

NICHOLAS RAY

April 1st, 1972

Mr. Ralph Hocking
T.V. Educational Center
164 Court Street
Binghamton, New York

Dear Ralph,

I've been working my usual long and unconventional hours, and ask your understanding in taking so long to answer your note of February 17th.

It seems ridiculous to me that you (or I) must petition for grants through public support when it could and should be administered through the recognition of accomplishment and need, ~~by~~ by people who, I suppose, are learned in our fields.

Your accomplishments with the Center at 164 Court Street during the brief time I have known you and observed the growth of the Center itself need only a before-and-now photo to remind those who do administer money how far you've advanced your program since last August. Any student of mine who does not avail himself of the facilities and a brush with your philosophy is, in my opinion, a dolt.

As you've probably noticed, in recent weeks I've been attempting to labor you less by sending you only the best; yet I know I must eventually send each one of them to you or else I would not be fulfilling my function as a teacher as I conceive it.

But prepare for a new invasion. Each 11th or 12th grade high school class I've spoken to in recent weeks has been given your address.

Some aficionados on the University level choose

(cont'd)

NICHOLAS RAY

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to think that I'm abandoning my rebel cause for "true art" when I so wholeheartedly endorse your program. They make an expert feel like a specialist a long ways from home -- until they get a taste of what you're doing.

Let's get lots of bread. Maybe we can do something together like helping people say hello to each other.

All good things.

Sincerely,

Nich

NICHOLAS RAY

NR:ss

Hey! I need some of your time this week to look at footage of my own film which is about ready, in part, to go to the lab for its multiple image beauty treatment. I must have at least twenty minutes ready by the 25th of April. You call me - I'll call you - yes.

Nich

CineScenes

Highlights From Cannes

by Betty Jeffries Demby

RAY: YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

Nicholas Ray arrived in Cannes with his film, YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN, a half hour before the 5:30 screening, having worked non-stop for three days and nights to complete it. He was so exhausted that he was fast asleep in the balcony in front of me when the lights went on after the screening, easily identified by his shock of white hair, black eyepatch, and scarlet shirt.

The film is a collaboration with his students and uses multiple screens, a technique on which Ray has been working for nine years on the premise that celluloid recognizes neither time nor space. The film went from video back to film without any degradation. All images went through a color synthesizer and became transformed into videotape images at an experimental TV center in Binghamton and were then transformed back into film in a lab in California that Ray said he found prohibitively expensive since he last used it 15 years ago. One to four video cameras were used, with each video camera plugged into the synthesizer. As a student working on the film commented, "The dials and switches are out of a science fiction movie as it controls the intensity and oscillations."

"As it was being taped, we were viewing it on a monitor," she continued. "You can simultaneously see exactly what the synthesizer is picking up and what effects you want. You can erase the videotape and choose what you want. You can use one videotape up to 40 times. You have to get a composite of the images, a balancing of color and sound. The hardest thing is getting the composite print. We had a Super-8, a 16mm and a 35mm, and each retained its own ratio within a 35mm context." (Ray described these at the press conference as a broken-down Bolex and nonfunctioning Mitchell out of Navy surplus.)

"The ideal that Nick wants is the breaking down of the rectangle of the screen. He wants to expand the visual image as much as possible. The idea of the multiple screen is that when you have more images on the screen you have more possibilities for the viewers' association to wander. Actually, three hours of film were shown but it took only one-and-a-half hours. The multiple screen broadens the horizon for seeing more.

"In dream research, it takes one-and-one-half hours to get into its three or four stages. A film is like a dream. A visual image sparks off personal associations that the director didn't intend. It creates more dimensions than a regular screen.

"Film is the only medium where time and space are forgotten. Everything is below the conscious level. This aspect is a whole new thing and makes one more aware of the dream process.

"The film was started by a class of 45 students in September, 1971, and was broken down into separate components. They were all beginners professionally and worked on a rotating system of changing jobs every two weeks. Before you changed jobs, the person whose job you were taking trained you. We had a chief cameraman, assistant cameraman, chief gaffer, and two or three assistants. There were two assistant directors every two weeks. Prop, wardrobe, and makeup were all together.

