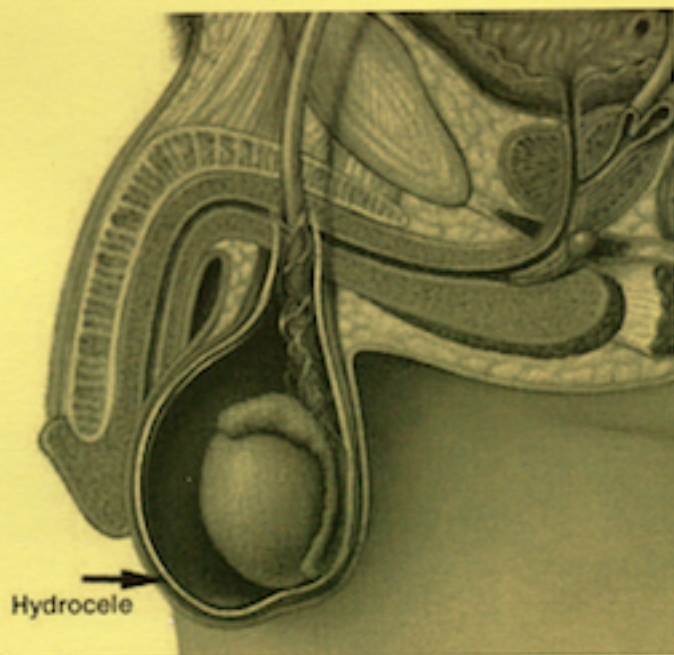


# CINERTIA

0.1



220 days of movies with an enormous ball  
2006-2007

By Jonathan Culp

Alley Cat  
 Android  
 Army of Shadows  
 Attack of the Crab Monsters  
 The Beaver Trilogy  
 The Black Cat  
 The Bloody Brood  
 Bored  
 The Celluloid Closet  
 A Christmas Story  
 Coffy  
 Corrupt  
 The Greter Lake Monster  
 Cutter's Way  
 The Departed  
 Diary of a Lost Girl  
 Don't Go in the Woods  
 Earth  
 Everything's Coming My Way  
 The Fatal Glass of Beer  
 Film Fanatic  
 Frankenstein's Daughter  
 Greetings  
 Grindhouse  
 Hatchet For a Honeymoon  
 Hiroshima Mon Amour  
 Homecoming  
 The Howling  
 Hymn Video Zine  
 Infest Wisely  
 The Last Man on Earth  
 Mac and Me  
 Mance: Hands of Fate  
 The Mayor of Sunset Strip  
 The Mind Snatchers  
 Murder and UFOs  
 North Dallas Forty  
 Obsession  
 The Phantom Planet  
 Reuben, Reuben  
 Sans Soleil  
 Saturn 3  
 The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad  
 Shack out on 101  
 The Shooting  
 Southern Comfort  
 Starcrash  
 Survival Run  
 Take the Money and Run  
 They Live  
 Up From the Depths  
 La Vie Heureuse de Leopold Z  
 Waking Life  
 Winnipeg 1919

## JUNE

An American Werewolf in London  
 The Armoured Vault  
 The Astro-Zombies  
 Baffled!  
 Beyond the Fringe  
 Blood of Dracula's Castle  
 Bluebeard  
 The Boy With Green Hair  
 Le Chat Dans le Sac  
 C.H.U.D.  
 Commando Amazon  
 Creak of the Moons  
 Creepshow  
 Deadly Twins  
 Desperate Moves  
 Divine Trash  
 Dreams That Money Can Buy  
 The End of the World  
 Evilpeak  
 Female Trouble  
 Flesh  
 The Giant Gila Monster  
 Grey Matter  
 Hamtrage  
 Helen Hill  
 The Hit  
 Horror Hotel  
 A Hundred Dollars and a T-Shirt  
 An Inconvenient Truth  
 Jandek on Corwood  
 Lifeforce  
 Mad Foxes - Stingray & Martin  
 Memories of Earth  
 Mooch Goes to Hollywood  
 Night of the Bloodsuckers  
 Not of This Earth  
 Outrageous!  
 Remembering Arthur  
 Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern are Dead  
 Satan's Cheerleaders  
 The Savage Bees  
 Sex and Seducness  
 Shadow of the Vampire  
 Snap Shot  
 Spooks Run Wild  
 State Legislature  
 Suspria  
 Terror Hospital  
 The Trial  
 Vampire Lovers  
 Vinyl  
 Who is Bono Textno?  
 A Woman Under the Influence



Cinertia 0.1  
220 Days of Movies With an Enormous Ball

by Jonathan Culp

(Originally published as Stupid Journey #6)

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# SEPTEMBER 2006

Vineland, Ontario. I'm home again.

For about ten years I have been packing my bags; vowing never to come back; tripping around the continent for four months or so; and then coming back.

This time was different. This time I was really determined not to come back. Why should I? Throughout that decade I had been trying to find gainful employment in the Toronto arts scene, to no avail; lately I had been working two food service jobs that chewed up my time and energy and spat them out, and still barely gave me enough to live on. I had said goodbye to my latest, and maybe coolest, collective home - which was nonetheless impossibly remote from Kensington Market, the true center of my own private Toronto. The place had become nothing more than a mental repository of scenes that had died, friends that had drifted, relationships that I had fucked up in horrible and unforgivable ways. Why should I come back?

Anyway. I came back. Not to Toronto, mind you - to Vineland. My other safe refuge when all else fails, the family farm, the room where I grew up, the home of my mom who had taken me in four times in the past decade, never more broke or without options than at this juncture.

Only this time I brought a friend.

And this friend lived in my pants.

He announced himself as I was reacquainting myself with Siue at her Portland home that July, struggling manfully to figure out whether getting back together was the right thing to do, and subjecting her to harrowing alternations of catatonia and glossolalia in the process. (Nonetheless - we got back together!) Recently I had suspected zipper malfunction as I found it oddly difficult to navigate my pants at pee time. Only now, however, did Siue articulate the true source of the dilemma:

"What's up with your ball!!!"

Sure enough, upon inspection my right nut was two or three times normal size. Of course once it was pointed out to me, it immediately started to hurt.

I've gone to American doctors before - regarding disasters in the same region in fact, but that's another zine. No way was I going to let mere testicular dysfunction wipe out an already depleted bank account, however. I waited until September, when I was securely lodged on a Victoria pal's guest couch, to go to a Canadian doctor, because of course the Canadian health care system is free and accessible for all - and perfect in every way.



I get sent for an ultrasound, and a lecture for not getting it looked at right away. While the results won't be available for a couple days, my nurse thinks it's a cyst; he's like, "Yeah, I had this before, myself!" But when I call for the test results I only find out what it *isn't*: cancer. That is good news.

And before I know it, the month is over and here I am back on the farm, and the ball is with me and still growing, slowly. I check in pronto with my family doctor, but he says there will be a one-month wait for the required second ultrasound, and a three-month wait to see the urologist.

Translation: three months at mom's, which I am initially frantic about avoiding. I insist that I'll find a way to move back to Toronto, although I want to be there even less, and also my work options, already limited, are further circumscribed by, you know, this giant testicle. I try to renew a housesit I had undertaken a couple years back behind the big mall in St. Catharines, but then some guy offers to pay rent...and anyway I couldn't get a job at the video store in the mall - I couldn't get a job at the video store in the mall!

With my options dwindling, the intrepid Jonnie falls back on a tried and true tactic: I don't move out of mom's. She doesn't mind, anyway.

However: what do I do?

For the first time in this chaotic, aberrant decade of instability, the answer is NOT "make movies." Part of my latest trip had been spent touring and screening with the two projects more elephantine than my right nut - one a 90-minute comedy, the other a 45-minute experimental film. These had been absorbing my attention for the last three years. I couldn't bear to start another one; it was time for a break.



One of several interesting things that happen to me when I'm making movies, is that it becomes difficult for me to watch movies. I try, but my mind starts wandering to my own projects and how I can learn from and incorporate what I'm seeing. When I'm making movies, that is. And I'm always making movies. But now I'm not making movies. And because my body is rebelling and this makes me unhappy, I am also smoking a lot of pot.

The result of this confluence of events: I start watching a lot of movies.

Read on and you'll find out what they were like.



# OCTOBER

The St. Catharines Public Library has always been a fine repository of free VHS movies classic and otherwise, plus now they've got DVDs too. So I stopped by, and look what I found.

## LA VIE HEUREUSE DE LEOPOLD Z (Gilles Carle, 1965)

This is one of those mid-sixties National Film Board productions where rogue filmmakers took what was supposed to be a documentary or short film, turned it into a narrative feature, and basically created the Canadian feature film, such as it is. This one was supposed to be a documentary about snow ploughs, and was transmuted into this shaggy-dog story about an operator trying to get off shift to see his son sing at midnight mass and give his wife a mink coat. So as you can see, this one was not heavily influenced by the French new wave! The bulk of the movie involves a long social between the guy and his pal the boss, and jump cuts are strenuously avoided in ways that are more awkward than the jump cuts would have been. It's also a little overextended and clunky. It's 'working class' which I guess is the social selling point, but it's interesting how the filmmakers transmute that into this general conservatism. Also, it's dubbed, so the scene where the woman in the department store is talking non-stop English at them loses its whole point. Overall, this one is 'interesting,' 'a piece of history' etc., not something I'd recommend in and of itself, and useful in de-romanticizing early feature filmmaking in Canada - the scrappy circumstances of production show on screen, and not in a positive way.

## SLAP SHOT (George Roy Hill, 1977)

Paul Newman as foulmouthed captain of bad minor-league hockey team that gains a following when they bring on the legendary Hanson Brothers and shift focus to beating people up. This one is a totally hilarious parody of machismo, without moralizing thank God; there are gestures toward conventional Hollywood ethics, but they are almost always brutally undercut. The characters are all recognizable types that you never see portrayed in movies with such rigor, eg the sex-crazed teammate who is also totally disgusting (he keeps wiggling his tongue). And now I understand why the Hansons are punk-rock heroes, they are absolute superstars in the Warhol sense of the word. An American film set partly in Canada, with real honest to God place names such as Peterborough; meanwhile Canadian features were doing everything possible to conceal where they were made in the name of being more like American films! Oh the irony. Note: there is one 'kind but stupid' Francophone, which I suppose constitutes a stereotype. And yes, it is Written By A Woman.

## THE DEPARTED (Martin Scorsese, 2006)

Yeah! I saw it on 'cheap' Tuesday (only \$9.85! Or have THOSE rules changed on me too?) A frustratingly enjoyable movie, it ALMOST gets there. It's got more emotional guts/nakedness than Scorsese usually allows, but those guts are isolated in DiCaprio and Vera Farmiga's performances. Nicholson isn't out of control, exactly, he's just a symptom of Scorsese's tonal problems: he's playing



vaudeville, while DiCaprio does psychodrama and Farmiga and Matt Damon play repression. Except unlike Farmiga, Damon can't (or doesn't) suggest what's going on under that repression. I liked how the excitement techniques were embedded in a relatively intimate, character-based approach where Goodfellas, say, is ALL direction. But as a result, when things blow up at the end, it feels pretty cheap, and I say foey on the jokey final shot. And really: by now the street language is almost as automatic a mannerism as the Rolling-Stones-over-tracking-shot business. The homophobia is put to use in terms of the themes of masculine role-playing, but the racist shit is really getting old.

The Niagara Artists Centre wants to give me an 18-month contract to set up their edit suite, but can't because I'm not on EI.

"It Can Happen Here," a film I made about art, addiction and mental illness, is rejected from a film festival about art, addiction and mental illness.

A screening of "Grilled Cheese Sandwich," probably the first feature ever made about life in the Niagara region, by Niagarans, is rejected by Niagara's only film society as 'outside our mandate.'

My ball continues to grow.

I go to Toronto.



#### WHO IS BOZO TEXINO? (Bill Daniel, 2005)

I've seen a lot of train hopping movies. This one is the best. As gorgeous as Free Ride, it has the advantage of two decades of shooting, a narrative hook (a quest for the originator of the hobo graffiti tag 'Bozo Texino'), and a plethora of old-timers. Through Daniel's eyes, these folks are gentle, wise old guys in permanent rebellion against their fucked-up society. But despite their saintliness, it doesn't ever seem unduly romanticized or self-indulgent, just touching. One more reason to throw your copy of "Evasion" in the garbage. Saw it at Cinecycle, with short graffiti-collage and subway-party movies that were slight and perfect appetizers. Also many pals I haven't seen in six months. Nice.



**LE CHAT DANS LE SAC**  
(Gilles Groulx, 1964)

This NFB production, transformed mid-project into a 35mm feature by director Groulx, must have been a traumatic viewing experience to Quebeckers accustomed to decades of church-sponsored morality plays. It is the first Canadian film to have absorbed the stylistic and thematic tics of the French New Wave. It's radical-boy-and-liberal-girlfriend just like Godard, only this one takes the side of the girl, which is nice. While there are some impressive rhetorical flourishes, this is a study in rebellion, not a rebellion in itself - which is what happens when you ask a government agency to produce a French New Wave film. Anyway, the boy goes to live in the country and sulk while reading newspapers, while the girl stays in town and gets fed up with him. So in other words, it resonated! I don't care if it fails to present any empowering solution to the guy's nihilist radicalism. I loved this film, it's beautiful. Thank you NFB Mediatheque, even if you're not free anymore.

