

FEARFUL SYMMETRY

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Richard Fleischer in  
costume on the set  
of *20,000 Leagues  
Under the Sea*



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**“Soylent Green is people.”** In the TV show *Millennium*, Frank Black, a psychic investigator into crimes of millennial dysfunction, uses the apocalyptic warning from the end of Richard Fleischer’s 1973 science-fiction film as his computer password. This may not be the same as a critical validation of Fleischer, but it is an endorsement of sorts, and throughout his extremely variegated career Fleischer enjoyed some variegated endorsements. “Balm in Gilead . . . always gripping, often pure joy, and classic in bits,” wrote Raymond Durnat in *Films and Filming of Fantastic Voyage*. “*Mandingo* is a masterpiece of Hollywood cinema,” defiantly declared *Movie* of his much-reviled 1975 excursion into Southern Gothic.

But the June 2006 *Positif* came out for critical validation, with a special Fleischer dossier timed to a retrospective at the Cinémathèque Française. An unplanned coincidence was Fleischer’s death in March 2006, which was generally greeted with critical silence. As Michel Ciment noted in his introduction to the dossier, that had long been the response of Anglo-American critics anyway, and validation had been left to Fleischer’s French champions, such as Jean-Pierre Coursodon and Bertrand Tavernier in *50 Years of American Cinema*.

So not too long after his almost-unremarked-upon death, how do things stand for Fleischer? There’s certainly a consensus on him, and it might be summed up in two opinions, stretching from Andrew Sarris’s scornful assessment of a career that “has stuttered, alas, at less than 50 percent efficiency” to David Thomson’s regretful “once upon a time, Richard Fleischer was a competent director of action pictures.”

The anti-consensus is represented most substantially by the *Positif* dossier and, in a way, most characteristically by the occasional opinions quoted above. What these also chime with is a kind of hearsay evidence: the number of critics one finds who harbor their own favorite Fleischers and not always gilt-edged genre classics like *The Narrow Margin*. *Soylent Green* scores high here, but is perhaps trumped by *The Vikings* (58), an extreme instance of a romp beyond genre.

The consensus and anti-consensus exist in tandem, and more harmoniously than most critical disagreements, because they do have quite a lot in common. For instance, the received view of Fleischer as a hack for hire—a view that certainly has its validity, especially when one comes to the later part of his career, from the early Seventies onward—is most succinctly

THE LATE RICHARD FLEISCHER: NOT QUITE AN AUTEUR BUT MUCH MORE THAN A HACK FOR HIRE BY RICHARD COMBS



put by Lem Dobbs in a review of Fleischer's autobiography, *Just Tell Me When to Cry*, for *Sight & Sound* (Oct. 93): "Fleischer rode the showman's whirligig, his you-gotta-have-a-gimmick aesthetic encompassing sequels, remakes, 3-D, CinemaScope, split-screen, Showscan, Italian-made spectacles, Jack Palance as Fidel Castro, microscopic submarines and giant squids, people who eat people—and talk to the animals." To which one might add a showman's stunt that even ropes in God when Fleischer managed to film the crucifixion in *Barabbas* (62) during an actual eclipse of the sun.

But turn this catalogue around and you arrive at something insisted on in the *Positif* essays, especially in an article on *The Vikings* by Pierre Berthomieu: Fleischer's formalist qualities. Through gimmickry—or otherwise—he arrived at a way of creating images that were not just dynamic but might seem to be in 3-D even when he wasn't using the optical process. The climactic duel in *The Vikings*, up and down the sheer sides of a castle tower, alternating high and low shots of sea and sky, is a fair example. Berthomieu: "Fleischer shuns frontality. His compositions revel in diagonals, variegated, simple or complex," his frames lead the eye on voyages into "multiple and centrifugal dimensions . . . mingling the effect of 3-D with that of the pop-up, the porthole vistas on the Nautilus with the *Amityville 3-D* sets, a pure exercise in the 'relief' form."

