Hallelujah for Prague: An American *Orbis Picta*

Gerald O'Grady

"And your own life, while it's happening to you
never has any atmosphere until it's a memory."

Andy Warhol(a), *America*
(New York: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 8.

It was in November, 1968 that Miles Glaser telephoned me at The Media Center which I had established at 3512 Mount Vernon Street in Houston under the patronage of John and Dominique de Menil, and asked if I would be interested in screening a film about which he briefly described the conditions of production. I met him and Jan Němec for the first time a few hours later, and *Oratorio for Prague* was screened on November 15, together with Němec's *Report on the Party and the Guests*, a political parable about a group of people who, for reasons ranging from opportunism to sheer terror, are members of a party they have no desire to join in. Němec, with Glaser acting as producer, had made a documentary about the Czechoslovakia of 1968, about liberated political prisoners, liberated clergymen who again held religious services, and about the Prague hippies and their friendship with foreign flower children who, that summer, had journeyed there from all over Europe. Josef Škvorecký wrote the commentary, and it was edited at the Vodickova Street laboratories on August 19, 1968. Jan Němec roused his cameraman on the morning of August 20, filmed the Russian tanks invading Prague, and immediately took that part of the film across the border to be shown on television, and then reedited the whole film into *Oratorio for Prague*.

The film had had its American première at the Sixth Annual New York Film Festival at Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall on September 28, 1968. The front page of *The New York Times* of September 30 carried a story from Prague by Ted Szulc, "30 Years Later, Prague Remembers Munich," which quoted the words of President Eduard Benes on the afternoon of September 30, 1938: "There is no precedent in history for treating an independent nation and state in such a way," and went on to make comparisons with the Soviet-led invasion of August 20, 1968, and reported that, during the post-invasion days, "MUNICH = YALTA" had been scrawled on many Prague walls, a reference to the agreement of 1945, which involved the United States. Inside the paper, film critic Renata Adler described *Oratorio for Prague* as "a film so moving that one is near tears from the first moment" and ended her review: "Nemĕc, who will be returning to Prague in a few weeks to begin another film, was greeted with a prolonged ovation by the festival audience, which was as obviously and profoundly moved as any audience I have ever seen." In Houston, I wept.

Jan Němec soon returned to Houston and began to script a feature film on heart transplants. Drs. Michael De Bakey and Denton Cooley were then making medical history at St. Luke's and Texas Children's Hospitals just after Christiaan Barnard had performed the first heart transplant in South Africa in 1967. A former colleague of mine, Professor William Akers of Rice University was already exploring the interaction with the human body of all of the various metals and amalgams which could serve to construct a truly artificial heart (not to be achieved until the Jarvik-7 in 1982). I also knew Dr. Irving A. Craft, a psychologist who was part of the heart transplant project. It is difficult now, almost a quarter-century later, to recall the excitement and anxieties about that new matter of vital organ transplants, but I remember Dr. Craft was interested, for example, in how these first transplant patients in history felt about having another person's organs providing their central functions, and how they integrated these different physical parts into a psychic unity. Although he and his colleagues always acted with the greatest discretion, mentioning no names and simply sketching out situational details, it was through them that I learned, anecdotally, about a few of the somewhat bizarre circumstances which surrounded those efforts on the operating table which were making international headlines. It involved how ordinary people would act when survival was at stake.

Those eligible for heart transplants would move into motels surrounding the hospital, such as Tides II across North Main Street. Then, on the motel roofs, they would expose to the sun their forearms, on which a donor's skin had been grafted to test receptivity, in order to make it appear that there was a match. These potential recipients, who sometimes did not have long to live, were often accompanied by their families, who purchased police radio equipment and monitored all highway accidents, night and day, as this might prove a source to replace the heart of their loved one. If there were an automobile fatality, the families would descend on the hospitals to see if the victim's heart matched that of their kin. Jokes abounded. Cardrivers, afraid of becoming cadavers, wore scapulars reading: "If I am injured, do not take me to St. Luke's Hospital"; patients already there were said to have signs on their beds: "I am not a donor. I am simply asleep."

I would try to amuse Jan Němec with such tidbits of information at the Lamar Towers on 2929 Buffalo Speedway, where he was the guest of Miles Glaser, and was astonished at the force of his script as it began to evolve. I was a dedicated surrealist, an admirer of absurd drama, and a devotee of black humor, but the plot of Němec, then a deeply frustrated man because of the Russian invasion of his homeland, went beyond all of them: the hearts of aborted babies were to be bought, and grown to normal healthy size in a factory, like a greenhouse, which would be pumping blood around the clock--like computer time-sharing--and these hearts would be owned and controlled by underground organizations which would sell them only to dictators, so that they could remain permanently in power. The world's political economy would go off the gold standard and on to the heart standard. There was also much discussion at that time about the world's population explosion, and some theorists put forward the principle that parents would be allowed to replicate, that is, reproduce themselves so that there would be zero growth. Němec went them one better by determining that one of the two children would be a spare-parts child for the other, and he called this group "coolies" in honor of both the Chinese and Dr. Denton Cooley. According to Václav Havel's recent self-portrait, *Disturbing the Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 59, together with Jan Němec, he developed this scenario for a film, called *Heart-Beat,* and when I talked with Němec by telephone on June 14, 1990, at the Barrandov Studios in Prague, where he was shooting his first feature film in 22 years, *The Heat of Royal Love,* the script of *Heart-Beat,* which currently exists in Czech, is being translated into English and forwarded to Miles Glaser in Houston, who still retains the rights to it.

The New York Times

NEW YORK, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1968

30 Years Later, Prague Remembers Munich

Liberalization and Invasion: High Drama in Low Key

The Program

ORATORIO FOR PRAGUE, written and directed by Jan Nemec; produced by Miles Glaser, Gulfilm; co-produced by Rein Productions; music by Ladislav Stanl. At the New York Film Festival, Philharmonic Hall. Running time 80 minutes.

WHEN seen in a small theater, under conditions that make it personal, Jan Nemec's "Oratorio for Prague" is a film so moving that one is near tears from the first moment after the credits appear. The movie was begun as a documentary about the liberalization of Czechoslovakia, and then simply continued when the Russian tanks moved in. "But we are beginning at the end," the narration—very low key, put together in four days with the voice of Variety's foreign correspondent Gene Moskowitz—explains. The movie is shot in a style so poetic and gentle that the humanism and generosity of spirit, which seemed about to radiate from Alexander Dubcek and Czechoslovakia into the world, is there intact.

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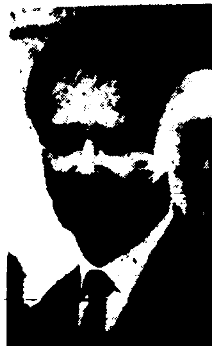
There are shots of churches, where masses are being said; of the synagogue, where "Shema Yisrael" is being sung; of a monument inscribed with 70,000 Jewish victims' names; of a monument to the American army in 1945; of weekend hippies, of dancing students who took so much of the responsibility of liberation; of President Ludvik Svoboda, who threatened suicide if Dubcek were not reinstated; of Dubcek arriving alone at the airport, and of students and old ladies facing tanks. (A passing student, protesting the invasion, ducks, so that the camera can catch the Russian infantry. One cannot imagine an American revolutionary ducking, under any circumstances, when a camera is around.) There are interviews with people, asking them their fondest wish under liberalization "That we may all be successful in our work," Dubcek replies.



Alexander Dubcek in the film "Oratorio for Prague."

Nothing sensational, no scoops or extreme violence, only a bloodstain on the pavement, burning tanks, two corpses, young faces mouthing "Fascist," a gesture to block the camera, a Russian soldier reassembling a torn Czechoslovak tract in a private moment, Nemec himself driving toward the invading forces, quiet Czechoslovak humor, a few verses of "We Shall Overcome," which, far from seeming trite or jaded, give one chills. The music is alternately rock, folk and liturgical. The whole film is marked with the restraint and beauty of Jan Nemec's style. Now that the newsreel is no longer with us, artists may turn increasingly to documentaries, and "Oratorio for Prague"—immersed in a sense of unradical continuity, full of solemn memories of World War II—has set the level of taste and humanity extremely high.

Nemec himself brought the film to New York from Paris, where it was put together quickly, after arriving secretly by way of Vienna, from Prague. Excerpts of it were among the first shots of the invasion shown on television. Part of the film's financing came from Truffaut and Berri, too. Nemec, who will be returning to Prague in two weeks to begin another film, was greeted with a prolonged ovation by the festival audience, which was as obviously and profoundly moved as any audience I have ever seen.

RENATA ADLER.

FILMMAKER AND HIS MONEYMAN DESCRIBE THEIR CZECHOSLOVAKIAN EXPERIENCES
Houstonian Miles Glaser, at Left, and Jan Nemec of Prague

Financed by Houstonian

Czech Nemec's 'Oratorio for Prague' Is Chronicle of Russian Invasion

BY JEFF MILLAR
Chronicle Reporter

It's very likely that Jan Nemec, who's from Czechoslovakia, is trying to hang himself. And Miles Glaser, who's a Houstonian, is helping him do it.

Nemec is a filmmaker and, to the Russians who occupy Czechoslovakia, a counterrevolutionary." Glaser is a local businessman, born in Czechoslovakia, who produced and financed a film Nemec made called "Oratorio for Prague." The film, a stunning success at this year's New York Film Festival, is an attempt to record the spirit of freedom which lived in Czechoslovakia during the country's brief spring and summer of independence.

Nemec was in Houston over mutual musician friend.
met Nemec there through a

They planned a film which would attempt to record "the atmosphere and mood of the Czech people during the period of liberalization," said Nemec. "We thought it would be an optimistic film, of songs and summer days."

"The original idea was to show Prague through the eyes of a man who returned to Prague after 20 years away," said Glaser. "He would see what life is like now. But the Russians changed all that."

The idea was a carbon copy from Glaser's own life. Now a 42-year-old bachelor and American citizen for 13 years, he left his homeland in 1949. for political reasons. Both his parents had died in concentration camps during World War

"We had three days shooting left to go when the Russians came," said Nemec. "We photographed their tanks and guns and the Czechs' defiance; the film changed completely.

"It got a new title, 'Oratorio'," he said. "I think it has the same relation to the film language as 'oratorio' does to music. The happy moments are still happy, but also full of death."

Nemec managed to finish filming, but he knew it wouldn't be safe to edit and score the film in Czechoslovakia. The unfinished footage was smuggled out of the country ("'I don't want to tell how," said Nemec, "because some of the people who helped me are still there") and eventually made its way to Paris, where French filmmaker Ca-

the surface, the film was an eccentric comedy about a garden party; a little reading between the lines revealed it to be a savage satirical allegory about life in a police state.

Why did the party allow it to be made in the first place?

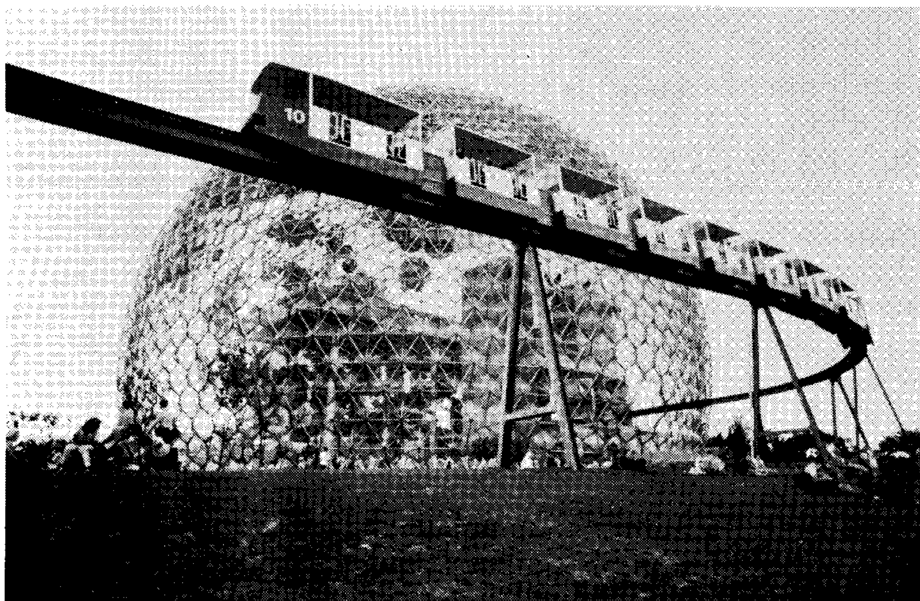
"That's one of the paradoxes of the party's relationship to the arts," said Nemec. "One year the party is against avant-garde painters and the filmmakers can make the films they want. The next year they may be against films.

Nemec and Glaser now hope to collaborate on a feature film to be photographed in Europe or possibly here in the U.S.

"But I'm a little afraid to start a film here," said Nemec with a smile. "I like America. What if I got to three

Oratorio for Prague was shown at various campuses and the newly-developing community media centers in the late 60's, as Glaser had assigned the American distribution rights to Donald Rogoff of Cinema V, but then the film simply disappeared and, in recent years, I could find no one who had even heard of it. When I saw Philip Kaufman's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988), made from Milan Kundera's novel of that title published in 1984, it appeared that certain scenes came from *Oratorio for Prague* and Jan Němec, in fact, had a credit as visual consultant. I called Kaufman's office and his son Peter informed me that the documentary footage incorporated in the film had come from ORF (Öesterreichischer Rundfunk), the Austrian Broadcasting Company in Vienna, and that rang true because Renata Adler had reported, back on September 30, 1968, that "Němec himself brought the film to New York from Paris, where it was put together quickly, after arriving recently by way of Vienna from Prague." Christa Neukomm of ORF reported to me that the Corporation possessed no documentary under the title, *Oratorio for Prague,* but only news material about the invasion, street scenes, and round-ups, before and after the invasion, including some items from Pressburg (Bratislava) and some from Prague. Most of the items are with "cameraman unknown," but one from Prague is definitely associated with Němec, others with František Jelinek, and others with a Mr. Popelka. She did tell me the story, still famous at the ORF, of how just after the invasion of Prague by Russia in August 1968, Němec delivered the film with his own hands to Mr. Helmut Zilk, the Director of Television at ORF from 1967-1979 and now the Mayor of Vienna. She also told me that, in 1988, on the twentieth anniversary of the invasion, the Corporation had produced its own program, *1968,* which was a compilation of these newsreel and documentary materials, and offered to send it to me. There has been a recurrent rumor that *Oratorio for Prague* will be distributed on videotape by Facets Multimedia in Chicago, whose co-director, Milo Stehlik, is a Czech-American, but some sort of legal difficulties seem to prevent it from surfacing. When it is shown at The Public Theater, quite appropriately on American Independence Day, July 4, it will be the first time in over a decade that anyone in the United States has seen the original film. Of all the films showing at The Public Theater in "The Banned and the Beautiful," this is the only one pictorally unrepresented in this tabloid, because no stills have ever been reproduced in any of the books and articles on Czech cinema. Josef Škvorecký is the only author who has ever mentioned the film, and Peter Hames quotes his description of it. Just for the record, it should be mentioned that when it was shown at a film festival in West Germany in October 1968, the progressive German students booed it because "the film contains a shot of Czech people who, for the first time, since 1948, were permitted to decorate the graves of the American soldiers who had died in Czechoslovakia while driving out the fathers of the booing youth" (Josef Škvorecký, *All the Bright Young Men and Women: A Personal History of the Czech Cinema.* Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1971, p. 137).

I should note that my own acquaintance with Czech film and media had actually begun earlier, at Expo '67 held in Montreal, Canada, the great international *summa* of the ways in which the new media might change our societies and ourselves. It was presided over by the spirit of Marshall McLuhan, whose writings had just begun to be recognised; I had invited him to Rice University the previous year. The American Pavilion was a celebration of Pop Art housed in a resplendent geodesic dome designed by R. Buckminister Fuller, a structure which McLuhan tried to purchase to house his Centre for Culture and Technology in Toronto. But it was the Czech Pavilion which dominated the fair with its Kinomat, a narrative film which stopped at various points to allow the audience to vote on the next turn of plot after discussing matters with the actors who were playing the characters, and with its Laterna Magica, an absolutely innovative multi-media mix of screen, stage, and mind, which I shall describe further on. Earlier that summer, I had agreed with the de Menils to found the Media Center in Houston, a concept which would allow me to teach the understanding of media to elementary school children mornings, high school students afternoons, college students in late afternoon seminars, and to the general community evenings. I took with me to Montreal the photographer Geoff Winningham, and he made over 500 color slides, a unique historical collection on which I draw here.

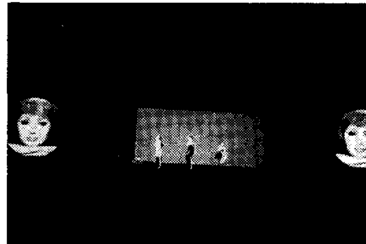


The American Pavilion by Buckminster Fuller — photograph by Geoff Winningham

I then flew directly to New York to attend the Festival of New Czechoslovakian Cinema. In his letter to Joseph Papp on the back cover of this issue, Václav Havel remembers that the last show of Czech film before "The Banned and the Beautiful" took place at Lincoln Center in 1967. While the Film Department at Lincoln Center was the co-sponsor, all of the screenings took place at the Auditorium of the Museum of Modern Art from June 16-June 28, exactly 23 years to the day that "The Banned and the Beautiful" will open at the Public Theater. I attended every program, seeing Věra Chytilová *Daisies,* which she described as "a necrologue about a negative way of life," and Vojtěck Jasný's *What the Cat Comes* (*The Cassandra Cat*), a still from which is on the front cover of this tabloid and for which he then wrote the following program note:

The film is my own modest contribution to a difficult and necessary struggle. There are too many such headmasters about, and their color (if my Cat weren't on hand to fix it) would never be one and the same for long, because like chameleons, they are ready to change it at the drop of a hat. It is these people we have to fight if the world is to be a better place.

Kinomat, Expo '67, Montreal, Canada — Czech Pavilion



Laterna Magica, Expo '67, Montreal, Canada — Czech Pavilion

Laterna Magica, Expo '67, Montreal, Canada — Czech Pavilion

The other feature films included were Jiří Menzel's *Closely Watched Trains,* then called *A Difficult Love,* Jan Schmidt's *The End of August at the Hotel Ozone,* Antonín Máša's *Hotel for Strangers,* Jan Němec's *Diamonds of the Night,* Jaromil Jireš' *The First Cry,* Hynek Bočan's *Nobody Laughs Last,* Evald Schorm's *Courage for a Day,* Ladislav Rychman's *Lady of the Trolley Tracks,* Zbynek Brynyck's *The Fifth Horseman is Fear,* and Jan Čurík and Antonín Máša's *Wandering.* There were shorts by Ivan Passer, Dusan Hanák, Jiří Trnka, Jan Švankmajer, Evald Schorm and others. It was a stunning show, coming from a country whose films we had not seen before. They were discussed for many months, and over half of them went into American distribution.

Earlier this year, from March 3 through May 13, 1990, Jonas Mekas' Anthology Film Archives showed at its Second Avenue screening rooms in New York "Czech Modernism: 1900-1945: Cinema," nearly fifty classics from the history of Czechoslovakian film, and stated in the Program Notes: "From its introduction in Prague in 1896, seven months after the Lumière brothers showed their 'animated photographs' to Paris for the first time, film captured and became the model for the Czech avant-garde imagination." At the same time, over 300 works tracing the evolution of the Czechoslovakian visual arts from Expressionism through Surrealism were presented at The Brooklyn Museum, installed under the curatorial direction of Charlotta Kotík, herself the great grandaughter of Tomáš Garrique Masaryk and the wife of Peter Kotík, whom I shall mention later. The extraordinary and largely unfamiliar (to Americans) work of the Czech photographers of those years was presented at The International Center of Photography. That entire show has moved on to Cleveland, and just as The Public Theater presents "The Banned and the Beautiful: A Survey of Czech Cinema 1963-1980," The Cleveland Cinemataque will be screening "Czech Modernism: 1900-1945: Cinema." The film selections for the whole show, which was organized by The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, were made by Jaroslav Andel, an independent curator and authority on the Czech avant-garde and Ralph McKay, the Curator of Anthology Film Archives. A series called "The Sixties Reclaimed," similar to The Public Theater's "The Banned and the Beautiful," programmed by Peter Hames, the distinguished author of *The Czechoslovakian New Wave* (University of California Press, 1985), will be screened at The National Film Theatre in Great Britain during September-October, 1990.

The highlight of the Anthology Film Archives screenings was the re-presentation, on March 3, of three programs of films which Alexander Hammid (Hackenschmied) had organized at the Kotva Cinema in Prague in the winter of 1930. These included René Claire and Francis Picabia's *Entr'Acte* (1924), Alberto Cavalcanti's *Rien Que Les Heures* (1926), Oskar Fischinger's *Study No. 3, No. 5, No. 6, and No. 7* (1930), Man Ray's Les *Mystères du Château du De* (1929), Jean Vigo's *A Propos dè Nice* (1929-30), and Alexander Dovzhenko's *Earth* (1930), as well as his own *Bejúcelná Procházha* (*Aimless Walk*) (1930). Hammid had not only been a pioneer of the Czech avant-garde, but, with his first wife, Maya Deren, of the American avant-garde cinema as well.

Alexander Hammid, ca. 1942-43. Photograph by Maya Deren.

Maya Deren, ca. 1942-43. Photograph by Alexander Hammid.

Theirs is the classic story of amatory and cinematic interaction between Czech and American experimental filmmakers, and it is told in detail in Volume I, Part 2, *Chambers (1942-1947),* of the Anthology Film Archives major publication project, *The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Biography and Collected Works,* by VèVè A. Clark, Millicent Hodson, and Catrina Nieman. Alexander Hammid was a Czech artist who studied architecture, photography, and set design in Prague before making two short experimental films, *Aimless Walk* (1930) and *Prague Castle* (1932) and writing many articles for Czech journals and newspapers advocating the growth of a cinema free from commercialism. In 1939, he came to the United States, as an exile, barely escaping the Nazi occupation of his homeland, and, shades of Jan Němec, forced to leave because he had surreptitiously filmed early images of the holocaust, Luftwaffe assaults on Poland, and the destruction of border villages, working with the Americans Herbert Kline and his wife, Rosa Harvan. Their two feature-length documentaries, *Crisis* (1938) and *Light Out in Europe* (1939) were among the very first films Americans saw about World War II. Eleanora Deren, who later took the name Maya, the Hindu Goddess of Illusion, was in Los Angeles with the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. F.B.I. records of the time report that she had been expelled from Syracuse University for handing out Communist literature and that her parents were thought to be Communists. She and Hammid married in 1942 and he taught her photography and filmmaking and introduced her to the classics of experimental cinema. In early 1943, they moved into a two-story apartment at 1466 King's Road, just a few blocks above Sunset Boulevard, and there made *Meshes in the Afternoon,* which initiated the non-Hollywood, poetic film tradition in America. Catrina Nieman, on whose account I have been drawing here, wrote: "*Meshes of the Afternoon* is considered by many to be Deren's best film. Its power is very largely due to Hammid's cinematography and editing, a fact which has began to be acknowledged more and more in recent years" (p. 15).