Back in Vineland, I start working through my VHS shelf. Considering my deep-seated collectorama, I have actually accumulated very few movies. Yet.

**LIFEFORCE**  
(Tobe Hooper, 1985)

After Texas Chainsaw Massacre made his name and Poltergeist got his foot in the Hollywood door, Hooper teamed up with Golan-Globus, whose names spell quality, and the result is this absolutely nuts movie about a pretty naked girl who is actually A VAMPIRE FROM OUTER SPACE. I can't even get into it beyond that. I'm not sure if credit goes to Dan O'Bannon's script or some kind of mid-production interference, but this thing is haywire and jerry-rigged, full of preposterous revelations and weird-ass stuff breaking out in banal settings. There's one priceless scene which presents some abortive softcore pornography as the psychic vision of a stressed-out narrator: "And then she LIFTED HER DRESS...and she, she, she grabbed his hand...and she put it on her thigh...oh lord!" I'll have to watch it again straight, I had no expectations for it but I'm pretty glad it's on the shelf.

**JANDEK ON CORWOOD**  
(Chad Friedrichs, 2003)

Well here's an interesting subject for a documentary - a reclusive musician who puts out his own music under a shroud of secrecy, and the search for his true identity. Sort of an indie-rock "Who Is Bozo Texino?" Only this one is inelegant, overextended, and strained in its attempted meaningfulness. There's a lot of stupid cutaways - but a different kind of stupid cutaway than the last rockdoc I disliked, I'm Your Man: where the latter breaks things up with shots of birds or Leonard Cohen's soulful countenance in slow motion, this one gets all literal (A FULL MINUTE of pouring beer footage accompanies somebody saying "we went out for a beer"). Way too many interviews with smart ass white boy rock types - including an old fave, John Trubee, who donates the ultra-rare tape-of-Jandek-interview that the whole film builds up to, in fact it tells us most of the content before we get there, sigh. It's none too revealing. Around here I got the feeling that these guys were copping serious style from Errol Morris, and botching it. And well before that it occurred to me that the major 'mystery' that they try to hook us on is: "Is this dude 'crazy'???" It's the wrong question to ask, and they never make me care about the answer. I get the impression that no one in the movie likes the music, either.



I have sworn that, this one time, I will not commute endlessly between Vineland and Toronto. Because doing this just makes Vineland seem farther from everything. Nonetheless, I do make the trip in order to show "Grilled Cheese Sandwich" in a special theme room at Canzine. Having spent many months alone in a tent and recent days alone on the farm, I am ill-prepared for the claustrophobic crush of this event which thinks that it can fit into the Gladstone Hotel when it belongs in the Skydome. At least I'm kept busy, making grilled cheese sandwiches for those few who can push through to my humble screening.

And if it's Canzine, that means Halloween is around the corner! What's playing on Scream channel...let me see...OMG!

#### AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

(John Landis, 1981)

Landis is no artist, and no moral philosopher. He has no sense of rhythm, no sense of structure, no grasp of character, and he imposes his car wreck fetish on every story he touches. And judging from the shower sequence I don't think this man has ever had sex. But I loved this movie when I was ten and I like it now. The horror milieu, the British setting, and Jenny Agutter playing it straight provide tension against his oddball juvenilia. The makeup is indeed great, though they sure are reluctant to show the damn wolf (which, as anyone who has seen Ginger Snaps can appreciate, was actually probably a very good idea). The porn movie-interruptus is hilarious, and it's fun watching Griffin Dunne rot. Lots of scenes, lines, images, are still with me from my way-distant previous view, so he's obviously doing something right. Not scary though. And neither is...

#### CREEPSHOW

(George Romero, 1982)

...unless you're claustrophobic, in which case the Ted Danson/Leslie Nielsen sequence will bug you out. (Yes, Ted Danson and Leslie Nielsen in a George Romero movie) I of course am an absolute freak about Romero, who is an artist AND a moral philosopher. This is no masterpiece that's for sure, but it succeeds in its project of capturing the spirit of the old EC horror comics. It's not just the visual sense, or the way people stand there stupidly waiting to be



eaten/dismembered/squished with their mouth hanging open. It's the morality-play thing, which is so intrinsic to these comix and so little remarked upon. The henpecked husband, the dumb rube, and the eternally rotting patriarch are just perfect renderings of this aesthetic, and the movie keeps some ironic distance from the more problematic aspects of these types while staying faithful to the originals.

Wow, I remember when the selling point of cable was no ads, now there's 17 minutes of 'em to the hour. I forgot how annoying that shit is, or maybe I've got sensitive with age. So I skipped Texas Chainsaw Massacre - a movie whose rhythm and ambiance should definitely not be interrupted with Maple Leaf Chicken every ten god damned minutes.



# NOVEMBER

Things slow down a bit this month, but I do finally make it back to the library.

## THE BLACK CAT

(Edgar G. Ulmer, 1934)

I think this is the ONLY time Ulmer ever had a budget to work with, fresh off the boat from Weimar, and what does he do? Hires Karloff AND Lugosi, buttresses them with a couple pug-ugly manservants and a truly goofy romantic-interest duo, and puts them to work: running through this outrageous modernist mansion built on a WWI bunker (they have electric clocks!), performing satanic rites and playing the organ, murdering (and stuffing) wives and daughters, settling ownership of virgins with a nice game of chess, fainting a lot, flaying each other alive, listening to stupid ass cops with feathers argue over whose home town is prettier, plus a line that EVERYONE should have implanted in their brains: "Supernatural - perhaps. Baloney - perhaps not." The denouement, in which the goofy male romantic lead/playwright reads a review exhorting him to be 'more realistic,' is out-of-left-field and perfection itself, like the rest of the movie. This is what cinema is all about folks! It's as if John Landis has been trying to remake this his entire life. It was Universal's top money maker of 1934!!

## EARTH

(1930, Alexander Dovzhenko)

Now it can be told: propaganda is NOT synonymous with contempt for the audience. I have never seen a movie with a more deliberate, or surer, sense of rhythm. Two riveting sequences are nothing but long montages of fruit. A man sits, re-evaluating his world view, and because it takes a long time to do that we fade to black THREE times over about a minute, without him moving or changing position. This glacial tempo lulls us, so that Dovzhenko can jolt us with the arrival of a speedy tractor; or a collective's joyous dance through the dust over several lengthy wide shots is disrupted by his abrupt murder. Then the movie climaxes with an unbelievable crescendo where at least FIVE events are montaged, in perfectly comprehensible rhetorical construction. The movie begins with a death scene whose acting is impressively understated even now, forget 1930; the final shot balances all the anti-church rhetoric with an image that is absolutely redemptive and spiritual, only the point is that redemption is found in life. Yeah, this movie really is that deep. It kind of reminds me of Brian Wilson's "Smile" in its modest grandeur, so true that it's painful, but so fantastic that you are damn right going to be putting it on again.

I go for my ultrasound at the West Lincoln hospital. After an uneventful prodding session, the verdict: no it still ain't cancer. It's a "hydrocele" - or if you prefer, ugh, a "spermatocele!" My doctor says the growth will probably have to be cut right out by the urologist, but if it's really getting in the way he can drain it - by needle, without anaesthetic. I pass on that. Two months till the urologist rears his head; and it's getting cold outside.



#### THE CELLULOID CLOSET

(Rob Epstein & Jeffrey Friedman, 1995)

Well, it's a documentary, with a lot of interviews; that should tell you everything you need to know. It's got good info and clips - that Shirley Maclaine self-loathing tantrum is unbelievable, as is the cruising cop. I just read a review from Pauline Kael that the latter 'makes the director seem pathologically straight'. But Christ God there's too much Whoopi and Hanks, and then after excoriating Hollywood for watering down its sources, the end is all like "but things are better now tweet tweet". It does also offer a half-assed apology from the writer of "The Boys In The Band".

Looking for something to do, I offer the following indie-video reviews for Broken Pencil. Haven't written for them in a while, and after reading the rather inscrutable crime against grammar that was their Grilled Cheese Sandwich review, I am compelled to shine sweetly once again upon their fleeting pages.

#### HYMN VIDEO ZINE Vol. 1, # 1 and 2

These came out over two years ago, but I just picked them up when I was in Vancouver this summer. Running about thirty minutes each on recycled VHS, collecting sketchy shorts from resourceful young 'uns, this is a zine in spirit as well as in name. Several of the shorts are EXTREMELY goofy - like the endearing super 8 "Girl & Wolf" and "Sick Day" on # 1, or the mannered fake-film farce "Fish is for France" on # 2. Several others look like exercises from someone's animation class - cute but slight. The first one's real selling point is "The Art of Diving," an unusually unsentimental look at this revered pastime; the desperate edge of the interviewees is played for black comedy ('So things like severed heads don't disturb you?' 'Well who wants a head? It's a severed head right, you throw it in the garbage.') Number two offers the smaller pleasures of "Weeping Horse Crying Tear" and the movie-punch rhythm collage "Untitled," followed by a really morbid documentary about an unhappy dog puking. I can take or leave the grrrl pretending to fly and the repressed light comedy about people in suits, but this is a noble analog incursion for internet-weary tubeheads.



#### MEMORIES OF EARTH SEX AND SADNESS MURDER AND UFOS (Brian MacDonald)

Victoria's Brian MacDonald has compiled his video output onto two DVDs - one comprising his short-video cycles "Memories of Earth" and "Sex + Sadness," one with his recent 20-minute opus, "Murder and UFOs". These shorts represent 31 flavours of guy-anxiety with ironic sprinkles. The narrative voice is rarely authoritative, whether it's running backwards, on subtitles, intertitles or thought balloons; but the tics are so deeply felt that the shorts convey a confessional tone anyway. This is disorienting in an

interesting way. It's also such a trademark that eventually one wants to shake things up a little, particularly given the austere gallery-installation aesthetic. But that aesthetic eventually pays off in richness of imagery and



grain: videos like "You Don't Know What Love Is" with its contrasty slo-mo bathwater, or the treated fireworks over the heartbreaking "I Can't Believe You Actually Died", were just made to be hung on a wall and stared at. In short, when it works it really works, and "Murder and UPOs" takes it to the next level. Absolutely gorgeous to look at and listen to, it uses collaged stock footage, subtitles and mood music to present a Marilyn Monroe-JFK-RFK love triangle, dragging them into the mother of all conspiracy plots. The stodgy manliness of the Kennedy camera pose, juxtaposed with the effervescent sobbing of the eternally wronged Marilyn, provides quite a channel for those human-relationship emotions MacDonald likes to play with so much. Kitsch plus emotion is what camp was supposed to be all about, and this nails it.



#### HAMTRAGIC

(Aaron Trugeon/Janet Komp Ryson, 2004)

Admit it cin-ee-ma snobs, you love low-end genre filmmaking too. You know how the adoption of high-concept Hollywood trash by the proletariat tends to open up fertile rifts in the monofarm. And when things go well and the energy doesn't flag, the simple struggle to get it made can compel the viewer. In spite or because of the technical swamp it trudges - it's unlit, the soundtrack is camera-mike top to

bottom, arbitrary diamond-wipes infest the middle of scenes - "Hamtragic" is a lot of fun. A mulleted lout from the working-class part of Hamtramck, MI, eats a sandwich laced with voodoo narcotics, causing him to turn into this OTHER mulleted lout who lumbers around killing people so he can take more drugs etc. The supporting cast is made up entirely of whoever was hanging around the block that day, and some of them are extremely endearing (best supporting actor goes to Jerry Bombrowski as the grinning ex-con who yells). The scribbled-on-a-math-book feel of the movie as a whole is only underlined by the classic movie monster doodles that some idiot has plastered all over the screen during key scenes. There's a special guest appearance by the president of Hamtramck City Council, and a performance by local bar-band sensations the Polish Muslims. Good triumphs over evil. And as an attempted draw for gore fans, it ends with five minutes of spaghetti coming out of a melting lump of dough.

You can tell I'm getting serious about renewing my media-consumer credentials, because the Liberal convention is on TV, and I am actually watching. And in order to subject yourself to the bad theatre of the convention itself, you are obliged to endure some of the worst broadcasting I've ever seen. I've never seen newscasters talk so slowly about nothing. When it looks like something's going to happen all hell breaks loose, people get cut off, but then nothing's happening really. This occurred when someone was talking to Paul Martin, there was this hushed anticipation as they waited forty-five seconds for the far-away mic to open, and after a couple minutes of Martin saying nothing in barely audible fashion, Mansbridge intones - "Well, former prime ministers are always very careful with their words...and also very careful with their actions...when they go...in terms of...who they support." Most of it's on this level, most especially Belinda Stronach, and not to feed the trolls, but I dare you to discern anything resembling an idea in her commentary.

So I'm not REALLY watching. It's just on, and I'm in the room. Honest.



# DECEMBER

Siue is down for a visit! And what better way to celebrate than to pull some more movies off the dust-encrusted shelf...

