factories, and the military helps the civilian community in road upkeep, cultural activity, and militia training.

Story of the Ball (11 minutes). A playground confrontation between teacher and student which reveals the working of the Cultural Revolution in microcosm.

Professor Tsien (12 minutes). A university teacher who had been the favorite target of the Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution tells his story.

A Performance at the Peking Opera (30 minutes). The training of opera performers in acrobatics and dance and a performance of a new work.

Training at the Peking Circus (14 minutes). More training of performers and another performance, of acrobatics this time.

Craftsmen (13 minutes). The transmission of traditional arts from the old generation to the young.

Impressions of a City (55 minutes). Shanghai.

From!
New Challenges
For Documentary
Edited
By Alan Rosenthal

History Is the Theme of All My Films: An Interview with Emile de Antonio

Gary Crowdus and Dan Georgakas

Cineaste: *How do you go about making a compilation documentary such as* In the Year of the Pig*? Do you start from a predetermined political thesis that you want to illustrate, or do you do film research first and work out a narrative line from the material available?*

Emile de Antonio: I approach all my work from a consciously left viewpoint. It's very hard to articulate what it means to be a Marxist today, but it was a little bit clearer in 1967 when I began *Pig*. The film originally grew out of anger, outrage, and passion, but I knew that all of these, estimable as they are as motivations, are wrong if unchecked in a film, because you end up with only a screed, a poster that shouts, "Out of Vietnam!" It seemed to me that the most passionate statement that could be made was to make a film that would treat the history of Vietnam as far back as the footage would take it, to cover the whole history of the war, from its earliest days to the Tet Offensive in 1968, which was the year I completed the film. Compilation filmmaking lends itself best to history, which is, frankly, the theme of all my films.

The first thing I did was read about two hundred books in French and English on Vietnam, because I figured that was one way I could find the images. Many who do compilation documentaries today come from an anti-intellectual generation, or have no historical sense, and they're motivated primarily by flashy images or simple prejudices, when what they should be looking for are historical resonances which are filmic.

In other words, you're really interested in finding images for a general schema that you've gotten after all your reading, whereas some filmmakers feel that they can just rummage through a lot of archival footage and find a film there.

Yes, that's right. I think you've got to do a hell of a lot of homework. I then proceed to assemble a chaotic draft of the subject. I knew that I was going to pursue a historical line, although not necessarily a chronological line. I had a friend who owned a box factory, and he used to give me corrugated paper in rolls nine feet high, and I'd tack them up on my office walls. I'd start out by writing, "Han dynasty"—even though I knew I'd never put anything about the Han dynasty in the film—because the Chinese experience begins there. I would obviously write down, "Dien Bien Phu, 1954, May 8th," and abstract concepts like "torture," "inhumanity," and other things that interested me. Sometimes I would also paste a picture into it, so I would have visual images as well as words on the walls.

Once this huge outline was done, I started to do extensive film research. I went to Prague, for instance, where the NLF had a main office, and they gave me tremendous footage. I went to East Germany and there I met the Soviets who gave me Roman Karmen's restaging of the battle of Dien Bien Phu. Sometimes it's very sad, by the way, when good research pays off, because most of the people who saw *In the Year of the Pig* thought that really *was* the battle of Dien Bien Phu. When I lecture with the film today, I tell audiences, "You should look more carefully, because if you look at those Vietminh troops, you know they're not actually in combat. They're all so neatly dressed and running at port arms, as if some major were in the back giving orders." Still, it was beautiful footage, and I think I used it well, because I cut from that to the real footage of all those white faces surrendering to yellow faces, which is one of the symbols of that war.

I met with the Hanoi people in Paris, and I was the first Westerner to get an extraordinary film called *The Life of Ho Chi Minh*, which is their view of Ho, with early stills of Ho and his family and great material of Ho joining the French Communist party in 1922. I love that kind of material. I also got access to the French army's film library, the greatest collection of Vietnam footage that exists—it goes back to 1902. While there, I saw Pierre Schoendoerffer's great footage that nobody's ever seen. He was a sergeant in Vietnam, the head of a camera crew, and got some of the greatest shots of tanks in battle in the jungle that I've ever seen. He later made several documentaries, including *La 317ème section* and *The Anderson Platoon*. I had acquired a whole bunch of this stuff when one of the two young French sergeants assigned to me said, "Listen, they're going to pull it out from under you, because now they know who you are, and you're not going to get one frame of this stuff." There's this beautiful shot in *Pig* of something you can't get in this country. It's Ho Chi Minh with Admiral d'Argenlieu, the French commissioner of Vietnam, aboard the battlecruiser *Richelieu*. It's the end of talking, a really symbolic scene, because the war's really going to go now, and as Ho leaves the ship, with the French saluting, he takes a cigarette out of his mouth and, in that casual way of his, flips it over the side. I had to have that shot, so I said to the kid, "Listen, I'm going to steal this. Would you mind going out, because I don't want you to be implicated in all this." So I just cut that shot out of the roll of 35mm negative and stuck it in the pocket of my raincoat. I realized that since they knew who I was now, there was a good chance that the guys with the guns at the gate would stop me, and I could have gotten five years for that in France, but I thought it was worth it. Making films is risk taking.

