I'm getting sick and tired of you three telling me what to do! (Pause) Now look girls, its settled. I'm getting a divorce. Whether you like it or not. It's for your own good.

Grandmother: Stop shouting, stop shouting. You don't have to shout cause they got two ears.

Margaret: The whole block will hear.

Jacqueline: Okay?

Mother: (quietly) Okay.

Jacqueline: Shall we go? Come on, lets go lets go lets go (the three girls get up and scurry out of the room)

Grandmother: I'll go with you, too, girls . . . and leave her alone. (angrily) If she wants to get a divorce its her business.

Mother: (shouts after them as they leave) Get out of here! (She sits down, with a sad look on her face. Camera stays on her face, then fades out.)

As the day wore on, I often collapsed into a chair and watched in amazement this family life going on around me. It was unnerving. The girls rarely came out of character. The only directions I gave were occasional technical ones so the camera would be sure to capture a crucial scene. The actresses seemed to operate with a double consciousness—cooperating subtly with the technical crew and at the same time remaining totally absorbed in their family experience.

Near the end of the day came an especially poignant scene. The mother and grandmother sit talking as the girls get ready for bed. The mother is depressed because she thinks the girls feel lonely, and she's afraid they blame her for the divorce. She decides to talk to them one by one.

The scene is, perhaps, a wish fulfillment for all the girls—the wish that parents would always take the time to explain family crises, like divorces, gently but honestly. It also showed the degree of self-insight the girls had about how they subvert the scoldings of authority figures by passing in and out of childish behavior. When the mother talked with Judy, I heard echoes of my own attitude towards the girls and their behavior when I first began working with them.

Grandmother: Judy, you come next.

Jacqueline: What do you want?

Grandmother: Your mother's going to talk to you, so you better listen.

Jacqueline: (shows grandmother her Easter egg) How do you put this thing on here?

Grandmother: Listen, don't talk to me, listen to your mother! I said that already.

(Judy sits down at the table next to her mother)

Mother: Judy, do you think it's my fault because I'm getting a divorce from your father?

Judy: (sullenly) No.

Mother: Now *why* don't you think it's my fault?

Judy: (babyish singsong voice) I don't know.

Mother: (tenderly) I'm going to explain something to you. Your father is . . . well, he's not like any other man, to be tied down to people. (Judy is playing with a paper bag that has little toys in it) Now look at me when I'm talking to you. *Look* at me; (Judy leans into her mothers face in a playful and exaggerated manner.)

Judy: (babyish voice) Why?

Mother: I'm trying to explain something to you. . .

Judy: (impatiently) So why *don't* you?

Mother: I *am*. I wrote to your father *asking* him for a divorce. I think that was right for *you* and right for me and right for your sisters . . . and right for your father. And if you don't think that's right (Judy suddenly snatches up her paper bag.) . . . And I want you to start acting like a young lady, not like a little kid. You're growing up! (Judy blows up the bag and is about to pop it. Mother reaches out to take it from her but Judy quickly pulls it out of her reach, giggling.) You're growing *up* and you should learn that. (Mother reaches again for the bag but again Judy pulls it away, laughing wickedly.) Now would you please stop laughing . . .

Judy: (cleverly as if she didn't hear) *Start* laughing?

Mother: *Stop*.

Judy: (casually) All right. (she blows into the bag again.)

Mother: (annoyed) Would you stop doing that.

Judy: (putting the bag down) All right, all right.

Mother: (looks her in the eyes) I'm going to tell something straight to you. You act like a lady . . .

Judy: Yeah.

Mother: Because if you don't. . .

Judy: So. I don't.

Mother: You *have* to act like a lady. You can't just act like a little girl. You're growing up. People are going to say you're stupid or something, or "She's crazy." And you're not! You're a young lady. Now, you should understand that. Do you?

Judy: (grudgingly) Yuh.

Mother: Okay, you may go.

Judy: At last! (she runs from the room).■

How to Live Without a Father (½" B&W reel; edited, 25 min.) is available through Teachers & Writers for rent ($25) or sale ($50).

Fiction Scripts For Film And Video

Meredith Sue Willis

When the creative writing team at P.S. 75 first gained access to a video portapak in the spring of 1972, the school was in a flurry of excitement. We discovered at once that unlike trying to get children to write poems and stories, there was never any problem of selling the concept of video and film. The possibilities were endless, and therefore frightening to the teacher. Children instantly saw the potential for a project that would get them out of the classroom using their hands and bodies and moving around. But for me, the teacher, there was a strain of learning to use the machine itself and taking on the responsibility of all that expensive equipment.