## GREY MATTER

(Joy N. Bouck Jr, 1977)

AKA "The Brain Machine" but the video people thought better of that; the screen says 1972 but IMDB says 1977; it's that kind of movie. The government has some kind of overriding interest in this 'brain machine' project that has drafted four people - who turn out to be, roughly, a philosopher, a horny priest, a crackpot veteran and a patriot who got an abortion - to sit in a shrinking room with a computer that can read their horrendous secret thoughts. In the end the government takes over the lab by force and everybody dies. Here is a movie that is incompetent in every important way; MY shit has better production values than this. It held my interest, though, just to see what exactly these exploitation filmmakers thought they were doing, dabbling in four-guys-in-a-room character drama. The answer: a tract about how science is inferior to God. Thanks a lot. It's like opening a Kinder egg and getting your 30th goddam jigsaw puzzle. The priest is played by James "Roscoe P. Coltrane" Best, the philosopher by Gerald "the Republican Simon" McRaney. Also featuring very, very, very long establishing and transition shots in great quantity, this moves almost as slow as the Liberal convention.

## THE HIT

(Stephen Frears, 1984)

A pretty fun movie about a self-confident snitch who gets kidnapped by two seemingly incompetent hit men, and everything gets all screwed up. Very, very low key, sometimes to the verge of mannerism, but you can get away with it when your leads are Terence Stamp, John Hurt and a pubescent Tim Roth. It's ingenious in that you never know what's coming next, and it's a breezy blast to watch. BUT I wasn't entirely convinced that Hurt's tragic character flaw was adequately motivated - at times it gets into Narrow Margin nonsense territory. But it's still more fun than being trapped in a shrinking room with a philosopher.

## CURSE OF THE VAMPIRE

(1971, Gerardo de Leon)

So when I was in Portland I bought this book called "The New Poverty Row," about schlock directors who were also producers, which was written by a schlock director etc., Fred Olen Ray, whose own august works - "Scalps," "Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers" etc - I have somehow missed. Until it degenerates into self-promotion, the book is fantastic, dishing the dirt on such unknown-to-me luminaries as David "Mighty Gorga" Hewitt, and I've been searching for the referenced works as a kind of side hobby. So when I saw this for \$5 at Grimsby Giant Tiger, I scarfed it up. And damned if it doesn't have Fred Olen Ray himself introducing the thing in an ugly, sexist intro that made me feel absolutely dirty (watching it on IWD didn't help) and almost wrecks the book for



me. Oh yeah, the movie is an example of the era's Filipino horror output - and not one of the best (!!!) either - mom is supposed to be dead but she's locked in the basement and has turned into a vampire, and bites her son, and quite limited action ensues, some involving locals in blackface as happy slaves. Dull and slow and not nearly as tawdry as the scene's rep.

#### OBSSESSION

(1975, Brian De Palma)

This is one of BDP's Hitchcock rips, in this case referencing Vertigo: Cliff Robertson's wife Genevieve Bujold gets kidnapped and killed, and 15 years later he meets her doppelganger in Italy and tries to start over. The main and fascinating divergence here is that the romance-myth-obsessive is portrayed as a victim of, quite vulgarly, Capitalism, whose agent is Robertson's business partner John Lithgow. There's quite an intriguing exploration of the homoerotic implications of business relationships in that team, and by the third act the variations on the theme have become fascinating and compelling - and exhilaratingly perverse, not to give anything away. Nonetheless, I think this movie fails on balance, most especially due to an utterly and hopelessly illogical setup in the kidnap sequence, and a total copout ending that looks like studio interference but is actually De Palma messing with the script by Paul Schrader. Also, and this may sound like sour grapes, but by blaming capitalism for everything, the movie lets Robertson off the hook and barely explores the gender-role themes that are inherent in the material (I blame this on Schrader, who is too utterly immersed in maleness to look at it from the outside). The meta-queer Lithgow gets stabbed to death with scissors, of course. And ultimately, the movie has to bear the weight of comparison with my favourite movie of all time bar none, and it can't possibly hold up.



#### HORROR HOTEL

(1960; John Moxey)

A grad student goes to an ancient New England town to research satanism, and ends up on the receiving end of an undead sacrifice ritual before it's half over - that's the 'Psycho' trick, and I'm impressed. Nice dark, foggy atmosphere on this British horror film, and in that country's cinematic tradition, Satan proves quite an impressive arch-enemy for God. I wish the Beatnik boyfriend didn't lose his attitude halfway through and go all heroic, and I want more Christopher Lee. But waddya want for nothing, it's got good low-key creeps, and will provide you with a fine evening's entertainment if you're not Starhawk.

#### ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD

(1990, Tom Stoppard)

How does a playwright turn a play about theatre into cinema? Not with token step-printing flourishes and Scooby-Doo sound effects, though they don't hurt anything; not with super-condensed, florid visual interludes interpreting the Shakespeare source for the unwashed. The cinema in this movie is all in the faces, timing and inflections of Roth and (especially) Oldman. They are the movie and they are great. I'm just glad someone who knew Hamlet was watching it with me, otherwise chunks of it would have sailed over my head...thanks Siue!



Had to restart the abovementioned movie 30 minutes in, 'cause I was having such a hard time concentrating after my rowdy altercation with a public library representative. Having previously run afoul of the library's 'no political posters' rule, I voiced an objection to an anti-pornography poster, depicting a cute little girl over the caption 'pornography hurts,' from a group called Canadians For Decency. His response was, "I don't see anything political about that." This made me rather furious. Siue, on the other hand, took the high road - she tore the fucking thing down and threw it away. That is why I love her so.

Shortly thereafter, I am mysteriously given an 'address check' by the checkout woman at that library. Since I don't really, you know, live in St. Catharines anymore, and just walking in the place now gives me the creeps, it looks like I need to find other sources for my cinema. The shelf of course...and my pal Marinko.

#### **DIVINE TRASH**

(1998, Steven Yeagar)

This is a required double bill with The Celluloid Closet; it nails Waters as an avatar of the real queer cinema - the stuff that dominated the American underground for decades. As it describes how contemporary drag queens wanted nothing to do with Divine, one can only imagine their reaction to Waters - his attitude to alternative sexualities being not exactly poster boy material. But I love him so, and this provides priceless behind-the-scenes stuff from Pink Flamingos and interviews old and new. Yes there are the obligatory/utterly irrelevant money faces (Buscemi, Jarmusch) prattling about how cool Waters is, but there's also priceless stuff with Waters' family plus an extended, excitingly detailed peek into the underground at large, with gratifying screen time allotted to the Kuchars, Ken Jacobs, Jonas Mekas. And no sign of Tom Hanks anywhere.

#### **THE TRIAL**

(1962, Orson Welles)

A lot of surprising deadpan, low-key humour set in a towering black and white wasteland - which Welles scouted and ran with after discovering the week before shooting that he had no budget for sets. The takes are long but there's lots to see, at times the staging feels theatrical but the tone is underground-film sneaky. To my surprise, the visuals remind me more than anything of Night of the Living Dead - particularly the bit with the mob of threatening little girls peering through the wallboards. (Now I get Romero's claim that he dug Welles more than Hitchcock) This and other scenes nail a precisely nightmarish logic and texture that I haven't seen before - particularly as Welles' lawyer, who disappears into his bed, hectors his manservant and accepts the ministrations of psycho-babe Romy Schneider - THIS reminds me of Titicut Polities. And the end is right out of Pierrot le Fou. In short, this guy was ahead of his time, or maybe just of it, unlike those cloistered studio types - he drew inspiration from all available art, not just the sanctioned stuff. I watched it in installments, it's a bit of a slog but I would see it again.

#### **MOOG**

(2005, Hans Fjellstadt)

The kind of movie that makes this exercise of writing up every feature I see kind of redundant, because it's not much of a movie. (at 60 minutes it's not much of a feature either) Bob Moog invented, you know, the Moog synthesizer, which as the movie illustrates has been the source of lots of directions in music, some legendary (Bernie Worrell), lots fun (Stereolab), and lots of atrocities against the ear (Rick Wakeman, Keith Emerson). The common thread



between these musicians is nonexistent, and the movie doesn't even try; it just plods from point to point, with Bob in tow to look on like a proud papa. I think the reason there's no cross-cutting is that there's no content - some lawyer clearly wouldn't let them talk about Moog's checkered corporate history (don't ask me for more detail), and all that's left is a sequence of short arbitrary rambles - still life with Gershon Kingsley, still life with DJ Spooky who is a pompous ass, Moog picking bell peppers, et cetera, plus some wan recitations of the word 'spirituality.' The only breakout moment is when Worrell tells Wakeman that he thinks of a keyboard as a woman that he's having sex with and Wakeman responds, 'I tried that but I found that the songs became very short.' To which Worrell replies, 'Play slower!' THERE is a cultural frisson to die for.

Stephen Harper's big announcement about giving back (well, selling back) expropriated land around Mirabel Airport is used as a platform to espouse the 'property rights' ideology he promised to enshrine in the constitution around debate time. This idea was one of the torpedoes that sank, yawn, the Charlottetown accord, but now, with CRIA and Randy Hillier holding the skirts of The Big Asshole's fateful triangle, it could really happen. As a collage filmmaker, I'm feeling beleaguered, and angry - in fact I've finally begun channeling my perspective into the big magazine article I've needed to write for years. And it's especially on my mind as I divert my attention from the library to the flea market - and towards the big collage-reclamation project that's been on my mind for years.

From the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties, Canadian filmmakers endured the "Tax Shelter" era, whereupon control of the sector was transferred from artists to...dentists, essentially. Long story, and one I've yearned to tell via a corrective (and, hence, uncensored) collage of such works. Many found their way to VHS, and now upon wandering through Misener's Flea Market, an old west-of-Hamilton fave, I find myself face to face with a shelf full of these films: Rabid, Terror Train, Prom Night, these are the good ones. Plus many international exploitation hits to die for. The man in charge is a gregarious fellow named Uncle Puzzy, and he gives me a sheet announcing his storefront operation downtown - even more VHS, four for ten dollars Christmas special.

I have found my ticket to the promised land. Uncle Puzzy, I'll see you on Barton Street, as soon as I get back from Christmas with my friends in Owen Sound. From whom I borrow...

#### A CHRISTMAS STORY

(1983, Bob Clark)

That's right, Bob Clark - director of Porky's and Black Christmas - helmed this modern holiday classic. And classic it is - but before it is anything else it is BROAD. Eyes roll, film speeds up constantly, dad talks in a high voice after he's bagged with a bowling ball. But it really works. Clark's nasty, cynical conventional wisdom is absolutely made for Jean Shepherd's folksy takedown of every Xmas cliché in the book. Every scene has a payoff, and it moves like slightly clunky lightning. Having just spent the holiday with a three-year-old I can confirm that this absolutely nails the childhood thing; Peter Billingsley deserves an Oscar, and the writers throw in familiar but underused types like Ralphie's absolutely unreadable brother and a terrifying bully-wimp by the utterly perfect name of Scott Parkus. And Clark's nervous neurosis about race is kept pretty much corked until the Chinese restaurant thing at the very end, where the wait staff sings carols with lots of gratuitous R's. Can't forgive that, but it doesn't ruin it. The Santa scene is as grotesque and terrifying as ever.



So now I'm back. With the snow falling thick, I make my way to Uncle Fuzzy's VHS Outlet, and it's everything I dreamed - a tiny storefront in the neglected part of town, stacked high with movies of all descriptions - even some laserdiscs! He's a good talker; we exchange perspectives regarding the Six Nations-Caledonia standoff which is underway - and even at this distance the tension between sides in the dispute is palpable, as is the remorse.

By the time I leave the Fuzz to his neighbours, I've spent sixty bucks at four-for-ten, with more to come, and can barely contain my bounding gratitude. I race home, rip open the bags of booty, and kick things off with...with...a John Carradine Film Festival!

#### THE ASTRO-ZOMBIES

(Ted V. Mikels, 1968)

This movie is legendary, I've heard of it for years. It is also a piece of shit. A bunch of pomaded slugs sit around a wood-paneled office and chat, including the drunk as a skunk Wendell Corey. Tura Satana sits around in a spectacular outfit and looks incredibly bored. John Carradine shleps around his lab with Igor and talks at length about how Astro Zombies work. Occasionally someone is shot or garden-weaseled to death, sometimes by a guy in a skull mask. In one scene a woman is sitting around and the door opens and she gasps but nothing happens, but the irony is that it would have been more of an inversion if something DID happen. In between lines there are excruciatingly long passages of people wandering around and fidgeting. There are also a lot of cars driving around, and even in broad daylight the exteriors all seem to have been pushed three stops. At the end Carradine is shot and Satana is electrocuted, inspiring the cop to muse, "Well, there's one basic element of human life that can never be removed - the emotions!" We're in Phil Tucker territory here, folks.



#### NIGHT OF THE BLOODSUCKERS

(Cirio H. Santiago, 1978)

I dunno. Do you give points for enthusiasm? This is like John Landis's "Schlock" or "A Polish Vampire in Burbank." The script reads like Hecht-MacArthur for morons. "Coffins are for being laid to rest, not for being laid." Like that. But the botched attempt to be snappy means that it looks REALLY good up against the trudgery of Astro-Zombies or my last Filipino outing, Curse of the Vampire. John Carradine must have been on set at least two or three days, and they give him some Whitman and Shakespeare to recite for old times sake. Three vampire babes - the blonde does a great Swedish deadpan - have this endless ten-minute three-on-one sex scene, complete with wah-wah guitar, with this guy who might as well BE Steve Guttenberg. He must have been a co-producer. They live in the cemetery under this stone trap door which closes with a perfect styrofoam 'thud'. The music cues cut in and out abruptly all over the climax. The theme song, bearing the original title "Vampire Hookers," is goofy and tasteless, like the rest of the movie, which gives you xenophobia (locals feed the sailors duck embryos) and homosexual panic (a cross-dresser at a urinal, plus the line "Hey! You've got balls!") in the first five minutes. But I am also responding to the fact that this is a film of legend, which Sean Welbourn described to me in wonderment back in Grade 11. It is the film with the guy who sucks his farts through a hose.