A topography of reliefs—among various allied forms—would as a result take precedence over the identification of themes in Fleischer. Or perhaps the forms assimilate the themes, stamping them out with their own peculiar depth. For example, take the theme of the "couple" that can be followed and expanded on in many ways through Fleischer's films, and seen figured most vividly in the mutual mutilation of Viking half-brothers Einar

(Kirk Douglas), with his eye clawed out, and Eric (Tony Curtis), with his hand amputated. Such loss thrusts itself forward as aggressively as any 3-D image. Is the theme equally bodied forth in the story of Barabbas (Anthony Quinn) and the man on the cross who takes his place and eventually seems, to Barabbas's despair, also to have taken away his death?

### 1. HIGH NOON

IN ITS FULL OPTICAL GLORY, FLEISCHER'S RELIEF FORM BEGINS WITH the 3-D rodeo film, *Arena* (53). But actual 3-D was a short-lived ride on the showman's whirligig—Fleischer would only hop back on in 1983 with *Amityville 3-D*. Immediately after *Arena*, however, he made *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (54) for Walt Disney, his first film in CinemaScope. Fifties CinemaScope evidently lacked the depth of field of even standard screen formats—although it was sold to the public as offering the same experience as 3-D, without the inconvenience of having to wear the glasses. Fleischer, anyway, may have found it a more graceful and involving 3-D, and he was probably most a formalist and most a showman in the ways he found to simulate the "relief" form.

The *Nautilus* is equipped not just with portholes but a large observation dome in its nose, which opens like an eye or a camera lens for viewing the wonders of the deep. They're back-projected wonders, of course, albeit shot underwater in the Bahamas, and the first spectacle is expressive enough: the crew of the *Nautilus*, in fantastic but sensuously heavy diving suits, carry one of their number to be buried in a coal-encrusted sepulchre. The somber mood of the occasion is keyed to the character of the *Nautilus's* commander, Captain Nemo (James Mason), a lonely, wounded seer who has cut himself off from mankind because it is

The Narrow Margin



Violent Saturday



The Boston Strangler



10 Rillington Place



PORTRAIT (PREVIOUS SPREAD): PETER STACKPOLE/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES; THIS PAGE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): RKO/PHOTOFEST; 20TH CENTURY FOX/KOBAL COLLECTION; THE EVERETT COLLECTION; 20TH CENTURY FOX/KOBAL



not ready for the scientific blessings he could bestow. In particular, it is not capable of making good use of the technological secret of the *Nautilus*, its power source, a glowing core of energy. It's the Great Whatsit a year before *Kiss Me Deadly*.

Captain Nemo's other half is Kirk Douglas's manic, mugging, eye-rolling, banjo-strumming harpooner Ned Land. They're one of Fleischer's most extreme couples, a pushmipullyu of energies, and at times the clash between morbidity and exuberance makes this a very uncomfortable children's adventure film. As for the relief effects, it's not surprising that Fleischer would eventually be using process photography in more extreme ways, pushing it beyond another comfort level to create the contortions of size and perspective in *Fantastic Voyage* (66), a film Berthomieu thinks should have been in 3-D.

But it was CinemaScope that was to become the Fleischer format par excellence, in which there were many ways to create

depth in the eye of the beholder. The adventurous diagonals of *The Vikings* are one way, but so too is the careful mapping of space, the delineation through lighting of depth and volume in settings, and the way these are investigated and connected by extensive camera movement. Fleischer may be the unsung Hollywood master of the sequence shot, in which an edgy symmetry can be opposed to Wellesian chaos let loose—witness the mini-*Touch of Evil* opening to *Bandido* (56), in which a tracking shot follows crowds of Mexicans fleeing civil war to a U.S. border crossing, then reverses itself to follow Zachary Scott's gunrunner back into Mexico.

In this respect, Fleischer's pivotal film is the one that followed *20,000 Leagues*. *Violent Saturday* (55) was his first film for 20th Century Fox, the home of CinemaScope and the studio for which he worked most consistently for the next 15 years. There are some crucial contortions of historical perspective here. *Violent Saturday* is in essence the kind of crime film that had been the staple of the first period of Fleischer's career, at RKO, from 1946 to 1952 (the end point and the high point of which had been *The Narrow Margin*). Fleischer has remarked on how unusual it was then to shoot a crime film in color, and also how much of a boost it gave him at the studio to bring in a CinemaScope production for less than a million dollars—which he put down to the expertise he'd gained in RKO's B unit.