Just as Lincoln Center, the Museum of Modern Art, and Anthology Film Archives kept alive the spirit of Czech film, it should be recounted that The Public Theater kept its fidelity to Czech drama from 1968 when Václav Havel himself spent six weeks in the United States during May and June and Joseph Papp directed his *The Memorandum.* It seems that Papp invited Havel to the United States just as he was being sent to prison. In a letter to his wife, written from Hermanice prison on New Year's Eve, 1979, Havel advised her: "When you speak with the lawyer, ask him if he's been able to determine whether my letter to Mr. Papp has been forwarded to the court. If not, write him yourself, thank him for his offer and explain to him why I could not accept it. . . ." (*Letters to Olga, June, 1979 - September, 1982,* translated by Paul Wilson [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988], p. 63). Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz reports that Havel's three one-act plays, *Interview, Protest,* and *Private View* were performed at The Public Theater during the 1983-84 season, directed by Lee Grant (Drama Contemporary Czechoslovakia [New York: Performing Arts Journal Publication, 1985], p. 13). Richard Foreman directed *Largo Desolato* there in 1987 and Jiří Zizka *Temptation* in 1989. Playwright Arthur Miller also made known his solidarity with Václav Havel when he wrote the monologue, *I Think About You a Great Deal,* for performance at The International Theater Festival in Avignon on July 21, 1982 (Jan Vladislav, ed., *Václav Havel: Living in Truth* [London: Faber & Faber, 1987], pp. 263-265). The title line itself is an exact quotation from Havel's own play, *Protest,* and Miller's set, with the wastepaper basket, alluded to that in Havel's *The Memorandum.* Miller's line: "In some indescribable we are each other's continuation" echoes the thought of a line—"The lives of people who are close to one another overlap"—in Pavel Kohout's novel, *From the Diary of a Counterrevolutionary,* translated by George Theiner (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972). Kohout himself is best known in the United States as a playwright (*Poor Murderer, Fire in the Basement*), but *Diary* is an excellent account of the events of 1968 and their historical context. In the book, three diaries alternate with each other: the first, by a citizen, follows a number of characters who meet on the most important moments of Czechoslovak history from 1944 to 1967, 23 years; the second, the actual diary of Pavel Kohout, is an account of the spring, fall, and winter of 1968, one year; and the third, the diary of a tourist, recounts the reactions of three characters, visiting Rome when they hear the tragic events of August 21, 1968, one day. Its structure, jumping back and forth in time over a 23 year period, is much like this essay, which borrows from it.

From performance of Václav Havel's *A Private View*, directed by Lee Grant at The Public Theater, 1983. Photography by Martha Swope.

My first faculty appointment at The Media Center in Houston in 1968 was the American, James Blue. He had made a feature film in Algeria, *Les Oliviers de la Justice* (*The Olive Trees of Justice*) in 1962 which won the Critics Prize for Best First Film at the Cannes Film Festival that year and split the French public in half; I have over 200 reviews and responses to it published in French newspapers during the following year. He had also made *The March,* a documentary of the March on Washington on August 28, 1963, which he directed, edited, wrote, and read the narrative. He joined me on the basis of a poem by Robert Graves, which I had handed him one evening in a French Restaurant in Washington, D.C. and which best expressed, I felt, the thrust of the media program which I wished to start; paradoxically, it contained no visual images and could not be camera-ized.

IN BROKEN IMAGES

He is quick, thinking in clear images;
I am slow, thinking in broken images.

He becomes dull, trusting to his clear images;
I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images.

Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;
Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.

Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact;
Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.

When the fact fails him, he questions his senses;
When the fact fails me, I approve my senses.

He continues quick and dull in his clear images;
I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.

He in a new confusion of his understanding;
I in a new understanding of my confusion.

After accepting his contract, Blue was unable to come for the first semester because he was asked to assist František Daniel, its first Dean, in designing the concept and curriculum for the American Film Institute for Advanced Study, which President Lyndon B. Johnson had founded, along with the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. It was the first American attempt to form a national film school, and as one can find in the Stanford Report, a background research document which advised the government on its establishment, its model was the Eastern European Film Schools, particularly the Prague Film and Television Academy. František Daniel had been born and educated in Czechoslovakia where he studied music at the Prague Conservatory and film and television at the Prague Film and Television Academy (FAMU). In 1953, he had been awarded a doctorate from the Moscow Film Institute and during 1953-55, he was Director of the Literature and Drama Division for Czechoslovakian National Television.

Before coming to the United States in 1969, Daniel had worked for 14 years at the Barrandov Studios, and for five years he had been Dean of the Prague Film and Television Academy. His film work in Czechoslovakia centered on his writing scripts for feature films, including two, *Daddy Wanted* and *Last September,* which he directed himself. He produced Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos' *Shop on Main Street,* one of the films to be screened at The Public Theater. He had been largely involved in the Czech New Wave, the films of Milos Forman, Ivan Passer, and others. Earlier, he had been active in the post-Stalinst thaw which produced films such as *Three Wishes* by Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos (1958), *The End of the Clairvoyant* by Jáno Rohó and Vladimir Svitáček (1954), *September Nights* by Voytéck Jasný (1959), and *There are Lions* by Václav Krška (1959), all of which were suppressed at the Bánska Bystrica conference in 1960, and Daniel himself was forbidden to make films for a year and the production association Feix-Daniel had been liquidated. He left for the United States on April 26, 1969 when he learned that Alexander Dubček was to be deposed.

From performance of Václav Havel's *Largo Desolato*, directed by Richard Foreman at The Public Theater, 1987. Photograph by Martha Swope.

He made an enormous contribution to American film studies in both production and analysis. From the outset, the American Film Institute, as an organization, was troubled with management problems, and I myself felt strongly enough to testify against its failures before a Congressional Committee in 1975 chaired by John Brademus, now the President of New York University ("To Amend the National Foundation of the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965," *Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Education and Labor on H.R. 17021* 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, U.S. House of Representatives). When Daniel was tragically dismissed from the American Film Institute in 1974, he was the recipient of a Ford Foundation grant to study curricula issues in American film and television education and while serving as Henry Luce Professor of Creative Arts at Carleton College in Minnesota, he frequently visited Houston and Buffalo. James Blue recorded more than thirty hours of his lectures at the American Film Institute; at The Media Center in Houston, by then housed at Rice University; and at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Some of those recorded at the American Film Institute were transcribed by Blue himself and they clearly indicate how the exercises of the Prague school and the analysis of Czech productions by its recent graduates (e.g., Ivan Passer's *Intimate Lighting*) became part of American film education.

Tribute to James Blue
1930-1980

Ontario Film Theater, Ontario Science Center
June 3, 1981
Toronto Super-Eight Film Festival

That was just the beginning of Daniel's contribution to education in this country. With Miloš Forman, he established the Graduate Film School at Columbia University in 1977. James Blue who, by then, had joined me in Buffalo, was to share himself between Buffalo and Columbia and Colin Young's National Film School in Great Britain before his sudden death in 1980. Daniel later went on to become the Dean of the School of Film and Television at the University of Southern California, and Vojtěch Jasný, another Czech director of the 60's, three of whose films will be shown at The Public Theater, succeeded him. Jasný's first American film for television, *Miloš Forman: A Portrait,* was produced for The American Masters series for transmission on PBS in February, 1990. Daniel has also served as the guiding spirit of Robert Redford's Sundance Institute in Utah, dedicated to helping young directors develop their first feature project with the assistance and advice of accomplished professionals, and he recently founded the Flemish European Media Institute (FEMI) which attempts to perform the same service, with more emphasis on scriptwriting rather than on production, for Common Market filmmakers, convening in different countries each year, with meetings already held in Barcelona and West Berlin.

When I moved to Buffalo, Blue had remained behind in Houston as the new Director of The Media Center. While I mentioned his filmmaking earlier, I should now, in relation to his transcription of the Daniel lectures, describe his unique contribution to the history of American and international independent cinema by conducting and publishing interviews with film directors. His great mastery of the interview form had begun with a Ford Foundation grant in 1964 which allowed him to travel all over the world to interview 30 film directors who had begun to use non-actors in their work. Those with Pier Paolo Pasolini, Albert Maysles, Jean Rouch, Richard Leacock, Satyajit Ray, Shirley Clarke, Cesare Zavattini, Peter Watkins, Jean-Luc Godard, and Roberto Rossellini, which were published in *Film Comment, Cahiers du Cinéma,* and *Objectif,* were widely acknowledged as the most useful materials available in film courses. His interview with Miloš Forman, republished in this tabloid, was printed in *Cahiers* in 1967, before he had met Daniel, and is a superb example of how a film director, by asking the right questions, can "direct" another film director to clearly reveal and articulate his or her own processes of film production. At Buffalo, he helped me establish the Oral History of the American Independent Cinema, and did extended interviews with John Marshall and Robert Gardner, among others, and with Willard Van Dyke and Ralph Steiner, the latter providing basic information for William Alexander's *Films on the Left: American Documentary Film from 1931-1942* (Princeton University Press, 1981).

While he was still in Houston, through Miles Glaser, James Blue was re-introduced to Miloš Forman and met Ivan Passer when they first emigrated to this country and he conducted four 45-minute interviews with them on 16mm film: Lighting and Lenses, Structure and Writing, and two on Non-Actors--I quote from the labels on the film cans. Only the original elements of this film ever existed and, until a few months ago, the soundtrack had been considered lost, but it was recently discovered and filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker, who founded Living Archives, is now seeing it through the printing process. In Houston, on November 15, 1990, the South West Alternate Media Project (SWAMP), the restructured and revitalized survivor of The Media Center which I founded there, will première it together with a screening of *Oratorio for Prague*, to mark that important date in its history of 22 years ago. When Forman and Passer were first in this country, before they had directed any of their American films, at Blue's suggestion, they came to Buffalo to lecture on their films on several occasions--it was a case of sheer survival at that time.

Conversations with Frank Daniel–June 10, 1969

Suggested Exercises:

Best way for doing these exercises would be to combine them with writing exercises. One scene from a novel or from a one-act play, and done with the TV equipment. Best to limit people in time and number of actors.

We must learn to understand the thrust of the material and to express it by a new means. You must learn the style and find the way to adapt it. Chekhov is marvelous for adaptation. Katheleen Mansfield also.

In Prague this is the exercise at the end of the second year and at the beginning of the third year.

Conversations with Frank Daniel–April 28, 1970

The Structure:

We now have the weapons. We must look for the best use of materials to find the best expression of the theme.

So we re-examine all the characters at our disposal to find the *main* character who will be the best demonstration of the *theme*, i.e.:

"Frustration" (*Intimate Lighting*)

We see in *Intimate Lighting* that the musician from the city has qualities, talents. He has succeeded in his life.

The girl friend is important because she demonstrates that he belongs to another world than the farm family—a freer one.

At first the film seems to present only a small episode which helps to assure the musician from the city that his way of life is the right one.

Then you gradually begin to discover that there is something more:

All the small scenes–the car, the supper, the house, the idiot, the funeral--create strange vibrations in this man (the city musician who is visiting the farm), and he begins to get deeper into the life of these people and see himself in them.

The old man has an adventurous past, his wife was a circus rider:

The musician now begins to see two parts of these people. He meets their dreams. They are still alive. The people carry them with them.

Then the quartet starts.

The city girl is a nice butterfly, she takes fun from everything, unable to understand the musician's inner feeling of frustration. He brought her to the farm as he might have worn a tie or a hat--just to show his success.

But during the quartet, he is in a serious and meaningful moment, a sanctified and holy moment that they are creating.

The irony is in how concretely Passer sees these things. They start an argument while playing. The relationships emerge even in this holy moment. And the search for the holy is frustrated.

Later the host opens the refrigerator and takes the meat --all material goods are here. They play Beethoven and eat. And what emerges is that both friends are in the same situation of frustration.

The one came from Prague to show how successful he is.

The other attempts to demonstrate from the beginning how well off he is here in the country.

Both discover neither are happy.

To show this: Passer found the scene on the road in the middle of the night when both try drunkenly to leave.

The next morning they are back at breakfast and the special drink sticks in the glass.

There is no one scene in the film which does not contain the controversy of the theme. But in the beginning there are scenes which *seem* only one sided. The theme develops and you discover later thematic elements in the earlier scenes:

The lunch with the fried chicken only seems a normal moment. In reality it is a "put on" facade which crumbles--like the house which is not yet finished or the chicken on the new car.

September 1, 1971

Chelsea Hotel
22 West 23 Street
New York, New York 10011

Dear Milos Forman,

I'm writing again to invite you to the State University of New York at Buffalo. We had hoped that you would come a year ago with *Taking Off*--you'll probably remember that my Houston friend, Mike Glaser, contacted you about it--but the company wouldn't let us have the film as it had not yet had a commercial showing Buffalo. As the students here see *Loves of a Blond* and *Firemen's Ball* often, that presented a problem.

This summer, I saw *Black Peter* and *Audition* at Clem Perry's theatre in NY City, and I am wondering if you would like to discuss your films after a screening of *Black Peter.* It might be possible, if you thought it a wise idea, to show parts of a filmed interview which you and Passer did with James Blue in Houston--he would be agreeable to sending it to me.

You can actually leave NY about five in the afternoon and arrive in Buffalo for the evening screening and discussion, and you can get back to NY by eight the next morning. If you would care to come a bit earlier in the day, I'd be delighted to take you to Niagara Falls and through the Albright-Knox Museum, our two natural and unnatural wonders!

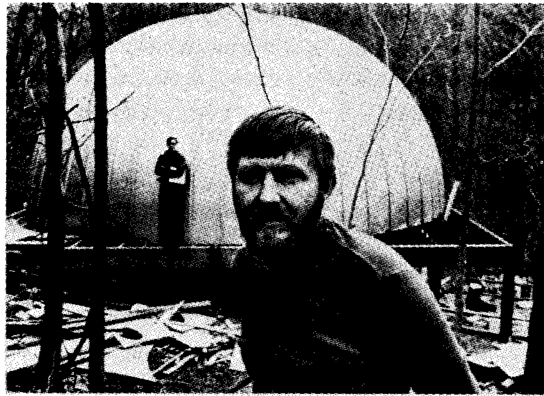
I'll telephone you in a few days in the hope that we can arrange something. I saw a very good film a few days ago, and recommend it to you if you haven't seen it, as I think you would want to--Dusan Makavejev's *Innocence Unprotected.*

Very best wishes to you.

Sincerely,

Gerald O'Grady

Later, I would see them at The Chelsea Hotel on West 23rd Street in New York. At the time, I was breathless, on-the-run. I was just trying to survive in the new knowledge environment of the various manifestations of different media, and had no sense whatsoever, as none of us do, that a history was being written around us. For three years during that period, I taught seven courses each week at graduate and undergraduate levels at four different universities, the State University of New York at Buffalo, the University of Texas in Austin, and at Columbia University and the New School for Social Research (at John Culkin's Center for Understanding Media) in New York City. When I hit New York, I would go out to Stoney Point,

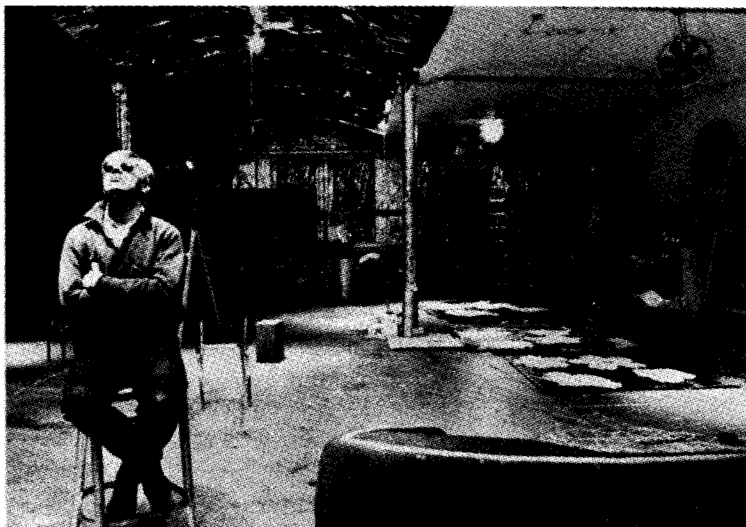


Stan Vanderbeek, The Movie-Drome, construction begun in 1963 at Stony Point, New York.

an artist's colony where he shared land with John Cage and others, to watch Stan Vanderbeek experiment in the "Movie-Drome" which he had constructed, from an old silo, into an audio-visual laboratory for simultaneous projection of dance, magic theatre, sound, and film. As many as forty super-8 and 16mm projectors would be operating in this Laterna Magica. Vanderbeek was also a pioneer in computer graphics and telephone murals and later presented eight hours of dream images in various planetariums throughout the country as people fell in and out of sleep. His article, "Culture: Intercom, and Expanded Cinema: A Proposal and Manifesto," *Tulane Drama Review 2* (1966), 38-48, coveys the political urgency of his almost superhuman vision:

> It is imperative that we quickly find some way for the level of world understanding to rise to a new human scale. This scale is the world. . . .
>
> It is imperative that the world's artists invent a non-verbal international language.
>
> It is imperative that prototype theatres, called "Movie-Dromes" be developed immediately. I shall call these presentations: "Movie-Murals," "Ethos-Cinema," "Newsreel of Dreams," "Feedback," "Image Libraries". . . .
>
> Each dome could receive its images by satellite from a worldwide library source, store them, and program a feedback presentation to the local community. . . .
>
> There is an estimated 700 million people who are unlettered in the world: we have no time to lose or miscalculate.

If I had then known the name of Jan Amos Comenius and his concept of



Andy Warhol at the Factory 1963-64. Photograph by Ugo Mulas.

"pansophy," I would have better known how to assimilate Stan Vanderbeek, one of my most cherished friends.

From Vanderbeek's silo, I would proceed to Andy Warhol's silver foil-lined Factory at Union Square West to observe him and Paul Morrissey in their attempts at an entirely different kind of cinema. Andy Warhola, as the 1950 portrait of his college friend, Philip Pearlstein, is called, as that was the name he knew him by, had been born to immigrant Roman Catholic Czech parents at the beginning of the American Depression, had grown up near the mills of Pittsburgh, and was to become the most famous Czech-American of the century.

The crystal-synching of the 16 millimeter Auricon camera with the Kudelski tape recorder and the development of fast film which enabled one to shoot in available light without the powerful illumination of expensive generators had made possible, in the 60's, the sound-synch recording of the lives of real people, and, in an affluent society, this new "low-priced" equipment was accessible enough so that the dominance of the Hollywood studios and television networks began to be challenged by cinéma vérité, and I was already going on shoots to observe Albert Maysles, D.A. Pennebaker, and Richard Leacock make new kinds of films. The concept of cinéma vérité was far from Warhol's mind, and he was equally uninterested in the use of non-actors in feature films, the subject of James Blue's interview with Miloš Forman in this tabloid, or in John Cassavetes' formulation of tight scripting combined with extreme freedom in exploring the situations and emotional lives of particular characters, capitalizing upon the specific temporal rhythms and personal resistance to social interaction of each one (*Shadows* [remake, 1959] and *Faces* [1968]). He seemed intent on combining them both, in filming the lives of real people performing unrehearsed fictions. He later wrote, with Pat Hackett, in *POPism: The Warhol 60's* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), pp. 109-110:

> I never liked the idea of picking out certain scenes and pieces of time and putting them together, because then it ends up being different from what really happened—it's just not like life, it seems so corny. What I liked was chunks of time all together, every real moment. . . . I only wanted to find great people and let them be themselves and talk about what they usually talked about and I'd film them for a certain length of time and that would be the movie. . . . To play the poor little rich girl in the movie, Edie [Sedgwick] didn't need a script—if she'd needed a script, she wouldn't have been right for the part.

The films, then, were essentially undirected and people were allowed to play out their own fantasies and to explore the transformation of their own personalities and identities, and some were adopting mythic names from popular culture, such as Ultra Violet, International Velvet, and Ingrid Superstar. The camera lens had become a Rorschach mirror. (Warhol did a Rorschach series of paintings in 1984.) Warhol himself was always keenly attuned to the perception of actuality. When he showed *Lonesome Cowboys* in Houston, he told reporter Nathan Fain: "I'm not sure if I should pretend that things are real or that they're fake. You see, to pretend something's real, I'd have to fake it. Then people would think I'm doing it real" (*Houston Post*, November 17, 1968).