The thing that staggered me was that even though the TV networks were going on and on about Vietnam, and other people were making films about Vietnam, no one found the footage I did for *Pig*. I located several great scenes no one ever picked up, including one of the film's best scenes from the 1930s, which is of these absolutely arrogant Frenchmen in their colonial hats and white suits being pulled in rickshaws by Vietnamese. They arrive in front of a cafe where there is a tall Moroccan with a fez—the scene encapsulates the whole French colonial empire—and when the Vietnamese put their hands out for payment, the Moroccan sends them away like trash. To me, that said everything you could say about colonialism without ever saying the word. If anything shows the primacy of the image over the word, what the image can reveal, it's the image of those rickshaws. It's the equivalent of a couple of chapters of dense writing about the meaning of colonialism.

Of course, *Pig* is only partly compilation; it includes a tremendous amount of interview material. I sought out the major left French historians, for instance. Not Communists, because the problem with most French Communists is that they talk like *L'Humanité*, it's a dead language. I filmed people such as Jean Lacouture, who had written a biography of Ho Chi Minh, and Phillippe Devillers, the editor of a French intellectual journal about Southeast Asia who had served in Vietnam. I used them as voice-overs for that early Vietnamese footage of the rickshaws—not talking about colonialism, because the image explained colonialism—but explaining what was behind colonialism, what the *corvée* meant, what the French were trying to do, the white face/yellow face thing, and all the rest of it. At the same time I was weaving the life of Ho Chi Minh in and out of the whole film right down to the end where I film Dan Berrigan, who had just come back from Hanoi where he saw Pham Van Dong at the end of 1967.

The old footage I found went back to the thirties, so the film covers some thirty to thirty-five years of history, from the early colonial experience through the thirties into the imperial experience under us, down to the Tet Offensive, including World War II, the French cooperation with the Japanese, the rise of Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh, the American intervention in 1949 and 1954, and so on.

How do you respond to those who dismiss the film as propaganda?

There is out-and-out propaganda in the film, obviously, although sometimes I don't know what the distinction is between propaganda and passion, and propaganda and politics. I wanted to make Ho look as good as he could be

made to look. It wasn't very hard. Ho was a patriot and a Marxist. There's a lovely sequence of Ho surrounded by a bunch of children, and Dan Berrigan says in a voice-over, "The Vietnamese know what it is to have a leader who leads a simple life." I used another shot they gave me of where Ho lived, which was a small space with a tiny typewriter and one extra Vietnamese suit hanging there, and you knew it wasn't bullshit.

An interesting thing happened when I spoke with the film on May Day in 1969 at Columbia University. It was still tumultuous there, even though it was after the '68 riots. In the film I have scenes of Sam 3 missiles shooting down American planes, and when the first American plane flew over, with its insignia clearly visible, and it was shot down, the whole audience clapped. I thought, "Jesus, that's weird, isn't it? What have I done?" I mean, I was in the Air Force, I flew, and, looking at that scene on the editing table, I wouldn't have clapped. They were right, of course, except that my reaction was a little more complex.

What is your approach to editing?

I'm very slow. I mean, I could cut my new film in two weeks, and it would be OK, but it wouldn't be my film. I work very hard at editing. I'm never satisfied. I always edit with the whole picture in mind. When I finish a sequence, I run the entire film from the beginning to see how it plays. I'll continue working on a scene until I'm satisfied. Finding a suitable ending to *Pig*, for example, proved a real problem. Originally, the ending I was going to use was some footage that the Hanoi people had given me. I had been playing with it for weeks. It was a very quiet scene of a road in North Vietnam, and suddenly the brush around the road gets up, it's the Vietminh, and they come charging out. But I thought, "Shit, I'm an American. I mean, I hope the Vietnamese win this war, I think our position is immoral, and I'm a Marxist, but I'm not Vietnamese. That would be a suitable ending for a Vietnamese film, but I'm an American." I decided to show that, even though we're Americans, the Vietnamese can punish us, so I got all this footage of dead and wounded Americans with bandages around their eyes, blinded, being evacuated. Then I took a shot of a Civil War statue—a young man who died at Gettysburg—and reversed it, put it into negative, to show, in my mind anyway, that our cause in Vietnam was not the one that boy had died for in 1863, and then added a kind of scratchy version of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. For me that was a suitable ending, a politically coherent ending.

