

March 21

*Good Morning (Ohayo)*

A delightful comedy of Tokyo's 'suburbia,' filled with odd Western touches, Eastern customs, rebellious children, TV sets and a broad humor startling by American standards. This is the 49th film of Yasujiro Ozu, an undisputed master of the screen who is entirely unknown here. A Shochiku Films release.

March 28

Screening of 1962 Flaherty Award Winners

One of our most popular annual events, co-sponsored by City College; 1962's best documentaries as selected by a distinguished jury.

April 25

The Beats and the Outs: Two Views

*The Flower Thief*

This frantic, crude, splendiferous riot provides the closest filmic approximation of the beat philosophy so far. Beneath its flamboyant tableaux and aggressive madness lurks a deadly serious rejection of organized society. (Ron Rice)

*The Mirage*

This European view of an outsider's odyssey offers a singular counterpoint to *The Flower Thief* in its almost classic serenity and Kafkaesque flavor. (Peter Weiss)

May 16

*The Crowd*

Only New York showing of King Vidor's classic of American naturalism, a story of regimentation and poignant attempts of two young people, ultimately compromised, to rise from "the crowd." With the negative gone, this is the only existing print. "One of the greatest films to have come from Hollywood." Rotha, *The Film Till Now*.

Speaker: Mr. James Card, Curator of Motion Pictures, George Eastman House.



**Dwight Macdonald, "Some Animadversions on the Art Film," *Esquire*, 4/62**

I have been looking through the old programs of Cinema 16, a New York film society with some four thousand members which is now in its fifteenth year, and I have been viewing some of its current offerings and it occurs to me it is time to cast a cold eye on what is known as "the art film." Its ideals are high and it is dedicated to truth—no escapism, no box office. I am in favor of high ideals, but why are they so seldom entertaining in art films? I am also in favor of Truth and Realism, but why are they here always depressing? Above all, why are most art films pooh? Cinema

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16 describes itself as "the Off-Broadway of the cinema" and "the Little Mag of the film world," adding that its "only ambition is to search out the creative, the artistic, the experimental; its only goal is to be the showcase for new directions in the cinema." But almost all the creative and new-directional films it has shown in its fifteen years—there haven't been many—have not been art films but rather films produced in the ordinary course of commercial (or Communist) moviemaking. Although I think Cinema 16 could have done much better with its programming, this isn't entirely its fault. From Griffith to Antonioni, all the great films—with only a few exceptions, such as Cocteau's *Blood of a Poet* and Vigo's *Zero de Conduite*—have been aimed directly at the box office. Cinema 16 is not analogous to Off-Broadway and the little magazines because (1) their level has been higher than that of the commercial theatre and press; and (2) they have often first presented writers who later became famous (as Joyce and Eliot in *The Little Review* and O'Neill at the Provincetown Playhouse). Neither of these statements can be made about the art film, which has remained through the decades a stagnant little back eddy.

Cinema 16 must be given credit for first showing such films—all but one non-art—as Torre-Nilsson's *End of Innocence*, Eisenstein's *Strike*, Cassavetes' *Shadows*, and Resnais' *Night and Fog*, and for reviving such films—all non-art—as Renoir's *The Rules of the Game*, Lang's *M*, Dovzhenko's *Arsenal and Earth*, Donskoi's *The Childhood of Gorki*, Welles' *The Magnificent Ambersons* and Clair's *The Italian Straw Hat*. But these plums were sparsely distributed through a vast pudding of dullness, nor was I lucky as a Jack Horner. The dullness is spiced with *Angst*. The more distressing aspects of life are so frequently on view at Cinema 16 that I have often wondered just who its four thousand devotees are. Masochists? Psychiatric social workers on a busman's holiday? Whoever they are, they have taken a lot of punishment. Typical Cinema 16 documentary films of past seasons:

*Images of Madness* ("macabre journey through the universe of the mentally ill")...  
*Frustration Play Techniques: Ego Blocking Games* ("special projective techniques developed at Sarah Lawrence College... Hidden cameras record test situations in which various children react differently to competition, frustration and prohibition")...  
*Neurosis and Alcohol* ("cats are made neurotic and then subjected to alcohol")...  
*The Invader* ("traces history of syphilis from fifteenth century")... *The Praying Mantis* ("alien and horrifying universe... love and cruel death")... *The Unknown Soldier* ("merciless inferno of blood and death")... *Witchcraft Through the Ages* ("cruelty and dogmatism of the Middle Ages, tortures of the witch courts, orgies of the devil's mass")... *Depressive States and Paranoid Conditions*... *Maternal Deprivation* ("disturbed children at a French nursing home")... *The World of the Microbes* ("in quest of tubercle bacilli")... *The Murderers of Anne Frank* ("controversial East German featurette banned in several countries... proclaims that Anne Frank's murderers are prospering in West Germany today")... *Psychotic Illnesses in Childhood*... *May 2, 1960* ("Caryl Chessman's execution").