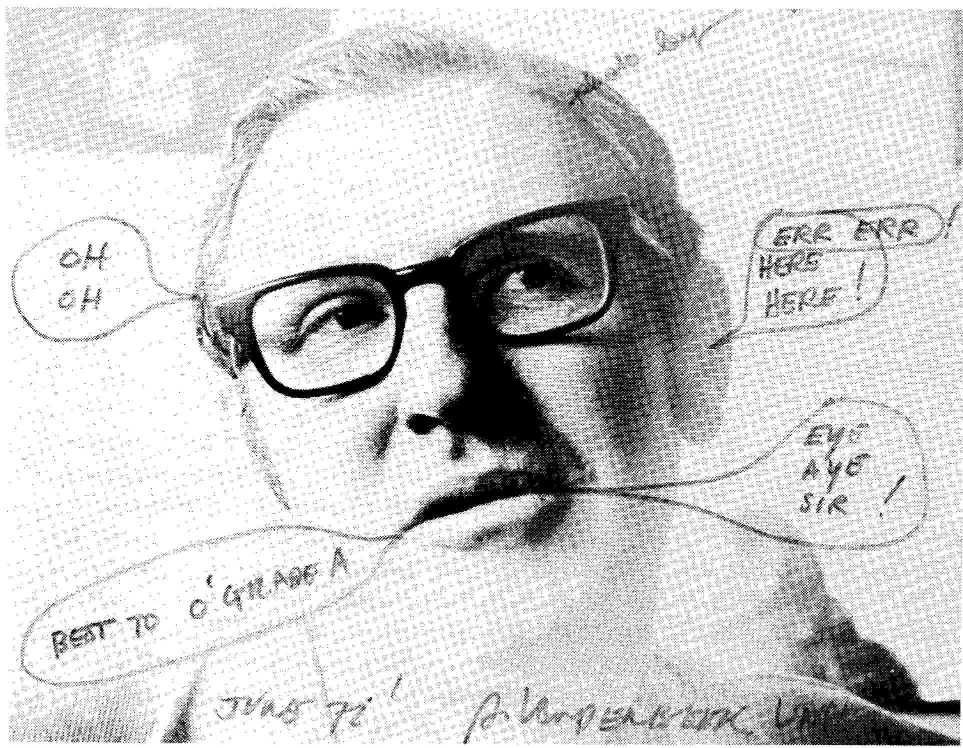
Certainly one of Warhol's strangest films was based on his meeting, in the mid-60's, with the star, Hedwige Kiesler or Hedy Lamarr, of one of the great classics of Czech and world cinema, *Ecstasy* (1933), directed by Gustav Machaty, the first director of the Warhola family's native land to enter the film histories. Warhol met Hedy Lamarr, the shoplifter; and her experience of being arrested, as recounted in her book, *Ecstasy and Me* (1965), became the basis of his *Hedy,* also known as *The Most Beautiful Woman in the World,* or *The Shoplifter,* or *The Fourteen Year Old Girl* (1965, 70 minutes). The transvestite, Mario Montez, played Hedy Lamarr and, according to Stephen Koch (*Stargazer: Andy Warhol's World and His Films* [New York: Praeger, 1973], p. 75), this was the only film of that whole period on which Warhol himself was the cameraman; apparently he got bored with the performance, and instead of his camera intensely focussing on the subject, as had Jan Stallich's, the cameraman of *Ecstasy,* Warhol filmed the walls and the ceiling of The Factory.

In the Czech summer of 1968, Vanderbeek and I had been pre-occupied in Houston with the murder of Robert Kennedy and the attempted murder of Warhol which took place within hours of each other on our west and east coasts on June 5. One of the reasons that Vanderbeek was willing to come to Houston was that a threat on his own life had been made by Valerie Solanas, the founder of S.C.U.M., the Society for Cutting Up Men, because he had not been interested in producing her scripts. She then shot Warhol. She had made her sole appearance in one of his films, *I, A Man,* a year earlier. She had also written a script, *Up Your Ass,* that was so vile that Warhol thought she was a police agent sent to entrap him.

It has not been sufficiently noted that Andy Warhol had a well-developed aural sense. Shortly after his operation, when he was still under heavy sedation, I talked to him in his hospital room where John de Menil had called to check on his welfare, and he insisted that I keep talking--on and on and on. I remember John de Menil

Philip Pearlstein, *Portrait of Andy Warhola* (1950) Oil on composition board.

angrily signalling for me to cut the conversation short, sure that I was tiring Warhol. I forgot that incident until he came to Houston in November the same week as Němec arrived with *Oratorio for Prague.* Warhol recalled the incident to my mind and told me that he had asked me to continue talking because he had heard, while still aetherized, that Kennedy had been shot and was dying, and somehow transposed my distinctly Massachusetts accent to Robert Kennedy's persona, and convinced himself that Kennedy was still living as long as I kept talking. That is an example of the way in which the telephone and the television have restructured our twentieth-century consciousness, a theme I shall touch upon later. Later, in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975], p. 91, he would write:



Gerald O'Grady — photograph by Ruth Abraham, printing by Stan Vanderbeek (1968)

When something's happening, you fantasize about other things. When I woke up somewhere—I didn't know it was at the hospital and that Bobby Kennedy had been shot the day after I was—I heard fantasy words about thousands of people being in St. Patrick's Cathedral praying and carrying on, and then I heard the word "Kennedy" and that brought me back to the television world again because then I realized, well, here I was, in pain.

When Warhol had heard, in 1963, that John Kennedy was shot, he had gone to his earlier studio at 87th Street off Lexington, a firehouse, and made a silkscreen of Dracula biting a girl's neck. In Houston, Vanderbeek, a gifted collagist, responded to that summer's shockwaves by making an animated film in which his drawings of human heads were continually blown apart and the human systems of audio-visual sensory perception destroyed by displacements of eyes and ears and speech. On the soundtrack, a human voice cried: "Oh! Oh! Oh! . . ." He dedicated it to "O," myself, because of our shared sorrow, and gave me the enclosed word/portrait as he left Houston.

From The Factory, I would go to The Chelsea Hotel to visit the extraordinary tin-welded tent-shaped structure on its roof, built as an addition to the top-floor apartment of Shirley Clarke and known as the TV TP (the Television Tepee), where she devoted her incredible energies to turning people on to video. Four monitors—-some had old-fashioned oval receiving tubes—would be piled in the shape of totem poles on each floor, and cameras were located on each floor as well. One floor, not necessarily the top, would put the image of the head of one of its temporary inhabitants in the top monitor, and the other floors would add the midsection and legs from two other persons on the other two monitors, and the trick was to physically operate our portapaks so that the composite human figures would dance in rhythm--sometimes, these figures danced on their own heads. This was called Playing Picasso. This was more like a jack-o-laterna magica and had the character of a Halloween party. The two Czechs, Forman and Passer, lived at the Chelsea and I would see them under the tepee. These silos, silver marias, and tepees, which have become sacred places in retrospect, were, at that time, simply gathering places of friends, and little did I realize that they were transforming my own career.

Shirley Clarke had also started "The Tepee Videospace Troupe" which would travel to campuses to give public performances of interactive video "games" of the kind mentioned above and, in enclosing part of a letter which I wrote at that time to recommend her activities for financial support, I would encourage the reader to relate it to Marshall McLuhan's chapter on Games in *Understanding Media* (1964).

Erik Erikson was then writing his books on the processes by which our identities were constructed (*Childhood and Society,* 1950 and *Identity and the Life Cycle,* 1959), and the pioneer work of R.D. Laing (*The Divided Self* and other books) was making us all aware of our multiple selves and exploding our previous descriptions of sanity and insanity. Clarke was using the electronic mirror of video both compositionally (the totem) and socially (performance) to make us question our received notions of both identity and community. Her famous film, *Portrait of Jason* (1967), explored, in a way again different from Warhol and the other filmmakers mentioned, the border crossing between reality and fiction.

To her career which begins as a touring dancer, she has incorporated all of the arts, and now loops back or recycles it to continue as a touring video trouper performing what is itself a continuing cycle. I have spent many fascinating hours at her tepee atop the Chelsea Hotel, an almost fully equipped video studio of her own design, witnessing the development of the totem concept. One example: four different people are given cameras to record parts of the bodies—heads, torsos, legs, etc.—of four other people; these images are then assembled and reassembled, always in live time, on four video monitors piled ends-up in the form of a totem; the exploration is unending as various visual matchings, makings and metaphors are formed; one's precepts and concepts of art, visual thinking, play, human social cooperation, and, in the largest sense, reality itself are stimulated.

Her work is hard to label or characterize but I would define it as interactive, cooperative, performance-oriented jazz video and thus distinguish it from the more environmental pieces of Frank Gillette, the meditative work of Peter Campus, the playful happenings of Nam June Paik, and the synthesizer work of Stephen Beck, to name but a few video artists who also have major stature . . . . Support of her work might be the quickest way to socialize some of the video potentials which she elaborates upon in her project. Here is dialogic versus discursive television.

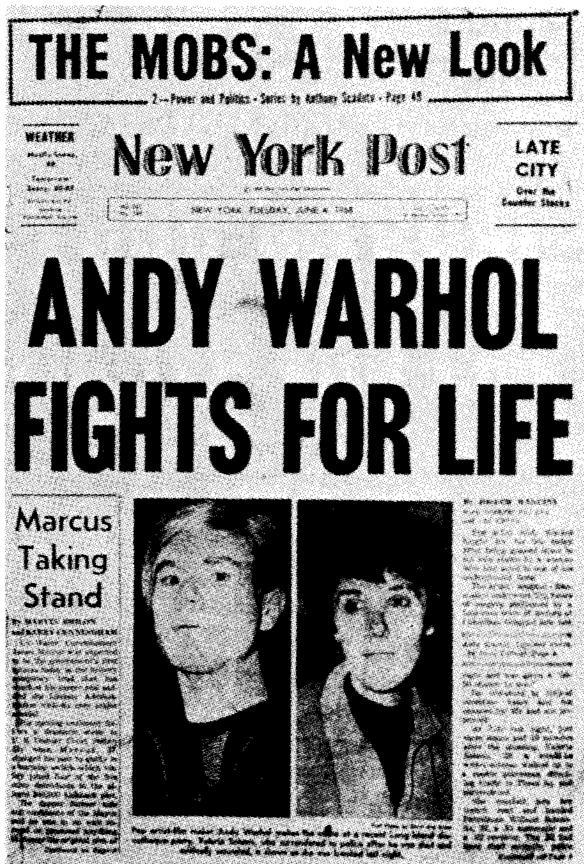
When her group appeared in Buffalo on September 6-8, 1974, she handed our audience this statement as an introduction to its performance:

> Will the human beings opt for the re-creation of life through non-biological means, that is, through technology, and thereby eventually give up their human intelligence and spirit to the "superior" machine: or will we make the political-socio-ecological decision to retain our human reality and together with technology and art develop a true humanist solution? We have chosen as artists to make friends with the machine. We invite you to join us in the most important political choice of the twentieth century.

I mention the activities of Shirley Clarke, and others, in this essay in light of Václav Havel's classic, "The Power of the Powerless" (October, 1978), which has been published in *Václav Havel, or Living in Truth.* Near the end of that essay (pp. 114-115), Havel wrote:

> Our attention, therefore, inevitably turns to the most essential matter: the crisis of contemporary technological society as a whole, the crisis that Heidegger describes as the ineptitude of humanity face to face with the planetary power of technology. Technology--that child of modern science, which in turn is a child of modern metaphysics--is out of humanity's control, has ceased to serve us, has enslaved us and compelled us to participate in the preparation of our own destruction. And humanity can find no way out: we have no idea and no faith, and even less do we have a political conception to help us bring things back under human control.
>
> . . . .
>
> 'Only a God can save us now', Heidegger says, and he emphasizes the necessity of 'a different way of thinking', that is, of a departure from what philosophy has been for centuries, and a radical change in the way in which humanity understands itself, the world and its position in it. He knows no way out and all he can recommend is 'preparing expectations'.

Readers of Havel will remember that, in the very next sentence, he insists that any real revolution in human affairs must not be "merely philosophical, merely social, merely technological. . . ," but that "its most intrinsic locus can only be human existence." And I tell here a New York story about František Daniel and James Blue



THE MOBS: A New Look

New York Post

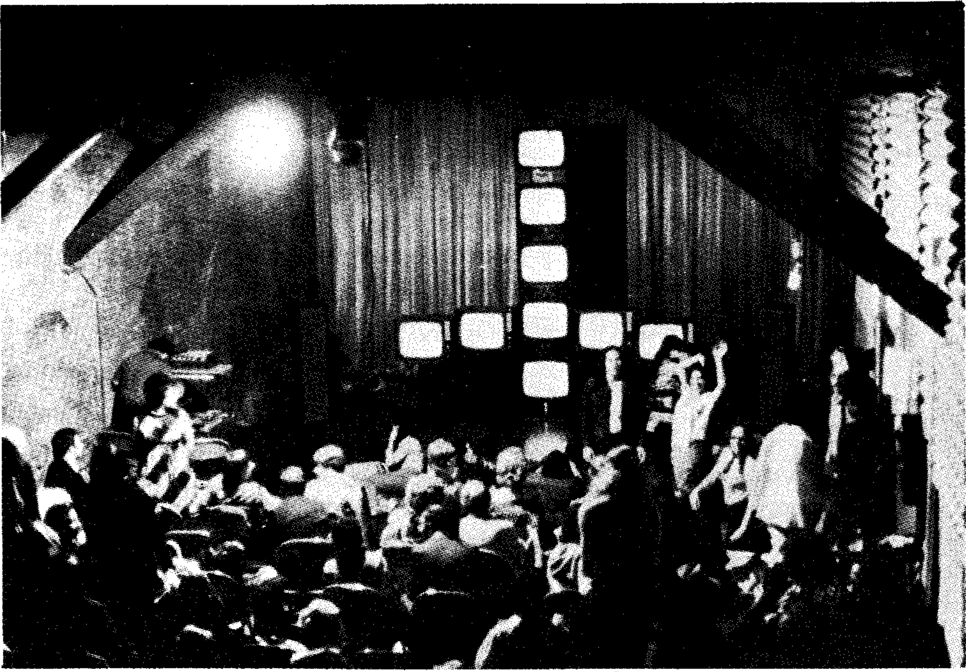
LATE CITY

ANDY WARHOL FIGHTS FOR LIFE

Marcus Taking Stand

Shirley Clarke

which happened later, in 1980, but illustrates the spirit of both men and of our times together. It involves a young Czech student, Oleg Harenčar, who somehow crossed the border to Switzerland when he was 19, only to find that there were no schools that offered a curriculum in film. A year later, he arrived at Kennedy Airport on a Friday, with so money, no place to stay, and no plans, other than his still being determined to become a film student. He looked up Miloš Forman in the New York telephone directory but couldn't find him listed; he learned later that evening that Forman was then living in Connecticut. He then looked up František Daniel--he had never met either man--and arrived at his home at 11:00 P.M., and begged him to accept him into Columbia. By 5:00 A.M., they had discovered that Daniel knew his father--both, as "bright young communists," had been sent to Moscow to get their doctorates at the same time, and Daniel had actually attended his parents' wedding. But he could still not be admitted to Columbia because it accepted only graduate students and Harencar did not yet have an undergraduate degree. James Blue was in Daniel's kitchen when he had arrived, stopping over for a visit as he flew from Buffalo to Houston. Before he left to get a 7:00 A.M. flight, he gave Harenčar the money for the 600-mile bustrip to Buffalo and the key to his house at 80 Mariner Street, and assured him that he would gain him admittance to our Center for Media Study at the State University of New York at Buffalo, as soon as he himself flew back from Houston on Monday. Harenčar graduated in 1985, with television productions of Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* and *Make a Joyful Noise,* a study of family, choir, and other Black musical groups in Buffalo who were moving from performing traditional church hymns to a more secular gospel music. He now makes and teaches film in Mendecino, California. Earlier this year, he flew to Moscow to film the Russian circus and, on his way "home," visited his father in Prague, who proudly introduced him as "my son, the American citizen." Robert Harenčar, a dissident, had been relegated in recent years to serving as an economist for a collective of disabled people--a step above window-cleaning and furnace-tending, it seems--and is now the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs under Jiří Dienstbier.



The Kitchen, 240 Mercer Street, New York

Woody Vasulka

After I finished the Buffalo/Texas/New York stint, I began to teach weekly at Buffalo and in the Graduate Department of Cinema Studies at New York University. One of the seminars I taught for graduate students included day-long visits to the lofts of artists whom I felt were transforming the structure of the electronic image. It was at one of these sessions that I first met Woody and Steina Vasulka at 111 East 14th Street, where they had altered a former garment altering shop to the needs of video. It was soon thereafter that I invited them to join Hollis Frampton and Paul Sharits at the Center for Media Study. (Tony Conrad, James Blue, and the theorist and historian Brian Henderson came later.)

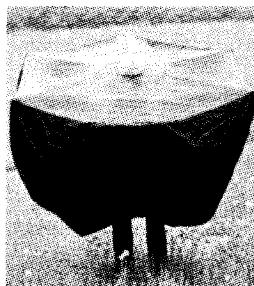
Bohuslav Vasulka was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia and took the name Woody when he heard Woody Herman records on "The Blue Danube," an American military radio station transmitting from Vienna. He once told me that he had wanted to emigrate since he was six years old, and after attending the Prague Film and Television Academy, he did so by marrying Steinunn Bjarnadottir and becoming an Icelandic citizen with the name of Timoteus Petursson. He worked in Algeria and Iceland and then came to New York in 1965. He clearly recognized that there was no hope in the United States for 35mm feature film as a cultural art, for which he had been trained, and he contacted Alexander Hammid and went to work on a multi-screen film for Francis Thompson with whom Hammid was then associated. Soon thereafter he founded The Kitchen which became the first and most important exhibition venue for video and other electronic arts in New York City and the entire United States. Under the influence of audio synthesis experimentation at Automation House and elsewhere and through his collaboration with Alfons Schilling. Vasulka abandoned narrativity or "the story" and began a relentless 25-year long exploration into the surface of the image, its principles of organizing energy, which has made him, together with Nam June Paik from Korea, the central force of experimental video art in the United States.

Schilling, originally from Switzerland but schooled in Vienna was involved in building "seeing machines" and in binocular performances which re-organized mental space in binary images--at some time, they must have touched on Frederick Kiesler's 1928 design for a "space stage" at the Eighth Street Cinema in New York which would accommodate both theatre and motion pictures, another early laterna magica, as Schilling was certainly familiar with the earlier Austrian avant-garde. In 1967, Schilling had also worked on editing Francis Thompson's three-screen film for the American Pavilion at the Montreal Expo. That summer, when Steina Vasulka went back to Iceland for a visit, he and Woody Vasulka moved into a loft over a Hero Sandwich Shop at 128 Front Street, formerly occupied by Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and there, Schilling later told me, they were like "two little boys at play." They removed the claw mechanism from the camera so as to make an endless photograph, and they developed a rotating mirrored sphere which simultaneously recorded all that could be seen of the world from all angles.

Like the experiments of the others which I have been describing, these involved some or all of these four features: (1) a desire to place technology at the service of human development; (2) a thrust toward a totality, as full as possible as immersion in the actual world; (3) an impulse to describe life as it was actually lived and perceived, with all its accidents and chance elements; and (4) an attempt to expand human perception. The cinéma vérité of the period was only one aspect of the new hope to "live in truth." Schilling invented a machine which, when attached to one's hand, enlarged the distance between the eyes and gave one the illusion of being a giant since, in accord with the laws of parallax vision, all of the objects in the world now were perceived, in a Lilliputian way, as much smaller, and also elongated. He later built a "darkroom hut" of black cloth, which was stretched on rods of wood, attached on top of his head by means of an African straw hat and then pulled up and tied securely around his waist so that no light entered this homemade "magic lantern," which had a small peephole at which he could look out, as he did at the cameraman in the photograph accompanying this text. The images from the outside world were perceived by him on a rear projection screen attached to the horizontal wooden rod supporting the cloth, and he could slide this screen on the rod to increase or decrease the size of the image, which, however, was perceived upside down and reversed from left to right. With this complete change of perception, he would attempt to walk through the actual world, a task which was complicated further by the fact that persons or objects dispensing voices or sounds would be heard from the one side but seen on the other side. Another of his experiments (1973) involved replacing his own eyes with video camera systems which were connected to two small receivers. He could actually remove his "eyes," place them on a table, and by training the camera on himself, see behind him, or one "eye" could look forward and the other behind him at the same time. While Vasulka was teaching at Buffalo, Schilling was a visiting faculty member for two different semesters.

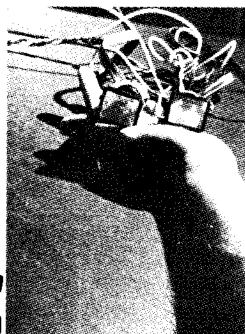
Alfons Schilling in New York with his *Kleiner Vogel*

Gerald O'Grady, Houston, 1967



Alfons Schilling, *Dunkelakkerhut* (1984)

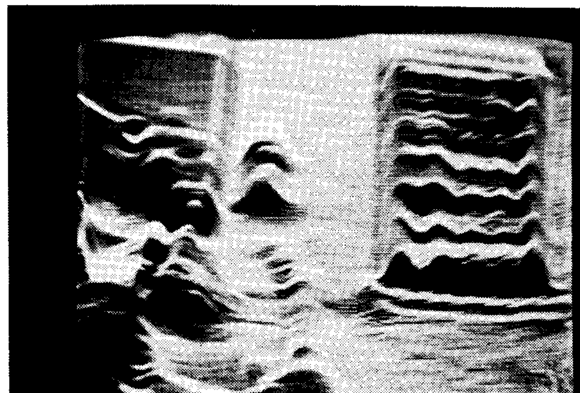
Georgiana Jungles, holding photo of Gerald O'Grady, with James Blue (left) and Woody Vasulka (right)



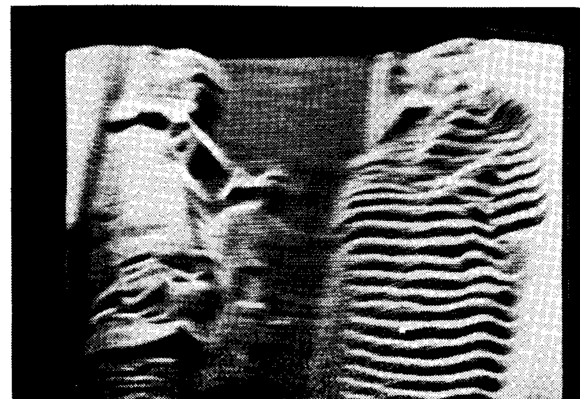
Alfons Schilling, *Stereoscopic Videosystem* (1973)

Gerald O'Grady reads while Alfons Schilling, seated on the floor, explains his work to Woody Vasulka and filmmaker Stan Brakhage, at Media Study/Buffalo workshop.

Vasulka had begun as a scriptwriter at FAMU, investigating what he retrospectively calls poetic space, and gradually moved through film space into video space and, now, on into digital space. He no longer had any interest whatsoever in straightforward representation, either documentary or fictional, of the so-called actual world. When he visited Czechoslovakia in 1974, he was not interested in the depiction of Telč, but in displaying the portapak images on a scan-processor and then feeding an identical image signal into its vertical deflection system, translating the energy structure of the original image into a vertical position of scan lines. In Brno, he took the farmyard of his youth in Moravia, a place of reminiscence, and vertically deflected the raster lines, according to their intensities, creating what he called "a topographical map of the brightness of the image."