That first spring I paid very little attention to the content of our video tapes: it was enough to deal with the clicks and whirrs and gray images of the medium's message. Almost all of my early work was built around ideas that children brought me full-fledged and ready-made. The large majority of these ideas were for fiction tapes, often comic, usually based on models from commercial television and movies. The children quickly picked up certain possibilities of video tape: the way you can effect magical disappearances by stopping and starting the recorder; the way the end of the world for a science fiction play can be illustrated by aiming the tv camera into the tv monitor and getting insanely whirling feedback.

There are also, of course, documentary possibilities and non-fiction self-exploration uses: the following year we took every child from one class and gave him or her a few minutes alone in a room with the video camera running and let them talk to it, dance, shadow box, make faces or whatever they wanted and then play it back alone, just for themselves. That idea, however, came from adults: whenever I have waited for the children's initiation of a project, the impulse has been overwhelmingly to make a fiction story, to try and be *in* the world of *Star Trek* or Bruce Lee. The teacher has choices: she can insist on more academically oriented adult-initiated projects like documentaries of the classroom or neighborhood, or the gerbil life cycle. She might also offer new models such as classical films, or assignments to watch educational television. She can also go along with the action and fairy tale genre and concentrate on the tangential benefits of movie making: the process of learning how to plan, the self-discipline of mastering the equipment, the working under adult-type pressures of deadlines. Again and again my personal predispositions led me into work with fiction films, and the majority of them have been of the action genre. These are not my favorites for my own viewing pleasure on commercial tv, but I have become increasingly interested in what it is in, say, a karate movie, that attracts and holds the children.

My very first video tape was done with a well-organized group of middle class sixth graders from an open classroom who presented their project as camera-ready. They were aficionados of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* on late night tv and *Mad* magazine and their video play was a combination of mad scientist and Tie-Pauline-To-The-Tracks melodrama. They wanted a chandelier falling from the ceiling to knock out the baddies and an onrushing locomotive. They gave up the chandelier upon considering the medium's limitations, but insited on a cardboard train, cowcatcher in the fore. I let them do their funny schticks and concentrated on the important business of making everyone learn to be quiet when the camera was running. The final product was somehwat haphazard and ragged, but they laughed to their hearts' content. My function had been that of Official Adult—they used me and our video tape technician to film their fun. There is a whole area of simply providing a service to children, letting them play out, elaborate and examine their own fantasies. Video tape is excellent for this. For example, this year Phil Lopate and Teri Mack let two boys act out the entire *Poseidon Adventure* on video tape. The boys did all the parts themselves, switching characters and climbing shelves in a closet as the ship's innards. My first year with video tape one girl had made marionettes and a play for her teacher's birthday party. She wanted this marionette play recorded just as it was. She, however, having had the contact with video tape moved to the next step: she and some friends were particularly impressed with the technique of causing apparent disappearances, so she made up a witch play in which some school girls sell themselves to the forces of evil and instantly change from ordinary clothes to black witch dresses. They ride in the sky via high camera angles and battery powered out-of-doors video.

That first spring we had the help of a college student who knew how to use the video tape and took care of teaching the children how to use it. The next year I worked with the equipment strictly on my own and I discovered that it is possible for one adult to supervize both the children behind the camera and those in front of it, but the adult tends to finish the shooting session with strained vocal chords and a head ache. With me, the final product looked more amateurish. I became mostly interested in the process of the project. I felt I had done too much with "star" children who could organize their own projects; I arranged with one class to cover everyone: the teacher divided the class into groups and I systematically gave everyone a chance to be in a video play during the course of the year. I wanted to accomplish many—probably too many—goals. I tried to mix creative writing of an introspective sort with group improvisations and video techniques. I began by assigning or suggesting characters like drunks, doctors, cops, a robber, a gorilla, a movie star to the children and asking for a monologue written in the voice of the character. We would then improvise a story by having the various characters interact. We would discuss other things that might happen as a group, but as the taping date approached, I usually ended up assigning a final script based on the group's ideas to one or two facile writers. With some groups the whole play seemed to come together with the actual taping sessions—perhaps because of a natural cameraman, but with others the writing was most satisfying, or the improvisations. The good writing did not necesari-

"We used the script as a tool for organizing everyone's thinking rather than for memorizing lines. With children, I find constant bursts of imagination that can change the entire aspect of the play occurring at any moment once the work is underway. . ."

ly come from the good actors; the best cameraman was often improvization shy, but everyone tried a little of everything.