There is a lot of *Angst* in the art films too. Some typical shorts have been: *Bells of Atlantis*, by Ian Hugo and Anais Nin, a paradigm of corny *avant-gardism*...  
*Together*, a British "free cinema" film which I found tedious and dreary, or, as translated into Cinema 16 copywriting: "a study of two deaf mutes imprisoned by silence and solitude... explores with lingering simplicity their desolate existence,

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their sad diversions" . . . *Actua-Tilt*, a recent French offering which is ballyhooed as "a savage attack on dehumanization, spurious eroticism and monstrous progress"; the attack is indeed savage, so much so that it becomes indistinguishable from the brutalitarian tendencies attacked. . . . *Abseits*, which is described as "water, wind, sunlight, and seagulls; the sounds and lonely grandeur of ebb tide on a North Sea beach." It's always ebb tide at Cinema 16. . . . To be fair, there are two shorts in the current season which are very good: one on the Belgian surrealist painter, Magritte; and *Sunday*, Dan Drasin's sound-camera reportage on last summer's folk-singer demonstration in New York's Washington Square.

During 1961-62, Cinema 16 has shown or will show four new feature films. I have already reviewed here (unfavorably) Robert Frank's *The Sin of Jesus*. Notes on the other three follow.

*The Time of the Heathen*

"Amidst solitude and desolation, a major new talent projects a psychological drama of guilt and violence," is Cinema 16's hard sell for this one. Well, as I have observed before, there is art-film cliché as well as Hollywood cliché and here Peter Kass, Ed Emshwiller and Peg Santvoord, with the loftiest intentions, have created a little anthology of the genre. The two protagonists are a seamy-faced wanderer who is not quite right in the head, and a Negro boy who is, one discovers without surprise halfway through the film, a deaf mute. There is the obligatory opening sequence of the man walking endlessly through a depressing landscape, the obligatory rape-murder scene, the obligatory chase through tangled wood (Griffith did it better in *Birth of a Nation*), the obligatory locations—ruined houses, desolate beach. There is also a long color sequence of montages about the bombing of Hiroshima which may be fruitfully compared with the similar montages in Resnais' film; it is the difference between the artistic and the artsy. This sequence is justified, plotwise, by the revelation that the psychotic wanderer has been reduced to his sad state by his guilt-feeling because he helped drop the bomb on Hiroshima. This is conveyed, with elephantine subtlety, by a shot of the Distinguished Flying Cross falling out of his nerveless hand as he dies on the beach. He has been shot by a proto-fascist character who has been gunning for him and the Negro boy because they are the only witnesses to the killing of the boy's mother by the proto-fascist's weakling son. However, it all ends happily: the proto-fascist is killed by the cops and the boy finds the love and protection he needs in the person of a nice old country doctor. In short, a TV fable tarted up with camera effects and the kind of "advanced" cutting that is designed to convince a Cinema 16 audience they are getting their money's worth. It lasted eighty minutes but seemed longer than *Ben Hur*. It got "top award" at the Bergamo (Italy) Film Festival, one more reason for steering clear of those unfeverish festivities.