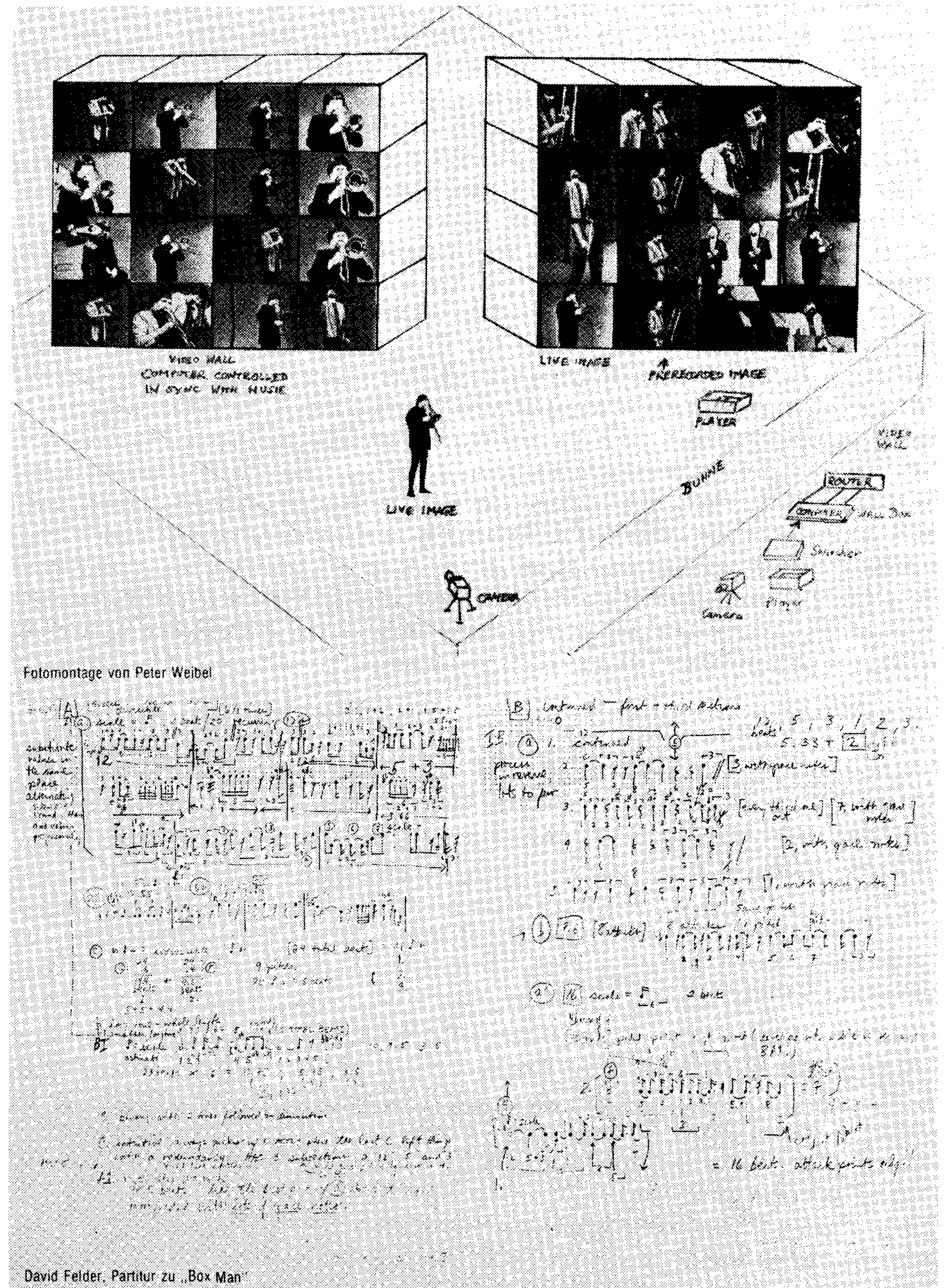
Woody Vasulka, *Telč*



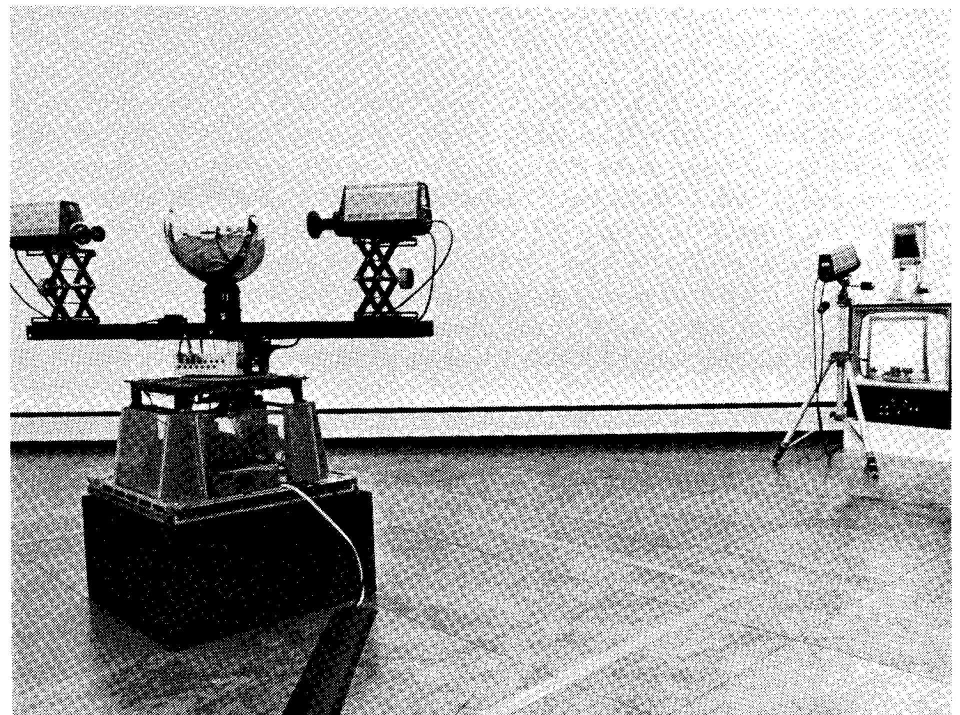
Woody Vasulka, *Reminiscences*

His most basic subject became the interaction or dialogue between electronic space and actual space and, more than any other contemporary video artist, he became involved in his own design and production of the physical tools--scan-processors, wave-form generators, dual colorizers, multi-keyers, variable clocks, line-locked strobes, video sequencers--which structured the image, and with the conceptualization and construction of machines to exhibit them in new ways, as the photographs of the exhibition of his and Steina's work at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo illustrate. It was called "Machine Vision" as a Schilling exhibit was called "Seeing Machines."

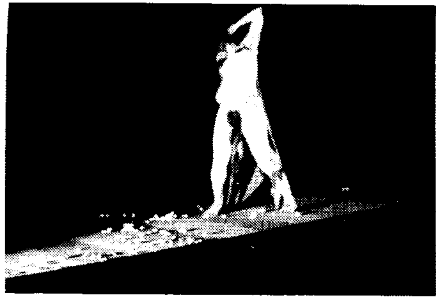
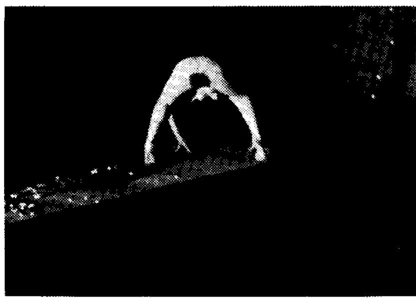
Currently, Vasulka is collaborating with Peter Weibel, his radio still set to "The Blue Danube," and others to simultaneously document real events in a variety of media (sound, image, text, speech), and by means of their storage in a common numerical code on a CD-ROM disk, investigate how a human's experience of the event could be continually restructured and transformed through new combinations and recombinations of these materials which would construct new interactive modulations between the different sensory modes. Weibel, who currently teaches at the State University of New York at Buffalo and, with Alfons Schilling, at the Hochschule fur angewandte Kunst in Vienna, and at the Institut fur Neue Medien in Frankfurt, has long been involved in reconstituting the electronic image by the vibrations of his own body motions and live rock-music performance on guitar, linking himself and his instrument directly to the television raster, and together with Henry Jesionka and the composer David Felder, also both at Buffalo, is presenting a live performance of jazz trombonist Miles Anderson before an interactive video wall of 32 pre-recorded and computer-controlled images of his performance from multiple perspectives, reconstituting a temporal history in a simultaneous space, using Felder's aptly-named musical composition, *Box Man*, based on a Japanese novel by Kobo Abe, rendering an updated extension of the laterna magica technology at Expo '67.



David Felder, Peter Weibel, Henry Jesionka, *Box Man* computer-controlled video wall with live performer Ars Electronics, Linz, Austria (1987)



Exhibition of the video works of Woody and Steina Vasulka, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York

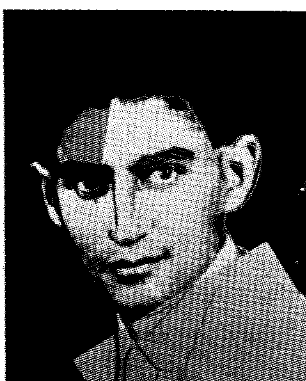
Woody Vasulka's *The Burrow* at Media Study / Buffalo.

At the same time that he explored the surface of the image, Vasulka remained interested in the portrayal of introspective or psychological space and in the use of electronically-generated space to present a completely transformed kind of dramatic narrativity. His *Art of Memory* (1986) was based on a book by Frances Yates, which I had given him. It is a study of how medieval and renaissance orators, following a classical tradition, constructed imaginary architectural spaces, with which they could associate parts of their speeches, so that, as they "walked through" the various sectors of a spatial continuity, they were able to recall the order of their speeches. By then, I had heard of Jan Amos Comenius, whom she mentions: "One of the preoccupations of the seventeenth century was the search for a universal language . . . Comenius worked in this direction . . ." (*The Art of Memory* [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966], p. 378), Vasulka created a mental landscape, based on his own reading and recollection, growing up, of the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, the Pacific Theater in World War II, and the coming of the atomic era, using his computer tools to give the 2-D documentary film footage of those events an "internal" quality of 3-D. In fact, he really never ceased exploring how to "represent a story" and once, in the film studio of Media Study/Buffalo, he directed a version of Kafka's short story, *The Burrow,* which included a narrator and a dancer depicting the mole, moving in a space in which slides of labyrinthine images were simultaneously projected on three walls. He now lives in Santa Fe and continually travels to Japan, Australia, Europe, and Latin America to exhibit his work and expound his theories.

It was under his influence that I myself began to design a work which would become an objective correlative for the impact which the reading and re-reading of Kafka's work had made on me over the years. I made a careful selection of passages which Kafka had written in his letters, parables, notebooks, essays, and fictional works, all involving the images of windows and doors which seemed critical to the anxiety of his work, those surfaces of exclusions and of potential—*always* potential—entrances. In his *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), p.6, for example, one of his very first tales, "Shamefaced Lanky and Impure in Heart," recorded in a letter to Oskar Pollak when he was 21, he wrote:

> Shamefaced Lanky had crept off to hide his face in an old village, among low houses and narrow lanes. The lanes were so small that whenever two people walked together they had to rub against each other friendly-neighborly-like, and the rooms were so low that when Shamefaced Lanky stood up from his stool his big angular head went right through the ceiling, and without his particularly wanting to he had to look down on the thatched roofs.
>
> . . . .
>
> One day before Christmas Lanky stopped at the window. There was no room for his legs inside so he'd stuck them out of the window for comfort; there they dangled pleasantly.

And these images even infested his dreams. In 1922, a few years before he died, he wrote to Max Brod: "Last night I dreamed of you, all sorts of things of which only one bit remains, that you looked out of a window, shockingly thin, your face an exact triangle" (p. 352). My concept was to mix this verbal "documentary" material which flowed through Kafka's imagination into the pen in his hand with documentary images of the doors and windows of the house in Prague in which he actually lived, having Vasulka record these largely vertical surfaces within the horizontal video frame, squeezed like Shamefaced Lanky and Max Brod, and then use all of his processing techniques to manipulate them into a musical piece which would be neither oratorio nor hallelujah, but some sort of "new music" which would embody Kafka's statement: "Man may embody truth, but he cannot know it." Following our appearance at Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria, in September 8-14, 1990, I plan to accompany Woody Vasulka to Prague, where he has been invited to talk about his research at his old school, FAMU, now that "the gentle revolution" has been accomplished, so that we can begin our first sketches for my Kafka project. There is the doorway to life at No. 1/21 corner of Maiselgasse and Karpfengasse, where he was born on July 3, 1883 and the doorway to death in the Jewish cemetery at Prague-Straschnitz where was buried on June 11, 1924 (he died on June 3), and all of the windows and walls, doors and deadends in the temporal space intervening, the entrances and exits through which he strutted, stuttered–and shuddered–in and out of actuality. It was in his Spring, 1968 interview with Antonín J. Liehm (*The Politics of Culture* [New York: Grove Press, 1973], p. 378) that Václav Havel confesses that it was an early gulf between his privileged existence and that of village kids that "explains my life-long affinity for Kafka, for his sense of isolation and alienation from the world." Space does not permit a confession about the roots of my own addiction here.



Andy Warhol, *Franz Kafka* from the portfolio *Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century* (1980) serigraph.

It was through Vasulka that I met and heard about two other Czech imagemakers who had emigrated to America. As a young man, Josef Krameš, now working at the Educational Foundation of the Cleveland, Ohio, Clinic, an institution for post-graduate medical research, was, like the American Johnny Carson, a magician and an "emcee" (master of ceremonies). He served in the Army with Václav Havel, helped write and acted in his first play, *Life Ahead* (*Život před sebou*) which Havel presented on behalf of The Fifteenth Motorized Artillery Division, an experience which he describes in *Disturbing the Peace* (pp. 38-39), and more fully in *The Politics of Culture* with Liehm, pp. 381-382. After graduating from FAMU, Krameš became on editor for Laterna Magica, and when I was seeing it for the first time in Montreal in 1967, he was helping to exhibit it in Argentina and Brazil. He was extremely well-acquainted with the conceptual work of Laterna Magica's founders, Alfréd Radoc, a film director, and Josef Svoboda, an architect, from its inception in 1958 and once described it to me as a fluid integration of screen and theater, an elastic merging of 2-D and 3-D. He also made me aware of the work of Radoc's brother, Emil, who now lives in Montreal, and of the Czech cameraman, Tonda Lhodsky, who now lives in Toronto, and their expansion of Laterna Magica concepts at the Vancouver World Fair in 1986. Thus, my story of Laterna Magica broadens beyond the United States and includes North and South America.

It was of unusual interest to me that another Czech emigrant to Canada, Josef Škvorecký of Toronto, when writing his historical and biographical novel *Dvořák in Love* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1983), transformed the following passage in John Clapham's standard biography, *Dvořák* (London: David & Charles, 1979), p. 119:

> Mrs. Thurber encouraged Dvořák to compose an American opera, and finding he was prepared to write one on the subject of 'The Song of Hiawatha', which he already knew from the translation into Czech, she tried to find someone who would prepare a libretto. Meanwhile, wishing to give him some suitable ideas for the opera's ballet, she took him to see Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Although there is not the slightest hint of Indian music in the Symphony [No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95, "From the New World"], it is closely linked with this opera project, for the composer described the Largo as a study or sketch for a Hiawatha work, and said the scherzo was suggested by the feast in 'Hiawatha' at which the Indians dance.

Using those last sentences, Škvorecký related Dvořák to the Spectatorium which Steele McKay designed for the Chicago Expedition of 1893 (Expo '93!) and rendered it like a nineteenth century precursor of Laterna Magica. I enclose parts of his chapter. It might also be mentioned that after leaving the American Film Institute, František Daniel began to write a novel about Dvořák's experience in America. It was never published, but rumors reached me, at one point, that Dvořák's patron, Mrs. Thurber, who finally was unable to keep her commitment to him, was an allegorical stand-in for the "patrons" who had brought Daniel himself to this country. This fictional identification had some resonance because Daniel had once told me that his office in Prague had once belonged to Dvořák.

The other Czech imagemaker who Vasulka put me onto was Pavel Fierlinger, whose family name is prominent in recent Czech history, for the restoration of communism in 1948. He was born in Japan in 1936, and lived in Burlington, Vermont from 1939-1947, at which point he returned to Czechoslovakia and became a classmate of Miloš Forman, Ivan Passer, Jerzy Skolimowsky, Václav Havel, and 75 other boys at the extraordinary boarding school, The College of King George of Poděbrady, located at a spa 50 kilometers from Prague, an experience which Havel has seemed to choose not to write about in his recent memoirs. Fierlinger made his first animated film there when he was 12 years old and went to art school instead of FAMU. Under the name of Fala, President Roosevelt's dog, he was a cartoonist for Prague literary magazines, and he produced the very first animated films for Czech television because he had access to 16mm equipment in a country in which the Government then held a monopoly on filmmaking, but worked in 35mm and regarded the smaller format amateurish. However, it happened to fit the technology of the film chain at the television station.

He later emigrated to the United States, and his first job in New York, in 1968, was to edit *Prague: The Summer of Tanks* for Universal Education and Visual Films. He eventually established his own filmmaking company in Philadelphia, A.R.& T., a play on AT&T, which means Animation, Recording, and Titling. He has made over 600 films and won more than 50 awards for his animation, regularly producing work for the Children's Television Workshop's *Sesame Street,* and received on Oscar nomination in 1980 for his animated children's film, *It's So Nice to Have a Wolf Around the House.* He recently completed *And Then I'll Stop,* an innovative 20-minute animated film, with voices of real people talking about the experience of recovery, on drug and alcohol abuse, and it was shown at The Museum of Modern Art.

The Tower House, where Kafka was born.

Cemetery at Prague-Straschnitz where Kafka is buried.

An Encounter of Geniuses

Harper's Monthly

Hugh McGregor-Fitzpatrick reviews
AN ENCOUNTER OF GENIUSES
in the salon of
Mrs. Francis N. Thurber

Early in 1983, or to be precise, in the spring of that year, an encounter took place in New York City between two geniuses, the eminent Bohemian composer and musician Antonín Dvořák, and my teacher, the brilliant dramatic and conceptual artist Steele MacKaye, recently and sadly deceased. It was an encounter that promised to unite their forces, their dreams, their genius and their energy to lay the foundations for a new art form, to which Steele MacKaye gave a name that captures precisely its intellectual and conceptual essence: the Spectatorium.

The meeting between these two giant minds and tireless imaginations took place in the residence of Mr. Francis N. Thurber, whose spouse, Jeannette M. Thurber, was Antonín Dvořák's patron. Mrs. Thurber was also responsible for the first--albeit fleeting--encounter between the sensibility of Antonín Dvorák and the genius of Steele MacKaye, when she took the renowned composer to Madison Square Garden to witness a performance by the Buffalo Bill ensemble of which Steele MacKaye was the director.

In the grand conceptual plan of Steele MacKaye, the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show was intended to acquaint the American public with the mighty drama of American civilization. This is accomplished through a series of seven tableaux, the first of which was entitled The Primeval Forest of America before its Discovery by the White Man, and so on until the seventh tableau, A Cyclone Is Born and Unleashes Its Fury in the Rocky Mountains, to which was later added an eighth tableau, Sitting Bull Defeats General Custer, in which the title role was played by Sitting Bull *in persona*, and thus, through a daring piece of casting by the director, Steele MacKaye, a unity of the truth of the imagination and the truth of reality, of reality and history, was achieved. The fact is that in the tableaux themselves one may observe the seminal idea of the Spectatorium, since the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show blended kinetic and visual drama into a unity. It achieved this remarkable effect by using the voice of a narrator located in a woodpecker's nest in the trunk of an enormous tree, greater than life size, which, being an original part of the Primeval Forest of America (Tableau One), symbolically recalled a past common to the other six, or rather seven, tableaux. The effect of actuality wedded to poetic vision was heightened by various ingenious devices designed and constructed by Steele MacKaye, such as his phenomenal wind machine, driven by a steam engine located outside Madison Square Garden which, for each performance, with the help of four gigantic six-foot fans, sent three wagonloads of dry leaves swirling through the settlers' camp in the Rocky Mountains (in the seventh tableau), all of which took place against a semicircular backdrop of the Rocky Mountains half a mile long and fifty feet high, the mountain the foreground having been painted to create the illusion that it was larger than reality. But more than by any of these wonders, and even more than by the narrative itself, the Master of Music's attention was captivated by the peerless sharpshooter Miss Annie Oakley, particularly in the closing moments of her act when, on horseback and armed with two pistols, she shot, within ten seconds, three-three rainbow-coloured glass balls thrown into the air by Steele MacKaye's ball-tossing machine, against a background of an electric Union flag designed by Steele MacKaye with the use of his own patented Curtain of Light. Nevertheless, the spirit of Steele MacKaye so fecundated the creative potential of the Czech Master of Harmony that by the time of their historic encounter at the Thurber home his mind was already primed to receive the ideas of Steele MacKaye and a mutual infusion of their geniuses was made possible.

When Steele MacKaye entered the salon of the Thurber home that evening, he observed Mrs. Thurber leading the Master of Tones by the arm with the clear intention of presenting him to Mr. John Pierpont Morgan and his spouse, that most admirable patron of the dramatic arts.

. . . .

Grasping the great composer by the lapels, Steele MacKaye unfolded his vision to the astonished genius. In his Spectatorium, the *dramatis personae* would neither speak, as in a drama, nor sing, as in an opera. Though essentially pantomimists, yet they were not conventional allegorical figures like Pierrot and Pierretta of the music-hall "Pantomimes". On the contrary, they became gigantic human personalities. To this end, the actor representing the hero would be enlarged by an enormous magnifying glass which would bring to life Steele MacKaye's vision. With the elimination of the actor's voice, the aural components--choral and symphonic--would be intensified and thus the *musical* elements would be on an equal footing with the *visual*. Hence the need for collaboration with a brilliant choral-symphonic composer.

. . . .

Here Steele MacKaye fell silent, being justifiably convinced that it was not necessary *expressio verbis* to actually pronounce the *name* of the person he sought to draw into his plans.... Now, when Steele MacKaye had eloquently left unfinished his final sentence, which, though unspoken, was clearly a direct invitation to Master Dvořák to collaborate on the Spectatorium, the silence in the room became absolute. At that moment, the Czech Master of Music, astounded by the daring of Steele MacKaye's vision and still backing away, brushed the back of his frock-coat against a velvet drape over a birdcage that stood against one wall between alabaster sculptures representing, appropriately, the Muses Erato and Euterpe, causing the drape to slide to the floor. The Harz canary, hitherto asleep, was now aroused and in the silence began singing a melody that, as it was, symbolically expressed the jubilant consent of *nature itself* to the grandeur of this moment of destiny. Steele MacKaye grasped the Master of Tones by both hands and the great Bohemian, aglow with profound enthusiasm for this epochal act of mutual creation, cast a glance full of creative rapture at the representative of nature, now warbling his full-throated delight with the future entente, and sighed: "What an artist!"