*Violent Saturday* is based on the not uncommon idea of combining a centripetal thriller plot—three urban criminals arrive in a small Western town to plan and execute a heist just before the bank closes at noon on Saturday—with centrifugal storytelling, following the lives of townspeople who will be caught up in the heist. Fleischer turns this into the motor for any number of tracking and gliding sequence shots, concentric circles turning within each other. From gang boss Harper (Stephen McNally) studying a relief map of the area in the town library we move across to librarian Elsie (Sylvia Sidney), reacting to a threatening letter from the bank about missed payments by scooping up somebody else's purse (McNally takes in this little prelude to his own grand larceny with amused disbelief).

At night, a fidgety, cold-ridden member of the gang (Lee Marvin) is alarmed when he sees somebody apparently watching their hotel. But this is only the bank manager, Reeves (Tommy Noonan), on his way to consummate a fixation on the local nurse by watching her undress through a back window. Here he encounters Elsie disposing of the purse in the dark street, and he threatens to report her theft, until she, realizing what he is doing there, dares him to go to the police.

At this point, the film's circling movement and its expansive character comedy has led us out of the Western light—the film was partly shot in Bisbee, Arizona—and into this nighttime scene, and a single compressed composition of the participants, that could be pure RKO noir. Still, it would not be accurate to call *Violent Saturday* a kind of film noir by default; it would be more precise to say that it complicates the notion of film noir, even goes some way toward deconstructing it, at least the version that has become such a generalized and lazy critical category.

The Walter Reade theater will screen *Mandingo* on February 23 and 10 Rillington Place on February 24 as part of Film Comment Selects. *Violent Saturday* will play New York City's Film Forum February 28 – March 6.

The Spikes Gang



Soylent Green



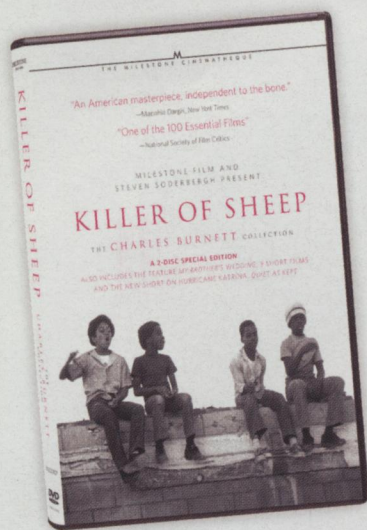
Mandingo



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*Violent Saturday* is a remodeling operation, a modernizing, abstracting, and reshaping of noir—and not only through its lengthened horizon. It is not drenched in shadows, but they are a significant and visually defining feature—from the band of shade under the brim of Marvin's hat that obscures his face, to the shadows that give weight and depth to space when the crooks case the town, particularly the police station, in the full light of day. The film's "Bradenville"—part Bisbee, part studio set—is stylized but not stereotyped, with a depth and compositional care one could call painterly.

Think of Edward Hopper in non-urban mode: his painting entitled *High Noon*, which shows an isolated house in an indeterminate plain, for which Hopper apparently built a model just to study how light would fall on it. *Violent Saturday* is such a model, an artificial reality transfixed and transformed by light. The three crooks' eruption from the bank after their holdup, the building and their bodies in flight sharply etched in noonday shadow, is another painting.

It's color, of course, that adds this dimension, but even so, *Violent Saturday* is not really a departure from the little thrillers Fleischer was making in the late Forties. In other words, even those early films are not really noir in any of the standard uses and abuses of the term. A key film here, so low-budget, so minimally fleshed out in every way that it is a very bare model for itself, is *Follow Me Quietly* (49), from a story co-written by Anthony Mann (whose career crossed with Fleischer's for about two years at RKO). A city is stalked by a serial killer both austere and vengeful—he calls himself "The Judge"—and totally faceless and traceless. This drives the detective in charge (William Lundigan) to construct a dummy out of the few scraps of evidence for use in lineups (an early rag-and-bone form of profiling).

