

Blow Up

Blow Up

Blow Up

A Review by David F. Dawes

Blow Up is Antonioni's first English language film, and his second color film (his first, *The Red Desert*, was shown last October by the UNB Film Society). Antonioni has said, "there's some landscape, some place where I want to shoot, and out of that develops the theme of my films". This idea is clearly shown in his films: *The Red Desert* concerns a woman on the verge of a breakdown, living in an ultra-modern, dehumanized environment. *Blow Up* is about a jaded, swinging photographer in jaded, swinging London. In *Desert*, the woman tells her problems to a complete stranger, in a broken soliloquy. Then she returns to her routine, either in resignation or with new hope — Antonioni does not say. In *Blow Up*, he is a bit more definite. The unfeeling photographer is placed in a situation which confuses him, challenges his empty existence. He does not find a solution to his dilemma, but he begins to feel, to find some meaning in life.

The story: the photographer (named Thomas — a potent reference to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*), tooling around in his Rolls convertible passes a group of revelers in whiteface. He throws them some money and drives on to his studio. He talks with his agent, and then has a frantic, almost erotic photographing session with a vapid model (played by *Vogue's* Verushka). The first forty minutes or so seem pointless to the viewer — interesting, but meaningless. This reaction is intended, for Antonioni is establishing the empty, swinging routine of the photographer (whose philosophy, according to *Mad*, in a recent parody, is "Life is like a can of tuna fish — sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not so good.")

The photographer is compiling a book of rather sordid scenes, and wants to conclude it with something comparatively happy and tranquil. This in mind, he takes his camera and goes out. Wandering in a park, he sees a young woman and an older man, walking hand in hand. He follows, snapping photos quickly. The woman sees him, comes over, and demands the roll of film. He refuses.

He returns to the studio. Two sexy little teeny-boppers come in, wanting to model for him. He chuckles them out. The woman (named Jean, another reference to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*) finds his studio, comes and offers her body in exchange for the film (a roll for a roll). He gives her a fake roll of film. When she leaves, his curiosity is aroused. He develops her film, examines the prints, sees nothing remarkable, and puts them aside.

But he returns to them. He enlarges them, examines them minutely. He is almost obsessed, he must find out what she wanted to hide. His casual voyeurism has become a quest for truth.

What he finds is not explicitly shown, but only implied, for the enlarged prints are extremely ambiguous. The camera has apparently recorded something that he did not see, a murder about to be committed, the murder of the woman's companion. This discovery confused the photographer. Things he had probably never thought about occur to him: should he call the police? does he care about the man? about life? Thus, in a almost off-hand, inadvertent manner, Antonioni introduces something completely alien into the photographer's spiritually void world: feeling.

The two teeny-boppers return, and he avoids

thinking about these things by stripping the girls and wrestling with them.

Later, he goes back to the park. He is considering the possibility that he has misinterpreted innocuous photos, that no crime has been committed. But here, in the deserted park, is conclusive evidence: The corpse of the man.

Upset, the photographer returns to the studio, and finds that someone has broken in and stolen the incriminating photos. He is relieved of his responsibility, no one can prove that he knows of the crime. But he has been affected by it, and makes a half-hearted attempt to tell someone of it, his agent's mistress, his friend. But they are both preoccupied, part of the London scene, and he cannot communicate with them. Unable to explain his problem to anyone, he returns to the park. The corpse is gone, and he stands alone, mystified. Was it all his imagination?

The whitefaced revelers again enter the scene and begin playing tennis in a nearby court, with an imaginary ball. The photographer watches them, bewildered. The ball bounces out of the court. He hesitates, picks it up, throws it back, the game continues.

This eerie (and, perhaps, somewhat contrived) climax illustrates the theme of the film: there are things in life which are seldom perceived. The photographer's puzzlement serves to emphasize the inability of man, with all his technology, to discover the hidden meaning of life. In this film, one man sees the unseen for one moment, and doesn't know what to think. But the important thing is that he sees it. He has begun to feel.

David Hemmings is superb as the photographer. Vanessa Redgrave, as the young woman, is also very good (her role is comparatively brief, the ads billed her disproportionately, above Hemmings.) But the real star is director Antonioni who, with Tonino Guerra, also wrote the script. It is wholly his film; he has marvelous control; he knows exactly what he wants to say, and how to say it. He shapes everything to his ends, actors, and even landscapes (he occasionally has grass and trees hand-painted to suit him).

Blow Up is a profound and disturbing experience. I left it feeling a kind of disappointment, a depression. The reason for this is that the film offers no solution, has no next, nor obvious ending; the viewer, like the photographer, is bewildered, left suspended, with no explanation. Antonioni intended this reaction; instead of a conventional, competent suspense film (such as Hitchcock would have made), he created a complex and puzzling parable about truth and illusion, values spiritual vacuum, the bleak passion of modern man for essentially meaningless things, lack of perception, and many other things. He is saying: "This is what my camera discovered. This is what life is like. LOOK".