It was in Buffalo, again through Vasulka, that I met Petr Kotík, about whom Václav Havel writes in *Disturbing the Peace*: "In serious music, there was the influential group called The New Music (Kopolent, Kamorous, Kotík) . . . " (p. 50). Kotík was born in Prague where he studied flute and composition, and founded the ensemble, Musica Viva Pragensis, in 1951 and the QUAX Ensemble in 1966. In November, 1969, my Buffalo colleagues Lejaren Hiller and Lucas Foss, invited him to join the Creative Associates at the University and, three months later, he founded the S.E.M. Ensemble in Buffalo, an acronym which has no meaning in itself. While in Buffalo, he absorbed and expanded on the aesthetic of John Cage and Morton Feldman, and his compositions, annually performed at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery there before touring all over the world, included *Many Many Women* (1968) for six voices and instruments on a text by Gertrude Stein and *Explorations in the Geometry of Thinking* (1982), a four-hour work on a text by R. Buckminister Fuller. When he went to New York in 1983, he used Media Study/Buffalo, the institution which I had established to support independent artists in media and music, as a conduit for his grants. The S.E.M. Ensemble's European Tour earlier this year (May 2-May 14, 1990) included his musical composition of Václav Havel's *Letter to Olga,* and in 1979, his group had performed an undergraduate concert in Prague for the Musician Union's Jazz Section.

When my friend Miles Glaser from Houston meet Petr Kotík in New York for the first time on June 10, 1990 at a dinner for Olga Havel at the home of William H. Luers, formerly the American Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, and now President of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, in connection with the opening of "The Banned and the Beautiful," Kotík mentioned that he had a film in his attic containing footage of the Russian invasion of Prague in the summer of 1968, and when Glaser called me the next day, we speculated that it might be a print of *Oratorio for Prague.* At my constant urging, Kotík looked deeper and deeper into his storage space and sent the film, which he had not seen for 20 years, to me in Buffalo. It turned out to be *Prague: The Summer of Tanks,* which Pavel Fierlinger had edited. It had a subtitle, *Dark Days,* a translation of *Cierne Dnc,* and was 30 minutes long. All of its narration, which is translated into English subtitles, consists of broadcasts transmitted by Czech radio during the events shown on the screen, and after the closing of the Radio Building at 7:30 A.M. on the day of the invasion, materials transmitted from clandestine stations during the days that followed. It was filmed in Cierna, Bratislava, Prague, and Trencen, and covers events from August 3 through August 27, counterpointing the visual depiction of the planes, helicopters, trucks, and tanks of the Warsaw Pact members with the anguished aural track of the Czech citizens. With an incredibly eerie prescience, one of the announcers said:

> They are saying that it will last twenty years before nations can relax as they did last spring. We speak in the year 1968 and it will last another twenty years before nations can relax as they did this spring. We have a tradition of a score of years, 20 years from the Republic's founding to Munich, and 20 years of this regime to January, 1968. We speak about runs of three's, three misfortunes or three catastrophes, about White Mountains, Munich, and Prague Airport. I believe in series of three's. We have lived through two periods of darkness. Despite that, I think about the darkness, which without doubt awaits us, does not necessarily have to last twenty years. It depends really only on us, on our endurance, our belief, our fortitude.

There follows a long, endless tracking shot of Russian tanks, followed by a shot, taken from the distance, of the towers of the castle of Prague.

When I called Fierlinger's office to tell him that I had just seen the film he had edited 22 years ago, he was astonished. He told me that it was the last print of that film still in existence. It was his own personal print, which he had been unable to recover years earlier after loaning it to a Czech friend who died suddenly. The production company, Universal Education and Visual Arts, had gone out of business long ago, and the film had ceased being distributed. He identified the prescient radio announcer as Sláva Volny .

S.E.M. ENSEMBLE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE April 24, 1990

S.E.M. ENSEMBLE EUROPEAN TOUR MAY 2 - MAY 14, 1990

May 2	John Cage	Music for 5
Theater im Palast	John Cage	Concert for Piano and Orchestra
East Berlin	John Cage	Ryoanji
May 3	Rhys Chatham	Waterloo 2
Theater im Palast	David Behrman	All Thumbs
East Berlin	Ben Neill	Money Talk
	Petr Kotik/Vaclav Havel	Letters to Olga
May 6	John Cage	Variations IV
Hebbel Theater	Petr Kotik/Vaclav Havel	Letters to Olga
West Berlin	John Cage	Concert for Piano and Orchestra
	La Monte Young	Composition 1960 #7
May 8	Rhys Chatham	Waterloo 2
St. Ann's Monastery	Ben Neill	Money Talk
National Gallery	Petr Kotik/Vaclav Havel	Letters to Olga
Prague	John Cage	Ryoanji
May 9	David Behrman	All Thumbs
Eden Cultural Center	Petr Kotik/Vac. Havel	Letters to Olga
Art Forum	John Cage	Concert for Piano and Orchestra
Prague		
May 11	John Cage	Concert for Piano and Orchestra
Galerie MS	Rhys Chatham	Waterloo 2
Münster	Petr Kotik/Vaclav Havel	Letters to Olga
May 12	David Behrman	All Thumbs
Museum Bochum	Petr Kotik/Vac. Havel	Letters to Olga
Bochum	John Cage	Concert for Piano and Orchestra
May 13	Solo Concert by Ben Neill with Chris Nappi	
Museum Bochum, Bochum	(matinee)	
May 14	Petr Kotik/Vaclav Havel	Letters to Olga
Kunstverein Düsseldorf	Ben Neill	Money Talk
Düsselldorf	John Cage	Concert for Piano and Orchestra

THE HOUSTON POST
Wednesday, November 13, 1968

Jan Nemec, Warhol Due At Colleges

Czech film director Jan Nemec, whose "Oratorio for Prague" was the hit of the recent New York Film Festival, will show it and another film "Report on the Party and the Guests," at Saint Thomas' University 5 PM Friday.

"Oratorio" was produced by a Czech-born businessman living in Houston, Miles Glaser.

THE PROGRAM joins appearances by Andy Warhol, Roberto Rossellini, Melvin Van Peebles, Scott Bartlett and Al and David Maysles at Saint Thomas and Rice Universities soon.

Warhol comes to appear at the opening of the Jermayne MacAgy Collection at Saint Thomas Nov 20 and to screen his "Lonesome Cowboys" in the Rice Memorial Center at 8 PM Nov 19. It is his first appearance with a film since he was shot this summer.

Rossellini, who will screen a 45-minute digest of his epic "Survival" in Jones Hall Nov 21, will show his 1946 "Paisan" 8 PM Nov 22 at Saint Thomas in Welder Hall.

Bartlett appears at Rice Dec 4 to screen early films, "Metropolitan" and "Off-On" and a new work, "A Trip To The Moon" lasting 40 minutes.

All these viewings are headed under "The Film Revolution" and were arranged by Dr. Gerald O'Grady, Director of the Media Center at Saint Thomas with cooperation from the Rice Memorial Center. Tickets are to be had by calling the Center, JA8-2287, JA9-7896, or Rice, JA3-0120.

Scott Bartlett — photograph by Robert Haller

When Jan Nemec showed *Oratorio for Prague* in Houston on November 15, 1968, it was in a series called "The Film Revolution," which included the first public appearance of Andy Warhol since the shooting; Scott Bartlett, the bright young American experimentalist from San Francisco who, with Tom Dewitt, was blending film and video together for the first time in works like *Off-On;* and Roberto Rossellini. In that week, I met both Nemec and Rossellini for the first time. It was presented as a benefit for the Institute of International Education for which John de Menil had served as Chairman of the Board of Directors for eight years.The film which Rossellini showed was called *Man's Survival*, and its intended audience were the inhabitants of underdeveloped nations, to be reached by television. Eleven years later, in 1979, The Public Theater, then supported by John de Menil's son Francois, asked me to prepare a tabloid, like this one for "The Banned and the Beautiful," for a retrospective on Rossellini; and his daughter Isabella gave us permission to publish the first and only American translation of the last essay that he ever wrote: "Reflections and Deliberations on Scientific Data to Attempt to Devise an Accessible Form of Integral Education." It is not so well known that Rossellini administered the Italian film school, Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, in Rome. One of the fathers of neo-realism in the 1940's, he was the first major director to turn from film to television, and his vision that television could be used to educate all of humankind and help it survive, was listened to and supported by the Schlumberger Corporation, and the non-profit foundation to fund it, *Horizons Two Thousand*, was licensed in Houston, Texas by John de Menil, then the chief executive of that French company, and my own patron in establishing the Media Center.

In his essay, which I now read for the first time, Rossellini said that his own theory of education was based on that of Comenius, of whom, to my embarrassment, I had never heard.

> We must, as Comenius says, "find the way through which anything worthy of being known can be easily instilled in the mind" (I prefer to say acquired by the mind). Is it possible to find a concise method capable of teaching everyone everything? Comenius, again, says that "the difficulty in learning derives from the fact that things are not taught the students by direct vision but with extremely boring descriptions by means of which it will be very difficult for the images of the things to impress themselves into the intellect; and they stick so feebly to memory that they will easily be forgotten or be interpreted in various ways." The remedy, still according to Comenius, will be to offer all things through direct vision, thus making them present to the sense (the visible things to sight, those tangible to touch, the tastable ones to taste). Indeed, seeing an elephant just once, or at least the image of one, this will more easily stay in the mind than if it were described ten times. It is obvious that sight is the most essential of our senses because first of all we see.
>
> . . . .
>
> But will images (cinema, television) finally be able to represent the concise way we need to teach, effortlessly, everything to everyone?

This set me off on a decade-long research project, and at a Conference at the Rice University Media Center attended by the leading American and Italian scholars on Rossellini, I wrote up that research for a talk dedicated to Dominique de Menil, the distinguished Houston art historian, curator, and patron who shared Rossellini's argument for integrating the humanities with the sciences and technology, and whose own career in publication had begun with an article on film technology, "Les Divers Procédés du Film Parlant," in the *Revue du Cinèma* in 1930. It is that talk which I draw upon here.

Jan Amos Komensky (March 28, 1592 - November 4, 1670) was, like the filmmakers and musicians I have been describing, an exile, the first in Czech history according to Josef Skvorecky passionate essay, "Bohemia of the Soul," in *Daedalus* 119, 1 (Winter, 1990), p. 113, banished by the Catholics on account of his religious belief, and he travelled through various European countries before settling in Naarden, in Holland where he is buried. Among other achievements, Comenius was the first educator to publish picture books for the education of children. *Orbis Picta,* published in Nuremberg in 1658, was the first illustrated school textbook in Europe and the early precursor of the Children's Television Workshop and *Sesame Street.* He was keenly aware of the way a new technology changed both the individual consciousness and society, as is indicated by his enclosed remarks on the printing press from his *Didactica Magna* (*The Great Didactic*), first composed in Czech from 1628-32 and first published in a Latin version in Amsterdam in 1657, and unknown even to Marshall McLuhan, to whom I owed so much in those years. Comenius also held that women should be educated equally with men and, foreseeing the age of computers and informatics, argued that a world-wide college should be established with each discipline presided over by the wisest men in that area of knowledge, and that the results of their research should be continuously distributed on a global basis. In his own mind, Comenius imagined McLuhan's "global village" in the middle of the 17th century.

I could further report on the result of my research here, but suffice it to say that the great modern psychologist of pedagogy, Jean Piaget, edited Comenius's works for UNESCO and wrote in his essay, "The Significance of Jan Amos Comenius at the Present Time":

> As we have seen in running through the stages of his life, Comenius constantly sought, with direct relation to his "pansophic" ideal, to lay the foundations for that co-operation which was at least as close to his heart as his ideal of teaching. He must therefore be regarded as a great forerunner of modern attempts at international collaboration in the field of education, science, and culture. (*John Amos Comenius on Education* [New York: Teachers College Press, 1967], pp. 28-29.)

Americans other than myself, I should hasten to add, had not always been ignorant of Comenius. In 1892, on the occasion of the tricentenary of his birth, Nicholas Murray Butler, the President of the same Columbia University where Frantisek Daniel and Milos Forman would establish their film school eighty-seven years later, wrote *The Place of Comenius in the History of Education* (Syracuse, New York: 1892), and said:

> The place of Comenius in the history of education is one of commanding importance. He introduces and dominates the whole modern movement in the field of elementary and secondary education. His relation to our present teaching is similar to that held by Copernicus and Newton toward modern science and Bacon and Descartes toward modern philosophy (p. 7).

May 1-20, 1979

ROSSELLINI

Presented at the Public Theater by Joseph Papp
in association with the FDM Foundation for the Arts

Loe, here an Exile, who to serve his God,
Hath sharply tasted of proud Pashurs Rod,
Whose learning, Piety, & true worth being knowne
To all the world, makes all the world his owne.

Chapter XXXII
Of The Universal and Perfect Order of Instruction

From *The Great Didactic* of John Amos Comenius, translated into English and edited by M.W. Keatinge, reprinted from the second revised edition of 1910 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), pp. 287-289.

1. We have now spoken at length on the necessity of reforming schools and on the methods by which this reformation can be effected. It will not be amiss if we give a brief summary of our ideals and of the means we have proposed for this realization.
2. Our desire is that the art of teaching be brought to such perfection that there will be as much difference between the old system and the new, as there is between the old method of multiplying books by the pen and the new method introduced by the printing-press; that is to say, the art of printing, though difficult, costly, and complicated, can reproduce books with greater speed, accuracy, and artistic effect, than was formerly possible; and, in the same way, my new method, though its difficulties may be somewhat alarming at first, will produce a greater number of scholars and will give them a better education as well as more pleasure in the process of acquiring it, than did the old lack of method.
3. It is easy to imagine how impracticable the first attempts of the inventor of printing must have appeared, in comparison with the simple use of the pen; but the event showed of what great use the invention was. For, firstly, by means of a printing-machine two youths can now produce more copies of a book than could have been written by two hundred in the same time.

   Secondly, manuscript copies differ in the number and size of their pages, and the individual lines do not correspond to one another; while printed copies are as like to their original as one egg is like to another, and this is a great advantage.

   Thirdly, it is impossible to tell if manuscripts are correct without revising them and comparing them accurately with the original, and this is a laborious and wearisome task. But in the case of printed books the correction of one proof ensures the accuracy of thousands of copies. This would seem incredible to any one unacquainted with printing, but is nevertheless true.

   Fourthly, only firm and stiff paper is suitable to write on, but printing is possible on thin and flimsy paper, or on linen.

   Finally, it is possible for men who are unable to write to be the most excellent printers; since it is not with their fingers that they carry out the operation, but by means of skillfully arranged type that cannot err.
4. Similar results might be obtained if this new and comprehensive method of teaching were properly organized (for as yet the universal method exists only in expectation and not in reality), since (1) a smaller number of masters would be able to teach a greater number of pupils than under the present system. (2) These pupils would be more thoroughly taught; (3) and the process would be refined and pleasant. (4) The system is equally efficacious with stupid and backward boys. (5) Even masters who have no natural aptitude for teaching will be able to use it with advantage; since they will not have to select their own subject-matter and work out their own method, but will only have to take knowledge that has already been suitably arranged, and for the teaching of which suitable appliances have been provided, and to pour it into their pupils. An organist can read any piece of music from his notes, though he might not be able to compose it or to sing or play it from memory; and a school-master, in the same way, should be able to teach anything, if he have before his eyes the subject matter and the method by which it should be taught.
5. Pursuing this analogy to the art of printing, we will show, by a more detailed comparison, the true nature of this new method of ours, since it will thus be made evident that knowledge can be impressed on the mind, in the same way that its concrete form can be printed on paper. In fact, we might adapt the term "typography" and call the new method of teaching "didachography." But this conception we will analyze at length.
6. The art of printing involves certain materials and processes. The materials consist of the paper, the type, the ink, and the press. The processes consist of the preparation of the paper, the setting up and inking of the type, the correction of the proof, and the impression and drying of the copies. All this must be carried out in accordance with certain definite rules, the observance of which will ensure a successful result.
7. In didachography (to retain this term) the same elements are present. Instead of paper, we have pupils whose minds have to be impressed with the symbols of knowledge. Instead of type, we have the class-books and the rest of the apparatus devised to facilitate the operation of teaching. The ink is replaced by the voice of the master, since this it is that conveys information from the books to the minds of the listener; while the press is school discipline, which keeps the pupils up to their work and compels them to learn.

A
REFORMATION
OF
SCHOOLES,
DESIGNED IN
two excellent Treatiſes:

The firſt whereof Summarily ſheweth,
The great neceſſity of a generall *Reformation* of Common Learning.
What grounds of hope there are for ſuch a *Reformation.*
How it may be brought to paſſe.

The ſecond anſwers certaine objections ordinarily made againſt ſuch undertakings, and deſcribes the ſeverall Parts and Titles of Workes which are ſhortly to follow.

Written many yeares agoe in Latine by that Reverend, Godly, Learned, and famous Divine M^r. JOHN AMOS COMENIUS, one of the Seniours of the exiled Church of *Moravia*:

And now upon the requeſt of many tranſlated into Engliſh, and publiſhed by Samuel Hartlib, *for the generall good of this Nation.*

LONDON,
Printed for MICHAEL SPARKE ſenior, at the Blew Bible in Greene Arbor, 1642.

Learning — By Seeing and Hearing
How to Train Children in Good Judgement

From *The School of Infancy* by John Amos Comenius, edited with an introduction by Ernest M. Eller (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1956), pp. 85-87.

The *natural* knowledge of newly born babies is to eat, drink, sleep, digest, and grow. However, they do not think about or understand these things. In the second or third year they first begin to comprehend what *papa* is, what *mama*; what are food and drink; what is that we call water, what fire, what wind, what cold, what heat; what a cow is, what a little dog; and what are the general varieties of different natural things. This knowledge their nurses will instill into them when caressing them in their arms, or carrying about, by saying, "Look! There is a horse, there a bird, there a cat."

Later, they can progress in further knowledge of natural things so as to be able to tell what a stone is, what sand, what clay; what a tree, a branch, a leaf, a blossom; what are the common fruits; and similar things. Also they will learn to call by their correct names the outer members of the body and in some measures to know their uses. To help them learn, their parents or bearers may often show them this or that and ask them to name it, saying for example:

"What is this?" "The ear."

"What do you do with it?" "I hear."

"And this, what is it?" The eye."

"For what use is it?" "That I may see." . . .

The beginning of *Optics* will be to look up at the light, a thing natural to children, for the instant it becomes visible their eyes turn to it. They must however be watched, especially at first, and not allowed to stare at bright light lest the new and tender sight be weakened or put out. Begin by letting them look at moderate light, especially of a green color, and gradually anything that shines.

The optical exercises of the second and third years will be to present to their study colored and pictured objects; to show them the beauty of the heavens, of trees, of flowers, and flowing waters; to bind corals to their hands and neck; and to supply them with beautiful dress, for they delight in looking at these things. Indeed, the sight of the eye and acuteness of the mind are stimulated even by looking in a mirror.

In the following years many things ought to be added to optics. Occasionally children will be taken to an orchard, a field, or a river that they may look upon animals, trees, plants, flowers, running waters, turning windmills, and similar things. Also, pictures of these in books and on the walls please them. So they ought not to be denied; rather, one ought to take pains to provide and point out such things to them.

You can understand my pleasure when, reading Timothy Garton Ash's *The Magic Lantern* (1990), I found Comenius referred to in his frontispiece.

Tvá vláda, lide, se k tob navrátila!

People, your government has returned to you!

Václav Havel, President of Czechoslovakia, in his 1990 New Year's Address. Havel was adapting words from the seventeenth-century Czech scholar Comenius originally quoted by Tomá Garrigue Masaryk in his inaugural address as first President of Czechoslovakia, in 1918.

It put me in memory of the frontispiece in another book, Matthew Spinka's *John Amos Comenius: That Incomparable Moravian* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1943).

> That brave old man, Johannes Amos Commenius, the fame of whose worth hath been trumpetted as far as more than three languages (whereof everyone is indebted unto his *Janua*) could carry it, was indeed agreed withall, by our Mr. Winthrop in his travels through the low countries, to come over into New England and illuminate this Colledge [i.e., Harvard] and country in the quality of a President. But the solicitations of the Swedish Ambassador, diverting him another way, that incomparable Moravian became not an American.—Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (New Haven, 1820), II, iv, 10.

Harvard College was founded in 1636 and opened in 1642. Mr. John Withrop Jr., the son of the Governor of Massachusetts and later himself the Governor of Connecticut, who was in England in 1642 where he met and began a correspondence with Comenius, tried to recruit him to be the first President of what is now Harvard University.

In 1987, I discovered that Roberto Rossellini had planned to make a film on Comenius—see my letter of October 12 to Mr. André Misk.Otákar Vavra, who had made films on natural themes, like the monumental *Hussite Trilogy* (1954-57), based on a novel by Alois Jirásek, had UNESCO support to make *The Peregrinations of Jan Amos Comenius* (1987) about the Czech educator's lifetime of exile, and Stanislav Barabás, himself appropriately in exile, make *Comenius*, which was based on the play by Oskar Kokoschka.

In addition to Rossellini, the other major European artist whose ideas were influenced by Comenius was the Austrian Oskar Kokoschka (1896-1980). The very first book his father game him as a child was Comenius' *Orbis Picta*. When he gave his famous lecture "On the Nature of Visions" in Viennna in 1912, it was shaped by Comenius' philosophy and his 1920 essay, "On the Awareness of Visions," bears the subtitle, "Forward to *Orbis Picta*" Then he tried to persuade the educational administrations of three different countries to use Comenius: first at the Dresden Academy of Art in 1919; then in 1933, he refused the position as Director of the School for Arts and Crafts in Vienna, because his condition, that Comenius' theories be initiated over the entire territory of Austria, was refused; during his stay in Czechoslovakia from 1934-36, hge urged Tomás G. Masaryk to use his power as President to establigh in Prague Comenius' dream of an international school. When he founded his own international "School of Seeing" in Salzburg in 1953, he said that its purpose was not only to offer instruction in painting, but in how to see the world and quoted from the *Orbis Picta*.