*The Sun's Burial*

This was introduced by Cinema 16's publicity man with his usual restraint: "a paroxysm of violence and eroticism. . . the work of Japan's foremost New Wave director, Nagisa Ohshima. . . explodes with the anger and fury of their rebellion and reveals, beneath its squalor and brutality, a deep—and hopeless—humanism." I didn't catch the humanism or the eroticism—both concepts I'm sympathetic to—

because I couldn't find anything underneath the squalor and brutality. It seemed to me a monotonous series of beatings up slung together without either motivation or cinematic form; the cutting was as arbitrary as in a "blue" movie, the only object being to get on to the next scene of mayhem; when two people met, one's only curiosity was as to which would smash the other to the ground first. Eroticism was represented by (a) the master of a brothel pushing the padded armrest of his crutch—he's crippled, natch—against the throat of a whore who had been so foolish as to get herself pregnant, slowly throttling her as everybody, including the neophyte boy who is presented as the innocent Candide of the film passively listens to her strangled screams; and (b) two young toughs (one of them Candide) robbing a lovemaking couple in a park—Candide crashes a club down on the man's skull and his companion (he's *really* bad) rapes the girl after having stifled her screams by stuffing her mouth with a clod of grass (that's quite a close-up). There are several other scenes of deep (and hopeless) humanism. Candide, trying to go straight, is delivering a load of tripes on his bicycle; he is waylaid by the gang, who slug him to the ground, kick him senseless and then belabor him with assorted lights and livers. It all winds up—or so I've been told, I left shortly after the intestinal attack—with most of the cast, stunned or wounded by a grenade, dying in agony as they try to crawl out of the ensuing conflagration. *The Sun's Burial* is all in color. Blood does make such a nice red.

#### *Guns of the Trees*

Jonas Mekas is the film critic of *The Village Voice*, a Greenwich Village weekly that had Norman Mailer as a contributing member and that first printed the cartoons of Jules Feiffer. Mr. Mekas is also the editor-publisher of a magazine called *Film Culture* which is, as Herbert Hoover once remarked of Prohibition, "an experiment noble in purpose." Sympathetic as I am to Mr. Mekas' purpose, which is simply to present with the utmost intransigence the true aims of cinema, I must confess I rate dedication lower than acumen and enthusiasm lower than talent. The proof of pudding is in the eating and much of *Film Culture* and of Mr. Mekas' column strikes me as not very nutritious. Now we have his first movie, *Guns of the Trees*, which Cinema 16 bills as "controversial. . . the best-loved or most-hated film on this year's program." I detect a note of desperation here: when an entrepreneur so advertises a cultural product, one suspects the first reactions have been hostile, as in the case of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* . . . which got adverse notices—Brendan Gill's rave in *The New Yorker* is currently displayed in lonely splendor in front of the theatre—and whose promoters were reduced to running one of those pro-and-con ads with an exhortations to the public to decide for themselves. Flattering, but why don't they ever ask us to decide about hits?

*Guns of the Trees* got off to a good start with an impassioned leaflet by its creator which I read with nervous appreciation (will I dig it? am I a square?) before the house lights went down. It was headed, with a jaunty echo of dry-cleaning establishments, "WHILE-U-WAIT," and its text raised considerable expectations. In the interests of cultural history, I reproduce the salient passages:

You may ask yourself, what is *Guns of the Trees* all about, what's the story?

There is no story. Telling stories is for peaceful and content people. And at this juncture in my life I am neither content nor peaceful. I am deeply and totally dis-