At one point, in his darkened office, the frustrated detective muses to the dummy in a chair: "Tell me where you're going, maybe I'll meet you there. How about a date?" (This pair is Fleischer's strangest couple.) After the detective leaves, the dummy inexplicably shape-shifts into the actual killer, who then puts the real dummy back in the chair and slips away. It's a shocking, elliptical move, outside the genre, so "new" it's more Feuillade or

Twenties Fritz Lang than Forties thriller. But even a relatively straightforward heist film like *Armored Car Robbery* (50) features a modern urban version of this kind of phantasm: a villain who stays one step ahead of the police by obsessively wiping away all traces of his identity.

And *The Narrow Margin* (52), Fleischer's apparent culmination in noir, actually only begins in that idiom, with a shooting covered in steep angles and shadows on a staircase. All the subsequent train-board action is more sleek and shadowless (though with some mirror effects). And the plot is an artfully deceitful reality game: we're seduced into accepting what a character played by an actor like Charles McGraw would assume about a character played by an actress like Marie Windsor. It's a conceit worthy of David Mamet.

### 2. "A RIDERLESS HORSE, STIRRUPS BACKWARD"

IT MAY BE THAT FILM NOIR HAS acquired a solidity and respectability in film criticism that it doesn't really deserve. It's like an artificial country bolted together from different nationalities, and it may now be time to break it up into its constituent parts and discard the term altogether. There are qualities of abstraction or modernism in Fleischer—he's a quixotic modernist, one who can also be superficial, popular, spectacular, optimistic—that he shares with Anthony Mann. Their "noir" maladies don't have to do with generalized social or psychic angst but organizational dysfunctions, with contrasts and parallels between organizations on both sides of the law, and with organizational solutions (hence the undercover or T-men films that they both made).

Perhaps this is the native American noir, as opposed to the European-influenced one that the *Positif* dossier tries to unearth in Fleischer. In the magazine's interview with the director, he states that he doesn't believe that Europe was an influence on his father, animator Max—the latter had left Austria when he was five—yet Michel Ciment detects such an influence in the work of Fleischer films: "The pessimistic outlook on a society in decomposition" that reveals a Middle European sensibility similar to Lang, Wilder, and Preminger. Mann, it might be said, was led into this area and gained his noir reputation through his work with the Hungarian-born cameraman John



Alton. It might also be said that while Mann is the better, or at least more consistent, director, Fleischer's films occupy a more interesting position.

It's an understandable temptation to apply the "society in decomposition" formula—with its air of instant profundity that characterizes so much writing on film noir—to Fleischer. It also instantly supplies a rationale to one of the most heterogeneous bodies of work in cinema. Taking a related auteurist tack, critics have isolated the four notorious case studies of real-life homicides as reflecting his most consistent concern, tracing them back to his four years of medical studies at Brown University when he intended to become a psychiatrist.

Certainly the last three—*Compulsion* (59), *The Boston Strangler* (68), and *10 Rillington Place* (71)—are fascinating films, among the best Fleischer has made. But what looms behind them as prominently as his psychiatry studies are his subsequent theater work at Yale, and his experiment in theater in the round ("It seemed to me that that got closer to cinema"). In the dining rooms of five hotels, he put on a different play each week among the guests—an experiment that apparently led to his call to Hollywood by an RKO talent scout.

Space takes precedence over psychology, or, rather, psychology comes out of space—and much else besides. If Fleischer's is a formalist art, then that's as evident in films that would seem to be all content—like the quartet of murder case histories—as it is in the choreography of action. *10 Rillington Place*, the last of the four, is the only one not in scope, and the only one set outside the U.S., in a shabby area of London's Notting Hill. The tighter frame tells the story. "This was their little domain," explains John Reginald Christie (Richard Attenborough), escorting police upstairs to the two-room flat of Timothy Evans (John Hurt), who has confessed to the murder of his wife Beryl (Judy Geeson) and baby daughter. Evans was hanged for the latter in 1950, though it was Christie who, beginning during the war, killed a succession of women and secreted their bodies in the cramped environs of No. 10.

