

## ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

## These Three Women are the same one in Altman's film dream

### THREE WOMEN

Written, directed and produced by Robert Altman  
Distributed by 20th Century-Fox, Rated PG

Robert Altman is an interesting filmmaker and a great public relations man. Sometimes he is also pretentious. In his latest film, *Three Women*, he is all three of these things.

*Three Women* has a dreamlike quality that defies logic and sometimes makes no sense. But then, Altman says the film came to him in a dream. The somnambulist feeling makes the film pretentious because it telegraphs the fact that the characters will turn out to be abstract symbols rather than just plain people. So the three women become three aspects of Woman. You'd better be a more original thinker than Mr. Altman when you get into that game.

To interpret dreams one must first know what they're about. Millie Lammoreaux (played by Shelley Duvall) is a physio-therapist in a desert spa for rich old parties who walk around the wading pool like zombies. Pinky Rose (Sissy Spacek) arrives on the scene to work alongside her. Idolizing her to the point of obsession, she almost crawls inside Millie's skin—takes over her bed, her sex partner and even her social security number. Turns out her name is also Mildred; she just adopted Pinky Rose because she hated her own name so much. Bells ring, lights flash. They are

two parts of the same invention.

We have to wait quite a while for the third leg of our triangle. She is Willie (turn the W upside down and you have Millie), the pregnant painter wife of an aging, drunken, former stunt man (Robert Fortier) and the co-owner of the tacky desert bar-amusement park where Millie likes to take her fun. Willie paints horrible Aubrey Beardsley creatures (part human, part animal) in all aspects of hostile sex. She covers every surface she can find, from the bottom of the swimming pool to every wall in sight, until she has to stop daubing to give birth to her baby, a still-born boy. Janice Rule, who plays Willie, skulks through the whole picture and never says a word. Her sullen silence is oppressive. But then this is Altman's dream, so all must be forgiven.

If it sounds grim, what's good about the film? The performances are remarkable. Shelley Duvall's Millie is a sub-normal valiantly striving for mediocrity. According to the press releases, Duvall improvised 80 percent of her lines herself. Some of them are very funny. A first rate comic, she is master of the telling look, the little head-turn. Her Millie is always not quite put together, earnestly trying to be a good person and take care of all those around her. Mother.

Pinky Rose comes straight out of *Carrie*—an extension of the evil innocence Sissy Spacek



Sissy Spacek, as Pinky Rose, who is one of the Three Women

played in that film. Here she is child-woman and seductress. Believe it or not, Spacek makes the combination convincing and interesting to watch.

The look of *Three Women* is exceptionally beautiful. Camera-man Chuck Rosher has done very well by Mr. Altman. Burned out

desert scenes alternating with soft haziness of image add to the spaced-out mood.

Had Altman taken Polonius' advice ("Neither a borrower nor a lender be.") there would be no *Three Women*. For Altman has taken a pinch of Fellini (8½), a tablespoon of Bergman (*Persona*),

a teaspoon of Antonioni (*Zabriskie Point* and *Red Desert*) and stirred it all together into a dream.

—Mavis Lyons

Mavis Lyons is a film editor working in New York and is the regular reviewer of films for *In These Times*.

## Peckinpah overskills anti-war message of *Cross*



### CROSS OF IRON

Written by Julius Epstein  
Directed by Sam Peckinpah  
Starring James Coburn, Maximilian Schell and James Mason

In his unrelentingly grim new movie, *Cross of Iron*, director Sam Peckinpah shows that he has not yet learned what Army filmmakers discovered long ago: if you make an overly explicit, overly threatening film, chances are your audience will simply tune you out and your efforts will be for naught.

The Department of the Army discovered this phenomenon making films that tried to convince soldiers to use prophylactics to prevent venereal disease. The VD films assaulted the recruits with graphically gory images of the more grotesque consequences of syphilis and gonorrhea and ended up decreasing the use of condoms instead of increasing it. According to follow-up studies done by the Army, the recruits found the films too distressing and simply refused to think about anything that would remind them of the problem—including condoms.

When in later films the images were toned down, the Army

found the soldiers much more receptive to the message.

*Cross of Iron* is a violent, blatantly anti-war movie, likely to turn off its audience just as those early Army films did.

