ECHOES OF MYTH
THE FEATURE FILMS OF JOHN BOORMAN
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ABSTRACT

All eight feature films (1965-1981) of John Boorman were viewed and analyzed according to Auteur Theory. The recondite themes and motifs found throughout his work revealed a preoccupation with character and events in the Grail legend. Thematically, Boorman's rendering of the Arthurian protagonist revealed him in the modern context of the private eye, the soldier, the defrocked priest, the displaced aristocrat, and the wilderness adventurer. Merlin figures, and women figures intrinsic to the Grail legend appear in all his work.

Aesthetically Boorman's feature films are veiled allegories of the Arthurian quest. Those recondite stylistic elements as abstract framing, colour distortion, elliptical editing, and overlapped and electronic sound were found to modify the cinematic conventions of those genres in which he worked. Boorman's mise-en-scene often approached the surreal. His action hovered between the world of slapstick, and the world of dream. The world-view that emerged from these feature-films makes Boorman a religious existentialist, or an Immanentist.
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PREFACE: NOTES ON THE CRITICAL METHOD

Auteur criticism is valuable. It had a major influence upon other critical methods. Its greatest impact was upon Structuralism. Like the literary criticism of R.W.B. Leavis, Structuralism saw itself as mediator between the film and the audience, between text and meaning. Structuralism sought an immanent meaning, a centre, a core within a film by utilizing archetypal and social elements. It vigorously denied the primacy of the director as creator. For Structuralism, the language of film itself, the language of visual signs could be codified into providing meaning to the ever-changing flow of film images. The idiosyncracies of form or method were as alien to the Structuralist critic as were signifiers to the Auteur. Structuralism, and its related theory semiotics, was a means for investigating the relationship between art and culture. Auteur theorizing sought to go beyond the role of icon and artifact, and to investigate the relationship between the artist and product.

Although generally disavowing cultural influences, Auteur criticism did place a director, by virtue of the chronological parameters of his work, within a specific cultural context. It is easy to see for example, that Howard Hawks' attitude toward women in "Bringing up Baby" and "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is markedly different from Woody Allen's view of women in "Manhattan" or "Annie Hall" some twenty-five years later. Such generalizations are useful, not only in revealing the changing social mores within the history of the cinema, but in also revealing the emphasis placed upon these mores by various directors who lived and worked in a particular time.
Methodology

Auteur criticism seeks to isolate a director's vision and aesthetic as revealed in all his films. As Peter Wollen has written, it seeks "to uncover behind the superficial contrasts of subject and treatment, a hard core of basic and often recondite motifs." Used critically, Auteur criticism must begin with a close textual analysis. As such the following three questions provided the impetus for the detailed criticism of each film in this study. Namely:

1. What is Boorman's imagination trying to achieve in a particular film?
2. To what extent is that vision evident beyond specific cultural or studio influences, and common in all his films?
3. What unique aesthetic does Boorman's imagination generate in order to reveal his vision?

John Boorman made eight feature films in a period of some fifteen years. As such, and as in all narrative works of art, his films operate on the level of value. Auteur criticism sees those components as character, setting, sound effects, etc., as express various states of emotional worth. Patterns and relationships are seen not only as fulfilling the requirements of a particular narrative, but also evolving into a uniquely personal vision. It is assumed therefore, that characters in Boorman's films are more than simply "people." Events are more than simply bits of plot, and settings more than collections of objects. All are elements that express values and relationships. These relationships are evident, and evolve throughout the whole of Boorman's canon. Auteur criticism also must assume that Boorman places artifacts and certain stylistic devices within his films because he believes they belong there. Auteur criticism is concerned
with the integrity and coherence of each of his works yet, these elements must also be seen to be interconnected with other elements in other works. As such they belong to a narrative process that taken together reveals Boorman to possess a unique style that expresses a limited though genuinely felt hope for man.

Thesis

It is the intent of this study to show that the feature films of the British-born director John Boorman contain elements that are a contemporary rendering of his long-time preoccupation with the Arthurian legend. Besides his interpretation of the seminal legend in "Excalibur" (1981), Arthurian characters and themes are present in all of Boorman's feature films. The magician Merlin is transformed as Lazlo in "Leo the Last" (1970), Arthur Frayn in "Zardoz" (1973), Yost in "Point Blank" (1967), and Ecumenical Edwards in "Exorcist II" (1977). Morgana, Arthur's half-sister of the Grail legend, surfaces as Lynn in "Point Blank" (1967), Avalow in "Zardoz" (1973), Jean Tuskin in "Exorcist II" (1977), and even Bobby in "Deliverance" (1972). The knight questors such as Arthur, Perceval, and Lancelot, become rendered into the modern private-eye, the soldier, the defrocked priest, the displaced aristocrat, and the wilderness adventurer.

The quest theme is basic to all western literature, and basic to Boorman's vision. In revealing Arthurian themes and characters in Boorman's films, it is the intent of this thesis to reveal Boorman's vision as that of a particular kind of religious existentialist. God is absent from Boorman's work, but the transcendent is not. Boorman is an Immanentist. He sees the transcendent not as a spiritual force outside of man, but
inherent in him. As such, Boorman's vision is both sacred and profane. His protagonists hover between the world of violence and catatonia.

The echoes of the Arthurian legend that surface in Boorman's work are at the same time allied to certain preoccupations with American culture. The notion of the wilderness, war, and the city, become mythic elements in his three American features, "Point Blank" (1962), "Hell in the Pacific" (1968), and "Deliverance" (1972). These elements Boorman renders into a visual ambience that makes his landscapes unnatural. As such the violence that electrifies his work often takes place in a subterranean, surreal world.