The temptation of the compilation film, though, is the high, jazzy moment, that plateau moment that you want in there even though maybe it doesn't belong.

In other words, you try to avoid the easy things that would play well for an audience.

The dream, of course, is to find something that's good, that plays to the audience and that's absolutely supportive of what you're trying to do. For

example, I had completed *Pig*, the mix date was a day and a half away, when I received a phone call from a young woman at the Sherman Grinberg Film Library. She said, "Mr. de Antonio, I've noticed you here looking for film. I know and support what you're doing, and we've just had come into the shop this extraordinary piece of film featuring Colonel Patton." It's that sequence, of course, in which Patton gives a little speech after some American troops have been killed, and, at the end, he gives that maniacal smile and talks about his men being "a bloody good bunch of killers." Well, no matter what, that just had to go in, and I made room for that at once. Sure, it was one of those plateau moments, the kind of thing you dream about, but it was so quintessentially the position of so much of our brass, that butch, phony-Hemingway sentimentality of the tough guy who's practically in tears about the men in his own company who were killed, but for whom, on the other hand, killing gooks didn't make any difference.

Those plateaus are the temptations. Nixon gives you a lot of those. Making a film such as *Millhouse* or *Point of Order*, where you have so much good material, it takes a lot of discipline to throw some stuff out that's absolutely brilliant, that you know people will laugh and clap about, but that has no meaning.

Speaking about Point of Order, *you took a big artistic chance in making what at that time was a form that hadn't been seen before.*

You're right, but it was the only way it could have been done. There were many mistakes in *Point of Order*—it was the first film I ever did, and it was done over and over. It took almost three years; that's a long time to do a compilation film. It was all there, though, there was no research at all. I had 188 hours of material. It took a month to look at it all, and the first cut I made reduced it to 20 hours. The trick with that film was structural.

I was fascinated with the idea of making a film about a historical event with a theme that would never be mentioned. The theme is the fall of a demagogue—the greatest demagogue of our time—and the idea was to begin somewhere near the beginning and not tell what the issues are, but to let them evolve, to let the struggle evolve between the issues as well as among the different personalities, and conclude with the ending—an artificial ending which I imposed —of the empty, silent committee room.

I had no idea how an audience would respond to it, and when the film was completed and the Museum of Modern Art asked to screen it, it was my virgin experience with an audience. I had a seat in the back row, but I was very fidgety so I finally stood up in the back of the auditorium. Then, the first time I hoped someone would laugh or respond, the whole house did, and it was just amazing. I think it was one of the high points of my life, and then, when people clapped at the end, it surely was. It later opened at the Beekman and ran for a long time. It was during the winter, and cold as hell, but I used to drive by at night just to see people standing in line to see a movie that was

hard to look at. I mean, it's a dry, intellectual film—no sex—and yet I still find it exciting. A lot of people have imitated it since, but, as it turns out, I was unknowingly imitating somebody long since dead whose work I had then never seen—Esther Schub.

You've said that you were disappointed with the critical reaction to Point of Order *and the way that audiences tend to see Welch as the hero of the film.*

I saw how effective Welch was, but I thought that people, particularly the critics, would see through it. My point was that there were no heroes in the film, but the press and many people tried to make a hero out of Welch. For instance, a lot of people I know who are gay are disturbed by that sequence in *Point of Order* with the word "fairy." The point I was making, of course, was that Welch was perhaps not as unscrupulous as McCarthy, but nevertheless unscrupulous. Welch was badgering this McCarthy aide, just the way McCarthy badgered people, saying, "Now, where did that picture come from that hung on Schine's wall?" And the guy said, "I don't know where that picture came from," and Welch said, "Well, sir, did you think it came from a pixie?" And McCarthy—then at the end of his career, with that absolutely unerring instinct to destroy himself—interrupts and says, "Let Mr. Welch define pixie for us. I think he might be an expert on that." It was as if Welch had baited a trap. Nobody could have done it better. Welch, who was so quick, looked at him and said, "Sir, a pixie is a close relative of a fairy. Have I enlightened you, sir?" And the camera turns on Schine and Cohn and McCarthy, and the whole audience burst into laughter. There was that rather meaningless rumor that two or three of McCarthy's people were gay, and Welch knew it. But when the film was released, a lot of people asked, "What did you bring up that fag thing for?" My feeling was that it belonged, not because of the allegations against them, but because that was Welch's technique.