This actually happens. What does NOT happen is, nobody says "Sounds like a fart - let's get out of here!" My world is shattered. But I guess it's better to know.

#### **BLUEBEARD**

(Edgar G. Ulmer, 1944)

It's official - I love Ulmer. Working super-cheap in Hollywood he kept German expressionism alive. This one features - yep - John Carradine in a great performance, he keeps the film alive as this guy who does a creepy marionette show, and also paints portraits of women, then kills them. There's some clunky detective stuff, but also tons of great moody compositions and those damn marionettes. You can imagine Hitchcock cribbing from this - there's the creep scoping out a girl through a hole in the wall (Psycho) and a big chase across rooftops ending in a fall (Vertigo). Fun movie.

#### **COFFY**

(1973, Jack Hill)

My previous encounter with Hill, the delightful Spider Baby, could not have prepared me for the gratuities of this film. To say that the astonishing Pam Grier carries it is to saddle her with the weight of the world. As if punishing her for being so strong, the filmmakers put her in one degrading situation after another. All the violence is sexualized and all the sexuality is violent. There are tits everywhere. The slack-jawed leer of the camera renders a 'lynching' scene incredibly offensive. And yet maybe Grier IS up for the challenge. She does end up on top time after time, even if there's no joy in it. It's as if she's fighting the whole industry, right on screen.

#### **WINNIPEG 1919: SIX WEEKS OF SOLIDARITY**

(Victor Dobchuk, 1994)

A ten-minute piece about the legendary general strike, this has some priceless glimpses of stock footage and classic photos, all mucked up with this stupid voiceover. It does however provide the tidbit that the Winnipeg market square has been converted into a police station - just like in Regina! At the end she goes off on some tirade about how "The spirit of solidarity has been lost in the new commercialism" - and they show a picture of the local Chop Suey House! What the fuck am I supposed to do with that?!

#### **MAC AND ME**

(Stewart Raffill, 1988)

Some rubber chickens from outer space fall in with a cute kid in a wheelchair and a mom who laughs incredulously a lot. They get very sick but the kids feed them Coca Cola and then they get better. At one point the youngest rubber chicken dresses up like a bear and does a dance number at McDonalds, with Ronald McDonald ('as himself') looking on approvingly. At the end the aliens are sworn in as American citizens in this big ceremony at Ellis Island, and what the fuck am I supposed to do with THAT?



#### NOT OF THIS EARTH

(1956, Roger Corman)

#### ATTACK OF THE CRAB MONSTERS

(1957, Roger Corman)

Picked these up on Ebay for my uncle Chris, who recalls being terrified by both of them when he snuck into the midnight show in Woodbridge back in '57. Needless to say, time changes everything. But Corman worked his magic by a diversity of means. Not Of This Earth takes place in mundane everyday settings and manages to depict an invasion of blood-thirsty aliens with only two prosthetic eyeballs. Victims include Dick Miller as a vacuum cleaner salesman and some jocular winos, trademark Corman bonbons. The ending, with the guy driving and going 'LOOK INTO MY EYES,' is genuinely creepy. Crab Monsters, on the other hand, takes place on an anonymous island that is shrinking while crew members are picked off one by one by a shrieking papier-mache crab from hell. The thing is, as the crab eats guys, it takes on their personalities, so that for a good portion of the film the crab is shouting in the voice of a French scientist, 'You won't survive ven I kiil you, vill you? Vill you?' This is really freakin' weird, and the dissonance adds interest, as does the presence of Russell 'Professor' Johnson. And when Corman needs to kill time, he does it with goofy asides and dialogue, not two minutes of guys putting on their coat.



#### FRANKENSTEIN'S DAUGHTER

(1959, Richard Cunha)

Now for comparison, here is a movie - borrowed from Siue - where NOTHING HAPPENS. Really. A pretty young thing does turn into a hilarious eyebrow-creature for five minutes around the halfway point, but then she quickly reverts to the pretty young thing for the duration, leaving us only an incredibly ugly halloween-mask Frankenstein that is made out of this sweater girl that I liked better before! Dr. Frank - as he is called - is an annoying fucker and he spends the whole movie hanging around being obnoxious in various settings. How did he get this job? Fortunately he gets acid thrown in his face at the end which is very rewarding. Alert: the PYT's oafish boyfriend is played by none other than Harold Lloyd, Jr.

Phew! That was a lot of movies for one lousy week, but I'm ready for more. Back to Uncle Fuzzy's I go - quick, before the December discount is gone!

#### ANDROID

(1982, Aaron Lipstadt)

Here's a movie that turns an old Corman trick, recycling sets for one low-budget movie after hours to make an even lower-budget movie, often one with more of a 'personal' touch. The victim here is Corman's Star Wars/Seven Samurai hybrid, "Battle Beyond the Stars," which was seriously el cheapo to begin with.

"Android" was co-written by its star (and producer's son?) Don Oppen, who plays an android in the throes of sexual awakening on a space station manned by Klaus Kinski in a blue sweater; he looks like he just popped by on a morning walk to the store. Some murderous 'anticorporate terrorists' happen on board, scheme a while, complications ensue. Some might find this too slight or too static, but I am impressed with how well it moves considering the economy, and actually I find



its modestly quirky tone just about perfectly realized. It is one of those movies that looks like it was scribbled on the back of a high-school notebook, like *The Abyss* which is blows away effortlessly, or *Phantasm* which it can keep company with. It almost plays out as a wish-fulfillment fantasy of its geeky star; who ever gets a chance to play around on this scale? Only a lucky few, and we should cherish it when it happens.

**THE VAMPIRE LOVERS**  
(1970, Roy Ward Baker)

For my poor friends who suffered through an allegedly 'lesbian' vampire movie only to be rewarded with a lot of hetero sex and one big-deal girl kiss...well, here's something kinda similar. Only in this one the seductions pack a bit of a punch, with ecstasy approximated facially, and the odd anti-patriarchical nugget lobbed modestly by lead vampiress Ingrid Pitt. She's real pretty, and it's fun to see everyone alternately drooling and bleeding all over her. Great potted-garlic shtick; some good creepy visuals; Pitt rolls her eyes at some Prince Valiant drivel that she's reading to her steady; framing device involving guy in pilgrim uniform hacking off female vampires' heads, thus restoring the moral order in no uncertain terms. Ignore the first and last five minutes and this vulgar dyke romp may actually be a bit more useful to real dykes than *Kumel's* classee one. (PS this plays some of the same necro-boob fetishism as *Coffy*, but it doesn't bother me so much here. I'm checking myself; I may have just been subverted)

## JANUARY 2007

**POINT BLANK**  
(1967, John Boorman)

Everyone talks about this movie's stylistic debt to the French New Wave - I've seen Alain Resnais' name bandied about - but in terms of directorial style it's a reduction, with hyperactive flashback material structured around simple parallel and repetition. It came off as pretentious to me and lost my uncle completely. But the pretensions are not allowed to get in the way of some very exciting and enjoyable sequences. Lee Marvin is almost Keatonesque in his ability to carry the movie without changing facial expression - the classic is where a bad guy is shooting at him in a parking garage and he turns, looks, and takes two hilariously laid-back steps backwards behind a pillar. (Plus of course the scene where Angie Dickinson tries to beat him up and he just stands there - this happened to me once) In this scene as in others the criminals are all hoisted on their own petard, and where some action movies of this era have excruciating politics this one is based around a concept of deep intrigue - Marvin, on a job, is cheated out of \$93,000 (and his wife) by his best friend, but he can't collect because the gangsters are structured like a corporation and no individual feels any moral responsibility for Marvin's case. He keeps going higher and higher in the structure and all they offer is obfuscation and booby traps. The ending must be kept quiet for the spoiler-nerds but suffice to say it



does not betray the ideological potential of this setup. So, I don't wanna say it's all in the script, but Boorman does have a reputation to careen insanely out of control ("Zardoz", "Exorcist II"), and this one is merely a hoot with some lapses in judgment.

**FEMALE TROUBLE**  
(1974, John Waters)

The best score yet from Uncle Fuzzy's, and on second viewing this definitely goes into my top ten movies of all time (I'll be revising my list for your benefit soon!) Funnily enough, around the time that Divine sits in the crib with the pile of dead fish I started thinking about the words of the Bomb Squad's Hank Shocklee - "If they want noise, let's give them NOISE!" Yes, friends, Waters is the queer Public Enemy, tying identity to culture, cranking the most alienating elements of same to 11, and losing great chunks of his own demographic in the spectacular, chaotic process. This was made right off the midnight-movie success of "Pink Flamingos", and presumably this facilitated a budget, and presumably this led to the extra notch of competence that keeps the movie barreling forward from beginning to end - there's even an original theme song, plus thirty glorious seconds of Nervous Norvus singing "H-I-P". In most underground movies a scene featuring the lead actor, in two roles, raping himself for two full minutes - and THEN taking off his pants - would be the climax, not the inciting incident! And Edith "Flav" Massey yelling "NO I don't want any god damn eggs!" is an even better inversion than the new Bond's martini line. A triumphant cinematic masterpiece.



**SUSPIRIA**  
(1977, Dario Argento)

This horror movie - Jessica Harper goes to a fascist dance academy and maggots start falling from the ceiling - is about movies too, but in a different way. It's about Argento's perverse love affair with composition and effect. The incredibly saturated color, the harsh geometry of the compositions, the virtual absence of character and plot - it's just one set piece after another, most of which are very impressive. Also kind of sick. Italian horror movies typically put so much emphasis on the details of physical violation that they can make you stop and ask yourself exactly WHY you continue to watch pretty girls being hacked to pieces, even in saturated color. But Argento's stuff is interesting and different in that it is CLASSY - both in setting and technique - so the chaos is tensing against something and has a very ill-defined aura of subversion. Also the music (also by Argento) is just WHAM WHAM WHAM WHAM the whole time, I've never heard such extremity on a

soundtrack before, and it's very effective. Sometimes you're like, WTF? But it's nothing if not impressive.



## MARTIN

(1978, George A. Romero)

A ringer, I admit. I probably watched it 100 times in high school, although I don't think I've put it on in this decade. And how does it look now that Uncle Fuzzy has replaced my old Betamax copy? Well the first thing I noticed was the fine detail of the bored-housewives this teenage vampire gets mixed up with, how that milieu really does affect their behaviour and hence the plot. I noticed that the bits of romantic dialogue that I used to find shudderingly cheesy are DELIBERATELY that, because that's how these people would actually talk. I noticed that old Tata Cuda, the Colonel-Sanders-like uncle who is out to save Martin's soul, is not completely unsympathetic, not due to anything the conservative old codger actually does, but due to the fact that Lorin Maazel's performance is - I can hardly even type it - UNDERSTATED. I noticed that Romero's smoking-priest cameo is even more hilarious and apt than I remembered it. I saw how this guy can barely pack into one movie everything he's trying to get across, new stuff just keeps happening - he's not connecting the dots or marking time, he's inventing something new. And I asked myself again whether this puberty-parable-for-grownups is an even greater film than Romero's anticapitalism-for-teenyboppers. Maybe not - see below. Still - it's great.

## HATCHET FOR A HONEYMOON

(1970, Mario Bava)

A cross between "Psycho" and "Divorce, Italian Style" by the director of the greatest of all the baroque Eurohorrors, "Black Sunday." For about an hour it's about this guy who saw his mom get cleavered but has partially repressed the memory; he goes around killing newlyweds, hoping this will allow him to remember who the killer was. He also runs a wedding dress company and spends a lot of time in a creepy room full of mannequins, or talking to his bitch wife, or ogling his stable of vixen models. There's flashbacks, there's a seance, there's a great scene talking to the cops with his wife dripping blood off the staircase. Unfortunately, the lead is written as this self-conscious, snooty "Hello, I am a psychopath" asshole; plus there's another one of these stupid fucking detectives. The lousy characters keep intruding on the cool filmmaking (there's a perfect, tossed-off audio cut between a skipping record and a police siren). But then we get a REAL shock: sixty minutes in, after he kills his wife she comes back as a cackling bitch wife ghost - what was up to this point a movie about the inner quest of a 'madman' is now, suddenly, a movie about a philandering prick whose dead wife keeps spoiling his pickups. (At one point it suggests a threesome!) This is the worst thing technically about HFAH, and it saves it nonetheless. Cool credit sequence graphics too.

I've been doing more than watching movies, honest. Also reading - Philip K. Dick, I. F. Stone, Dick Hebdige's "Subculture" (69c at Value Village) and "This is Orson Welles." The collage article is off to the editors. And, for the first time in ten years or more - am I getting inspired or what? - I've put together a best-movie list!