While in Prague, he completed a portrait of Masaryk. To the left of the seated Masaryk stands an even larger portrait of Comenius, whose right hand rests on the President's right arm, and in his left hand, like Moses with the Tablets of the Law, he holds a huge chart, which bears the inscription, *J. Amos Komensky — Via Lucis* and shows the organs of the five senses. In *My Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), his autobiography, Kokoschka tells a story which reverberates Sl ava Volny's 1968 radio broadcast:

> During one of our last meetings, Masaryk said to me, in a troubled tone: 'If the Czechoslovakian republic is alloed to reach its twentieth anniversary in reasonable peace, then there is some hope it will survive.' The year was 1936; just eighteen years had passed. In the twentieth year after the founding of the state, German troops marched into the Sudetenland and, a few months later, into Prague. Masaryk himself did not live to see the collapse of his house of cards. His idea of a humanistic state, like the educational ideas of Comenius, was fated to remain Utopian.
>
> Even before the annexation of Austria, which cost me my citizenship, Masaryk had offered me a Czech passport. After his death I took up the offer; you can't exist anywhere today without a rubber stamp on a piece of paper. After I fled to London, this document saved me from being interned (p. 156).

In Prague, Kokoschka had begun a play, *Comenius*, about the life, exile and sufferings of Comenius, with allegorical references to the horrors of Nazi Germany (Oskar Kokoschka, *Schriften 1955*, edited by Hans Maria Wingler [Munich; Langen/Müller, 1958]). In 1972, at the age of 86, he rewrote the earlier play, greatly expanding on a fictional meeting between Comenius and his contemporary Rembrandt, and concentrating on the martyrdom of the humanist, rather than on political allegory. It was published in his *Dichtungen und Dramen* (Hamburg: Chistians, 1973). Neither had been translated into English. According to Henry I. Schvey's *Oskar Kokoschka: The Painter as Playwright* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), Kokoschka made a pen and ink drawing for a production of the *Comenius* fragment in 1942, six sketches for the film version directed by Stanislav Barabas for German television in 1973 and in 1975, an additional six portraits for the larger play.

Kokoschka's portrait of Masaryk has a view of the castle in Prague in the upper right hand corner, and that might serve as a reminder of Comenius' pervasive influence in Central European intellectual life. In his *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp. 233-234, Heinz Politzer convincingly shows how *The Castle* (1926) draws on Comenius's treatise, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* (1623).

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October 12, 1987

Mr. André Misk
Vice President
Director of Communications
Schlumberger Limited
277 Park Avenue 44th Floor
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Misk:

Thank you for your very fast response to my request for information on the role which Schlumberger played in the career of Roberto Rossellini. I am most grateful, both for your thoughtfulness in bringing the correspondence files from Paris and for your making them accessible to me for reading and copying.

Your efforts will make it possible for me to shed considerable light on Rossellini's career--e.g., the evolution of a film on hunger into twelve episodes on man's survival--*La Lotta Dell Uomo Per La Sua Sopravvivenza*; the information on the incorporation of Horizons 2000 in Houston, Texas in 1966; and not least for me, a record of the efforts of Jean de Menil, who has a permanent place in my affections.

My first effort, for the tribute to Rossellini in Houston on October 22-25, will be to relate these corporate records to Rossellini's last essay, "Reflection and Deliberations on Scientific Data to Attempt to Devise an Accessible Form of Education" (1976), with which I provided you a copy; the other sources for that talk will be the published works of John Amos Comenius, the seventeenth century Moravian educator who was once offered the Presidency of Harvard University in 1642, six years after its founding, and the fifteen hours of audiotape interviews which my friend and colleague, the filmmaker James Blue, did with Rossellini during his residencies at Rice University. A Rauschenberg-like combine of materials!

. . . .

Believe me, there is a great deal of useful material in this file of papers. You can imagine how delighted I was to find that, as early as October 19, 1966 ("Le cinéma sera. . ., p.3) Rossellini was thinking of making a film on Comenius. That seems to be recorded nowhere else. You will also find among the papers an essay called "La Contestation," written April 25, 1969. No one mentions it in any of the books and essays on Rossellini. What it is, in fact, is the beginning of a script about the student revolution in your country in 1968. Since I came back to Buffalo, I located a taped interview (February 2, 1970) in which Rossellini discusses it with James Blue in Houston. Blue did not leave me a copy of that script, but he did provide me with a copy of Rossellini's script, never made, on the Industrial Revolution; I enclose a copy for you since its two Appendices give a marvelous and detailed chronology of "Inventions and Discoveries in Physics, Mathematics, Anatomy, Chemistry, Electricity and Their Application to Industry, Between 1800 and 1940."

. . . .

I shall contact you again some time in early November.

Very best wishes,

Gerald

Gerald O'Grady
Director

P.S. I wrote this on Columbus Day, and I remembered my attached essay, "Napoleon, Columbus, Magellan," which I thought you might enjoy. It refers to Gance and Lumière and Charles deGaulle, as well as Hollis Frampton, and is about filmmakers in the Rossellini tradition--serious serial works of international and educational import.

***Comenius in Rembrandt's Studio*, 1942, pen and ink drawing.**

***Portrait of Thomas G. Masaryk*, 1936, oil on canvas.**

Given these contexts of Comenius and McLuhan, it was not without interest to me that Ash's account of events in Prague in November, 1989 in *The Magic Lantern* began with his being interviewed by a video-camera team for the samizdat *Videojournál* (p. 78), and that, later, he reported: "Both externally and internally, the crucial medium was television. In Europe, at the end of the twentieth century all revolutions are telerevolutions" (p. 94). In his interview with Philip Roth, "A Conversation in Prague" (*New York Review of Books,* April 12, 1990), the writer Ivan Klíma referred to a memorandum in which a task force had outlined a position on television, which he had signed as President of the Czech PEN club:

> Television, owing to its widespread influence, is directly able to contribute to the greatest extent towards a moral revival. This of course presupposes . . . setting up a new structure, and not only in an organizational sense, but in the sense of the moral and creative responsibility of the institutions as a whole and every single one of its staff, especially its leading members. The times we are living through offer our television a unique chance to try for something that does not exist elsewhere in the world . . .

It seems clear that, like almost all his other critics, Czechoslovakia's Ján Smok, one of Woody Vasulka's former teachers, had badly misread the work of Marshall McLuhan in his essay, "Marshall McLuhan: teorie se lování a televize" (Theory of Communication and Television) in the June, 1969 *Film a Doba.* He focussed on only the technical aspects of McLuhan's book, discussed three separate technologies-- the photochemical, the thermoplastic, and the electromagnetic--and wrote that McLuhan's theories were without social import, not realizing that *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* was itself a magic lantern of sorts. After seven introductory chapters, a magic number, McLuhan divided that book into 26 chapters, metaphorically indicating that more complex media were replacing the letters of the print world's alphabet. McLuhan extended the word media beyond print, radio, and television to include clothes, roads, automobiles, money, and, most importantly, games. In fact, Chapter 24, "X" marking the spot, is Games and it is itself subtitled, "Extensions of Man." There, McLuhan argued that games are extensions of social man and the body politic, just as all technologies are extensions of our physical bodies. He saw games as dramatic models of our psychological lives, as collective and popular art forms with strict conventions, and as rituals and myths which both represented and revealed the patterns of our culture. "Like our vernacular tongues, all games are media of interpersonal communication, and they could have neither existence nor meaning except as extensions of our inner lives" (*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* [New York: McGraw Hill, 1964], p. 210).

To cite but one example, that of televising games themselves, while 80 million Americans watch the Superbowl and major college football bowl games, and pursue the fates and fortunes of their teams with an intellectual and emotional intensity unequalled in almost any other phase of their lives (the same applies to soccer, e.g., in other countries), we do not yet possess forms of analysis and models of interpretation which allow us to begin to understand what is happening when these teams represent the two great corporate bodies of our culture, the city and the university, and are sponsored by a third, corporate business, and amplified by a fourth, the corporate networks: that what is here being presented is a new and profoundly involving drama of communal and corporate interdependence that, from the beginning of time, has developed parallel to our narratives and dramas about individual heroes and heroines. One night in the Houston Astrodome would prove the point. Its architect told me that he designed it on the model of "the jazzy interaction of the pinball machine."

When the students at Tienamann Square, armed with fax machines and cellular phones build a paper maché Statue of Liberty. and the students of Prague, armed with "cyclostyled or computer-printed flysheets" (*The Magic Lantern,* p. 84) and chanting "Live transmission!" in Wenceslas Square (p. 91), sing the Czech version of "We Shall Overcome" (p. 80), we are no longer dealing simply with "Václav Havel, who was at once director, playwright, stage manager, and leading actor in this, his greatest play" (p. 79), but with corporate international mythologies which seize upon, as it happens in these cases, two primary symbols (one visual, one aural) of American cultural identity and launch an appeal for a global solidarity that implodes and shatters local politics with a power that calls for an entirely new kind of analysis by the political historian. In mid-July, 1989, an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* advised the Chinese government:

> China's leadership might want to look at their situation from the perspective of a group many times larger than that massed in Tiananmen Square, which is to say all the world's people who've been watching on television and reading long accounts these days in their newspapers. It is likely that the Chinese people have never in their history received from the world as much admiration and good feeling as was directed the past week at those faces in Tiananmen Square. These images and stories have created an extraordinary reservoir of good will toward China.

There now needs to be a deeper analysis of what Timothy Garton Ash so brilliantly describes.

Ash is currently a Fellow at St. Antony's College, Oxford which I myself attended as a Marshall Scholar from 1958-1961. I was then a member of a college of 70 people from 50 different countries, almost all of whom were studying history and politics. While the three years were packed with novel experiences, the most memorable event took place on the night of my arrival in the fall of 1958, just 10 years before the screening of *Oratorio for Prague* in Houston. About ten o'clock, the late Max Hayward crossed the hall and gave me a welcoming present: "Here is a book which I just translated in your country." He had just returned from Harvard, and he gave me the galley-proofs of Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, its pages connected like a long medieval scroll. I read it continuously for the next two days and nights. Its hero, Doctor "Life," was a medical doctor specializing in gynecology and perception, later a farmer bringing forth life from the soil, and a poet, the guardian of spiritual life; and, in the course of the novel, he married and generated children with women from Russia's three different social classes. What made the book entirely extraordinary was that verses and stanzas of Doctor Zhivago's poems appeared throughout this fictional novel, marking his responses and recording his

memories of the people and events of that time of the Russian revolution. The full volume of these poems, called *Zhivago's Poems*, about fifty pages, was published at the conclusion of the novel, but these poems were also published under the name of their author, Boris Pasternak, and are obviously his poems, as well as the Doctor's, merging the personae of the artist and the hero in a new and profound way. By then, the character, Doctor Zhivago, has died, and, in the last paragraphs of the novel, his friends are remembering him by reading his book of poems, and we join them in remembering Pasternak. In the penultimate poem of the collection, they write:

> Life rafts down a river, like a convoy of barges,
> The centuries will float to me out of the darkness.

It was almost thirty years later, in 1987, that I read Arthur Miller's autobiography, *Timebends*, and his two short plays, *Danger: Memory!*, and wrote him a letter which I quote in part.

October 15, 1987

Mr. Arthur Miller
Tophet Road
Roxbury, Connecticut 06783

Dear Arthur,

. . . .

Danger: Memory!, not to mention your own autobiography, seems to chart the fluid interior structure of mental life which you established in *Death of a Salesman* [its original title was *Inside His Head* — G.O'G.] and *After the Fall*, and I have a sense that this comes from your being one of the first playwrights in history who served his apprenticeship writing for radio, for the ear rather than the eye, and I remember your telling Olga Carlisle and Rose Styron that "You were playing in a dark closet, in fact," while on numerous occasions you have compared the similarity of radio to motion picture editing!

. . . .

As I write, I have Inge's photograph of Pasternak's grave over my desk; the title of his novel, *Doctor Zhivago* remembered his first book of poems, *My Sister Life*, published in 1917, and he called his own life story *I Remember: Sketch for an Autobiography* — and Nabokov called his, *Speak Memory: an Autobiography Revisited.* I recently came across the writings of L.S. Vygotsky, who separates natural memory from social memory and makes clear the function of memory in culture.

> The use of notched sticks and knots, the beginnings of writing and simple memory aids all demonstrate that even at early stages of historical development humans went beyond the limits of their psychological functions given them by nature and proceeded to a new culturally-elaborated organization of behavior. Comparative analysis shows that such activity is absent in even the highest species of animals . . . The very essence of human memory consists in the fact that human beings actively remember with the help of signs . . . It has been remarked that the very essence of civilization consists of purposely building monuments so as not to forget. In both the knot and the monument we have manifestations of the most fundamental and characteristic feature distinguishing human from animal memory. [*Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 39, 51 — G.O'G.]

. . . .

Miller had always been very knowledgeable about and involved in Central and East European affairs, especially when President of P.E.N. Both his grandfathers were born in the Polish hamlet of Radomizl. He had published a book of reportage, *In Russia*, with photographs of his wife, Inge Morath.

In my studies at St. Anthony's College, which was my first experience with professional historians, my main observation was that history was seldom contextualized. I had a glimmering of what Clifford Geertz would later call "thick structures." Even so fine a book as Geoffrey Barraclough's *An Introduction to Contemporary History* did not pay attention to the way events were being newly perceived by minds transformed by the disappearance of God, the massage of many technologies, and the cultural commentary provided by the traditional arts, the news media, and popular culture. To simply comment on the last, events were reconstituted in an age of newspaper previews, reviews and interviews, and how millions of people thought such events were being transacted was as much of a fact, and an important one, as the fact of the event itself. Film, not to mention television, was not an accepted academic discipline at Oxford College, and I must admit that I myself, raised on Saturday afternoon horse operas involving singing cowboys, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and Hopalong Cassidy, and their horses, Champion, Trigger, and Topper had never attended another movie during my undergraduate and graduate education.

It was my fellow students from Eastern Europe, Zgislav Najder from Poland, Georgi Gomori from Hungary, Kristov Cviic from Yugoslavia, and Jan Darvos of Czechoslovakia, who first drew my attention to the cultural importance of film, that, coupled with the extraordinary development of international cinema during that period when Bergman, Antonioni, Fellini, Resnais, and Godard began to make their first classics. Even as we discussed and debated the cultural implications of these films far into the night and went back to see them a second and third--and fourth--time, I was entirely unaware that my own cultural habits were being shattered and reconstituted. By 1973, a decade later, when I addressed the Director and Heads of Departments at the Museum of Modern Art in New York to open their doors to television and host the first international study conference on television as an art form, called "Open Circuits: The Future of Television," I was able to describe what had happened.

> My own life has undergone a transformation. I was trained as a medievalist, and I have now dropped the "evil" part and spend most of my time, my aevum, in media. I was then engaged in a long study of patristic thought from the year 1 A.D. to 1500, centering on the concept of penance or individual psychological reformation which the Greek fathers expressed by the word *metanoia,* literally "to change one's mind," and I was attempting to relate the impact of that kind of personal religious force to social and institutional reformation as encoded by the transformation of the late medieval imagination in those works of art known as dream vision allegories—Dante's *Divina Commedia,* Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose,* and the great English social epic, *The Visions of Will Concerning Piers the Plowman,* which represents the journey of a soul through a confrontation with each of the aspects of its own mind—Memory, Conscience, Intellect, and Will—against the background of the black plague, the burnings, and assassinations of the period, and the complete loss of faith in contemporary institutions and leadership, an age much like our own, except that the Peasant's Revolt, then localized, is now globalized. Our vision is not that swords will be beaten into plowshares (*Isaiah* 2.4) but into television antennas, as we move from fields of wheat to fields of electricity, from an agriculture to an undreamt information society.
>
> I am here this afternoon because those same trio of forces—the personal, the social, their imaginative fusion in art and technology—engage me in the new dream allegories, the tele-visions which you have seen this afternoon. Válery wrote, "The deeper education consists in unlearning one's first education." (Gerald O'Grady, "Sound-Track for a Tele-Vision," in Douglas Davis & Alison Simmons, eds. *The New Television: A Public/Private Art* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977], p. 229)

St. Antony's College, unplanned by everyone and understood by no one at the time, had provided an environment that began to allow media to penetrate history. Jerome Kuehl, who had, like myself, come to Oxford from the University of Wisconsin, where McLuhan, incidentally, began his teaching career, and was then studying Dilthey, became chief writer and researcher for Thames Television's *The World at War.* A British student, Paul Smith, became a teacher at King's College London and edited *The Historian and Film* in 1976, showing that film, in its manifold forms, from the newsreel to the feature, was a major source of evidence and of interpretation for contemporary history. A few years later, Pierre Sorlin, a Professor at the University of Paris, became a Visiting Lecturer at St. Antony's College and wrote *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (1980) arguing that films were a legitimate source of documentary evidence and a living archive for the social historian. Earlier yet, in 1971, seven years after I left, Anthony Smith, later the Director of the British Film Institute, wrote *The Shadow in the Cave,* a history of broadcasting policy, while a Fellow at St. Anthony's and has since gone on to produce *Goodbye Gutenberg: The Newspaper Revolution of the 1980's* (1980) and *The Geopolitics of Information, Television and Political Life* (1979), as well as *Social Change, Social Theory, and Historical Processes* (1982). He is now Master of Magdalen College, Oxford. My own journey was part of a larger transformation of an obsolete educational system.

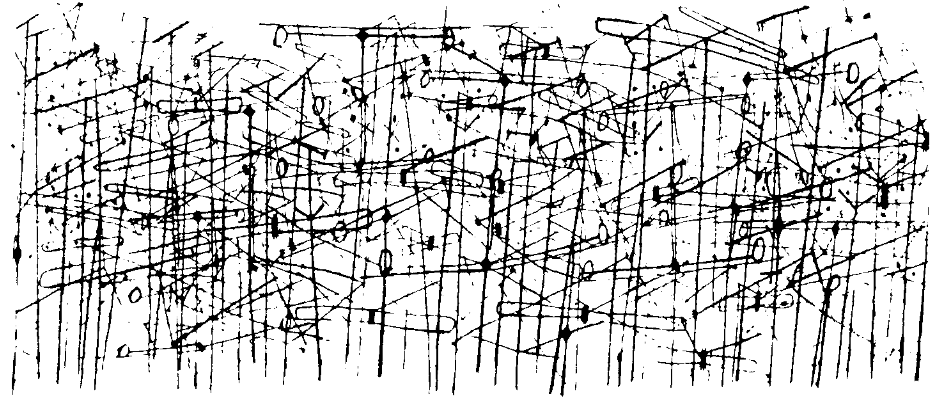
My own interest in film centered on the "history" of the individual, that is, on autobiography. As is clear from the reflexive stance or, more properly, flow, of this essay, my subject had become the interactive process of how the "I" was mediated to the "me" through all the codes of consciousness, all those elements of the man-made environment which McLuhan had begun to elaborate. In an interview which James Blue did on his Ford Foundation Grant in 1965, Cesare Zavattini, a collaborator on Rossellini's films, told him:

> In neorealism, however, there were already the first movements required in order that the film use not only people of the streets as actors, but eliminate the concept of actors altogether. The first phase was to take the man in the street and make him an actor, but the second phase was to take the man in the street not as an actor but as himself. That was in a way the mission of Cinéma Vérité. . . . It seemed to me — and I wrote about it several years ago — that the natural result of this principle would be the autobiography . . . We must have the courage to aim the machine — the Arriflex, the microphone — at ourselves and then at others (James Blue, "Interview with Cesare Zavattini," *Media Study/Buffalo* [May, 1979], pp. 10-11).

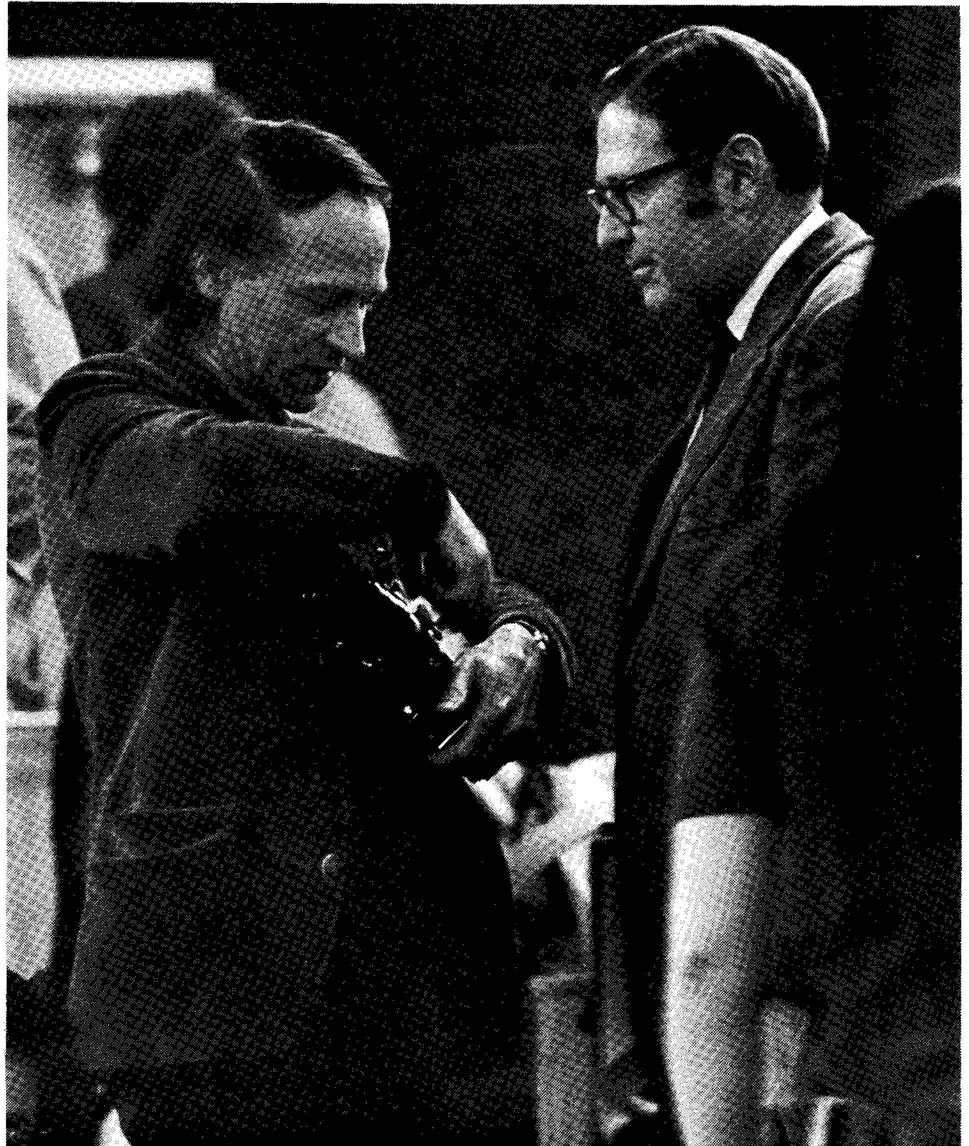
This may explain why James Blue recorded more than twenty-four hours of interviews with Rossellini over his lifetime. It was interesting to observe how Rossellini's neo-realism, still what I called third-person cinema (fiction) had gradually shaded into second-person cinema, biography, and then, in time, into first-person cinema autobiography. Jonas Mekas carried a camera with him everywhere, and I once described the first "volume" of his autobiographical film, now almost twenty hours long, in this way:

> The only adequate description of Mekas's three-hour-long *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches* is stained-glass fireworks; there are thousands of colored shards against a Fourth-of July sky — which the sheer

From *The Vision of Will Concerning Piers the Plowman,* Manuscript R. 3.14, Library of Trinity College, 14th century.