My most satisfying effort of this sort came later that year in a slightly older class, a fifth grade. Again I had a more or less arbitrary group that came up with an idea for a tape. We began with a partially written script idea and I became the secretary and let several children dictate further ideas to me. We used the script as a tool for organizing everyone's thinking rather than for memorizing lines. With children, I find constant bursts of imagination that can change the entire aspect of the play occurring at any moment once the work is underway: there is, after all, nothing like being involved in the thing itself for discovering where it really wants to go. Sometimes I even dispense with conventional speech notation in scripts, using instead simple narratives that describe the action. This particular play was like that: it concerned strange happenings one ordinary day at P.S. 75. We set up our taping equipment in the classroom and took turns at the camera shooting all kinds of activities: kids petting white mice, an experiment with candles. We ignored the raucous sound track. The only planned event was when one girl asks the teacher to go to the bathroom and then doesn't come back. The teacher, Mrs. Soroka, showed that day a flair for acting, and we decided to write her into the rest of the play. One day's shooting had her marching the whole class up and down the halls while one by one the children disappear. Almost everyone in the class makes at least a brief appearance, or rather disappearance, in the film. In the end, though, we couldn't use much of the sound track: there were class noises and hall noises and garbled dialogue. Out of necessity we decided to use a narrative that is added after the tape is complete. We set up the microphone and the main actors watched their drama and dubbed appropriate speeches. I had originally assumed we could use a straightforward description of the action, but the children began to speak in the first person: "I remember that day so well— look, there's Diane. I wonder where she is now. . ." The final product pleased me. We were on location, that is, our classroom was the real thing, as opposed to a cardboard locomotive. We had also maximized the video magic: a child disappears out of the very hands of the teacher. In many ways, "The Vanishing Children" was a play I would have made myself, if I had been the child. I did put a lot of myself into the play. I realized that the teacher would be a good addition; I had picked out this idea as the one that would serve our purposes best. The children and I had collaborated, shared responsibility and work.

This productive tension between child's mind and adult's mind has been especially important to me in my movie making with the boys from a fifth-sixth grade bilingual class over a span of three years. The first videoplay came from Francisco, a boy who had worked the previous year with Phillip Lopate on a group video project. This year he was ready with his own idea. From experience he knew how video was done, and he knew precisely what scenes he wanted, what characters. He dictated the English version to me and then himself translated it into Spanish. The Spanish had to be extensively corrected, but when it was done, we had a bilingual version of a formal, workable script. Most of the boys in the class wrangled parts; we shot largely out-of-doors, and followed a formula that is being continued in that class to this day: violent action and revenge. Francisco's play begins with an act of treachery: the bad guys sign a peace agreement with the president of the U.S. and then make a sneak attack in which some commandos are killed and the president captured. The remaining commandos go out for revenge and rescue. There is a mass battle, and, for a climax, a man to man confrontation between the hero, Francisco, and the enemy leader. Lifes' adventures and struggles come down to a one-on-one contest, and the best man, of course, wins. There is a short envoi in which Francisco is decorated and chooses new boon companions to replace his dead ones and accompany him on his future adventures.

Francisco went back to Santo Domingo, but his action thriller set off the other boys. The next fall Victor (the commando sidekick who died) wanted to do a cowboy movie.* Victor didn't have the singleness of purpose and vision that gave Francisco's play its graceful simplicity. Victor always brought a friend to the dictation sessions, and he tended to jab an elbow in the friend's ribs and say, "*You* tell her something now." The ideas came slowly, but they found what they wanted: chase sequences; Indians, bullying bad guys; a bank robbery; gun battles. They did not give much significance to whether they played the bad guys or the good guys; the plot, except for its broadest outlines of the good guys winning in the end could be negotiated. What they wanted was the galloping, the running, the struggling, and the occasional heroic gesture. In Victor's video play there is no single hero: a cowardly sheriff becomes brave, but dies; his brother comes to avenge him. The three characters with the most camera exposure are the bankrobbers, who are not nice at all. They shoot a drunk they don't like, they pistol whip the sheriff (but it is the Indians who actually kill him.) Eventually the bank robbers turn themselves in and are hanged, along with the Indian chief. Throughout the play there are gestures, minor actions on the themes of courage and respect for courage; the robbers return the sheriff's body to the hostile town "Because he was a brave sheriff." The townspeople, all drinking from whiskey bottles, rise and remove their hats. All of the action, some obvious, some obscure in its precise meaning, forms a complex surface to the play. My part was to keep pressing, to keep asking questions: How did the sheriff's brother feel that made him want to get revenge? Why did the robbers become robbers? A policeman, Armando said, stopped him from fighting with his brother when he was a kid. We included some of this material in dubbed interior monologues.