English critics complained at the time that by focusing so tightly on Evans and Christie, the film missed the bleak and oppressive postwar context. But the context is there, whether as a matter of scenic

abstraction, detailed domestic ambience, or compacted performance (the two best of his career, according to Fleischer). The film's exteriors, shot in Rillington Place shortly before the area's demolition and redevelopment, reveal a street of forbiddingly blank, shadowed windows—demonstrating that if the Hopper "line" and gestalt is not confined to cities, it is not confined to America either.

Fleischer's Evans and Christie are a couple born for this place, two hollow men, both fantasists. The former is illiterate, with the mind of a child, and boasts of aristocratic lineage and the "elegant but passionate" women he encounters as a van driver. The latter is psychosexually crippled but maintains a wheedling air of gentility that allows him to get away with murder. (Attenborough's Christie insistently proffers cups of tea, and having a "little cup of tea," according to the book by Ludovic Kennedy on which the film was based, was also Christie's euphemism for visiting prostitutes.)

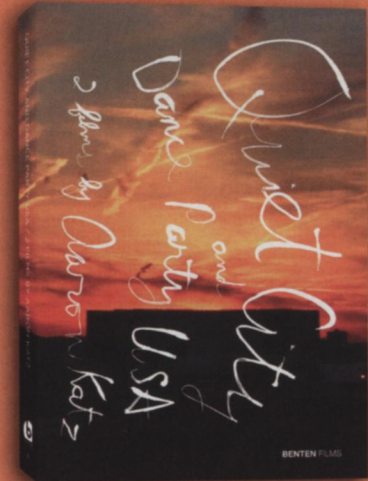
But 'scope is made for show, for the kind of display that is the theatrical and legal context to murder in *The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing* (55) and *Compulsion*. In the first, showgirl Evelyn Nesbit (Joan Collins) swings on, after being the cosseted mistress of overweening architect Stanford White (Ray Milland) and the wife of unstable millionaire Harry K. Thaw (Farley Granger), but when Harry shoots Stanford, and she is frozen out by the Thaw family, her venue becomes an Atlantic City carnival, where both her act and her fate were duplicated in the same year by Lola Montès. With Billy Wilder's regular collaborator Charles Brackett as producer and co-screenwriter, Fleischer does acquit himself well here in decomposing society *Weltschmerz*.

Performance is again on show in the recreated courtroom drama of *Compulsion*, the trial of two homosexual youths (Dean Stockwell and Bradford Dillman) for the kidnapping and murder of a schoolboy to prove their superiority to society's laws—the 1924 Leopold-Loeb couple in all but name. In the renamed Clarence Darrow role, Orson Welles is a grandstanding rumbler, turning the proceedings into a hearing rather than a jury trial, argued on the issue of capital punishment rather than the facts of the case.

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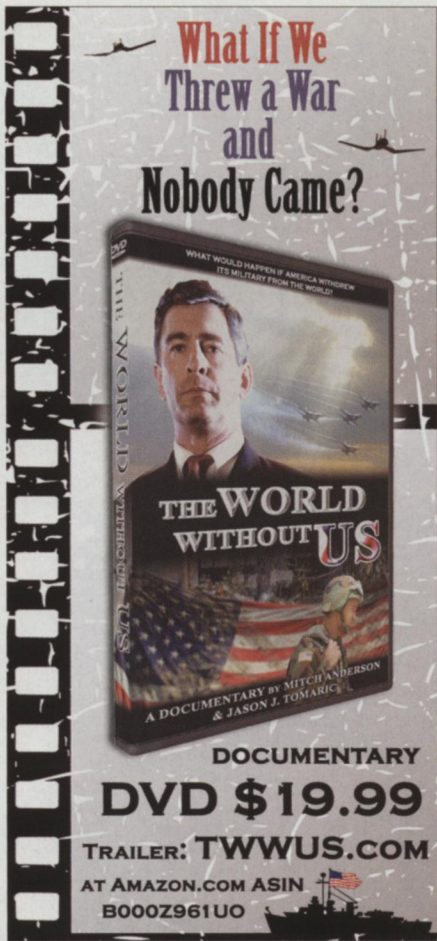