What bothered me most about the critics was the political judgment that made them dwell on how funny the film was. All those critics, however, almost without exception, were silent during the McCarthy days, so what they were doing was enjoying a kind of vicarious solidarity with history. Those people had all been intimidated by that monster and demagogue Joseph R. McCarthy, the junior senator from Wisconsin, and some ten years after the events they all had a chance to dump on McCarthy. Critics such as Brendan Gill at the *New Yorker*, Bosley Crowther at the *New York Times*, and Archer Winsten and Jimmy Wechsler at the *New York Post* all wrote things that made me puke, particularly Wechsler who called the film "a love letter to Miss Liberty."

How did your film Charge and Countercharge *come about?*

In attempting to reach a larger audience with *Point of Order*, a major publishing company came to me and said, "We love your film, but it could never be used in a classroom." I asked, "Why not?" They said, "A classroom hour is like a Freudian hour, it's about fifty minutes. Your film is ninety-seven minutes. That's two entire classes, and it almost makes the teacher an unnecessary appendage. We'd like something about forty-three minutes. That will allow the teacher time to talk." So, in putting together *Charge and Countercharge*, the subtlety had to go, because subtlety depends on time; but all the great moments are kept.

Your "negative" films which attack the establishment, such as In the Year of the Pig *or* Millhouse, *tend to be better, more accomplished works than what might be categorized as your "positive" films about the left, such as* Underground *or* America Is Hard to See. *How do you account for the surprising lack of critical edge in those latter films? Is it a fear of criticizing or undermining the left?*

I don't share that perception entirely. I think *America Is Hard to See* is a film which was not understood. Basically, the subject of that film is the failure of the liberal left. Liberalism came down the pike with its most articulate spokesman, Eugene McCarthy, a genuinely intellectual man, and there was a brief moment when something of a normal democratic process might have worked here if McCarthy had had a little bit more courage, if he had played hard in the convention and attacked Humphrey instead of rolling over like some obscure monk who didn't want to get into a brawl.

As for *Underground*, its weaknesses are many, and among them—speaking only for myself now, since more than one person was involved in that film—was a generation gap. I've never shared all the Weather Underground's politics, although I supported large assumptions they made. They were the last gasp of a movement I had been following, from the early days of SDS on, of an entire generation younger than me. It's a film about endings, not about where life is going, it's the end of that generation's most important political organization.

Do you think that's the way audiences perceived that film?

No, maybe not. It's not downbeat, because I did admire those people personally. It's a very confused film, and, since the truth has to come out on this sometime, collectives of two are impossible. This was basically a collective between Mary [Lampson] and myself. Mary had always worked for me, had been my employee, and then suddenly we were equals. It was a very hard thing, and we struggled over it. I think Mary was much more deeply moved by them than I was. I had to give way a good many places in that film where I would not have given way previously. I was working very hard to be collective and self-effacing, which is something I'm not by temperament. I was trying very hard to be a superfeminist. I mean, I don't have a hard time being profeminist, but being a superfeminist is very hard because it's a false position. The Weather people had that same problem, and it shows in the film.

In fact, I thought the Weather people were incredibly arrogant. I can't remember if we left this in the film or not, but at one point I said, "Look, if you don't want to talk about who you are, why don't we just get a fucking copy of *Prairie Fire* and you can read it?" And they said, "OK, that would

be good, that might be better." I said, "No, that wouldn't be better. It's not well written, it's a boring magazine in many places."

I wanted them—and they had originally agreed to do this—to tell how they got to where they were. In other words, how did essentially middle-class people—and some of them came from the upper class—become revolutionaries carrying on an underground war against the government. That was the story I always thought we were going to do, and it was only when we got underground that they pulled their own gig. We argued, and I wanted to put that argument into the film. Mary and I had a lot of problems about that, and I think the reason Mary didn't want it in the film is because I'm the one who did the arguing and it would have made it much more my film. Mary didn't argue with them, Haskell did somewhat, and I argued a lot.

My feeling was that nobody gives a shit about all this abstract political terminology. American political people, especially SDS types, have almost no theoretical formulation to fall back on. Every time I heard them talk about Lenin or Mao, my heart skipped a beat, because it was never anything different from what they wrote in *Prairie Fire*, whereas I thought the human stuff would have been fascinating.

