

planner; a bothersome "input" into a depersonalized "system" that has a *raison d'être* far removed from the child or resident.

The game is to manipulate the "input" until it serves the "system" rather than *vice versa*, to see in the case of education how closely children can be made to react in the predictable fashion of inanimate objects motivated by mechanical and technological forces. In his report, Scott proposes that each teacher not only "utilize the Sequential Inventory of Reading Skills and Specific Objectives for Pupils' Performance in Mathematics" but also "develop individual profiles of children charting progress in skill in reading and mathematics and diagnose each child's learning needs in reading and mathematics and project goals for each child." To accomplish this latter task, Scott desires a "projection of scores by date and teaching goals." In other words, not only is the students' present status objectively definable but his future is objectively predictable, as well. By thy test scores, ye shall know them. The philosophy implicit in this is, as they say in the commune, heavy. It is not surprising, perhaps, that Anita Allen proposes to use the same simplistic evaluation on Scott himself and constantly presses the superintendent to project his own score by date and goals. The only difference is that if Scott fails to meet the goal by the specified date he won't be retained for intensive specialized instruction. "The name of the game," chirps Ed Hancock, "is accountability." And Mrs. Allen, Hancock and friends come from a time when kids were taught to count. What's sauce for the students is sauce for the superintendent.

There is, if one ignores his report and listens to Scott in person, considerable reason to feel that the new school chief will produce some healthy improvements in the system. In the flesh, he mixes the language of educational technology with that of human beings: "The teacher's task is to deliver a system with compassion." And he rationalizes that "if I didn't use 25¢ words you'd think I was a 10¢ superintendent." His report is, in part, a carefully constructed attempt to undercut Anita Allen's campaign to get rid of him and he can be forgiven at least some of the ambiguity and obeisance to educational faddism on the grounds of good politics. By an overrun of obfuscation, Scott has brought his stated objectives close to those of Mrs. Allen and her beloved Dr. Clark while still retaining a good deal of his ability to do what he damn well pleases.

In person and in action, Scott comes off better than he does on paper, and certainly justifies the current pleas to "give Scott a chance."

For example, the new teacher curriculum guides for junior high school that were quickly produced under Scott are far more reassuring than his own report. (On the other hand, the same office also produced a curriculum guide that amount to 71 pages of propaganda for Metro, indicating how easily educational innovation can be distorted for the political purposes of the state). There are signs that the provision of supplies for schools is improving and that teacher-instigated experiments will be more favorably received than in the past. The proposal to decentralize administration has merit, although one wonders why something designed to improve the efficiency of the schools should cost so much more money. And the moves towards an ungraded school system are encouraging.

Still, giving Scott a chance and providing him with some protection from the vultures flying in a holding pattern about two feet above his head ever since he arrived in Washington should not obscure the fact that the real job is to give the kids a chance. Given the choice between Allen and Clark or Scott, Scott deserves all the help he can get. But somewhere in the back of our minds should lurk the consciousness that there are other choices in education and that we better start making them.

A school system that hides behind the euphemism of "staff development" is not about to face up to the fact that it is dying, in part, because of crummy teachers. A school system that clings to parochial and absurd teacher accreditation requirements is not about to attract the new good teachers required. A school system that protects principals who go bawling to congressmen when the community becomes aware of their incompetence and tries to do something about it is not about to markedly improve its administration. A school system that insists upon line responsibility for minor decisions is not

about to clear away the superfluous administrative superstructure it has built over the years.

At the heart of learning is a student, a new experience and a guide to that experience. The students are there. It is the school system's job to provide the experience, through books, films, field-trips, classes or what-have-you; and to provide the guides to those experiences: teachers, in the broadest sense of the word, including professionals, non-professional adults from the community and the students themselves. The system must also provide the supplies and the facilities that make the experience work. Beyond that, the school system quickly becomes a bureaucratic burden, an encumbrance on learning rather than its aid. Scott doesn't propose to end that encumbrance, by permitting teachers the freedom granted other professionals such as doctors and lawyers, but merely plans and reforms to make the burdens of the chain of command less onerous. The teacher remains the second lieutenant in a system that still draws its inspiration from military headquarters and management suites.

The teachers, the voice from the Presidential Building warns, are not prepared for such freedom. Of course not. Trained as drones, many act as drones. Some could change. Others are merely waiting the opportunity to be themselves. And the rest? Well the rest have been and would continue to curse the school system. It would be harder, however, for them to hide than in the anonymity of the present system. It would be worth the cost to provide them with an early retirement.