## MY TEN FAVOURITE MOVIES OF ALL TIME

1. Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)
2. Playtime (Jacques Tati, 1967)
3. Once Upon A Time In the West (Sergio Leone, 1969)
4. The Playhouse (Buster Keaton, 1921)
5. Welfare (Frederick Wiseman, 1974)
6. Gun Crazy (Joseph H. Lewis, 1949)
7. Dawn of the Dead (George A. Romero, 1979)
8. Female Trouble (John Waters, 1974)
9. Very Nice, Very Nice (Arthur Lipsett, 1961)
10. F For Fake (Orson Welles, 1973)



### ALLEY CAT

(Edward Victor, 1982)

An apparent vanity project for Karin Mani (who?), as a hottie Charles Bronson going around wiping up the 'scum' that mugged her parents, or grandparents or something, and impressing young hunks with her karate skills. In a pivotal scene she intervenes to stop a rape and a moron cop throws HER in jail, so after a couple cool shower scenes and some abortive prison-dyke seduction she has to take the law into her own hands blah blah blah. I guess there were a lot of movies like this? The script is dumber than usual if you can believe that. Mani comes off as exactly the kind of showbiz karate type that would co-produce her own Death Wish starring role, and I find that type sporadically endearing, but the movie is an ungainly apparatus. Competent actors would be wasted on the scumbag roles here, and would actively undermine the fantastic mincing-incompetent DA and a judge that has got to be Mani's uncle, or a key investor.

### SATURN 3

(Stanley Donen, 1980)

Just what you didn't know you needed - an 80s sci-fi epic from the director of "Singin' in the Rain". With a cast of three - outer-space technocrat Kirk Douglas, wife Farrah Fawcett, and prim British agent Harvey Keitel. Read that again. The movie opens with some peculiar choreographed stuff that looks like a tribute to the moon landing at the Oscars, then proceeds almost directly to an absurdly jocular Douglas-Fawcett shower scene. There as elsewhere, Douglas looks like he's having the time of his life - huh huh, I'm in the shower with Farrah Fawcett - only they're being MENACED BY KILLER ROBOTS for Christ's sake, and there he is winking at us. Farrah's blank 'oh my gosh' stares make for a dissonant counterpoint, her star must have been fading around now because we get some gratuitous boob shots. And meanwhile there's Harvey acting as weird as ever while he frantically builds/turns into a robot. There was some kind of money in this movie, clearly, and some of the flashing lights and stuff amount to a dream date for stoners, but it's still an 80s sci-fi epic from the director etc.

### THE END OF THE WORLD

(John Hayes, 1977)

The third time I fall asleep watching a movie about the end of the world, I give up. It's a moral issue.

Sad: the sainted Ryan Larkin - animator, coke-and-celebrity burnout (at the NFB!), subject of the movie "Ryan", and coworker of my movie muse and family friend Lotte Reiniger - dies.

Happy: I have changed my mind about MST3K - bits of "Manos" keep coming to me out of nowhere and cracking me up. It's great.

### WAKING LIFE

(Richard Linklater, 2001)

The most talked-about movie of all time and since I hadn't seen it I was starting to feel left out (at least people weren't taunting me about it, unlike The Goonies). So I stole it from the shelf at Arlington and watched it. I had one of my emotional episodes, where I just get all worked up about how GREAT this movie is. The treatment of endless ideological outpourings as dreams and vice versa is very liberating and not as reactionary as it sounds in that description. And just as it's all getting a little oppressive, suddenly things shift in just the right way. The rotoscoping is fantastic.



THE MAYOR OF THE SUNSET STRIP  
(George Hickenlooper, 2003)

Marinko brought over a couple movies tonight, and this one was pretty good, especially coming immediately after one of the worst documentaries I've ever partially watched (a bunch of assholes filming themselves at a techno industry conference in Miami). It's about Rodney Bingenheimer, this DJ and autograph collector who made all kinds of stuff happen with his LA radio show, breaking stuff like Blondie, The Ramones, and, er, Coldplay. He's a totally modest, homely, desperately fragile guy, and lonely to boot, with mounds of family issues dragging behind him into his sixties. The people around him - the even more-disgusting-than-I-knew Kim Fowley, this guy in a space suit who sings so about Jennifer Love Hewitt to old Moody Blues melodies - could probably carry whole movies by themselves. The attempts to be insightful about fame and mortality get pretty hokey, especially when accompanied by melancholy piano music. But Hickenlooper is gifted at getting things happening on camera, you hear him pushing and usually it gets the necessary results. The best part is world's biggest creep of a rock DJ (in a crowded field!) talking about how he couldn't imagine anyone doing what he does just because he loves the music. I hear Hickenlooper's new movie Factory Girl really sucks though; how can it not with Hayden Christensen portraying Bob Dylan!!

The second drainage of the ball is upon us. This time I get a peek at the pan into which the liquid is squirted, another half-liter of the stuff, and it's all golden and viscous. Leading to my question of the day: what IN that thing? A: "It's like blood with all the red and white blood cells removed." And then, without further provocation: "You see the body is smart, it doesn't just do these things at random. If you get hit somewhere a certain number of times, your body will build up a defense." This is close as any professional adult has ever come to calling me a wanker.

Anyway this time the hobbling is much less severe, I'm able to navigate the stairs with ease and am not forcibly confined to the couch. In a related development, the fucking thing is back to full size within 24 hours.

Shortly thereafter I venture to Toronto in order to do some video mixing for Marinko's legal fundraiser - he got thrown in jail for making stencil art on St. Catharines' fair virgin streets. The event is a hit and Marinko ends up buying the supercool video mixer rental, into which I feed chunks of the last four months of my life.

Then I limp back to Vineland.



# MARCH

You can tell I'm getting antisocial because old Genesis albums are starting to sound good.

It kicked in as I sat in the basement drawing this other zine, "Cine-VHS", and rooting through my underplayed vinyl. Soon I get rather obsessed with "In The Cage," in spite of the cheeseball synth solo. I think I've made some kind of discovery.

Then, on my next visit to the St. Catharines flea market, the FM radio in the next booth started going ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum, just like the "In the Cage" intro. Then it stopped. It did this about three times in five minutes, it was way in the background and disjoint so I was like "Nah, can't be..." - and THEN after a couple of minutes of something else, there it was, the whole damn thing, with me digging through the VHS humming along. I've NEVER heard this song on the radio before. Is it because they're going on tour?

One interesting aspect of this though, is I hear this song on the RADIO at the FLEA MARKET and it sounds like, well, shitty 70s art-rock. This is partly the quality of the sound system (I mean it, headphones do wonders for this stuff), but it's also got me wondering if there's such a thing as sonic class politics. Because shitty 70s art-rock is the ultimate flea market music...anyway that's more or less the end of that, thank God.

By now I'm up to perhaps 80 tax-shelter movies, that aside from all the stuff I'm actually watching. Back in Hamilton for another pass, I tick Uncle Fuzzy off by trying to wangle a 'preferred customer' discount. Turns out I'm not the biggest buyer around here by any means. Be that as it may, this is already the last month for his storefront, he's retreating to the flea market for economic reasons. By his account, some of the videos below may or may not have constituted the entertainment library of an international shipping vessel.

## SATAN'S CHEERLEADERS (Greydon Clark, 1977)

Stupid, and offensively innocuous, but energetic and watchable trash-o-rama. Some cheerleaders are borrowed for a virgin sacrifice by a buncha satanist hicks led by John Ireland and Yvonne de Carlo. Except none of them are even remotely virginal - a funny gag, but it's telegraphed and not worth the wait. Carradine is back for his usual one day on set as a wino, the girls get supernatural powers as well as a shower scene, and the cheerleaders' coach becomes more awesomely stupid and annoying as the film progresses. At one





point she utters the line "I'm just a drag!" at EXACTLY the moment that very adjective entered my mind. The story is so discontinuous that it might as well be an anthology - the opening scene sets up a dramatic confrontation with some rival youths who are never seen again, there's a dorky janitor satanist who you think will be the villain but then he just dies, and even the high school setting is dispatched by midpoint. Those who never pass up a movie called 'Satan's Cheerleaders' will feel only mildly ripped off.

#### SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE

(E. Elias Merhige, 2000)

So: what if the ugly guy in the legendary vampire silent 'Nosferatu' was REALLY a vampire? What's best about this conception is the plodding social-realist detail of what working in the film industry was like in 1922. Since old movies come to us like dreams or at least antiques, this engagement with the conditions of production is refreshing and amusing, even if it's made up. The fact that a vampire is on set drinking crew members' blood is treated as a personnel-management issue. Funny! But at the end it gets Symbolic about Art and Truth, with John Malkovich's Murnau descending into dum-dum speechifying. Leaving us with the real, permanent reason to see this film: Willem Dafoe, of course, as Mr. Ugly, interpreted not as a Monster but as the ultimate Weird Old Pervert. His facial reaction as Malkovich begs the cast indulgence for his 'unorthodox methods' was worth an Oscar in itself.

#### SHACK OUT ON 101

(Edward Dein, 1955)

Now here's some trash like it oughta be. Keenan Wynn's greaseball diner becomes the crux of a commie spy ring featuring the much-maligned Slob (suddenly I LOVE Lee Marvin). It's up to babyfaced waitress Terry Moore to set things straight. The rapport between Marvin and Wynn when they're not on the let's-get-into-Terry's-pants bandwagon is something to behold - this movie is casual in a delirious way, feels like it was shot on break from a really fun beach party. In their effort to add variety to what is basically a one-set movie, there is SO much going on - there's a goofy workout scene, Wynn gets uncharacteristically introspective and soft-spoken and then suddenly he's running around in flippers and snorkel, and a pacifist veteran shoots a commie with a spear gun. The plot contrivances have to be seen to be believed, especially the love-interest subplot with the State Department lunkhead and Moore walking straight in and out of the spy conference without being noticed. Lots of political speeches, all somehow overwrought and vague at the same time.

#### SOUTHERN COMFORT

(Walter Hill, 1981)

A bunch of neophyte National Guardsmen go on maneuvers in the bayous, tick off the locals, get lost, and freak out as they get picked off one by one. This movie screams VIETNAM WAR - there's no mistaking the casual inhumanity and tragic idiocy of their dealings with their Cajun POW, and the transposition of those issues to American soil is provocative and works great. It also screams SAM FULLER - this is a character movie, and the interactions are multidimensional and compelling. Less compelling are the horror-movie flourishes, with one set-piece death in particular sticking out like a bloody thumb; the end sequence in the superficially friendly Cajun village does work up a good creepy ambience but it fizzles in the end. And it does fall victim to the usual failure of imagination - while it critiques the actions of its own side, it can't perceive the enemy as human beings. There is no critical distance between the filmmakers and the protagonists - the Guardsmen see the Cajuns as fearsome monsters, and so do we. So while it's a good watch, it's also a big disappointment. The Ry Cooder music helps a lot, and the bayous are a great



setting. And while we're on the subject of empire-goes-domestic, I wonder whether the locations even exist post-Katrina.

Siue is back in the area again. This time I visit her at her parents' place in Windsor, helping her move her things to a new Toronto home. Of course, I have movies in tow.

#### THE SHOOTING

(Monte Hellman, 1965)

One of Hellman's 'existential' genre flicks from the 60s-70s cusp. Warren Oates and his skittish cohort Will Hutchins are hired by Millie Perkins (the star of "The Diary of Anne Frank") to help her navigate the desert to the next urban centre, or so she says. Soon she is joined by sharpshooter Jack Nicholson, who keeps the boys in line until the surprise ending. There are a lot of neat twists on western convention here - the woman is urbane and sickly, Hutchins is completely incompetent, and as they battle each other everyone is battling the desert as it grinds em down. Unfortunately, several rock solid performances are arrayed around the stilted and extremely irritating Perkins, who is so unappealing that you don't know what everybody sees in her. It's quite majestic for such a tiny-scaled movie, with some truly memorable images, but I also found it more portentous than the content justified, ultimately. The wrapup is pretty abrupt. Admittedly the sound on my VHS is atrocious which didn't help. Still pretty far out for a low budget western, and enough rewards to at least mitigate the drags.

#### DESPERATE MOVES

(Ovidio G. Assonitis, 1981)

Desperate movie. I picked this up as a coming-home gift to Siue who is the world's biggest Eddie Deezen fan. So big that she would even watch this. In fact she rated it higher than his "A Polish Vampire In Burbank." But of course that is not saying much at all, and this was made by PROFESSIONALS. It is the tale of a Loser who leaves Oregon to find love and glory in San Francisco. First thought was "Oh no - San Francisco, when does the queer baiting start?" But in fact the inevitable gay stereotype is quite underplayed by former Jeffersons neighbour Paul Benedict. In fact there's nothing wrong with most of the acting here - Deezen, Benedict and Isabel "Weezy" Sanford are all game for some broad comedy, Christopher Lee seems to be having the time of his life in his brief sequence, and Steve Tracy and Dana Handler, while hardly romantic lead material, are mostly the victims of a textbook-awful screenplay. You picture the director administering Handler a sedative while she moans, "What's my motivation?" As the roller-skating bitch queen, she elaborately dupes Tracy into taking her to the swankiest restaurant in town, has him order her a big meal of lobster and oysters, then...then...then LEAVES before she eats anything! At the end Handler goes all tender, then is an even bigger bitch than before (hurling Tracy from a moving car no less), then comes back with the mush to facilitate a happy ending. Tracy spends about half an hour training for a final confrontation with the Bully, who stands there dumbly while the guy kicks him in the forehead, not knocking him out or anything just giving him a small bruise. And yet the bully doesn't object, doesn't fight back, doesn't do ANYTHING. Bad focus, bad lighting and bad framing are everywhere. For some reason this American movie by a Greek director has Canadian music all over it, and that sucks too.

#### AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

(Al Gore, 2006)

Why should I credit the director? He clearly hasn't got the franchise. His role, just like at the Oscars, is to look up at his Leader with doggie eyes, and he does this with aplomb. Now, I'm a reasonable man; this movie would probably



Convince Siue's dad that global warming is not 'cyclical,' which is worthy work, and I'm sure Gore is doing more good out of office than in. But you will not learn from this movie that Democrats ever did anything bad regarding anything at all; you will not learn that corporations have interests that do indeed conflict with those of other 'people'; you will not find your prayers and recycling programs getting underfoot of America's great hallowed decision-makers. Gore made a slide show about global warming; the hacks behind the camera chose to make a movie about Gore. That is the true meaning of all the personal interstitial stuff down on the ranch and so on; instead of opening up the context, the movie NARROWS it to this one guy, like we were stupid and needed a leader. Gore plays into this for sure, but I'd certainly rather see his sales pitch live than mediated through the catastrophic Great Man Alone documentary framework that is such an endless gift to STOPPING the changes that will enable us to survive. Of course, if it had tried to be anything else it would never have been distributed. Maddening.

Siue and I discover a new route from Windsor to Niagara, cutting off the 401 to take Highway 3 through the mid-peninsula. Found a great little bookstore that funds a teachers' school in Haiti; a herb store with homemade jam for \$1.25; a VHS clearance sale and lovely bakery in Delhi; and in addition to its blessed kitsch store, Dunnville gave up a wonderful 50s diner with malted milkshake and hand-cut fries. Wonder if they'll still be there two years after the Mid-Peninsula Expressway rips its way through.

By now it is official: after three years of nebulous and confusing breakup we are getting back together. The plan has been that I would join Siue in Toronto come May. But there are new problems impinging on that plan; three guesses where they originate.

Before I left Windsor, the ball was getting angry - achey, huger than ever and misshapen. An emergency call to Dr. Love in the Moffats' kitchen seals it: I am getting my extra ball cut off on April 26. This means at least a two-week recovery time at the exact moment I was supposed to be 1) moving to Toronto and 2) starting to earn money, somehow - an increasing concern.

I slog through the rest of the month with a limp and a dart in my right hip joint. I think the vas deferens has got twisted up, and is yanking on my tender young vasectomy. Weather's nice but I have to limit my walking, goddam it, now that I finally FEEL like exercising...I'm so preoccupied by this situation that I have trouble getting excited about my own birthday. I step up the reading - big, intimidating, life-changing things like "The Country and the City" by Raymond Williams and "Anarchism" by George Woodcock.

And I get stoned. And I watch movies.

**NORTH DALLAS FORTY**  
(Ted Kotcheff, 1979)

The opening is perfect, with Nick Nolte's football pro waking up with a bloody nose and feeling every hit from the night before as he tries to navigate the kitchen. The ending is awful, with Duddy Kravitz (and, er, First Blood) director Kotcheff channeling Stanley Kramer in a big speechifying boardroom rigamarole. In between is a pretty fair expose of the business of American sports, with the players ENCOURAGED to remain stupid childish louts so they'll be easier to manage. Unfortunately this movie really wants it both ways on the gender thing - the Smart Girl who rescues Nolte from the daily grind is just a device to facilitate domestic bliss, nothing new there. And condemnations of misogynist



violence are married to gratuitous boob shots. Not at all as bad as that makes it sound, but when I recall this movie I remember the lapses, not the many nice touches in between.

#### **CORRUPT**

(Roberto Faenza, 1981)

Even Worse Lieutenant. Harvey Keitel and John Lydon go head-to-head as cop and prole in a film-long mutual torture session, and ooooh, they aren't really so different after all. It's an ancient shtick, and the production (filmed in NYC) is Italian cheese, and the jaunty c & w theme song with the sliding cadence is not only totally incongruous, it wouldn't get out of my OR Siue's fucking head two weeks later. But you know you want to see Keitel and Lydon going at it; I've already forgotten all about the love interest shenanigans and the chase scenes and Keitel murdering his partner, but I will never forget those two geniuses sneering off in that empty apartment. And Sylvia Sidney plays Lydon's grandma! These people know their audience.

#### **DEADLY TWINS**

(Joe Oaks, 1985)

Anyone remember Judy and Audrey Landers? Neither do I, but here is a shot-on-video actioner starring these two prudishly sultry twin bimbos (that's not a put down, it's a professional title) with big, big 80s hair. I'm starting to think ALL movies should be shot on video. Good God! You never know what's coming next.



After an inciting picnic scene with our heroines, we cut to the bad guy proving he's evil by smashing some cars with a front end loader, and cackling maniacally - on a LOOP - "NYAhahahaha/ NYAhahahaha/ NYAhahahaha," like that. Then an absurd Vegas-style musical number, followed by a rape scene that precipitates a Judith O'Dea like collapse in sister #2 - she has a miscarriage and jumps out of her hotel window, and talks a LOT about how she wishes she were dead. The frank desperation is kind of disarming at first, but by the time bad boy pulls a Baby Jane

and pushes her wheelchair down the stairs it has degenerated into some kind of Kenny thing. In another highlight, Sister #1 has a meeting with the disgusting love-interest cop outside #2's hospital room, and the fucking guy lights a smoke! At the end of the long hall we see a woman approaching the camera, and as soon as she walks past the camera cuts out, and you just KNOW she's a hospital employee coming to tell the crew to put out the damn cigarette! Anyway I don't know what she sees in him, he's balding and needs to cool it with the come-ons, I mean he's a cop. The sisters spend the whole movie scheming to 'get' the baddie, but at about the one-hour mark we suddenly cut to these moustache men from the ammo department, chasing Mr. Bad through some vacant industrial land in a scene that goes on for at least twenty minutes. Someone in head office was really determined to get value for money for that helicopter rental. Not deadly as in deadly boring - deadly as in wicked, man, and one of the most spectacularly bad movies I've ever seen.



#### **MOOCH GOES TO HOLLYWOOD**

(Jim Backus and Jerry Devine, 1971)

Oh my god it's Doggie Porn. Moch is this Benji type dog that can do some trick and wears some cute OUTFITS, arrrrrrrh. 'She' goes to Hollywood, apparently to screw her way to the top if you can believe the incessant and ludicrous narration from Zsa Zsa Gabor. But how are you gonna reach the top when your only ins are Vincent Price, Mickey Rooney, and James Darren? All of whom take turns running toward Moch on the beach in slow motion. When Backus takes his turn he's got what looks like a tumor on his nose but apparently he's been made up to look like Mr. Magoo. I was thinking it was pretty low for the filmmakers to put Backus through such demeaning paces, but I check the back cover and he wrote the fucking thing himself! I had constructed a scenario in my head where it was Gabor's dog in real life and she got her latest husband to bankroll it. I didn't think there was any other possible excuse. I love human beings and think they are basically intelligent and capable, but the IMDB commentary on this movie is a SOLID case for the opposing view. Then again, the box is warning enough to anyone who isn't predisposed to doggiegasms. I swear I only got it because the sale was six for a dollar and I was short one.

#### **DREAMS THAT MONEY CAN BUY**

(Hans Richter, 1949)

I wound up spending my birthday at Cinematheque, watching this heretofore unknown avant pastiche with a few non-filmie friends, who were also rewarded by the experience. First-wave abstract filmmaker Richter comes to America, picks up some noir affectations and calls it narrative: fedora'd lout in ratbag apartment sets up a business reading dreams for various clients. This allows just enough structure - and HUMOR, crucially - to draw the uninitiated into its tour of Surrealism's Greatest Hits. Man Ray, Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, on and on and on, Richter has assembled a powerhouse crew for his dream sequences, with the likes of John Cage on music, and the segments are varied, hypnotic, and hang together perfectly, from Duchamp's patented hypno-spiral shtick to a pipe-cleaner circus scene that reminds me of Allyson Mitchell's stuff. The color is great and well used, and Richter's own conception on the end sequence ties everything together perfectly. Furthermore, while it may not 'mean' anything, there IS a 'logic' to it, I swear, although I was having too much fun letting it wash over me to pursue it very far. These old men point toward a future that hasn't even arrived yet, but seeing it makes you want to join the project. Loads of fun.

#### **A HUNDRED DOLLARS AND A T-SHIRT**

(Joe Biel et al, 2005)

The promised 'cultural analysis' of the Northwest US zine scene gives way to a whole bunch of cool people talking about their experiences in the zine community. It's structured with care via the dangerous collective filmmaking process, and characters do emerge from the sound bites - these people are good subjects for a movie. In the Microcosm tradition though, this thing is all talk - the clever-cute visual interludes are always married precisely to the voiceover so that they offer no counterpoint, and the location footage is all B-roll. As a result, it gets exhausting about half-way through its 70 minutes. A noble endeavour of course, although gender issues get a better platform than race issues and both are at issue.

#### **BORAT**

(Larry Charles, 2006)

I approve. In fact I'm awed. How can anyone improv (?) so close to the brink for so long without ever crossing the wrong line? The guy must have the best politics in the fucking world. Or maybe it's the editors.



# APRIL

I go to the intake interview at West Lincoln Hospital (escape from the Mistake!) It is routine.

I see a video online of Karl Rove rapping. It is appalling, which doesn't stop the entire American press corps from heartily applauding and yucking it up.

Bob Clark dies in a head-on collision with a drunk driver. An era that was already over is really over now. My Tax Shelter collage will give him as much respect as he deserves, which is some.

## CRATER LAKE MONSTER

(William R. Stromberg, 1977)

A couple nonprofessional actors are terrorized by a prehistoric creature. This creature appears in about thirty seconds of marginal stop-motion animation, but oh how you will long for that margin when for the rest of the movie the animation is replaced by production assistants waving around an inner tube with teeth. No time for terror when this movie is hijacked halfway through by these comic relief boat rental doofuses, who suddenly become lead characters, but again you gotta admit watching them try to be funny is better than plodding around after the sheriff. Only at the end one of them gets eaten and the other one sits on a rock crying tears of loneliness - that's no fun!

## BAFFLED!

(Philip Leacock, 1973)

You can tell this is a pilot for a TV show because the credit sequence is a trailer montage of everything vaguely exciting that happens in the following 90 minutes. No self-respecting theatrical feature would take a horrible matte shot of Leonard Nimoy drag racing and make it the first image of the movie! Anyway Nimoy has a psychic vision which causes him to crash, and some woman sees this crash on TV and decides to join with Nimoy and fight crime. Their mission takes them to a mysterious castle where a woman with bad teeth is hosting Special Guest Star Vera Miles and her hokey daughter who is given a satanic medallion and thereafter starts trying to act pubescent - ooh evil! Where'd that miniskirt come from? How'd mom recover from that poison in between scenes? Who locked them in the elevator shaft and then forgot to call the elevator? This is less a whodunit than a willsomebodypleasedosomething. For most of the running time there's not much to do except marvel at what has got to be the worst collection of hair in the history of the 70s! Nimoy has a serious Howard Cosell/lego figurine do. The best part is that his visions never, ever advance the plot - they often turn out to be flash-forwards to incidental sequences that aren't even remarked upon. One vision centers on another guest surrounded by a lot of knives and blood; he does a lot of stupid things that make no sense at all when you realize that he isn't really a murderer, merely THE POOREST EXCUSE FOR A RED HERRING OF ALL TIME. And for the devoted trekkie, watch Nimoy ALMOST take his shirt off. Be glad they balked.



#### HOMECOMING

(Joe Dante, 2005)

This one IS a TV show, and one of the best I've ever seen. For those who haven't heard, this item from Screem Channel's "Masters of Horror" series has Dante (The Howling, Gremlins) riding the current zombie revival into new territory: all dead soldiers are rising from the grave to vote Bush out of office! This doesn't even try to be scary: at one point the James Carville lookalike mutters, "Why can't they eat a brain or something?" All they do is stand around and remind people that they're there. Which puts us back in the realm of EC allegory, with its depraved melancholy and hateful grotesques where the good guys should be. There is one way overripe scene where a black couple gently ministrates to a shivering zombie, and there are few surprises once the turf is staked. But here's a sentence you don't write every day: this TV show is smart, visionary, and brave.

#### THEY LIVE

(John Carpenter, 1988)

This allegory doesn't try to be scary either, because it's not horror, it's sci-fi, Carpenter's first cinematic calling. It's also a living leftist legend, the tale of a box of sunglasses from outer space that allow their impoverished wearers to see the hegemony. That's seriously what it's about. And striding gamely through the lead role is the great Rowdy Roddy Piper! At first you think he's acting or something, but as soon as things heat up he's spluttering and ranting like he's having Piper's Pit flashbacks. "Formaldehyde Face!" Or: "I'm here to kick ass and chew gum" et cetera. So yes, ideologues, this movie is a total hunk of cheese, and no, classbound snobs, it doesn't matter, it actually helps, because lowbrow moralists have more fun. And of course, EVERYBODY benefits from the greatest fight scene of all time. Put the glasses on!