Afterwards, I realized we didn't have enough to make a film, because much of what we shot didn't work, they didn't want to say very much, and the jargon didn't appeal to me. So I thought, "Well, I'll make an anthology of the left. I'll talk to people I know and get excerpts from their films to put in." So there's a great sequence of Malcolm X, there's something from Saul Landau's *Fidel*, something from Chris Marker's film about the Pentagon, and so on. Those are the roots that the Weather people came from. They're the roots, for that matter, of anybody who was in SDS or for most young people in the American left, and I wanted to confer on them a kind of historical authenticity by tying them up to all that. I mean, I found Malcolm X more interesting than they were.

Now, I don't want it to seem as if I'm running down the Weather people. It was my idea to make the film. I was the one who approached them: I was the one who got Mary and Haskell into it. I did it because I found what they were doing exciting. That does not necessarily mean that I shared their politics, but there was something in their desperation that I felt myself. Ford was in office, it was all going to be the same thing over and over again, the whole left seemed shattered, all those great demonstrations, all those forces that seemed to be alive were dying, and these people were the last spark that was left of all that. There was something that appealed to me, almost in an avant-garde sense, about what they were doing. I mean, to put a bomb in the lavatory of the Capitol, to put a bomb in a police station, in Gulf Oil, in Rockefeller Center, and to get away with it every time. There was a Robin Hood quality about that.

Someone at the time said that the Weather Underground's strategy was to destroy capitalism, bathroom by bathroom. It's ironic, but perhaps the most significant aspect about Underground *was how the Hollywood filmmaking community came to your defense when the FBI subpoenaed you to turn over your film and tapes.*

We were supported because our stand was so aggressive and so rational. We kept saying, "Our crime is that we made a film, not that we belong to any organization." Even Peter Bogdanovich, who is a fairly apolitical person, signed the petition in support of us, and Robert Wise, then the head of the Directors Guild of America, spoke out officially in our favor.

You've had a long history of harassment by the FBI, the CIA, and the government in general. You're perhaps the only filmmaker who was on Nixon's Enemies List. Has any of that ever seriously hindered your work?

Sure, I've had a lot of fucking over. Many times I would set up an interview to be filmed and then, at the last minute, it would be short-circuited. I think the government also goes out of its way, directly and indirectly—and the indirect way is the more potent way—to prevent certain films from getting the kind of exposure they might get. *In the Year of the Pig*, for instance, was booked to open in a good house in Los Angeles, and someone broke into the theater in the middle of the night and painted on the screen a hammer and sickle and the words "Communist traitor." News of this spread to other theaters, and that was the end of the film theatrically.

Something strange also happened with *Millhouse*. The film grossed $36,000 in its first week at the New Yorker, which was a house record. It was in the *Variety* charts, so all the other theaters wanted it. Louis Sher of the Art Theater Guild, who owns seventy theaters out West in cities such as Denver and Albuquerque, booked *Millhouse* in his theaters. Then, just like that, they were all canceled. But who knows the real reason why? I got a letter from a theater manager in Denver who said, "My company canceled your film, which I was looking forward to, here at the Bluebird Theater in Denver, and to this day I don't know why it was canceled." I know the kind of muscle the White House exerted, because I have copies of all these memoranda on White House letterhead about the film. I don't moan or complain about it, because if you attack the reigning president of the U.S., if you attack the government, you can't expect them to treat you with a light hand. It comes with the territory. *Millhouse* did show theatrically in twenty cities, but it could have been shown in seventy other cities where documentaries ordinarily don't play.

When *Millhouse* opened in Washington, D.C., Larry O'Brien's assistant at the National Democratic Committee called me at my hotel and invited me to come by for a drink. He asked me, "Mr. de Antonio, how can we use your film?" I told him, "You can't. You'd be tarred with my reputation. But I'll tell you how you could use it. Buy a hundred prints, let me give a week-long course on Nixon to about three hundred young people. Then let them take the

prints to all the territories you're sure to lose—the South, the Midwest—and have people look at that life." He said, "Gee, that's a good idea, but you're right, there's no way we could do that."

Millhouse did have a wide distribution for a documentary. Of course, audiences were laughing at Nixon, which I wasn't doing. Basically, I use him as a comic figure, but I wasn't laughing at him. There's a difference. I'm not unsympathetic to that poor, wretched, clumsy, mixed-up man. I wouldn't want him for a friend, but I understand the drive that must have made him from the first moment of his life. What I wanted people to understand in that film is that the souring of the Horatio Alger myth is almost a necessity in our kind of culture. Nixon, the glib opportunist who trampled over Helen Gahagan Douglas and Alger Hiss and everyone else, that is the way you became a Horatio Algerish mythic hero—you know, pluck and luck turned out to be something quite different. He paid the price right along the line, although more of us paid the price in a bigger way than he did.