With such a change, the Presidential Building would become a disaster area. Hundreds of superfluous functionaries would be thrown out of work. It would not be without the bitterest struggle that the administration of the system would give up its presently conceived role of taking line responsibility, as one School Board member put it, for what happens in each school on Friday afternoon. It would be hell, but it

would be worth it. The students and their teachers would recapture the schools and the administrators and consultants could -- like Lockheed, the Penn Central and other anachronisms -- seek loan guarantees from the federal government.

But that's all a dream. Back here on earth --blessed with pragmatic trade-offs, objective criteria and diagnostic techniques -- we're setting new goals for 146,000 school children based on achievable projections of expectations. That means every classroom a model classroom. It means instructional supports and non-instructional supports. It means a Flying Squad to do the repairs and Red Line supplies. It means a Hot Line and Holiday Skill Kits. It means Prescriptive Learning Packets and 200 student decoders. It means Peer Administrators Consulting in Education -- that's P-A-C-E, folks! It means Mobe Teams and Functional Learning Centers. It means norm-reference tests and criterion-reference tests. It means Assessment Teams and Quarterly Regional Profiles. It means mini-courses and a check list with space to note whether the checkee "assumes responsibility for a feedback mechanism to disseminate information from central office."

All this and more is coming to your school system to prove that in this post-Sputnik age we can still teach reading, writing and arithmetic.

Oh yes, and one thing more. We're going to teach Standard English. No more of that ghetto slang that says what it means, kids. We're going to teach the value of the abstract over the specific, the obscure over the clear, the contorted over the concise, hedging over forthrightness. If you want to know what it sounds like, read Dr. Scott's report.

It's not a bad idea for adults to read it too. But be careful, though. It might lead you to the conclusion that some of them dudes igging the JAMs messin' over their minds down to school might really be on the case.

## FILMS | JOEL E. SIEGEL Stolen from life

THREE naturalistic films, fictional but with deep roots in the documentary tradition, have recently opened in town. Although I prefer the more stylized cinema of Ophuls, Bresson and Godard, not to mention Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, that intoxicatingly unreal dream-movie revived on television last week, documentary-oriented filmmakers have produced some of the screen's greatest achievements. The decline of the studio system has virtually put an end to the lavish, artificial worlds of filmmakers like Welles and Minnelli and most of the best recent work in movies, films like *Loving and Ice* and *Raven's End*, has come from documentary-based directors. Young filmmakers with enough sensitivity and ambition to offset their lack of financial support are turning to the city streets and to the countryside in search of fresh visual and dramatic material. The result is a new, behavioral style of filmmaking which is rapidly becoming the prevailing mode of American cinema. These three films suggest some of the strengths and pitfalls of the new naturalism.

Don Shebib's *Goin' Down The Road*, at the Outer Circle 2, is an extraordinary achievement in neo-realistic filmmaking. Shebib, a Canadian with a Master's in film from UCLA, made the film, a full-length color feature, for \$82,000 working in 16mm which was subsequently blown-up for theatrical projection without much sacrifice in quality. (In fact, the slightly grainy texture enhances the film's effectiveness, the roughness emphasizing our feeling that it had been snatched away from life.) *Goin' Down The Road* is about two quite ordinary young men from Nova Scotia who go to Toronto to fulfill their media-based dreams of wealth and pleasure. The actors are so well directed that you will probably spend most of the film fighting against your awareness that they are performing for a camera. Doug McGrath is Peter, the more sensitive and ambitious of the two--a lumpy-faced, coarser Jon Voight. Paul Bradley is the open, simpler Joey, a darker, goonishly handsome Huntz Hall. Bradley's performance, particularly in the wedding-party speech in

which he reveals that his bride is pregnant and confesses his love for her, is persuasive to a degree uncommon in movies.

Shebib and cinematographer Richard Leiterman could not be more accurate in their observation of Peter and Joey's world. Shebib understands and has sympathy for the innocence of people who rent luxury apartments quite beyond their means, fill them with pasteboard furniture ordered from ads in T.V. Guide and offer Kraft Dinner to guests. One detail struck very close to home. Last year I bought an atrocity--a plastic scale with a clock face festooned with plastic fruits--in a Los Angeles store called Pic'N'Sav; it was, quite simply, the most tragically failed attempt at beauty I had ever seen. That same hideous, pathetic scale hangs in the doorway of a depressing rented room in the film, a desperation try at sweetening squalor. Only once, to my mind, does anything in the film ring false. Peter visits a record shop where he sees an ethereal girl listening to a Satie recording; the girl spurns his advances but he buys the record. This symbolic Yearning for Higher Things doesn't quite suit Peter's character or background. It seems, instead, to be something that Shebib has applied onto Peter from his own set of values.