Ben Shahn, Television Antennas — a detail from *Caliban* (1953)



Jonas Mekas and Gerald O'Grady at conference on autobiography, 1973. Photograph by Robert Haller.

energy of ongoing movement magically restructures into a mosaic in mid-air. In his notes on *Diaries*, Mekas explained that while a written diary is composed in retrospect, in moments of recall at the end of the day, his camera diary was composed of instantaneous reactions to the realities before the camera: It has to register my state of feeling and all the memories as I react" (Gerald O' Grady, "Our Space in Our Time: the New American Cinema" in Donald E. Staples, ed., *The American Cinema* [Washington, D.C., 1974], p. 237).

In *Diaries*, there often appeared footage of New York's Central Park, covered with snow, and Mekas once told me that, unintentionally and unconsciously, he filmed these winter scenes because they reminded him of his childhood in Lithuania. He was documenting his own mind. On March 22-25, 1973, I convened the first meeting on that problem ever held in the history of film called "The Buffalo Conference on Autobiography in the New American Cinema," and showed the films of more than twenty artists.

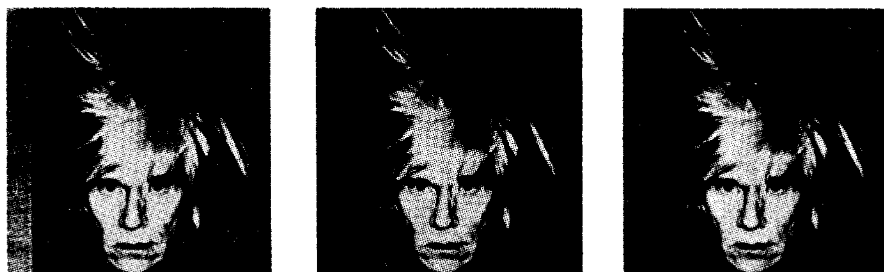
It should not be thought that transformation has been either limited to or the result of film, video, and computer explorations. Rather, it was manifested in all of McLuhan's media or coded extensions of human consciousness. In 1932, Pablo Picasso painted his *A Girl Before a Mirror,* and the American art historian Clement Greenburg later wrote:

Picasso and other moderns have discovered for art the internality of the body. . . Thus, the body is represented outside and within, and in the mirror is still another image of the body. I think that this is a wonderful, magic, poetic

Pablo Picasso,
***Girl Before a Mirror* (1932)**

idea, to show the human body which is ordinarily represented in one way— in its familiar surface form—as belonging to three different modes of experience within one picture. I don't know of another picture in all history that does that....

Jackson Pollock, *The Magic Mirror* (1941) — oil, granular filler and glass fragment on canvas.

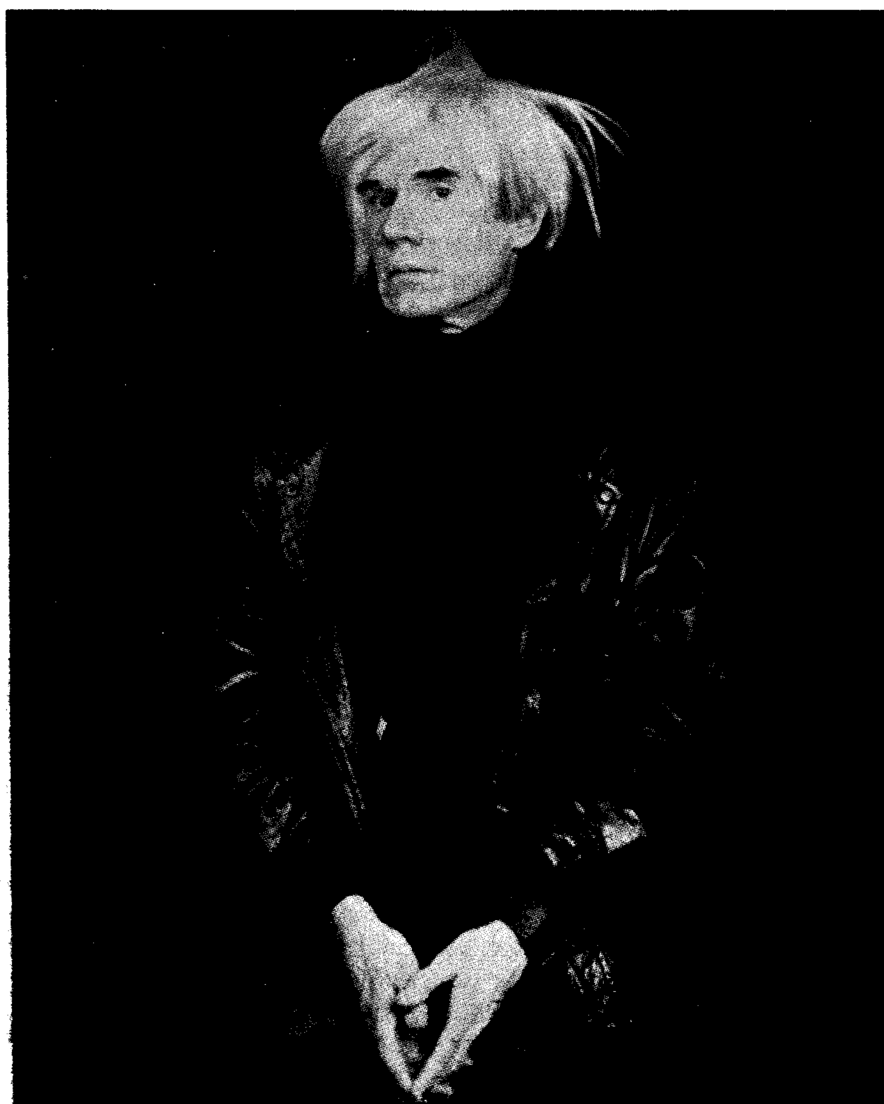


Andy Warhol, from *Six Self-Portraits* (1986). Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas.

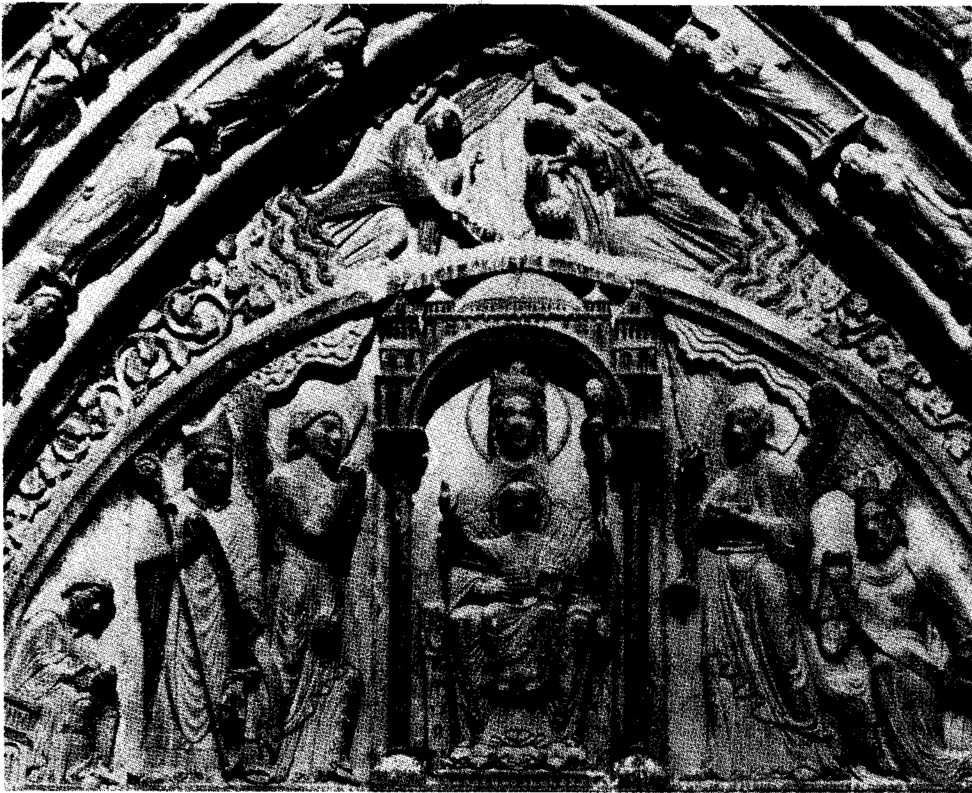
In his essay, "The *Magic Mirror* by Jackson Pollock" (*The Menil Collection: A Selection from the Paleolithic to the Modern Era* [New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1987], Walter Hopps establishes the likelihood that Pollock knew this work before painting *The Magic Mirror* in 1941. *Girl Before a Mirror* was one of the most accessible and celebrated works of recent European modernism to be seen in New York at the end of the 1930's, and it is probably served as a stimulant rather than as a model for Pollock's work.

While his title suggests the presence of a figure before the mirror, his canvas superimposes three layers of crusty paint and fine gravel, and merges elements of three separate compositions, a result not pre-planned but worked out, on the fly, from streams of images developed in the process of painting, giving a freer expression, than any previous painter in history, to the atavistic and archetypal elements of his unconscious, a painting which still conceals as much as it richly reveals. One layer, at the top upper left of the composition, shows a radically abstracted head with a feathered headdress, prominently outlined in strokes of black, yellow, purple, and red, a surface somewhat like *Bird* (ca. 1938-41) and also prefiguring the imagery of a later painting, *the Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle* (ca. 1943); at the time, Pollock's images were full of correspondence with American Northwest Coast and Southwest Indian art. At the upper right-hand corner of the composition, there is an enclosed rectangular form, and the nature of its framing suggests that it may be a mirror which is revealing a complicated, ambiguous reflection. Hopps thinks that Pollock's psychic identification with his work introduced new degrees of both subjectivism and indeterminism into the process and says that, "...with him, gesture in painting came to signify a language of expressive graphology unique to the artist" (p. 218), and "If the entire canvas of *The Magic Mirror* may be likened to the surface of a mirror, by analogy its composition might be seen as a self-portrait of the artist, where the likeness is reflected as a subjective, psychic transformation" (p. 261). In relation to this, even Picasso's stunning morphological permutations reveal themselves to be highly-structured depictions. In Pollock, unlike Picasso, there is no clear separation between male and female identities, and *The Magic Mirror* is not so much a considered depiction of one individual subject from multiple perspectives as it is an expressive merging of many fluid identities which are changing in the moment of making.

One wonders whether Andy Warhol, when he came to do his own self-portraits in 1968, was aware of Pollock's painting. He used a basic iconographic image, but articulated it in a variety of media—*Self Portrait II* (gelatin silver photographic prints stitched with thread) and *Camouflage Self-Portraits* and *Six Self-Portraits* (silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas), the last being one of his repetitive serial images, each a different color—blue, green, yellow, light red, an image rendered with more photographic realism when he posed for Robert Mapplethorpe (also 1986). The image of the Indian simultaneously served several myths: that of the wild man, the free man; that of harmony with nature and birds; that of origins or primitive settler; and that of a future in which there would be a unity of all races, of all men. I have already touched on my meetings with two Czech "Reds" in a New York tepee and mentioned Dovrák's incorporation of the Indian into his symphony,

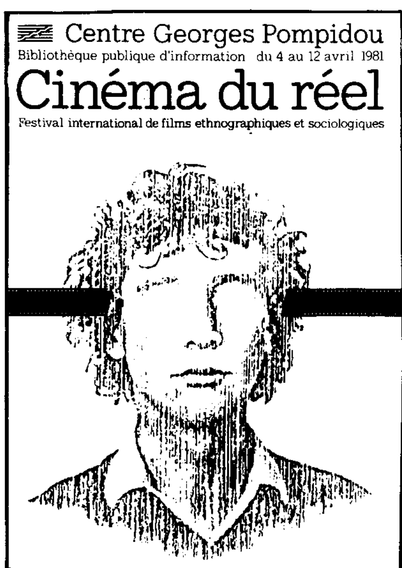


Andy Warhol, photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe (1986)



The Virgin in Majesty and The Founders of Notre Dame, Portal of Saint Anne, Cathedral of Notre Dame (c. 1165)

From the New World, and can also report that another Comenius' basic books, the *Janus linguarum reserato* (1631) was used, at his urging, to teach Indians in the American colonies. It was a new kind of textbook for teaching grammar and included, together with conjugations and declensions, a miniature compendium of useful knowledge. In 1655, he wrote to his then patron, Andrew Klobusicky, a Magyar nobleman: "We hope about Whitsuntide to receive a full account of the progress of our class in America." The whole story is told in Robert Fitzgibbon Young's *Comenius in England: The Visit of Jan Amos Komensky (Comenius) The Czech Philosopher and Educationalist to London in 1641-42; Its Bearing on the Origins of the Royal Society, on the Development of the Encyclopedia, and on the Plans for the Higher Education of the Indians of New England and Virginia* (Oxford University Press, 1932). I cite these Czech interests here because it was Woody Vasulka who led me myself to discover the Indians in my own country and to engage me in all those myths I mentioned above.



On April 4-12, 1981, I had travelled to Paris for the first time to speak at a retrospective of the films of James Blue which I had organized for the Cinéma du Réel International Festival of Ethnographic and Sociological Films at the *Centre Georges Pompidou,*which was honoring him along with Nagisi Oshima and Jean Rouch. While the Pompidou was its own laterna magica, I took the opportunity to spend every morning at the Cathedral of Notre Dame. I had spent thirty years of my life reading about the coming of the Gothic and the Biblical iconography in the stained glass windows and sculptural elements, and now, in the spring sun of Paris, it fulfilled all of the qualities of that laterna magica for which I had long hoped. Back in Buffalo a few days later, I travelled to New Mexico to visit the Vasulkas, and went on location with them as they finished *The West* (1981), which has since been purchased by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The location was Chako Canyon, completely unknown to me and never mentioned in any of the textbooks on American history which I had read during all levels of my education. Here, in my own country, two centuries before Notre Dame had been constructed, the Anasazi, the Navaho word for "old one," had erected buildings on the sides of mountains with religious meeting places (kivas) designed to allow the maximum entry of the sunlight, having perfect acoustics, a natural *laterna magica.* The Vasulkas placed their own magic mirror at the center of a kiva and set it rotating on its arms, and caught the reflections of images from all directions, later to be displayed as a multi-monitor environmental installation, which also included material from the VLA or Very Large Array, a field of radio telescopes which themselves rotate slowly to scan the sky, listening to the Moon. For me, the experience of these low, plain, simple houses and these enormous constructions of technology in a barren landscape was a religious one. Here were two technologies, centuries apart, whose principle of beauty was determined by use alone.

American reporters have been interested in Václav Havel's religious experience, as the enclosed item from the *The New York Times* of June 8, 1990 indicates. He had written profoundly about this experience in a letter to his wife on August 8, 1980: Ever since childhood, I have felt that I would not be myself—a human being—if I did not live in a permanent and manifold tension with this 'horizon' of mine, the source of meaning and hope—and ever since my youth, I've never been certain that this is an 'experience of God' or not." As his paragraph continues, it becomes clear that his "God" whom he describes as this"intimate universal partner of mine" is a kind of varying and multiple self-reflection, the mirror of his own soul, "...sometimes my conscience, sometimes my hope, sometimes my freedom, and sometimes the mastery of the world..." (*Letters to Olga,* p. 101). In a later letter (March 14, 1981), he movingly meditates about "the disappearance of God":

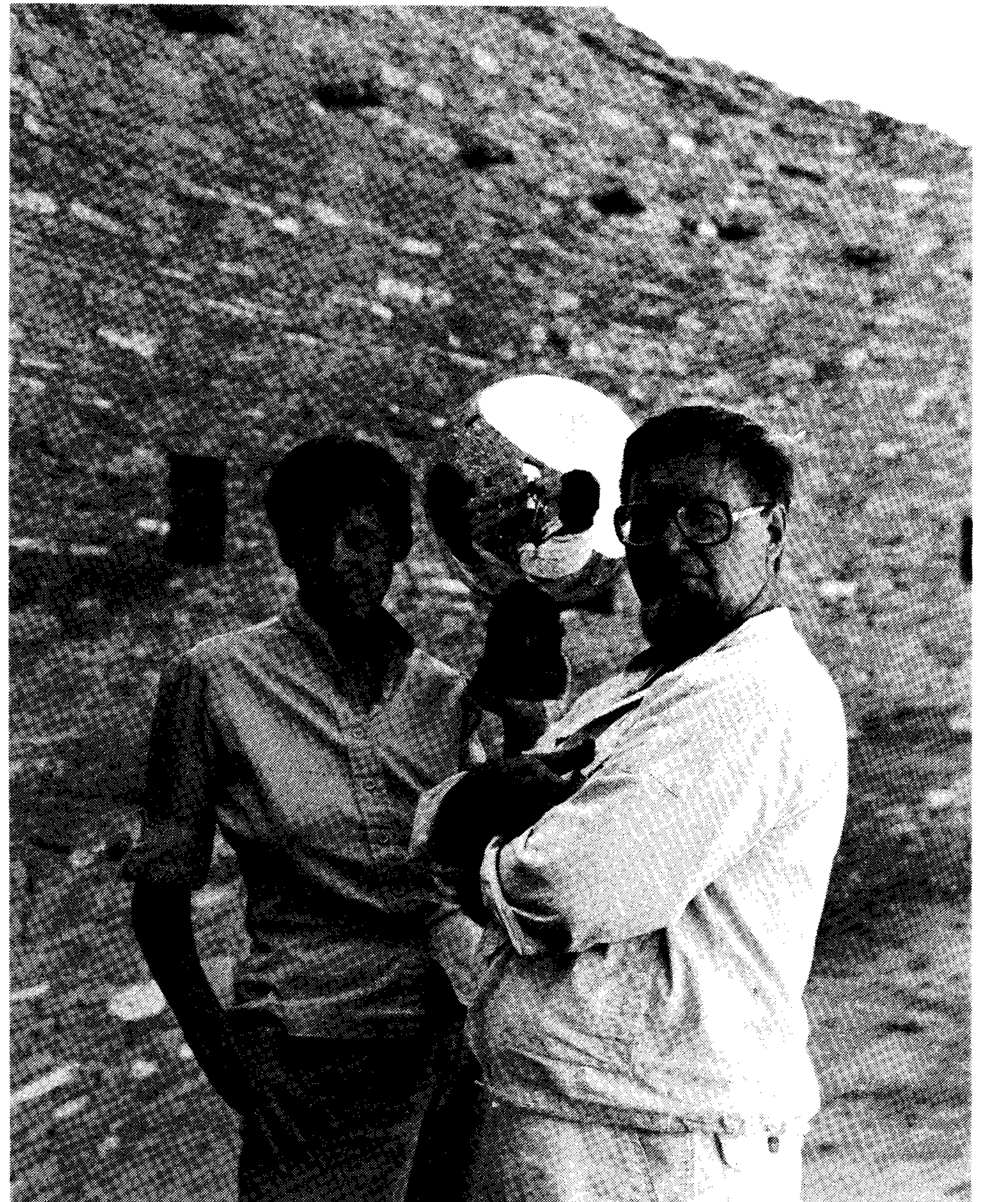
> Much has been written about the hopeless, desolate atmosphere of Sundays in large cities, and there are many evocative cabaret songs about it. Essentially, it is what sociologists call the problem of leisure time; modern man has lost touch with the original, mythical significance and substance of festive occasions, and all that remains is emptiness. Perhaps my Sunday depression in prison is merely an extreme form or a distorted echo of a common problem of civilization called Sunday. I personally see this mood as one of the typical fissures through which nothingness, that modern face of the devil, seeps into people's lives.

"Nothing," said Samuel Beckett, one of the playwrights whom Havel admires, "is more real than nothing," and John and Dominique de Menil, who were truly committed to the religious impulse of the spirit in all of its manifestations, he deliberately confronted that modern mood. At the time of our screening of the *Oratorio for Prague* in 1968, the building of the Rothko Chapel was in the fourth of the seven years which it took to be completed. In 1964, they had commissioned the American abstract painter Mark Rothko to make a series of works for permanent installation in a magnificent chapel which would not be built to his specifications. David Snell would later report in *The Smithsonian* 2, 5 (August 1971) that "it marked the first time in perhaps 400 years that a religious commission of this scope to a major artist had brought about such a degree of concurrence between art and architecture" (p. 49). The person who persuaded them to collect art, Marie-Alain Couturier, describes his own early efforts to introduce contemporary art into religious edifices, notably Henri Matisse' *Stations of the Cross* at the chapel in Vence, in his diary/autobiography, *La verité blessée* (Paris: Plon, 1984). Rothko's 14 huge dark monochromatic canvases were installed in an octagonal structure inspired by the floor of an 11th century baptistry on the island of Torcello; in the Middle Ages, the number 8 stood for "the eighth day of the week, the resurrection, rebirth and apocalypse."