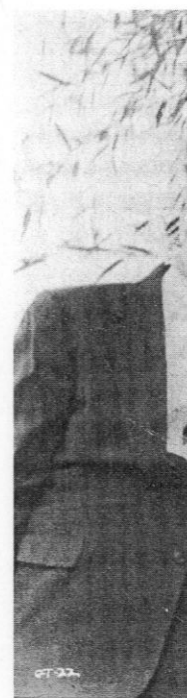


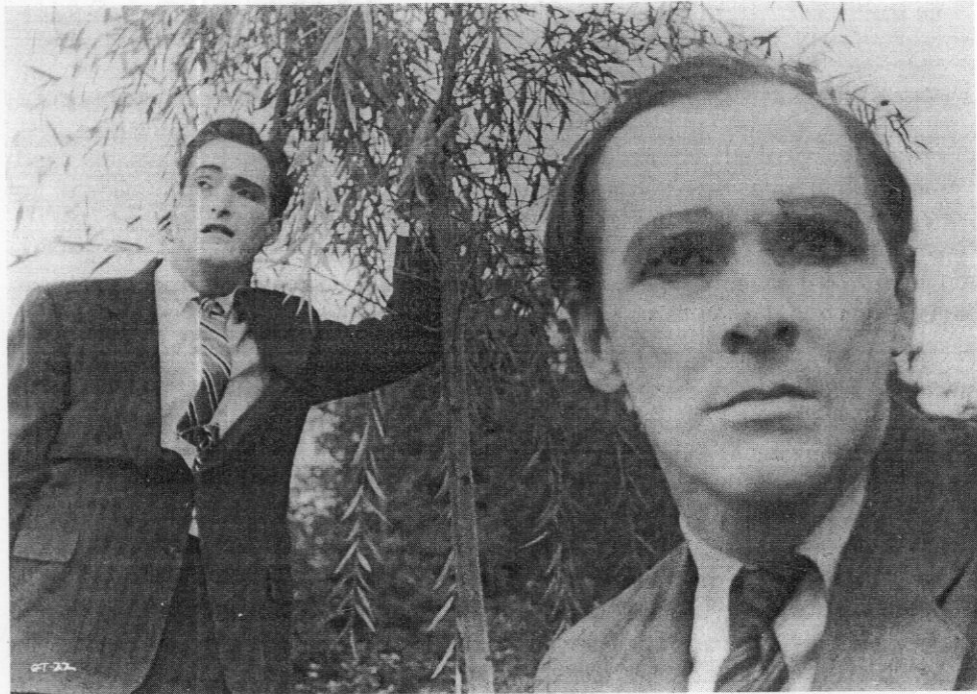
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**Illustration 80.** *Guns of the Trees* (1960) by Jonas Mekas. Courtesy of Anthology Film Archives.

content. Do I have to list the reasons why? Haven't you read your *Times* and *Pravda* today? Why do you wonder, then, that poets are beginning to get uneasy?

Yes, the artists are abandoning the beautiful, happy, entertaining, self-glorifying stories. They are beginning to express their anxiety in a more open and direct manner. They are searching for freer form, one which permits them a larger scale of emotional statements, explosions of truths, outcries of warnings, accumulations of images—not to carry out an amusing story but to fully express the tremblings of the consciousness of man, to confront us eye-to-eye with the soul of modern man. . . .

It's not through the mind and order that I create. I create through my ignorance and chaos. Order doesn't interest me. I know that through my chaos I have a chance of arriving somewhere, of catching some secret movements of subconscious, of Life, of Man. . . .

It is from this anxiety that my discontent grows. And I am throwing it against all those who are for death. It is not that I believe in changing them. They are perhaps not even worth saving, not worth the breath of a single flower trampled under their Power. It's only that my patience has run out. It's only that I had to make this gesture of solidarity for those who think and feel the same way I do, are angry about the same things I am—for all the others my film will have no meaning. My film is only a letter of solidarity to the friends of an existential discontent,

no matter in what continent, what country—a letter from the mad heart of the insane world, WHILE-U-WAIT.”

Then the film began. George Jean Nathan once wrote a piece about the opening of the Paramount Theatre in New York circa 1926. He described in detail the platoons of epauletted, cloaked, shakoed, ushers, the spotlights and the red carpets, the hand-painted oil paintings that lined the walls (they still do), the Baroque profusion of the gold-leafed interior, the stupendous obligato on the mighty Wurlitzer organ, and then—I quote from memory—“the great golden curtains parted and we saw a movie in which a floozy seduced a bond salesman.” Such, *toute proportion gardée*, was my reaction to *Guns of the Trees* after reading Mr. Mekas’ eloquent leaflet.

I expected something profound and difficult. What I got was two contrasting love stories which were all too easily followed (once one got used to *avant-garde* cutting) since they represented Good and Bad, Creative and Destructive, Life and Death, or, existentially speaking, Authentic and Inauthentic. The Creative, Authentic, etc., couple was colored, the Destructive, etc., couple was white. “The small people don’t learn,” says the Negro girl, who was embarrassingly smug, to the tense white girl, who later kills herself, “but people like you and me should learn from everything.” (This is the Salinger complex, the We Happy Few syndrome.) This labored fable takes place in a welter of “*avant-garde*” effects that don’t come off, as in the stylized mimes that open and close the film. The settings were grimly “realistic,” in the mode that I remember from similar art-film efforts in the Thirties: railroad yards, city dumps, crumbling walls and alley ways, frowzy parks, kitchens that could do with a little dishwashing. Shot 210 is described in the script as: “Somewhere in the Bronx. A field of broken glass, junk, sun—Gregory walks across the junkyard, slowly, looking down, black.” Meanwhile, back at the dump. . . .