How do you account for your fascination with history and politics?

I come from a long line of intellectuals, there's no other word for it. My grandfather was a philosophy professor who translated Lucretius, and my father was also an intellectual. I was raised in a home with five thousand books in it. The stories I heard as a little boy were Homer, Dickens, or my father's versions of European history. I knew the French Revolution fairly well, as well as the Italian movement to create a unified Italy.

Was your father a teacher?

No, he was a sort of upper-class gentleman, a doctor who owned a hospital and who had money and time.

How were you politically radicalized?

I was very early confronted with the reality of class. We lived in a big house in Scranton, Pennsylvania, with a chauffeur, cook, and maid. When I was five or six years old, I can remember, every Thanksgiving we collected money for the poor children in Scranton who lived only a mile or so from us. I used to ask why that was. I entered Harvard when I was sixteen and immediately joined the Young Communist League, the John Reed Society, and the American Student Union. I knew that's where I wanted to be. I've never deviated from those ideas, although I left all formal groups long ago.

When did you become interested in film?

I disliked most films. I had very strange, perverse tastes. I thought Louis Jouvet, the thirties French actor, was absolutely fantastic. I loved Renoir's films, and Chaplin and Keaton. I didn't care for John Ford's films at all. I mean, I saw that the images were beautiful, but I quickly got tired of Monument Valley and those tacky songs.

The one movie that turned me on—because I knew all the people in it and the guy who wrote it—was *Pull My Daisy*. It's a movie that doesn't hold up today, by the way, but it was so much of that time, and it made me want to

make a movie, that's another reason why it's important to me. I saw that an interesting film could be made for very little money.

We understand that Andy Warhol made a film about you. What was that like?

Andy and I have been friends for a long time, since long before he was a painter. One day he said to me, "De, I think we should make a film together." I said, "Come on, Andy, we're friends, but I like to make political films and you make these frou-frou films." Then one night I saw him at a bar, when I was drunk, and I said, "OK, Andy, let's do it!" He said, "What shall we film?" and I said, "I'll drink a quart of whiskey in twenty minutes." I knew that twenty-two-year-old Marines had died doing it, but I knew what I was doing. I'm a very good drinker.

I showed up at his studio with my wife and a drinking companion. They turned the lights on, and I sat there cross-legged against a wall and drank a quart of J&B whiskey in twenty minutes. It was boring, nothing happened. I didn't want the glass, so I broke it. I had some ice and I threw that away. Andy was filming with a twelve-hundred-foot 16mm magazine which runs for thirty-five minutes. When it came time to change the magazine, he was so untrained in the use of the camera that it took him about fifteen minutes to change it. So by the time the second roll went on, I was on the floor. I mean, I couldn't even get up. My hand goes up the wall, trying to pull myself up, I'm singing Spanish civil war songs and shouting, "Fuck you!" It was unspeakably degrading. I finally walked out with the help of my wife and friend and went home and slept it off. The next day I was sharp enough to call my lawyer and have him call Andy and tell him, "De never signed a release, so if the film is ever shown, we'll sue." It appears in Andy's published filmography—it's called *Drink*—but it's never been shown.

How does Painters Painting *fit in with your political films?*

I think *Painters Painting* is a political film, too, except it's political in another, more complex sense. In my lifetime, the most significant cultural event, which took place in an absolutely closed circle, was called New York painting. It addresses itself to a few thousand people. I mean, maybe a few million people go to museums, but only two or three thousand people—the painters, the collectors, the owners, and the dealers—actually comprise the scene. That was a scene I knew intimately. Nobody was as well qualified by experience as I was with those people. They would say things to me that nobody else could even ask them. I knew the answers to the questions in advance. I was fascinated by these people. They were amazingly articulate. I loved their work, they were my friends, so I made a film about them.

Their work was the highest commodity we produced. It became something that every sophisticated millionaire had to have. I mean, any asshole could buy a Rolls Royce or a $2 million house, but it took exquisite taste to have a painting by Frank Stella or Robert Rauschenberg. *Painters Painting* is a film

largely enthusiastic about American art, and I'm aware of all the political contradictions. The history of the West is replete with similar examples. The great art of the nineteenth century was the art of imperial France when they had African colonies. But for a moment after World War II, all this stuff exploded and New York became the art capital of the world. One of the reasons it happened, of course, is that many European artists fled Hitler, and many of them—particularly Hans Hofmann, Marcel Duchamp, and Max Ernst—came here to New York where their work was immediately shown by Peggy Guggenheim. Jackson Pollock was painting like an American romantic realist when, suddenly, he became acquainted with the unconscious through these people and, boom, developed a genuinely native American art nonetheless. Nothing has happened since then like that explosion between 1945 and 1970.