"For a solid year 30 people worked on the set while we improvised the script. After that there were only 15 people at the most. We would discuss script first, using actual events in our lives, and then write them down. Nick wrote three scripts for us and these were done 10 minutes before we shot them. We would have key words for whole scene. The key word would be the action. Nick would always say you must know

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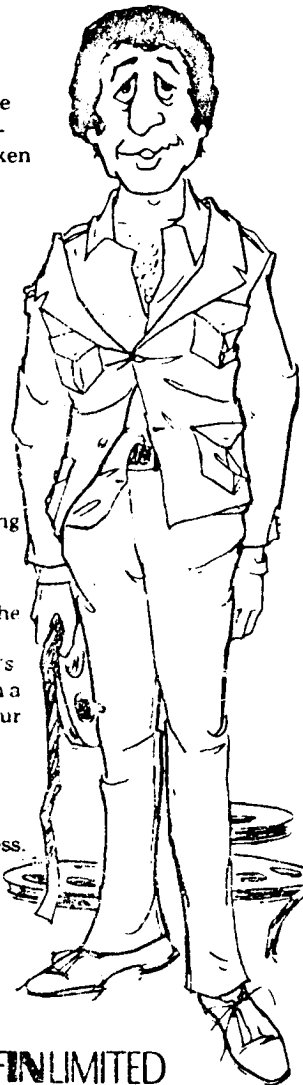
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wanting something. He would only use the close-up to show violent changes in thought. He wouldn't use a close-up to show a pretty face. It's all in the eyes. A close-up is only to advance the action. One of Nick's hopes is that video will become a means of international distribution, to have open channels for communication."

Nicholas Ray then picked up the interview from there, while sunning himself on the beach of the Carlton Hotel.

"Video creates a Socratic relationship. I'd like the people to take over all the open access channels in the world. They need the means of communication at their disposal. The technique I used is not new. Jack Cardiff did it in THE MOTORCYCLIST about six years ago. He used the transfer of video colors and abstraction of the film with Technicolor. Perhaps Frank Zappa's work, 200 MOTELS, is more recognizable in the United States. He used the direct transference of videotape to film. Ours is film that has gone through a process invented by a Korean composer-filmmaker, Nam June Paik. It's a mechanical console combine which permits us to work for the kind of emphasis we wish to put on a scene, a close-up, entrance and conflict which would otherwise not be present.

"It has been very restricted in use to people who are avant-garde in TV work, such as Shirley Clarke, but never before used like this, according to Shirley, who has seen some of our work. This is the first time it has ever been used and bears no relationship to anything else except what would be related to someone's own associations in painting as it itself relates to film. There is a sequence I call the Guernica sequence. It has an empty red carpet with a crystal on it against the stage backing, and Steve and Leslie begin walking around it. To me, this is the equivalent of the Plaza in Mexico or in Spain where girls walk one way and boys another."

Susan, Ray's close companion, expanded on this. "I had a dream one night taken from Picasso paintings. In my dream I saw different geometric shapes all merged to make a whole. That was the beginning of the Picasso concept."

Ray continued. "This kind of recall is useful, but once making a film, it has to become one's own idea. I try to make the actor have his own idea and bring something from the inside. Film is a very eclectic medium. It has to be.

"I think that within a year or two this kind of filmmaking will be incorporated among the young and adventurous filmmakers. I am really frustrated when I know that a great piece of classical literature is abandoned because it must cost 14 million dollars and run for 8 hours on the screen. That is nonsense. You should begin to explore the medium itself, the cellular composition of the script. All of this came about by accident, when the Curies were researching how to photograph a moment of the interior. They were playing with radium while doing research in radiology.

"You can do long scripts because we know that children don't have to wait until six to put blocks into sequence or find the words for color. The subliminal knowledge that creates our response to the whites and reds and browns in the Carlton Hotel are filed back in the brain, even the color input of the subdued pastels. The texture of the white sand of Pensacola came into my mind as a contrast to that, as visually as Marguerite Duras tried to do in the film HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR. We try to do that on the split screen, but not as simplification of the Fox Movietone. You can understand it if you look at a triptych painting or Turner's paintings in the Tate Gallery in London."

The film is about the lives of the students and a professor like Nicholas Ray trying to relate to them. He accepts their stripping him down and even denigrating his career. When he is accidentally hanged trying to save a student, they refuse to cut him down in time. "Let him swing," Steve says.

Questioned about this condemnation to death, Ray said that it was deserved, since his generation was the worst one ever. But his 23-year old companion told me that she and others disagreed with this violent self judgment and wanted the ending changed.