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may be the black-and-white CinemaScope—most unlikely and therefore most mystical and transcendental of formats—whose deeper-focus views and cool grays, in both interiors and exteriors, are perfect for a procedural narrative. But they also hold in suspension the hints of a Providence at work in the manifestation of clues, Stockwell's enthusiasm for the ideal Platonic (if not Nietzschean) society, and Welles's mighty peroration, that in pleading for his clients' lives he is also "pleading for the future." But to see the murder case histories—in positive or negative terms—as Fleischer's personal project, the only auteurist credential of a journeyman director, is to overlook the fact that the subject may have been as much a gift of his studio as CinemaScope. 20th Century Fox, after all, had done the most for the "semi-documentary" thriller—another of the problematic strands of film noir—with *The House on 92nd Street*, *13 Rue Madeleine*, and *Call Northside 777*, all the work of Henry Hathaway. Fleischer, who readily acknowledged that he didn't initiate any of his films, was carrying on a tradition, although "real-life" crime in his case didn't tend toward anything that resembled documentary. It has more of the stylization, the semi-abstraction—the formalism, even—of *Follow Me Quietly* (an extra-lean budget can produce a severe formalism).

Fleischer worked in a plusher mode at Fox, but in *The Boston Strangler*, the best of his crime series—and one of the best American films of the Sixties—he turned in his most elegant scope composition, severe and abstract in its way yet also a moving piece of crime reporting. The split-screen device, used here to represent Boston terrorized by a psychopathic killer of women between 1962 and 1964, was universally dismissed as a gimmick. But apart from its piling-up of images to represent spiraling panic, it is used with considerable variety, subtlety, and even wit—sometimes to contain a shot/reverse shot within one frame, or to extend a sequence shot into something more "in the round."

Its first use is even faux: a TV in one corner of the darkened frame shows the Boston parade for the Project Mercury astronauts, before the rest of the screen lights up to reveal the first murder scene. This bleeding together of public and private is repeated for the introduction,

halfway through the film, of Albert DeSalvo (Tony Curtis), in a sequence shot that circles through his apartment as he watches President Kennedy's funeral on television ("a riderless horse, stirrups backward for the fallen chieftain"), then follows him out on his next "job."

Light also persistently enters to break up the screen: light that seems cold in the bleak squad rooms; Olympian when it pours through the Attorney General's tall windows as he appoints scholarly, removed John Bottomly (Henry Fonda) to head the investigation; and even religious when it frames Bottomly in the shabby apartment of one suspect who proves to be just another case of everyday psychosis in need of succor ("Oh, I thought you were going to help me!").

Light is everywhere, sourceless, in the completely white hospital room where Bottomly finally records DeSalvo's "confession." This is more a therapeutic mime, as DeSalvo is led to act out the murderous self his consciousness cannot accept. Which brings us back to Jekyll and Hyde, a dubious "classic multiple personality" diagnosis. But one might interpret the extraordinary white-on-white mime sequence differently, as a projection in a void—the void opened up by the subsequent revelation that Albert DeSalvo almost certainly wasn't the Boston Strangler.

Does such indeterminacy constitute another dimension? It might in real-life crime. Even John Christie's execution and Timothy Evans's "free pardon" (16 years after being hanged) have refused to settle that case, given the 1994 publication of a book called *The Two Killers of Rillington Place*. As for Rillington Place itself, in the street that has replaced it there is no No. 10, just an empty lot between Nos. 9 and 11. In a city replete with plaques to the famous, this is an eloquent amputation.