All that is spontaneous in *Pull My Daisy* is self-conscious here; Ginsberg is inferior to Kerouac as a narrator because he is really rhetorical while Kerouac is mock-rhetorical; here Ginsberg alternates with folk songs, the last refuge of the American left; he is too pompous and they are too simple. All those MacLeishian questions: “What is man?” “Perhaps just to be.” “Will it ever change?” No reply from Ben Carruthers’ co-star, Adolfas Mekas, Jonas’ brother, who is perhaps the most stolid movie actor since Francis X. Bushman.

The symbol of police brutality is some cops timidly pushing around folk-singers in Washington Square—maybe Eleanor Roosevelt or the *New York Post* will object; in the Thirties the cops were, with not too much hyperbole, called “Cossacks” and they really roughed up Communist demonstrators in Union Square; a clear gain in civil liberties, but not much of a symbol of Power trampling underfoot those *Flowers of Life*. Sorry, forgot the climactic expression of rebellion: Carruthers pissing on my bank—Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company branch at Fifth Avenue and 43rd Street—or, to be accurate, *almost* pissing on it; he gets his fly open, but he is drunk and his pals lead him away before the awful deed is done.

Gregory (Francis X. Mekas) has a big scene with a “social worker”—the quotes are in the script, perhaps to imply that the “social worker” is not a social worker really though why it’s not bad enough to be actually a social worker I don’t see—which runs as follows: (Gregory speaking) “There is nothing wrong with Fidel Castro.” “You compare yourself with Fidel Castro?” “No, I identify with him.” “You realize

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Fidel Castro is a revolutionary. Are you revolting against something?" "Yes I am." "What are you revolting against?" (TV scripts run on this way but at least it's from hunger.) "Against dishonesty, corruption." "What do you want? To change the world? Is that your idea?" "I think everybody wants to change the world, no?" There then comes a blank white screen, which is Mr. Mekas' ingenious transition device, after which we hear the portentous tones of Mr. Ginsberg:

"What do you think of America? You who run America, vote hypocrite, edit school books, make foreign wars, appoint aldermen and football coaches?

"You who therefore are America, the land that opens its mouth to speak with four hundred billion dollars of armaments and two cents' worth of measly foreign aid [anybody checked these figures?] all for bombs and horror, fraud, dope fiends, Syn-gman Rhee, Batista, Chiang Kai-shek, madmen, Franco—who else God knows. I refuse to read the paper."

This is cut into (shot 187): "Frances, somewhere in the fields, standing by a pile of burning autumn leaves." So even that most charming and nostalgic ceremony of American life is twisted into an emblem of our allegedly death-oriented society.

Instead of transitional music, Mr. Mekas uses an electronic squeak of varying pitch. Very *avant-garde* but after a while it gets on one's nerves just like Hollywood's mood music. But he does score one coup: he has dug up from somewhere a line that still haunts me: "Where are the snows of yesteryear?" Now where could he have found *that*?

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### Amos Vogel, "Riposte from Cinema 16," *Esquire*, 9/62

It would be nice to begin with some profound observations, but I am afraid your cataclysmic criticisms [in the April issue] of Cinema 16 are largely based on lack of acquaintance with our programs and on 'tendentious selection.' I cannot prove this charge in 500 words: but from about 250 programs presented during fifteen years, you arbitrarily concentrated on films of 'Angst' (omitting large numbers of joyous programs), review in detail three programs you hated (while barely mentioning twenty programs you liked), and criticize so-called 'typical documentaries' (actually representing less than ten percent of our total programs and including feature-length fiction films and animations).

To say that Cinema 16's films are inferior to Off-Broadway, and have not led to the revelation of substantial talents, is quaint, considering that we were the first to introduce to American audiences the films of Antonioni, Robert Bresson, Norman McLaren, Robert Breer, John Cassavetes, Robert Frank, Shirley Clarke, Georges Franju, Bert Haanstra, Hilary Harris, Andrzej Munk, Leopoldo Torre-Nilsson, Yasujiro Ozu, Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson, Arne Sucksdorff, Lindsay Anderson, Stan Vanderbeek, Agnes Varda. As to the classics, how, exactly are Dreyer, Welles, Eisenstein, Lang, Dovzhenko, Vigo, Vidor, De Sica, Rossellini inferior to Off-Broadway revivals?

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