Again and again I was touched by the eagerness of the boys to play at suffering: the sheriff hissing out his last words; the Indian jerking his body and falling as he is hit by a bullet; the sheriff's brother slapping his gun in his hand when he hears of his brother's death.They seemed to have within them, in easy distance, a great fund of emotion and experience. Revenge, violence, pain, the difficulty of being brave seemed comfortable to them, a natural part of their lives. Suffering comes natural to them, and the cruelty too: they enjoyed playing the robbers who shoot anyone who gets in the way, in being the jury that hangs the robbers, in playing the Indians who beat their prisoners.

This year I vowed to stay out of violence films, but Sammy, last year's Indian chief, came to me with a Bruce Lee karate plot, and the passionate conviction that he had to make this film. I am convinced again by the vitality of the need to film this story, to act on this fantasy. Partly it is the project, the excitement of story conferences and the pleasure of the fake karate practices that attracts them, but there is more; there is the meaning of the revenge and action plot. We are using silent super 8 film this year and working from a simple narrative sketch. Teri Mack, our video/film specialist is preparing detailed shot plans with the camera crew, and again I am pressing for the inner life in the conventional drama. The boys say revenge, karate fights. I say, Why? As if it were obvious, (and perhaps it is to a Bruce Lee fan), they say, "The bad guys kill our family." My ears perk up. The family has entered the drama. We sketch out a twofold background of family life through group improvization rehearsals; a real life of squabbling and grumbling and then, when the family is murdered, there is a flashback of a poignant birthday celebration with loving gifts and cake. Sammy and the boys willingly indulge in sentiment for the lost family utopia, and the fighting seems to make more sense to me: of course they want to fight whatever destroyed that warm family nest of remembered and lost love. The karate fights are a fantasy of power, of felling the enemy with a kick, a magically effectual blow of your fingers, but I am convinced that the struggle is genuine. In their movies they can localize the evil. The unrealistic part of their fantasy, it seems to me, is only the belief that their side must triumph in the end, and that life struggles can be reduced to a matter of physical courage. If they are mistaken, though, it isn't something I can explain to them. I say, "I don't know, I don't like all this killing." "That's okay, Susi, man," Sammy says. "We only kill the bad guys."

* * *

I have tried in these notes to suggest some of the possible variety of fiction scripts for movie and video plays and also the variety of expressive and learning experiences children can have through them. There are specific media skills to be gained: how video works, how tv programs are made, how movies can influence us through clever editing. There are the generalized benefits of team work, long-range planning, decision making and working with an adult in a relationship of mutual responsibility. There is the whole area of personal and group exploration, *of going inside*, which is the special freedom of the creative arts. For this type of endeavor, the form can be revenge play, fairy tale, or show biz success story: the potential lies in what is explored through the conventions. ■

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* "Los Tres Prisioneros." The text of this video play, in English and Spanish was published in *Teachers & Writers Newsletter*, Volume 5, Issue 3, Spring 1974.

TEACHERS & WRITERS COLLABORATIVE PUBLICATIONS

POSTER cover of the Fall 1973 issue of the Newsletter, full size (17 by 22).

THE WHOLE WORD CATALOGUE (128 pages) is a practical collection of assignments for stimulating student writing, designed for both elementary and secondary students. Activities designed as catalysts for classroom exercises include: personal writing, collective novels, diagram stories, fables, spoof and parodies, and language games. It also contains an annotated bibliography.

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TEACHERS & WRITERS COLLABORATIVE NEWSLETTER, issued three times a year, draws together the experience and ideas of the writers and other artists who conduct T & W workshops in schools and community groups. A typical issue contains excerpts from the detailed work diaries and articles of the artists, along with the works of the students and outside contributions.

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