Many people will detest this film; they will be dissatisfied with its "indecisiveness", they will demand answers. This is the great thing about the film, it gives no answers. It is not merely a murder mystery, it is a riddle that each viewer must solve for himself. It forces one to think.

I doubt that this plot summary will spoil the film for anyone, it is unique; it must be seen to be fully appreciated. I only hope this review will prompt people to go to it.

UNB Hosts International Debate

The UNB Parliamentary Debating Tournament will be held February 2 and 3 in conjunction with the annual Winter Carnival. International in flavor, it will feature teams from the Maritime universities, universities of Central Canada and from the United States.

Through all those invited have yet to confirm their appearance, one of the teams to be here is Princeton University. Others invited include the University of Toronto, McGill, Queen's and Osgoode Hall, Toronto.

The topic for debate is: "Resolve that uni-

versity students should be considered capable of sharing in the administration of universities.

The debate will be held in Carleton Hall, with the final championship debate in McConnell Hall on Saturday afternoon, February 3.

The tournament, sponsored by the Student Representative Council and the administration of UNB, will be hosted by the UNB Debating Society.

There is also to be a guest speaker, whose name will be announced later.

JELLYBEANS

by Tom Murphy

THE LAW AND THE COMPUTER

The ancient symbol of justice is a well bodied blindfolded female who in one hand bears a set of scales and in the other, a sword. Though the blindfold is meant to be symbolic of impartiality, it could be more appropriately used to represent the blindness with which the law is meeting the contemporary society.

THE JURY SYSTEM

Consider the jury system. At one time this system was probably the fairest that could be devised. It was based on the assumption that twelve men could intelligently and carefully deliberate over all the facts, and unanimously come to a decision. If they could not reach a decision, they would declare themselves a "hung jury", (a unique pun, I always thought). But such is not the case. Sociologists for tens of years have studied the small group. They have said that manipulation by one or two people helps control the group. They have said that there are group pressures exerted upon those individuals who do not conform to the group norms. If one or two individuals in a twelve man jury vote opposite to the others, further deliberation will be aimed at converting the two rather than examining all the facts again. The decision of the jury is not a result of the weighing of the facts, but of numerous individual and group pressures. And yet the jury persists.

THE PENALTY SYSTEM

Almost as absurd as the jury system is the method of distributing punishments to the guilty. There seems to be a non-defined foundation upon which all penalties rest. For example, on what basis is a man who steals thirty-five dollars from a small grocery store given a three month jail sentence? Why three months? Why not three years or three decades? Why not three weeks of three days? Why jail him at all? It is so arbitrary. Was there ever a scientific study which demonstrated that a man of a certain character who stole thirty-five dollars from a grocery store will benefit from three months in jail? Or is it designed just to "protect society" for an arbitrary period of time?

It is so obvious that the penalty has no direct correlation with the crime. And thus the penalty in most cases will not help the criminal to "see the light". The assumptions of the penalty system are these: (1) that crimes can be placed in order of their "criminal substance" (i.e. murder is worse than robbery), and (2) that penalties can be proportioned according to this order. Again the question arises: on what grounds can law makers constitute this order?...so arbitrary; so unscientific!

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY

When a judge instructs his jury, he asks them to find the defendant guilty or not guilty. This is the most intolerable gimmick in the entire system of law. It commits the fallacy known in logic as "black and white thinking". The instructions should be phrased, "guilty or not guilty, if guilty, by how much?" Surely if one can have degrees of crime, one can also have degrees of guilt. It should be the degree of guilt that is the determinant in selecting a "penalty".

THE SOLUTION

The few fallacies of law outlined above seem to focus on one common error — the law is not scientific. The solution, then, in extremely general terms seems to be one of "scientizing" the law.

The computer would play a key role. A person tried for any given crime would be programmed according to the offence, his physical characteristics, his personality, and the thousands of other variables involved with both the individual and the crime. All witnesses to the crime would be programmed similarly. Then the computer could be asked to give a verdict. If guilty, to what degree? It would also recommend the form of "treatment" that stands the best chance of rehabilitating the offender.

Of course this would not prove flawless, but on the other hand, it eliminates the drama of the courtroom where emotional witnesses and manipulative lawyers decide the fact of another human being. The environment is hardly conducive to rationality. The computer's only bias is that of the program — and computers are not very emotional. Fritz Wittles, a disciple of Freud said some forty years ago, "The daily practice of our present penal law has become a matter of routine so that we fail to observe how irrational it actually is." That statement still holds true.

Law is necessary for cooperative survival. But just as the tractor has replaced the horse in agriculture; just as the lightbulb has replaced the lantern in the home; so must the computer replace the judge, jury, and melodrama of the courtroom.

Damn it, Vote!