Would you tell us a bit about your new film? We understand that for the first time you will be utilizing actors and fictional sequences.

The heart of the film is the trial of the Plowshares Eight. Originally I went down to Pennsylvania, hired a very good lawyer, and petitioned the court to film the trial. I was denied the right to film, even after an appeal to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. At first I tried to film all around the trial— meetings between the defendants and their lawyers, demonstrations, prayer vigils—but I knew I didn't have a film, so I said, "Fuck 'em, I'll write my own screenplay." I got all the trial transcripts and from thirteen hundred pages of transcript I made a seventy-page screenplay.

Did you elaborate on the trial transcripts?

Well, I changed things. This is not a documentary. For example, all throughout the trial the defendants kept asking to produce expert witnesses, and the judge said, "The only thing that's pertinent here is your crime, not nuclear war." The defendants were going to call witnesses like Robert Aldridge, who'd designed five generations of nuclear warheads for Lockheed then one day realized that what he was doing was wrong, and he became a leader in the antinuclear movement. Daniel Ellsberg, Dave Dellinger, and others were going to be called. The judge refused to allow any of them to testify, but since I'm making my own trial, I've put the witnesses in.

So you're filming the trial they were not allowed to have.

Yes, I've reconstructed the whole trial, with the Berrigans and the other defendants playing themselves, and everyone else is an actor, including Martin Sheen, who plays the judge. I had met Martin in the days of the *Underground* fracas, and he impressed me as being not only a very fine actor, but also a fantastic human being, a person of commitment. I asked him if he'd be in the film, and he said, "Absolutely. I'll give you a week's shooting time for free." Then he asked, "Don't you need some money?" I said, "Yes," and he gave it.

I videotaped every actor who tried out, and ended up with as many as forty actors trying out for one role. So I had very good actors working for scale.

The film has a real interaction between real people and actors. The tension began to build during the shooting, you could see it in the defendants. I mean, there was Martin Sheen, acting the way the judge was supposed to act, and George Crowley plays the prosecuting attorney who knows that this is his last chance, that if he's ever going to be anything other than an assistant prosecuting attorney in this small, right-wing town, he *has* to win. So all those other forces and struggles are in there. The actors were wonderful, and the Plowshares Eight really got angry. In fact, Dan Berrigan gave the greatest performance I've ever seen in a courtroom. He did it better than Welch, better even than he did it in the real courtroom. Dan Berrigan is a brilliant guy, a Jesuit priest who also happens to be a great actor, among other things. One of the things I learned on this film is that the Catholic left is a very real left. I was raised in an anticlerical household and was never very sympathetic to the Catholic church, but they are really a committed left, their bodies are out there.

I'll be integrating documentary material with the fictional sequences. I've already filmed two members of the jury, and in two weeks I'll be filming the real judge, Judge Salus, and the district attorney. They're going to talk about the trial.

Do you know how all of this is going to cut together?

Nope. I've never done this before. But isn't that part of the fun of art? You take those chances, and you can come out looking like a fool or you can come out feeling that you've done something good. Both possibilities are there.

We understand that you used tape instead of film.

Yes, we shot on videotape. I knew that I didn't want to have a tape person shoot it for me, though, so instead I chose Judy Irola, a woman whose work I liked and who had never, ever done anything on videotape. It was the most intelligent thing I did in making the film. We shot on one inch, which is professional gauge, and the technicians in the video truck said, "Wow, we've never seen stuff like this," because Judy shot it like a film.

Why was it shot on tape?

Because I started out shooting the documentary stuff on tape. When you shoot three-quarter inch for documentary, it's incredibly cheap. Later we'll take it up to one inch, and it'll look not quite as good as film, but I don't want it to. The real part will look slightly tacky and the trial part will look highly professional, but that difference between the documentary and fictional scenes is quite intentional.

Where do you find money to finance your films?

Rich liberals. I don't use foundations. I ask people I know who have money and who have been supportive of left projects in the past. It was always easy, I never had any trouble raising money. But I've noticed an enormous difference in my fundraising ability today as opposed to eight or nine years ago. You become unclean after a while, and the times have changed. A friend of mine told me about a fundraising party last night where they screened Diego de la

Texera's new film on El Salvador. A lot of theater and film people were there, and ten years ago, during the Vietnam war, the checkbooks would have flashed out at the end of that film, but last night nobody gave, they were all afraid. Some people said, "Here's a hundred dollars in cash," but nobody would put their name on anything. They were afraid that something might happen to their careers. That's reflected in raising money right now to complete my new film. I mean, I never thought that I'd have trouble raising money for Catholic activists, but I'm having a harder time with that than anything I've ever done.