#### A WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE

(John Cassavettes, 1974)

Maybe I need to see a couple more Cassavettes flicks to get to the bottom of the self-indulgent charge. I find the leisurely pace here enticing, with lots to look at most of the time and all kinds of stuff going on left and right as Gena Rowlands melts down amid the more contained neuroses of her extended family. I DO get that the depiction of mental illness here winds up as another variation on the performative, sentimentalized, rain-man-cute Hollywood syndrome. But - I don't really want to complain when the whole point of the picture is to show the continuity of dysfunction among the entire cast, with the clear message that Rowlands' sin is that she's the wrong KIND of crazy. As the movie went on I found myself concentrating on Peter Falk as the husband; here is a guy who does not know how to play the hand he's been dealt, and fails all over the place, but you can see him trying. Particularly when, just as the ending seems to be heading for total meltdown, things suddenly normalize, and all the drama turns out to be part of the domestic routine. King of Hearts meets Ivan Denisovitch?

#### THE BLOODY BROOD

(Philip Roffman, 1959)

The first Canadian exploitation film ever made, with a much younger Falk playing a beatnik-gangster-mole who feeds a delivery boy 'a hamburger full of ground glass' - that phrase becomes a mantra as the whiter-than-Wonder protagonist-come-lately sleuths through the shocking and unseen world of the young bohemian! The beatniks are not shown as evil, they're just stupid dupes - that's nice. They're also viewed at a long arms-length via our virtuous heroes (there's also a girl, who is saved from an interesting life by mister blowdry). "The Mask" is later and greater Roffman, though, it too depicts subcultural life as immoral and despicable while it cashes in on its allure. But why do ya think they call it



'exploitation'? It's got some energy, it's got Peter Falk, and it's competently shot when it's indoors. What's "Canadian" about this movie, I hear the tenured laggards inquire? Here's what's Canadian about it: it looks like Brits trying to look American only it's whiter than either.

#### HELEN HILL TRIBUTE

This screening at an Images Festival that people seem to be finding stuffy and academic showed why everyone loves and misses Helen so much. Her work combined vulnerability, social conscience, and cuteness in such perfect proportions. I stupidly didn't pick up a programme for the film, but I know "Madame Winger Makes a Film" from a rough edit VHS I happen to own; it was interesting seeing it with music, it made it move a lot smoother but on the other hand it drowned out the voice much of the time, which since this is basically an (invaluable) instructional film kind of matters. The rest was brand new to me, kicking off with an augmented SILHOUETTE ANIMATION - the protagonist even had curly-toed boots, so she HAD to be referencing my dear Lotte Reiniger. There were a couple lovely hunks of the usual fun fucking around from Phil Hoffman's Film Farm, one of which is a glorious letter to her husband announcing his new gift, a pet pig. And play her glorious dead-grandfather movie next to mine to see two very different people expressing themselves - Helen had made her difficult peace with death, and while I'm envious I also hope she shared that peace with her family. I mean, I only met her twice and the hole her murder has left for me is enormous, and Siue feels the same way; we didn't LIVE with her wonderfulness on a daily basis. So, so sad.



#### ARMY OF SHADOWS

(Jean-Pierre Melville, 1969)

And so on a day when I was already face to face with death, we went to Cinematheque for this. It's one more film that comes with a lot of 'best of the year' baggage - it got its US release 37 years late - and I am vulnerable to influence. But I can say that, while at 145 minutes it's longer than Goodfellas, it may be the first feature since Goodfellas came out where I never ONCE looked at my watch. And now that I've typed the name I notice another similarity: what Goodfellas does for the unglamorous, dead-end underbelly of Godfather glitz, Army of Shadows does for the still-potent, still-deadly WWII-heroics narrative. Not that there isn't bravery and excitement on evidence - but it all sits in the shadow of an absolutely harrowing informer-execution scene in the first act, which just heaps scorn all over Survival Run; and this scene's full meaning comes damnably clear in the end. If I'm not fudging my terms, this is an existentialist rendition of the French Resistance, and as such it is impossibly brave, and complex - Siue found it depressing, Kristine found it hilariously ironic. And just as the movie ends you realize: all these people have accomplished for the last two and a half hours is to bust each other out of jail again and again, and in the process they have become dysfunctional, paranoid, tormented, their own kinds of victims of an all-consuming war. For someone who believes in resistance as I do, it is a real test of honesty, and crystallizes anxieties that have clawed at the bottom of my revolutionary ideals since I began speaking them. And all this is embedded in one of the most gloriously cinematic presentations I've ever had the pleasure to watch - an interior car light, a glass bust of a horse, six doomed men relating uniquely and personally to their cigarettes, the stuporous denizens of the concentration-camp opening, so many arbitrarily gripping images you want to explode.



With the help of a Canada Council travel grant, I travel West for two screenings of my short video "Death Mask." Wasn't I just here, the month this zine began? What's going on here? Am I on a treadmill? But it was a worthwhile visit, unimpeded by ball trouble although it's now the size of a large pear and I have been wearing the same track pants for over a month.

Here's what I screened with, in Victoria and Vancouver, respectively...



**REMEMBERING ARTHUR**  
(Martin Lavut, 2006)

Well, you know me and documentaries - I think they all suck unless they're by Frederick Wiseman or are on a topic dear to my heart. Well Arthur Lipsett is DEAR, so sue me, because this artfully constructed array of talking heads allows us to come as close as we ever will to an understanding of this brilliant casualty of Canada's movie wars (he committed suicide in 1986). Problems do arise as we shift out of the NFB era, which takes Lipsett out of the production loop and gives the editors very little to cut away to. Instead we get a bit too much theorizing and extrapolating. But it doesn't over-indulge the who's-the-villain games (admittedly this was probably most expedient), and it serves the function of popularizing the man and his work, some of the greatest collage cinema ever, and a perfect meld of personal and sociopolitical agonies when he's got it going. Since NFB historians have always alternated bewilderment and contempt in dealing with his work, this is long overdue, and it's as close as you'll get to the real thing without tripping down to the Mediatheque because guess what? His work is being suppressed due to copyright issues...

**SIGNAL + NOISE 2007**

Vancouver's premiere arty-movie-and-soundscape event, and to my surprise there was far more of the latter than the former - only one program of videos plus a little VJing on the third night. So I was even MORE honored to be keeping company with these spectacular filmmakers. Although one of the programmers enthused at the welcome party that 'there's not too much Art in there' - only in such a rarefied subculture could you say such a thing about this lineup. However, it was mostly very good art. Twice my pleasure buttons were pushed dead center: Alison Kobayashi's "Dan Carter" visually performs the arbitrary narrative of an unedited answering machine tape, and sustains the transcendent, perfectly-timed hilarity for fifteen whole minutes! And Aleesa Cohene's "All Right" is a brilliant and moving collage about Canada's scumbag immigration and refugee policy. I might have been similarly effusive about Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby's "Songs of Praise For the Heart Beyond Cure" (FINALLY I see something by these hot topix!), but instead I basically spent this entire video fixated on the impossibly large silhouette of the guy's head in front of me - Video In should invest in some risers. Dana Inkster and Guy Maddin offered striking works that were a little slight, Jeremy Bailey's rather more so, and the others went over my head (or into that fucker's head in front of me).



As for the Noise: soundscapes not being my domain of expertise, I was able to turn my brain off and just let the spectacular soundz wash over me. Some of them were utterly transfixing, others had not quite enough or a little too much going on, but there was a real sense of being part of something, the connection between the performers/pieces and the audience was very real. That is except for two total howlers. The first was a guy with a shirt tied around his head doing the Henry Rollins Gorilla Walk while yelling "CALLING...CALLING..." into a cell phone with a simple delay effect...for about half an hour. The second was, yes, the legendary Mecca Normal, who I had never encountered before, and by the second song I was just about rolling on the floor over their uncanny resemblance to Andrea Martin's Buffy Sainte-Marie impersonation. At least I had a good time!

On the airplane I try reading underground-film critic Parker Tyler for the second time in my life, and for the second time I want to KILL him before page 20. The last time it was scornful contempt for the idea that Hitchcock was an 'artist'; this time it's perfectly transparent racist spew about cannibals.

I've barely touched down and it's surgery week. I've now turned into one of those guys who smokes pot nonstop immediately before surgery, after explicitly being told not to; as a result they have to anaesthetize my throat along with everything else. I drift through the process in the same druggy haze of a million victims before me, and I am told that all is well. I go home, deposit myself on the couch, and do not move. The movies move for me.

#### **CUTTER'S WAY**

(Ivan Passer, 1981)

Picked this up for a dollar in Victoria, had heard nice things about it without any clue what it was about. Turns out to be one of the two or three best scores of my whole VHS-spelunking sojourn, a lost almost-masterpiece from the tail end of the 70s' adult drama period, drenched in class consciousness and ironic distance. The characters in this sorta-mystery about some losers aiming to 'get' a mysterious cheerleader-murdering-maybe millionaire are unlike any I've seen in an American movie. You feel like you've seen them all before but not on screen. There's something very off-center about the whole picture, from the fascinatingly unpredictable failings of the leads to Jack Nietzsche's Morricone-goes-to-LA soundtrack, but it also stands up for commitment in the face of utter futility, an inspirational and timely theme! I can forgive the speechy bits although they stick out like a sore thumb. And who decided to drop Ann Dusenberry in the third act? Her hormonal glare shtick is unlike any dead-cheerleader's-sister in movie history, one more cool thing in a movie that is full of them.

#### **BLOOD OF DRACULA'S CASTLE**

(Al Adamson, 1969)

It's funny. Either this movie comes in waves or it was a victim of some serious mood swings on my behalf. For the entire first act it's all blah, blah, blah, and Siue made me turn it off after twenty minutes because nothing was happening. I put it on again when I got home, and suddenly the endless dialogue was entertainingly goofball, the plot started to move a bit, and the general air of regional-theatre rigor mortis took on a certain charm. Then suddenly it looks like things are going to get ugly and sadistic a la Herschel Gordon Lewis, and I got icked out watching it. Then of course, the stupid ending. Recommended to Ted V. Mikels fans.



### BEYOND THE FRINGE

(Roger Graef, 1976)

Monty Python trot through some old chestnuts in the company of Peter Cook (who I'd never really seen before and whose miner routine is pretty brilliant), Dame Edna (who sings some insufferable song about 'British pluck' - what, is there a war on?), Neil Innes (I just can't take the guy, I'm sorry), and the Queen, for whose benefit this movie-of-the-event was staged. The routines are always fun, but you know, Python are media artists, laughing audiences only fuck up their timing. Palin tries not to crack up, you know the drill.

### THE HOWLING

(Joe Dante, 1981)

You know, I'd never seen this the whole way through. And it's great! Oh, there are some cheesy track-through-the-cocktail-party setups, and the movie really should have given us a few minutes to get to know Dee Wallace BEFORE she became a nervous wreck. But I like how the husband is this mustachioed vegetarian lunkhead, basically useless, and I like how John Sayles' script combines werewolves and encounter groups without making it into a Metaphor for Society or anything. It's just a smart jape - evidently Dante's specialty - as evidenced by the preponderance of movie insider gags, including characters named David Hewitt and Sam Newfield and a cameo where Roger Corman checks the pay phone for change. The effects are great. And it's lovely to see Carradine in a quality production, the old coot looks like he's having a really good time.

### THE PHANTOM PLANET

(William Marshall, 1961)

OK, so this spaceship get sucked into this intergalactic vomit-mat which is peopled with people who are small for some preposterous reason, and then the astronaut becomes small too, and then he fools around with some women, and dukes it out with this guy who's actually all right in the end, and for about five minutes in the second act a rubber fish man from outer space menaces the vomit mat but he's dispensed with and that's it for the excitement. Space effects really seem to be hard to get right, don't they - these really suck. The movie ain't no prize either.

### COMMANDO AMAZON

(Yin Ping-Chiu, 1982)

If The Seven Samurai were Hong Kong action hotties dressed up like the Village People, they would be this. And they would rock!

### VINYL

(Alan Zweig, 2002)

Finally caught the documentary about insane record collectors, which since I am an insane record collector myself is of interest. There's lots of hilarious stuff, like the guy who is trying to get every record ever made in 'the world' but never thought of, like, Asia; or how about Geoff Pevere admitting that he threw 2000 records in a dumpster because he couldn't stand the thought of anyone else owning them. There's also lots of confrontational stuff where Zweig, quite reasonably, tries to get these people to face up to what idiots they are being. A couple of them get very far out. But whatever's going along up top, way back in the distance somewhere you can hear this droning 80s infomercial music which I guess is supposed to be the movie's soundtrack. Docked a notch for that lazy shit.

**SPOOKS RUN WILD**  
(Phil Rosen, 1940)

The East Side Kids throw Lugosi some work in this aaah-shaddap knockabout, my first exposure to Leo Gorcey, Huntz Hall and the gang. I need some context, but at this remove they're pretty cool, riffing and razzing and running off at the mouth with ease and charm, like they've been doing this for years. This plays well off of Lugosi's starched mugging, most of the time, when the atrocious storyline and production values aren't intruding. It's only an hour long, 55 minutes if you skip the ending.