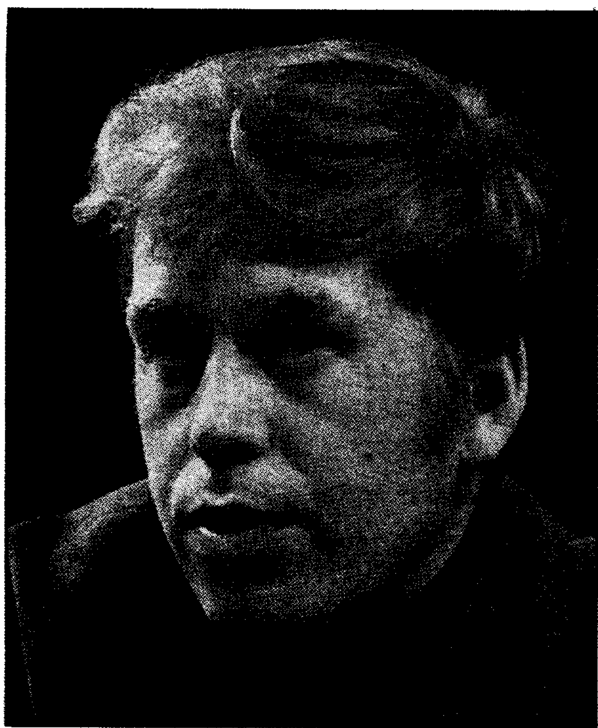
Rothko completely broke with the traditional iconographical and representational concepts of the Divinity, and early critics found his brooding abstractions, drained of form, it seemed, and subdued in pigmentation, to be gloomy, and the chapel a place of "black, unbearable nothingness," but Dominique de Menil responded:

> I know that some people are distressed because they find them dark and they are the people who always associated darkness with something malignant. These are paintings of silence, and you know it's difficult for people to accept silence if they don't like to be confronted with themselves. It is better perhaps to look at the paintings as the obscurity of God, the silence of God. I myself feel no anguish here at all, nor anything disturbing, distressing, or sad.

Rothko, wanting his paintings to be seen under the same kind of illumination he had made them in his studio, insisted that they be naturally lit by means of a skylight. Here, then, was the ultimate *laterna obscura* of modern art, truly reflecting the cultural history of the terrible 20th century. It was the zenith of the reductive sublime. On the



Steina and Woody Vasulka at Chako Canyon (1982). On Steina's camera is mounted the "Magic Mirror."



Václav Havel

THE NEW YORK TIMES

INTERNATIONAL *MONDAY, JUNE 8, 1990*

Beliefs | Peter Steinfels

Vaclav Havel's quest for 'the focus of all meaning,' a journey that has its own meaning.

Not long after his cause emerged victorious in Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel went to the Manhattan residence of John Cardinal O'Connor to receive an award from the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, a group concerned with religious freedom. While Mr. Havel met there privately with a number of New York's religious leaders, reporters milled about outside, trying to scrape together whatever they knew about Mr. Havel's religious beliefs.

Václav Havel. Drawing by Adolf Hoffmeister.

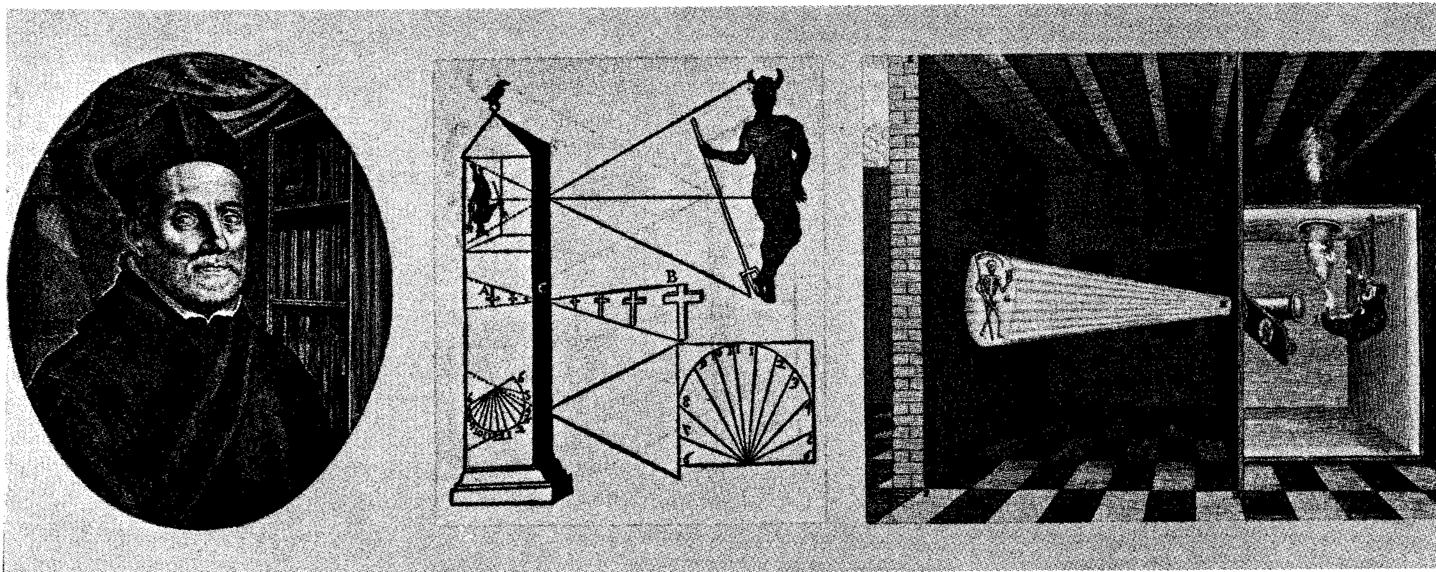
one hand, the paintings clearly established their own powerful ontological presence, perhaps best described by Harris Rosenstein:

> Before monochromatic painting can function outside itself, as it does in the greater scheme of the chapel, it must hold its shape—i.e., work in itself—by stimulating and conducting eye movement up, down, and across the surface, so that the painting is not merely seen but continuously and vividly experienced. (*The Menil Collection,* p. 314).

On the other hand, the chapel which was open to all religious faiths and to non-believers and served as a sanctuary, a place for the presentation of classical and modern music, and a meeting place for scholarly colloquies directed to the spiritual and social concerns of mankind, was a black, magic box which encouraged each entrant to continuously confront, experience, and transform his or her own image, conscious and unconscious, and to move in and out of those atavistic and apocalyptic forces that spiritually unify all humans, including the dead and the unborn.

There had been still one more film made in that summer of 1968, in August in fact, and it presented still another variation on that search for a larger and fuller truth that I have been trying to document. Norman Mailer had conceived the heart of his movie, *Maidstone*, in the days right after the assassination of Robert Kennedy, in that year when he thought that the country would blow apart its Democratic and Republican presidential political conventions. The film would feature a famous film director, one of fifty men whom America, in her bewilderment and profound desolation, would be thinking about as a possible President, and there would also be a group of secret police debating that director's assassination And here he added a new twist: the secret police thinking of his assassination would be empowered to film their plots without his knowledge. Just as the director was in his own film as an actor, so several actors in the film also served as directors as the story, various scenes shot simultaneously on three estates over a five day period, veered off in a dozen unexpected directions; these actor-directors were able to call on five camera/sound teams trained in shooting rock concerts. The cameras teams were sometimes interchangeable and they too were to be involved in that quest for a truer sense of what life is like, and since their lenses were the final mirrors for the recording of the activity, they themselves would be obliged to anticipate the actions of the non-actors. As Mailer noted, "...they were ready to be surprised. It stimulated that coordination between hand, eye, and camera balance which was the dynamic of their art, and

The Rothko Chapel (1971)



Two illustrations, a demonstration of the properties of the lens and the projection of a slide, from Athanasius Kircher, *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* (1646), and a portrait of Kircher engraved in 1678.

surprises gave style to the rhythm and angle by which they would move in or zoom away" (Norman Mailer, "A Course in Film-Making, *New American Review* 12 [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971], p. 224). This gestural interactivity of D.A. Pennebaker and others put one in mind of Pollock.

The psyches of the persons in front of the cameras were equally fluid and multiple. Mailer had praised Warhol's talent for perceiving that in every home movie, there were moments of palpable *being*, but he also recognized the limitations of traditional *cinéma vérité* in which people played themselves in real situations and were therefore the opposite of actors. For him, instead of offering a well-structured lie which had the feel of dramatic truth, as in Hollywood fiction, they often gave off a sense of themselves which was a species of fact but come out flat and wooden like a lie. "It was as if there was a law," he said, "that a person could not be himself in front of a camera unless he pretended to be someone other than himself" (pp. 222). The editing was equally improvisational. When the director of the film (Norman Mailer) came to edit the footage of his non-actors playing roles, himself included in the role of Norman T. Kingsley, the film director with presidential potential and assassination possibility, he was again approaching the filmic material with the openness of life, since he had not seen much of the material which the other actors had conceived in their capacities as directors. He described the editing in this way: "...with improvisation and free cutting, the story was not obliged to be present as the walls and foundations of a movie, but rather became a house afloat on some curious stream, a melody perhaps on which many an improvisation was winging" (p. 231). Unlike Warhol, he engaged in extensive editing: "One can put anything next to anything in film — there is a correlative in some psychic state of memory, in the dream, the déjà-vu, or the death mask, in some blink of the eye or jump of the nerve" (p. 228). *Maidstone* had been made as an imaginary event and a real event, and so was both a fiction and a documentary, and it became impossible to locate either. It had the flavor of R.D. Laing (ear, here, err).

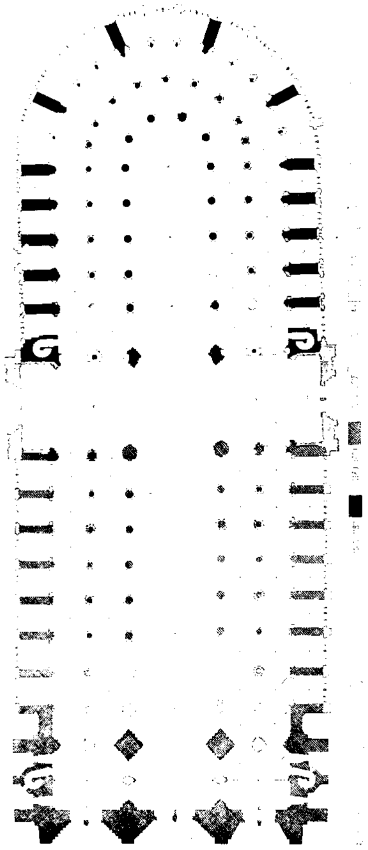
This was not unusual because Mailer was already combining fiction with history in his novels, like *The American Dream,* in the first sentence of which, the main character, Stephen Rojack, a thinly-disguised version of Mailer, reports: "I met Jack Kennedy in November, 1946" (Norman Mailer, *The American Dream*, [New York: Dell, 1964], p.9). He had also written a book of distinguished reportage, *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel — The Novel as History* (New York: New American Library, 1968), an account of The March on the Pentagon in which he treated himself as an engaged participant in the third person, and then, in another book of reportage for which he came to Houston to describe the launching of Apollo to the moon, he gave his own responses in the mythic character of Aquarius. One thought of Ultra Violet. In the fifth chapter of his book, *Of a Fire on the Moon,* called "A Dream of the Future's Face," he records his own reaction to the moon shot by means of Aquarius' long meditation on the relationship of science to religion, of technology to eschatology, and of the past to the future, and then, unable to sleep, he gets up and roams the house of his hosts, reporting his insomniac imaginings that he will be set adrift in a society that may feature "transplanted hearts monitored like spaceships— the patients might be obliged to live in a compound reminiscent of a Mission Control Center where technicians could monitor on consoles the beatings of a thousand transplanted hearts" (Norman Mailer, *Of a Fire on the Moon* [Boston: Little, Brown, 1969], p. 142), a fantasy not entirely unlike Jan Němec's. The home in which he reports these dreams took place is identified earlier in the chapter as that of John and Dominique de Menil, and it should also be stated, as a matter of record, that John de Menil had appeared in *Maidstone*. (Mailer would later play Stanford White, the real-life architect of the original Madison Square Garden, in Miloš Forman's film version of E.L. Doctorow's fact-and-fiction novel, *Ragtime*.)

Houston, then, at that time, was a community engaged in heart transplantation, moon transportation, and was planning to house that site for the deeper transformation of the self, The Rothko Chapel. The Rothko Chapel opened in 1971, over three hundred years after Athanasius Kirchner, Comenius' contemporary who also lived in Holland, had first formulated in his book, *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* (1657), the principles of projection on which the magic lanterns were based. Also three hundred years later, a Swedish director would appropriate that machine as the title for a biography which began with his first possession of one as a child: "Then I loaded the film.... Then I turned the handle... I can't find words to express my excitement.... I can see the trembling rectangle on the wall" (Ingmar Bergman, *The Magic Lantern*, translated by Joan Tate [New York: Viking, 1988], p. 16).

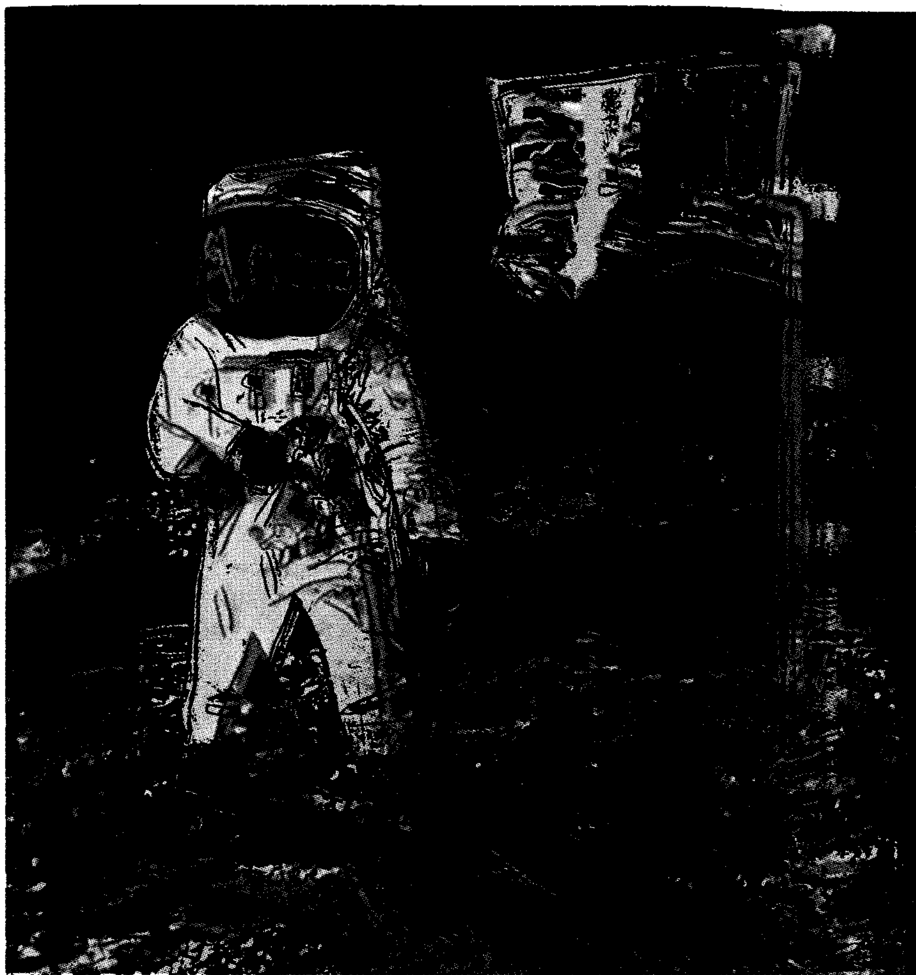
Since Comenius, "the writing on the wall" in all its meanings, and I would not exclude the title of Antonín Liehm's anthology of contemporary Czech literature (1983) as well as its more traditional significations, has come to mean the trembling rectangle on the screen or on our television tubes or on the walls of museums and chapels—as Comenius predicted and propagandized for, this "writing" has become increasingly pictorial, and it is also reinforced and enhanced by the synchronized and separate channels and frequencies of electronic sound, and by the high-speed and condensed transmission of alphabetic text and numerical data. While Timothy Garton Ash's *The Magic Lantern* describes an actual theater in downtown Prague in November, 1989, it also serves as a metaphor for that explosion of human identity and implosion of global solidarity which, according to Roberto Rossellini, building on Comenius, is our human hope. Unknown to me at that time, there was some "writing on the wall" in that November week in Houston in 1968 when the paths of Rossellini, Warhol, Jan Němec, and Scott Bartlett mysteriously crossed in my series called "the Film Revolution."

Comenius: Frontispiece to *Didactica Omnia*, by Crispin de Pas

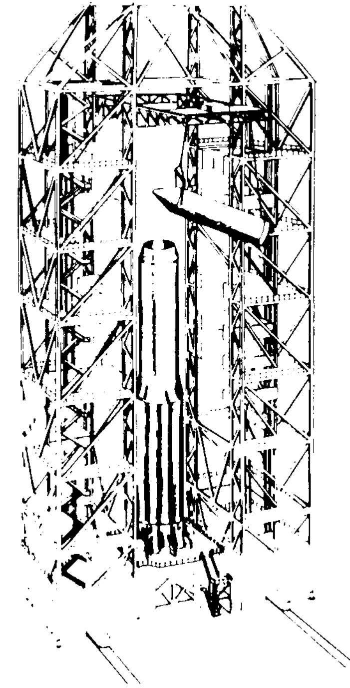
Roberto Rossellini



Plan of Notre-Dame in Alan Temko, *Notre-Dame of Paris* (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), p. 116.



Andy Warhol, *Moonwalk* — History of a TV Series (1987). Serigraph on paper.



Erecting the upper stages of a booster, in Charles D. Benson and William Barnaby Faherty, *Moonport: A History of Apollo Launch Facilities and Operations* (Washington, D.C.: National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 1978), p. 55.

Scott Bartlett's *A Trip to the Moon*, that then young American's tribute to one of the magicians who founded French film, Georges Mélies, perhaps signified our mutual aspiration. The very last image that Andy Warhol made before his death was *Moonwalk* (History of TV Series) (1987). When he had reviewed the television coverage of the first moon landing in his *Village Voice* column in August, 1969, Jonas Mekas mentioned that it was filmed in Warhol-style cinéma vérité, and he added:

> I should say here, in one brief sentence, what I think about the trip to the moon, since I keep hearing and reading all kinds of smart cracks about it. This is what I believe: Our trips into space are frozen spirit. The deeper man descends into himself spiritually, the farther he will fly materially, because both are the same, and the farther distance is proportional to the closest (deepest) inner distance. So that the only way to stop our space explorations is to begin to retrogress spiritually, and that's the easiest thing to do.

As time moved on, in my own mind's magic mirror, I imagined that the womb of the floor plan for the cathedral of "our lady" waited to give birth to that child, Apollo, which, in its awe-filled trajectory of the world, a "bird," as these projectiles and satellites are known, might provide a new perspective to all of humankind on the fluid mergings of science, technology, religion, art, and play, all extensions of the laterna magica of our individual consciousnesses, whose transformations create human history. This is simply my own way of remembering Ortega y Gasset's opening sentence of his essay, *On Point of View in the Arts*: "When history is what it should be, it is an elaboration of cinema . . . The true historical reality is not the datum, the fact, the thing, but the evolution formed when these materials melt and fluidify" (*The Dehumanization of Art* [Princeton University Press], 1968, p. 107).

I humbly dedicate this *orbis picta* to the memory of John de Menil, who not only supported the work of Rossellini and Warhol, but my own maiden voyage into the media galaxy. Miles Glaser, a Czech emigrant, a survivor of the concentration camps who had lost his family in them, as I would learn later, was unknown to us when he telephoned that day in November, 1968 and unwittingly became my co-programmer for "The Film Revolution." At the opening of *The Menil Collection* in Houston in 1987, I met his former wife, Zuzana Justman who, with Dan Weissman, had begun a documentary on the concentration camp for children at Terezín, based on interviews with survivors, the pre-war photographs, writings, drawings and artifacts from Terezín, and on footage from the film, *Hitler Gives the Jews a City*. *Terezín Diary* was completed in 1989, has already been shown at several international film festivals, and will be presented at Karlovy Vary in July, on the same program with *The Banned and the Beautiful*, there called *Elective Affinities*. One of the academic advisors on the film was Martin Gilbert, who had been a student with me at St. Antony's College. I had quoted him in a recent review of *Shoah* which, because of its length, I had had to see on a Sunday morning in Buffalo. I sent the review to Zuzana Justman. I had written:

> Each of us constructs a mental life by binding together our memories, what might be called a bio-religion. The word "religion" is related to "ligature" and literally means "to tie back," to connect, to splice, if you will. . . . When I went home, my memory merged with that of the woman in Wallace Stevens' *Sunday Morning*, which Yvor Winters called the greatest American poem of the twentieth century. It is a meditation on the annihilation of traditional religion, and the inconsolable encounter with death which each of us faces. It presents a world in which "the holy rush of ancient sacrifice" is dissipated and the tomb in Palestine has become a grave, nothing more. It concludes:
>
> And, in the isolation of the sky,
> At evening, casual flocks of
> pigeons make
> Ambiguous undulations as they
> sink,
> Downward to darkness, on
> extended wings.
>
> (*The Reporter*, University at Buffalo, 18, 4, September 25, 1986, p. 11).

These birds, "sinking downward to darkness" convey Wallace Stevens' analogue to The Rothko Chapel and Václav Havel's "common problem of civilization called Sunday." Arthur Miller, more than any other American playwright, had spent his career remembering dark places — the grave of Willy Loman, a man who had lost out to technology, in *Death of a Salesman*, and the concentration camps in his screenplay for Fania Fenelon's memoirs, *Playing for Time*, and in his own plays, *Incident at Vichy* and *After the Fall*. The working title for the last, during its decade of gestation, was *The Survivor.*

Today, Miles Glaser is The Chief Financial Officer of The Menil Foundation.

> "The first installment is about 'what is a man'. We say that a man became a man when he started to remember and have ceremonies for the dead."
>
> Roberto Rossellini to reporter Jeff Millar on the occasion of the screening of *Man's Survival* (*La Lotta dell'uomo per la sua soppravvivenza*, 1967) — *The Houston Chronicle*, November 21, 1968.

Jean and Dominique de Menil with Roberto Rossellini at The Media Center, Rice University.

John deMenil celebrates the opening of the Rothko Chapel (1971)

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Compiled by Gerald O'Grady

[A more extensive and detailed bibliography, beyond the space limitations of this tabloid, should be consulted in Peter Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave* (University of California Press. 1985 - G.O'G.]

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