### 3. ENDOWED WITH UNGUESSED KINSHIPS

IF THERE'S NO NEED TO CONSIDER ONE OF Fleischer's films as more personal than any other, there's no need to insist on thematic development as a center of interest. The "couple" is a fairly static entity considered as a theme, but it has great complexity and adaptability in its formal or structural function. This is true of even the most eccentric films, or,



indeed, of the eccentric films most of all. *Che!* (69) makes of Che Guevara (Omar Sharif) and Fidel Castro (Jack Palance) a revolutionary odd couple: Che is the uptight zealot, with world revolution in his sights and a death list on his mind; Castro is the slob, with a bottle in his hand and a woman on his arm.

Most eccentric, though, is the historical tableau of *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (70), an account of the lead-up to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which spends two and a half hours not on the content of the diplomatic maneuvers but on the timetabling and prevarication involved. The result, as the inevitable creepingly approaches, has a certain minimalist fascination: the Japanese characters spend their time on ships looking through binoculars; the American characters spend their time in offices looking at pieces of paper. But beyond this, are we back to the couple as an overarching structure? This would cast the Japanese and American establishments—there's one noirish sequence, the only one involving a woman, showing a last-minute dash round Washington at night to alert a complacent officialdom—in the roles of dissembling predator and disbelieving victim.

Beyond the couple, what to make of relationships in Fleischer? Again, they're very hard to separate from spatial relationships. One becomes aware of groupings—in courts, hospitals, police stations, or any domestic interior (where lighting and decor isolate irregular centers of interest), with a careful staging of looks and postures across the (ideally, scope) frame. In the investigative context of *The Boston Strangler*, the way characters in one shot can face in so many directions away from one another seems both a formal and a psychological design. This scheme comes most into its own, though, in *Mandingo*, where the close quartering of masters and slaves, oppressors and oppressed, immerses them in a communal world, a warm saturation of sepias and golds. But it's a world where everyone is facing "off," where internal and external realities are sundered (perhaps it's Fleischer's truest film noir, in color).

Far harder to place, to come to terms with, because in many respects it is so uncharacteristic, is *The Spikes Gang* (74). It is Fleischer's most extraordinary film—with a fair claim to being his best—perhaps because it is working so much

against the grain. In the *Positif* interview, he declares he has no great liking for westerns, and thinks of his three examples—*These Thousand Hills* (59), *Bandido*, and *The Spikes Gang*—as not "really" westerns. So the spirit of dryness in the latter, a refusal to make it atmospherically congenial, is not surprising.

This leads to a certain sparseness in other respects: in place of tracking or sequence shots, there are zooms or straight cuts. When one of the three boys who have abandoned life on the farm for the romance of the West finally succumbs to hunger, a sequence of quick cuts take us from him fainting, to his friend pawning his father's watch, to them all eating, to the watch in the pawnbroker's window from where they steal it back. It's a somewhat Buñuel-esque western, written by Irving Ravetch and Harriet Frank Jr., who had recently taken a simpler view of growing up in the West in *The Cowboys*. That the roguish charm of the boys' outlaw mentor, Harry Spikes (Lee Marvin), will wear thin is a genre given, but not the desolating nihilism to which it leads, which makes the unbending religiosity and brutality of life on the farm something to dream of.

With an author like Cormac McCarthy now so primed for movie adaptation, it is shocking to find in *The Spikes Gang* a nightmare landscape—where "all preference is made whimsical and a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships"—that is McCarthy before the fact. In one respect, *The Spikes Gang* is pure Fleischer: space as a beguilement and a trap. For their big and inevitably botched job, Spikes leads the boys on a bank raid in the small Texas town of Uvalde. Scouted from above, Uvalde is as real and detailed as a model in the sun. But the bank they enter seems huge, cavernous, stretching out in all directions, a space too large for these cowboy games.

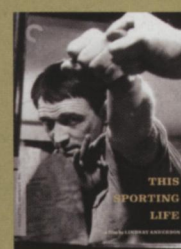
It's a fine site for 3-D dreaming, where other stories—both real (Pat Garrett spent some time in Uvalde after the shooting of Billy the Kid made him unpopular in New Mexico) and fictional ("Uvalde—God forgive us, we painted their walls with blood that time, walked out of that bank with \$11,000": Dock Tobin in *Man of the West*)—might cross paths. □

RICHARD COMBS is a regular contributor to FILM COMMENT.



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