**CHUD**  
(Douglas Cheek, 1984)

Oh, it's not so terrible. It's got real actors, and if the shooting were so incompetent, how could it look like a TV show? About half the characters are also homeless, which is nice although there's some othering going on of course. And when the man-eating CHUD toxies show up they are guys in stupid rubber costumes, and they remain guys in stupid rubber costumes no matter how tight you cut the shots. And none of the actors were written one single bit of character development. At the end when the bad guy drives his flaming truck into the manhole after his men have pumped the sewers full of deadly gas, and you're like, great - New York is gonna blow up. But no, apparently nobody, er, thought of this, so nothing happens. And before you know it, we're at the stupid ending to end all stupid endings. OK it's terrible.

## MAY

My first post-surgical shuffle to Toronto - a little VHS, a little Hot Docs, a little Jewish Film Festival...and a good deal of heightened discomfort. I'm taking myself along too fast.

**SANS SOLEIL**  
(Chris Marker, 1982)

This is Marker's much-lauded travelogue-essay film about Japan, Guinea-Bissau, and Hitchcock. The imagery is gripping and the intuitive structure is marvelous, although I think he's jaded about resistance and in spite of his best efforts there's some exoticizing going on in the Weird Japan stuff. Also - the version of this Siue's roomie got from the library is dubbed by this from-hell BBC woman; her civilized recital almost wrecks the movie! I guess in art you can't get away with that tone of voice without sounding utterly pretentious. A lesson. I stuck with it and would advise you to do the same, it goes places.



## STATE LEGISLATURE

(Frederick Wiseman, 2004)

One of Wiseman's 3-1/2 hour opuses, this one settling in to the Idaho State Legislature for another round of inquisitive and patient observation. Two juxtapositions stood out in particular. One began with a confrontation between a state senator and a Latino man arguing for immigrants' rights. The two become stuck on a long loop of assertion and have nothing resembling a conversation. The senator's message is predictable. Several scenes later we see a bunch of little Mexican girls doing a hat dance in the atrium of the legislature - a security guard looks down at it and almost imperceptibly shakes his head. The second comes toward the very end, when there is a debate on whether to pass a motion opposing same-sex marriage. The motion is defeated, with each person giving their reasons, and with rationales almost exclusively based on procedural precedent and differing priority. This scene comes between a quiet conference between the senate speaker and two businessmen coming to seek advice, and a prayer-and-bagpipe ceremony for a deceased colleague, and this plus this plus this made me think that Wiseman was proposing a new wrinkle on the church-and-state conundrum - for these people, the forms and practice of government ARE their religion.

## FILM FANATIC

(Shlomo Hazan, 2006)

Caught this at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival. It's a documentary about Yehuda Grovais, a filmmaker who is also, as a Haredi Jew, not permitted to watch movies. He sells disks containing quicktimes of his low-rent, clunky spy-action movies, with a patina of Haredi moralism and no women on camera. But his community isn't too keen on this movie stuff, sales are going down, and Grovais decides to seek government support. And here we begin a pretty brilliant exploration of the structural contradictions of cinema. Grovais is using dull Hollywood stereotypes as a medium to address his community directly; the arts bureaucrats want him to adopt an 'artistic' approach whose end result, Grovais intuits, is to have him produce a stereotype of his community for the general audience. The film he makes for the arts council turns out to be ABOUT this process of stereotyping, and a quite charming evocation of the issue at that; the response is positive; the process continues. Conventional in form, but the issues roiling underneath are staggering.

To my horror, the ball is GETTING BIG AGAIN! I call Dr. Love in a panic, and while he schedules an appointment he does reassure me that this is merely predictable swelling and will soon subside. In the meantime though, ain't a damn thing changed but the scar.

## GRINDHOUSE

(Robert Rodriguez/Quentin Tarantino, 2007)

How could I not? Especially on a camera-in-the-theatre pirate quicktime in my friends' back yard! Thus saving me the agony of reliving the grindhouse years in a Silver City! Take it from someone who has been watching crapola of a certain vintage for months and months - this movie knows of what it speaks. It doesn't speak it with complete fealty - Rodriguez's editing rhythms and camera moves are more early 80s, that is when he's not imposing the jump-cut rhythm of mangled prints to absolutely brilliant effect. It's like ballet, and it's exciting and hilarious. Tarantino's is more 'deep grindhouse' or 'the whole action' - OF COURSE the actors won't shut up, because this is the rhythm of the grindhouse. You have to be bored to cutesy tears for hours before you are rewarded with the spectacular car chase - and even though the boredom here has no thematic relevance whatsoever to the era, the structural message gets through and I think it's pretty brilliant and audacious - because it's boring, is it all right for

me to think that? Anyway we can hardly demand even more breathless excitement immediately after an hour of Rodriguez and! and! the trailers, oh my god. Thanksgiving.

The magazine with my collage article has its release, on an evening of punishing pissing rain. A few people do nonetheless come to the party, which features a screening of my favourite collage stuff,, including Dan Carter, All Right, and Murder and UFOs.

Then I embark on my first trip to Uncle Fuzzy's flea market stand in about three months. And on this occasion I decide there is something wrong with me. I mean, in my first-pick pile were such quality films as Rashomon and Hidden Agenda and The Year of Living Dangerously. And after the weed what's lying in front of me? Terror Hospital, Hellcats of the Navy, Innocents from Hell (the latter is a dud tape, damn it). Also Claude Jutra's version of Atwood's "Surfacing" which has a topless woman on the cover!

I have never smoked this much pot in my life - May is pretty much a month-long, post-traumatic chain smoke. Good news though: the ball has, indeed, begun to shrink. Looks like I will be moving to Toronto on June 1 with a more or less corrected uro-genital system. And gearing up for this, I shift my viewing to town yet again for several hotly anticipated screenings...

#### INFEST WISELY

(Jim Munroe, Jon Sasaki, Kirby Ferguson, Craig MacNaughton, Rose Bianchini, Chris McCawley, Benny Zenga, 2007)

Jim's new movie has seven directors and one plot, divvying up the honors in a very interesting solution to the logistics of feature-film scale. Lousy sound is a more conventional approach to the dilemma. And the lack of collective visual emphasis means that eventually I found myself blanking on some plot elements. However, while the look is rough, it is also more unified than you'd expect - although I guess MacNaughton's supercompetence does stand out and, to be honest, the punk-rock sequence looks like a salvage job. Pluses: The script is fun, the deadpan comic tone is very watchable esp. Sasaki's opening, the evil-shmoo-bugs concept works, and the performers are fine.

#### OUTRAGEOUS!

(Richard Benner, 1977)

Thankfully one of the producers was at the Inside Out screening, to untangle some of the tendrils of this incredibly complicated movie built up around the great Craig Russell, whose performance and drag impersonations just stand on top of the thing. It is not told from the inside of the queer community. But in the white-guy-ends-apartheid role, mind-bogglingly they give us a Crazy Woman. (of course, Margaret Gibson's source story is also told from this POV) At first you get squirmy and expect that the parallel this character articulates between her and drag queen Russell - "We're both crazy" - will be used as an excuse for the





usual queer self-loathing, but in fact this is in a different tradition, that King-of-Hearts, madness-as-sentimental-symbol-for-nonconformity stuff. The problem is that Hollis McLaren plays this woman very theatrically - she actually STARES THROUGH HER FINGERS - and in general she probably inspired Catherine O'Hara's turn in "We're Gonna Be All Right You Creep Leaving Home And All, Eh?" But even though wr/dir Richard Benner was apparently far more interested in this theme than in the gay scene, and even though Benner seriously does not know how to point a camera, this actually does end up giving a pretty fascinating rendition of Toronto's 70s gay scene - tiny, remote and claustrophobic; drag queens at the bottom of a rigid internal hierarchy, everyone's on the skids, and dykes are harpies from another planet. Financed by friends, not Alliance or the CFDC, this movie has to take responsibility for its own neurosis, but it also must be credited with the brilliance of the impersonations, and nb: apparently Russell was Mae West's house boy, and the routines he does are all impersonations of MAE WEST'S impersonations! Like I said: complicated.

#### DIARY OF A LOST GIRL (G. W. Pabst, 1929)

Yow, what is not to like about Louise Brooks. Seriously. This is the first of her too-few movies I've seen straight through and as Siue says she is The Most Beautiful Person In History; with her angular, boyish fashions and wry sideways smile to compliment her beaming grin, she also leaps out of her context like she got there by time machine. And unlike Craig Russell there's a hell of a movie built around her. The plastic is a meller about a fair maiden's victimization by a conniving pharmacist - in fact ALL the men in this film are either ogres or clods, and there's a bald headmaster who you will laugh at a lot once I whisper you the words "Stephen Harper". But Pabst, who knows his Brecht (he did the Threepenny movie), twists this stuff two ways. When he feels like it, he directs actors with a subtlety and precision I've never seen in a silent movie before: a lot of the narrative is told entirely with the actors' eyes. But at the same time, this film is not just witty, it's GOOFY, with broad comic scenes that skirt the ridiculous in a way that challenges you from left field - dare you laugh at a silent masterpiece when it presents a spoiled aristocrat failing to milk a cow, or a horny bastard (one of several) with a Kropotkinesque goatee mincing around the dance lesson like he's in a Dwain Esper movie? It's like, popular entertainment!!



#### THE ARMORED VAULT (Lupu Pick, 1926)

This admittedly eccentric spy caper is 'popular entertainment' too; but unlike Pabst's masterpiece there is zero going on underneath the surface. Its tale of a diabolical counterfeit ring and the lives it ensnares is basic expressionist melodrama, with only incidental nuances to elevate it. I admit I lost a couple minutes to sleep around the one hour mark. Aside from some very memorable closeups, there are only two really outstanding things about it: Siegfried Arno - the dance-lesson guy from Lost Girl without the beard! - in another wacky turn as the master criminal who gets caught out; and one of the stupidest twist endings of all time, where a completely over-the-top, fifteen-minute suspense finale turns out to be 'only a dream'! When that happened I wanted to smash something.

The ball is still ugly like Frankenstein, but as the month winds down I actually manage to go for a two-hour walk with no pain. This reclamation of my body is a good thing as I prepare to move - I have met pleasantly with the future roomies, in a fixer-upper bachelor on Ossington. I dream of a weekly potluck-movie-night.

I vow to finish my long-promised T-shirt quilt, knowing that it will be impossible to give it the required attention once I'm in the metropolis. I struggle manfully but on moving day it still ain't near to being done. And that's not mentioning the family-photo-album project. I've had more important things to do. Like watch movies.

Mom takes me to the revitalized Jordan Hotel for a farewell dinner. I order a veggie burger. This veggie burger is made of meat. The server apologizes after a fashion. I am seriously ill.

I run out of pot. I still don't have a job.

Movies!

#### REUBEN, REUBEN

(Robert Ellis Miller, 1983)

This movie wasn't just written by Julius Epstein - as executive producer, and with another Epstein coproducing, he clearly midwived it as well. So this would be a fairly unmediated labour of love from the man who penned Casablanca 40 years earlier, and damn if I don't like it better than Casablanca - a portrait of the lapsed poet as an old womanizing souse. Making him a Scot run amuck in New England is another great touch, gives the milieu a specificity you don't see every day. And that's not mentioning Tom Conti's very specific, and brilliant, performance - he LIVES inside this thing. His hilarious portrayal of the sad-eyed loser Epstein has written him is the opposite of maudlin. As his doomed infatuation with young 'un Kelly McGillis approaches its inevitable demise, you wonder how on earth they are going to wrap things up - redemption would be corny, but despair would be hopeless and wrong. The answer he comes up with is a head-spinner, but it's also a perfect answer to this dilemma, and answers your lingering questions about the movie's name.

#### TERROR HOSPITAL

(Al Adamson, 1977)

yclept "Nurse Sherri", here's another one from Al Adamson, who had clearly learned some minuscule amount about filmmaking since the "Blood of Dracula's Castle" days. Where that earlier effort is a more or less totally sclerotic lump, this one mixes it up a little, adding a definite element of variety and surprise amid the incompetence. Sure half of the movie is a blind post-op football player shooting the shit with his stacked nurse, but at any moment we might be cutting away to the cackling disembodied head of the satanist mastermind, or Nurse Sherri running a farmer through with a pitchfork, or a wee bit of abstract student-film quick cutting to go with the pulsing-blob effects in the possession scene, or the most gratuitously half-hearted topless bit ever, or god knows what else (I forget, to be honest). As dumb-ass pieces of shit go, this one runs toward the high end. Congrats, Al.





# JUNE

On the evening of June 1 I burst proudly into my new domicile with the first load of stuff - it's a nice apartment! I call a welcome, but nobody is home. And as I walk inside, here's what immediately catches my eye:

## LIVING ROOM:

- open package of saltines
- open package of chips
- bowl with small puddle of ramen

## BATHROOM:

- freshly-cut hair on floor
- rolls of toilet paper in bathtub
- toilet bowl caked with years of dark brown crud

## KITCHEN:

- bread in toaster
- cockroach crawling out of bread bag
- compost wide open
- overflowing recycling box
- overflowing garbage can
- carpet of aging mouse turds in cupboards

## DECK:

- KFC box and scattered bones
- ashtray contents emptied on floor
- soggy newspapers enveloping leaky personal lubricant tube
- raccoon shit
- green garbage can full to brim with compost, cigarette butts and rain water, topped by one used condom

Welcome to the next phase.