Set on the Russia front in 1943 the plot revolves around the travails of a German reconnaissance platoon, led by the disillusioned Corporal Steiner (James Coburn). Tired veterans, the squad not only has to struggle against the enemy, but also battle the treachery of their medal-hungry commander (Maximilian Schell) who leaves them stranded behind enemy lines as part of a ploy to get himself an undeserved Iron Cross. The film chronicles their attempts to rejoin the German forces and to see the commander brought to justice.

While the audience is still fresh *Cross of Iron* effectively communicates the grim realities of war. Opening with black and white footage of Nazi propaganda films and rousing march music, the film gradually melts into a silent attack-in-progress by Steiner's platoon. Peckinpah uses images of the brutally silent killing, the farting, filthy soldiers, and their squalid surroundings to illustrate the hopelessness that

marked the last days of the Russian front. These soldiers have long since left behind any illusions created by blaring bands and patriotic speeches, and know war for the hell it is—a hell in which even a birthday party serves only to deepen the gloom.

These early sequences culminate in a superbly directed scene in which Steiner, having suffered a concussion during a Russian attack, regains consciousness amid the torn and battered bodies of the wounded in a German army hospital. Peckinpah's direction of this scene, in which the still hallucinating Steiner sees the faces of his friends projected on the disfigured and scarcely human forms of the hospital inmates, make it one of the most moving cinematic experiences of the year.

If it had been possible to end the movie here, this first half hour or so would have achieved Peckinpah's goal of recreating "war as it actually happened," showing that "death is ugly, undignified, and unnecessary," and getting away from the old war movie tradition in which "people died clean."

Unfortunately, the movie has to go on and, unmindful of the

fact that the audience can take only so much of this horror, Peckinpah unflinchingly pours it on, and on. As the members of Steiner's platoons, their limbs blown away, faces shattered, or castrated, die slowly and painfully, it quickly gets to be too much. It is as though Peckinpah feels he must beat the audience over the head with his message that war is not hell, but worse than hell, lest they overlook the evidence.

In the end, the violence of *Cross of Iron* will suffer from comparison with understated anti-war movies like Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory*. This failure is especially disappointing in light of its flashes of brilliance (especially in the acting of the supporting roles) and the fact that it was made by the same man who directed such superb movies as *Ride the High Country* and *The Wild Bunch*.

It is a pity that as talented and sensitive a director as Peckinpah should waste his talent because he still hasn't discovered something that even army filmmakers know.

—Miles Archer

Miles Archer is a free-lance writer who lives in Chicago.

## BOOKS

## PBC alternatives to corporate capitalism

*Global corporations are dismantling their industrial base here and shipping off their plants to points all over the globe. This mass exodus has helped to throw America into an economic crisis.*

### OWN YOUR OWN JOB

By Jeremy Rifkin  
Bantam Books, 1977

The latest book by Jeremy Rifkin and the People's Business Commission (formerly the People's Bicentennial Commission) is a short, easy-to-read indictment of corporate-capitalism, a call to replace its control over our economy by democratic control and ownership.

*Own Your Own Job* is divided into three sections, the first of which is a vivid expose of the contradiction between corporate-capitalism's expansionary profit-maximizing requirements and people's right to democracy, both political and economic. Corporate control of the political and economic systems; runaway shops, increased unemployment are some of the charges in Rifkin's indictment. "In the process they (global corporations) are systematically dismantling their domestic industrial base here and shipping off their plants, facilities and other capital assets to points all across the globe. This mass exodus has helped throw America into a profound economic crisis."

Part Two points out the weaknesses of both the "apologists" and the "reformers." The former "continue to deceive us with false hope that our salvation depends on the grace and good will of the giant corporations."

"Breaking up the giants [the reformer's approach]... will further weaken our already frail state and render us less able to resist the next time around. In the end we will have to fight a few giants once again."

So far, so good. But Rifkin continues: "Aside from the apol-

ogists and reformers, there are those who preach the gospel of socialism as the answer. If the word 'socialism' doesn't exactly set your heart pounding, it's understandable because it's often been misapplied in countries like the Soviet Union, and none of us are thrilled at the idea of replacing unresponsive, greedy businessmen with unresponsive, self-serving bureaucrats."

This vulgar interpretation does little to enlighten people on the democratic potential of socialism or its application in Cuba and elsewhere. This is particularly disturbing as it precedes the presentation of the decentralized and democratic characteristics of Rifkin's own plan for Economic Democracy. For example, Rifkin's projection of firms controlled and managed by the people who work in them and held accountable to the communities in which they operate, of public banks, public ownership of natural resources, with broad policy determined by the national government—all this has many similarities to the organization of socialist Yugoslavia. But Rifkin does not make this observation and leaves the reader with the impression that socialism is inherently undemocratic.