*Goin' Down The Road* is consistently affecting and wonderfully sympathetic but rather weak at the center; its reliance upon the chestnut about the rural innocents destroyed by the heartlessness of the city and finally driven to a life of outcast criminality might well have come straight from the pen of Dreiser, and I don't intend that as praise. Shebib's indictment of the city as heartless capitalism in action might be better served by something more innovative than William Fruet's screenplay. (The dialogue, however, is unusually good.) Still, I rather hate voicing this objection because Shebib and his company have given us so much, such a deeply felt, wholly uncondescending portrait of the waste of some ordinary but nonetheless precious

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## Films cont'd

lives. *Goin' Down The Road* is filled with the kind of desolate poetry that *Five Easy Pieces* aimed at and missed so completely. It is a sensitive, honorable film and I recommend it to you.

Ken Loach, whose first film was the affectedly deterministic, pseudo-Godardian and quite dreadful *Poor Cow*, has redeemed himself with *Kes*, a very worthy second effort. You probably didn't go to see it at the MacArthur because you were afraid it would turn out to be something bloatedly Disneyish about a boy and his pet. To be honest, I had to force myself a bit, but I'm awfully glad that I did.

*Kes* is an open, refreshingly uncomplicated social film which owes quite a lot to Truffaut's *The Four Hundred Blows*. A young boy, toughened by the cruelty of his home life and the dullness of his Yorkshire village, begins to connect with life when he finds and trains a kestrel hawk. David Bradley, Loach's discovery, is absolutely perfect as the boy, scrawny, proud yet vulnerable, no better than he should be; it is, I think, a very great performance. Like Shebib, Loach reveals a deeply detailed understanding of human behavior. There is a gym class, run by a going-to-fat athlete, which takes the whole audience back to junior high. There's a pop singer doing lightly risqué songs for the ladies in a neighborhood bar which captures just the right feeling of genial bawdry. There is an interview with a government employment agent which, although it comes straight from Truffaut, is scrupulously staged and acted. Best of all, and surprisingly so since I had rather dreaded them, are the sequences in which the boy trains his hawk. It will be difficult to forget the intimacy of those moments in which the unhappy spirit of a wild boy is partly tamed by his taming of a wild thing.

If *Goin' Down The Road* is somewhat blemished by the familiarity of its material, *Kes* several times is compromised by Loach's resorting to melodrama. The episodes with Freddie Fletcher as Jud, the impossibly bestial brother, are rather crudely contrived, presumably to prepare us for the film's too pat, bitter ending--Jud's killing of the bird. Jud, straight from Victorian melodrama, has no real place in Loach's undramatic, episodic film. Otherwise I have no criticism. *Kes*, made on a larger budget than the Shebib film, is very good to look at; Chris Menges' photography, dull blues and greens mostly, is oddly lyrical in its juxtaposition of mines and factories against the Yorkshire countryside. Some viewers have complained that the Yorkshire accents make the film too difficult to watch. I disagree. Admittedly, one may miss a few of the lines but our language becomes wonderfully fresh again when set to different rhythms and intonations. It is to Loach's credit that he does not betray the specificity of his characters by normalizing their speech.

Barbara Loden's *Wanda*, recently at the A. F. I. and due for theatrical release soon, is the dead-end of realism, a movie which I admire in several respects but which I wouldn't see again if my life depended upon it. *Wanda*, surely the ugliest of women's names, is a stupid, sluttish creature from Scranton, surely the ugliest town this side of Gary, Indiana. Miss Loden wrote, directed and stars as this woman who, by Miss Loden's own admission, has "no redeeming qualities." Nothing much happens. *Wanda* leaves her husband and child, takes up with a smalltime thief and loses him through her own dumbness. Miss Loden has admirably resisted the temptation of making *Wanda* a conventionally poignant character, of giving her the easy "human-interest" of Fellini's *Cabiria*. But she has failed to give the character adequate definition; the girl lacks everything. I have never known or heard of a person who did not possess some shred of pride or self-regard or some minimal apprehension of beauty. (That's what the plastic scale is about in *Goin' Down The Road*, and the cheap figurine at the end of *Bonnie And Clyde*.) Miss Loden has repeatedly stated that much of *Wanda*'s character comes from her own early years, from her depressed Southern rural background and her years of exploitation as a young woman in New York. But surely Miss Loden had some desire to escape, some sense of herself which led her to acting in *After the Fall* and *Splendor In the Grass* and marrying Elia Kazan. Why, I wonder, does she deny *Wanda* those things which proved redeemable about her own life? Although Miss Loden

appears not to condescend by refraining from cheap sympathy, her refusal to grant this largely autobiographical character even a minimal humanity amounts to the same thing really. Is *Wanda* an exercise in self-hatred or should one believe Miss Loden's published admission that she has no idea what *Wanda*'s problem is? Shouldn't she have gotten some idea before she made the film?