When you receive money, is it an outright gift?

No, rarely. I've a moderately good record of making my own high-handed rules, which is that I pay people back but they get no profit, because I figure they have more money than they need anyway. But they're entitled to be paid back, and they get a tax benefit.

Some of your readers may be interested in a ploy that I think more left-wing filmmakers—particularly compilation filmmakers, and particularly if you're as thorough as I am—should use. When I was done with *In the Year of the Pig*, for example, I had the most complete film library on Vietnam in existence in this country, tens of thousands of feet that I couldn't use. The law says that the artist can't take a tax write-off on such material, so what I would do was to find the person I was going to ask to put money into my next film—*Millhouse*, say—and explain, "Look, this footage is worth $100,000. If you put X amount of money into *Millhouse*, (a) I'll guarantee to repay you, (b) you can claim a loss this year because the film is being made and you obviously can't make a profit on it, and (c) two years hence, as an inducement for getting you to invest in the film, I will sell you these Vietnam outtakes for the money that you're putting into the film, and you can donate them to the University of Wisconsin and claim a tax write-off on their declared value." The film then becomes part of the university's archive—and I'm lucky, of course, because there's an archive about me at the University of Wisconsin—and they make it available for study by scholars, film historians, and the like. If you're in a high tax bracket, you make a fairly good profit just getting your money back, plus that later tax write-off. It's a very good inducement and should be used by young filmmakers who know rich people.

How do you perceive your audience? Who are you making films for, and what sort of political impact can your films have?

A great American, Walt Whitman, said that to have great poetry, you must have great audiences. Since I'm interested in history, I'm obviously interested in what happens to my films over the long haul. Anyone who makes films wants them to be seen, and I would do anything except change my films to reach a larger audience. But in America and most Western capitalist countries, film—from its earliest, nickelodeon days up to the most sophisticated mind control today through television—has been seen as an opiate, as entertainment. As the old Hollywood saw has it, "If you have a message, use Western Union." Well, all my films have messages, but I don't want to send them by Western Union.

I have never looked upon documentary as an apprenticeship for the making of Hollywood films. That's bullshit. I've always chosen to make documentaries. I love documentary film, I love the political tradition of documentary film, and I love the subjects that documentary film can treat. I never saw making documentaries as preparing me to do a *Gidget* film or even a fake serious film like *Coming Home*.

My bet's with history. I'm an American who believes in history. That's a very rare thing, because most Americans live by seconds, they try to live outside of history. But I live in history, and I think that people will be looking at *Pig* and *Point of Order* long after I'm dead. I don't think it will be millions, but there will be audiences who will know that *Pig* is a history of the war in Vietnam as good as any book on the subject. Those images that you have to struggle to find and to make effective will endure, because history endures. That's an optimistic view of the human race, and I realize it's almost kind of silly to be optimistic about the human race today at the rate we're going.

But, to answer your question more directly, I get the audience I know I'm going to get. I suffer from small audiences, I know that. It's too bad that those gorgeous color spectaculars are the things that reach masses of people, and that films like mine are customarily seen by college graduates, intellectuals, East Side audiences, or public television audiences. What kind of audience, theoretically, would I have wanted for *In the Year of the Pig*? I would have liked police and working class, blue-collar guys who were for the war to have seen it. I would have liked them to have seen that the Vietnamese were fighting for their country, even though they might have hated the film.

Does it always have to be a question of reaching massive numbers of people? Is it possible to be politically effective reaching a smaller audience?

I lecture at universities a lot, and I can't tell you how many times I've been absolutely *bouleversé* by having some young woman come up to me and say, "You know, I was radicalized by seeing your film *In the Year of the Pig*. I was going to the University of Kansas when I saw it, and it made me see the war in a different way and I joined SDS." Or a young person will come up to me and say, "I just saw *Point of Order*, and I think I understand something about McCarthy now." That has happened many times.

Your films are also very popular overseas.

They do well in countries such as Sweden, England, West Germany, and France—the French in particular like our mad president, our mad demagogue, and our unsuccessful war, which was just as unsuccessful as their war, because they think I'm anti-American, which I'm not. I like this country, and if I didn't, I'd go somewhere else. I'm an American. This is my space, and that's why I want to change it.