Part Three is a stimulating look at how activists can challenge corporate rule on several levels, followed by the findings of the Hart Poll—done on behalf of PBC two years ago—on what Americans are thinking about the present political/economic system.

*Own Your Own Job* presents a challenge to socialists to develop and articulate alternatives both to corporate-capitalism and to bureaucratic socialism. French Marxist Roger Garaudy has written: "The crucial problem in a socialist democracy is to bring decision-making, both political and economic, closer to the worker who might otherwise be subordinated to extraneous political forces, personified by a remote, anonymous state." Although it mucks up the terminology, *Own Your Own Job* does address this problem.

—Daniel Neal Graham

Daniel Neal Graham was formerly a PBC organizer, is now a distributor for *In These Times* and a teacher/organizer in the Syracuse Free University.



Morton Halperin

## The Lawless State exposed in carefully documented study

### THE LAWLESS STATE: The Crimes of the U.S. Intelligence Agencies

By Morton Halperin, Jerry J. Berman, Robert L. Borosage, and Christine M. Marwick

Penguin Books, 1976, paperback, \$2.95

With careful and thorough concern for the evidence and forceful commitment to democratic principles, the authors have described and analyzed the secret crimes of "the lawless state"; the CIA's campaign against Salvador Allende; the FBI's vendetta against Martin Luther King Jr.; the IRS files on more than 11,000 individuals and groups.

These presidential and bureaucratic abuses have undermined constitutional principles and exacerbated the crisis of confidence in American government. Furthermore, clandestine illegalities in both foreign and domestic spheres continued long after Watergate and throughout the Ford

administration. Indeed, Ford publicly justified the CIA's destabilization program in Chile: "I'm not going to pass judgment on whether it's permitted under international law. It's a recognized fact that historically as well as presently, such actions are taken in the best interest of the countries involved."

Predictably and tragically, these operations have broken down the distinction between domestic and foreign policy. Lawlessness justified abroad in defense of "national security" becomes justified at home in order to control "subversive" groups: e.g., the FBI initiated a program, COMINFIL, which penetrated such "un-American" groups as SANE and the American Friends Service Committee; and as is well known, Nixon justified the break-in at Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist on national security grounds.

The distressing thrust of the facts in this book is that constitutional principles and democratic processes are pure rhetoric to vast armies of anonymous bureaucrats working for the imperial presidency.

President Carter campaigned against government lawlessness. One wonders whether he can control the agglomeration of vested interests and factions or will he too become mesmerized by the trappings of power and the "imperatives" of national security? To protect against this garrison-state mentality, a firm grasp on past abuses and their consequences will provide concerned citizens with valuable ammunition.

*The Lawless State* should be required reading in the library of this cause.

—Jonathan F. Galloway

Jonathan F. Galloway teaches political science at Lake Forest College.

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## Halperin suing Nixon for damages

The first thing most people connect with the name of Morton Halperin is the lawsuit brought by him (and his wife and three sons) against Richard M. Nixon, H.R. Haldeman and John Mitchell for maintaining a secret wire-tap on the family's telephone during the years (1969-71) when Halperin was a senior staff member of the National Security Council under his friend and colleague, Henry Kissinger.

The suit, which may turn out to be a precedent-setter, passed its first hurdle when a Federal District judge in

Washington ruled that the wire tap did indeed violate the Halperins' Fourth Amendment rights and ordered Nixon, Haldeman and Mitchell to pay damages. The question being argued at present is how much.

The Halperins' attorneys are asking punitive damages under both the Fourth and First Amendments. Attorneys for the defense, supplied by the Carter Justice department, maintain that there was no real damage since the wire-tap didn't cost Halperin his job. After an amount has been settled on, the case can be ap-

pealed, so there is little likelihood of an immediate settlement, either of the principle or the "debt."

In the meantime, Halperin is serving as chairperson of the steering committee of the Campaign to End Government Spying and is an associate of the Center for National Security Studies. (The director of the Center, Robert Borosage, and two other associates, Jerry Berman and Christine Marwick, are co-authors with Halperin of *The Lawless State*, reviewed in this issue.)