*Wanda*, also shot in 16mm and apparently processed at Drug Fair, is an extraordinarily ugly movie which, admittedly, rather suits its ambiance of littered roadsides and crumbling hotel rooms. There is a shot of the protagonist walking through a coal field which is so numbingly protracted that one gets the feeling *Wanda*

herself must be directing. Michael Higgins is awfully good as the smalltime gangster as, indeed, is Miss Loden as *Wanda*, but the characters and situations are so poorly defined and the dialogue so sketchily developed that one never cares very much about these people as individuals or as types. There are some lively moments, a well-staged bank robbery and, particularly, a shot of *Wanda* picking the condiments from a hamburger with her fingers and tossing them in a wastebasket which seems, beyond any rational analysis, a frozen image of a very special and probably terminal kind of American despair. This shot seems to be what Miss Loden is trying for throughout the film and so seldom achieves.

## Moving the mail

A.H. BERZEN

A LETTER dropped into a mailbox at a Madison Avenue and East Eighties corner reached Washington seven days later, having first gone to Greenport on Long Island's north shore, according to its second postmark. A letter airmailed from Miami required six days to reach Washington. A Christmas card, sent from Anacostia on December 22nd arrived in Georgetown on January 15th.

Each of us probably has his own way of coping with the exasperation generated by the deteriorating mail service. Myself--I click on my memory machine and let the motor idle a bit before putting it into gear for the trip back to a Christmas school vacation many years ago when I worked in a downtown Manhattan post-office.

The "temporaries" hired to sort mail were placed, one after another, at a long, narrow table. In front of each of us, at the table's far side, was an upright cabinet of cubbyholes affixed with printed cards giving the name of geographical regions of the United States; foreign countries; continents; metropolitan areas; and so on.

Our job was to place individual pieces of first class mail into the appropriate destination slot. Near us were huge canvas hampers filled with cancelled mail waiting to be sorted. When one of the cubbyholes was full, we carried the sorted mail to one of another row of hampers bearing the place names corresponding to the cubbyholes. Every so often, someone came around to wheel away the "sorted mail" hampers and replace them with empty ones and, of course, bring a fresh supply of cancelled "unsorted" mail.

As it happened, I was situated at the last station in one of the several long lines in the huge room. Behind each man was a sort of seat a pole about three feet from the floor, atop which was a wooden surface perhaps eight or ten inches square. This seat, however, could not be adjusted to provide either a horizontal surface nor a perpendicular one, so that you could neither sit on, nor lean against it, comfortably.

Sorting mail is hardly calculated to engender excitement, and since the "seat" kept boring into my spine, I tried, after the first half hour or so, to converse with the "temporary" at my right; a blank wall was at my left.

He was a short, elderly man who merely nodded but said nothing, for he seemed to be concentrating on his job. He'd hold an envelope in both hands, study the address, stamp, cancellation mark, then turn it over and stare at the sealed flap, before consigning it, slowly, to one of the cubbyholes.

I thought him extremely conscientious, for he apparently had a faulty knowledge of geography and was being careful not to toss Utah into "New England" or Georgia into "Far West". And I noticed that whenever I carried sorted mail to a hamper, or brought back unsorted mail from another, my companion would wait a few moments then do exactly as I did.

By noon, my brain reeled in tandem with the blurred fuzziness of my eyes. Lunch helped somewhat but then, mid-afternoon, I felt a sudden blast of *deja vu*, as I found myself sorting a stack of mail from a bank.

Through the envelopes' transparent address windows, I could identify the contents as checks; probably, that time of year, dividend checks. I'd noticed them the first time and here they were again. Or were they? They certainly appeared to be the same as those I'd already handled. Was this particular bank sending checks to the same addresses in separate envelopes? It seemed hard to believe such extravagance of any bank, but easier to accept that explanation than suspect I was hallucinating.

My eyes resumed skimming over addresses and my hands continued flipping envelopes into slots. Then, minutes later, I picked up a letter addressed to a prominent actor--certain I'd already sorted it because, earlier, I'd noticed not only his address but that of the equally well-known theatrical producer who'd sent it.

Did anyone else on that long line have the same experience? I was reluctant to interrupt them -- they were all working so busily -- but I had to find out.

I turned to the man beside me. He was sitting-leaning on that ridiculous seat, staring at the pile of mail before him. He heard me move and quickly began poking pieces of mail into slots, one after another, without looking at either the envelopes or cubbyholes.

"Say, don't you bother to read the---?"

He looked at me and smiled, as if waiting for me to find the answer to the obvious question I suddenly found it impossible to ask.

In an accent I could not then, nor since, define, he said, "Connections."

The next morning, I was transferred to an uptown branch and given sacks of mail to deliver.

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