Hence, much of Boorman's work is allegorical. Those recondite stylistic elements such as his use of abstract framing, careful control of colour, elliptical editing, and overlapped and electronic sound, modifies the conventions of those genres in which he works. The amalgam of mythic elements that echoes throughout Boorman's work reveals him to be an innovator who explores and extends the language of commercial cinema. Though not always successful, Boorman's films reveal him to be a modernist whose preoccupation with the Quest gives his work a clear religious dimension.
ix.

for Helen Gully
CHAPTER ONE: DYING GODS AND THE SEARCH FOR TRANSCENDENCE

The films of John Boorman are replete with the echoes of the Grail myth. Yet the unbelievable events of the twentieth century--war, depression, mass murder, and the possibility of the annihilation of mankind--provided for Boorman an horrific, ironic counter to his boyhood fascination for the adventure he found in T.E. White's version of the Arthurian Legend. The violence inherent in the Grail myth was born of a moral imperative, a drive to reassert the Divine. Good and Evil were clearly distinguishable. Man's ability to understand and control his universe was based on the assurance of Faith. Boorman's childhood in London during World War II saw the innocent and the guilty perish together. He retains particularly graphic memories of the London Blitz. "The first thing I remember is violence, bombing, and people being carried away on stretchers." In such a climate, even the faith and reason of his early Jesuit education could not camouflage the failure of a rationalist or a Christian ideology. These antinomies of absolute intrinsic violence, of the moral imperative born of myth and dogma, and the full-bloodied entertainment contained in the Arthurian adventures, surface in all of Boorman's feature films. It is the intent of this thesis to show how Boorman's transformation and rendering of Arthurian themes in the modern contexts of the gangster, the science-fiction, war, and comedy film, reveal a particularly unique existential vision of man. Moreover such a world-view modified the aesthetic conventions of those genres in which he worked.
The Existentialist View

From the analysis of Boorman's work, Boorman is not strictly a secular existentialist. To deny the existence of God outright as do the secular existentialists such as Nietzsche and Sartre, would mean for Boorman to negate the question of meaning itself. Boorman's vision, I intend to show, is that the divine element in man has played a part in his history. Man is not resurrected in the films of John Boorman, yet he is not without mystery. Boorman is a post-liberal man who confronts a post-liberal God. For Boorman, the mysterious is not the same as the absurd. It is necessary first, however, to put forward a brief definition of philosophical (secular) existentialism such that the meaning of the Grail Legend, and Boorman's rendering of it in his films, can be seen to reflect its influence.

A purely existential view of man would hold that existence is neither a reasonable nor a God-given time. It is simply a fact, a given. An existentialist in response, would seek to give meaning to existence entirely out of his own resources. He would not rely on the external providential scheme of a divinity, or even upon natural law or social custom. The only given for an existentialist is that man is not an artifact; he is a being, and in that being, he is free. The divine creator could not exist for an existentialist. Faith in such a creator would be bad faith, in that it would allow for the evasion of human responsibility, and the means to deny working to overcome personal misery, and that of mankind. This ethic of action, however, for an existentialist could not be grounded in hope, for hope like faith would be considered an illusion. An existentialist, by definition, must reject all pretence and illusion. An existentialist is not a rationalist for the brute facts of existence he knows would not be
discernible through logic. Existence for the existentialist is not reasonable; it is only a given. Inevitably, the "pure" existentialist who seeks to justify his life by intellectual, emotional, or experiential terms is doomed to failure. For the existentialist, man lives simply to die. He is free, but constrained by history. His choices are choices between the lesser of evils. Certainty or perpetual doubt are extremes of existence he must reject. For the existentialist, life simply is absurd.

The existentialist challenge, neither to withdraw completely in negation nor to soar in the delusion of rational optimist grandeur, is difficult. It has been met in various ways throughout history by various writers. An existential view of life called for courage and integrity in the face of the givenness of existence. Strangely out of a reaction to a religious dogma that was felt to be little more than a pretext for evading the burden of an illusionless existence, the existentialist once again made commitment acceptable. For the existentialist religion kept man from ultimate decision-making from which true faith could emerge. Such a religion only shielded man from his real self and his real faith. Any system of worship that allowed for less was considered hypocrisy. Ironically, when faith had been dismissed by sophisticated men for centuries, the secular existentialist called again for commitment.

Strangely, the call made by those religious and literary existentialists of today such as Beckett, Ionesco, Albee, and Nicol, was not unlike the call made by those writers of the Arthurian Romances during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Chretien de Troyes in France and Thomas Malory in Britain wrote compilations of stories about the knights of the Round Table. Based upon earlier Celtic myths and rituals, these medieval writers
transformed and enriched the "adventures" with the spirit of their own inspiration. Chretian and Malory did not consider themselves writers of fiction. Their task, a cross between writing an encyclopedia and a novel, explored subtleties of character and plot. Like the structure of the modern novel or play, Le Morte D'Arthur investigated the psychology of heroes who had to act with honour, courage and commitment in a world in which feudal obligations were being threatened by gentility, comfort, and pretense. Like the literary existentialists of the twentieth century, the authors of the Arthurian Romances sought to awaken mankind to an authentic existence. The content of that commitment called for a faith in God. The meaningless-ness of a man's life taken solely in its own terms, is, too, the basis of much recent existential literature. The films of John Boorman are an amalgam of this medieval, yet strangely modern view.

King Arthur and the Grail

The name King Arthur has stirred the poetic imagination for some fifteen centuries. Legend placed him in the remote and misty Celtic darkness. Myth idealized his life as founder of the Round Table where from Camelot he rode with his knights to seek glory and the Grail. The tales of the Round Table gave shape to the great themes of love, and war, and faith, that were Middle Ages. Arthur, Merlin, Guinevere, Lancelot, Galahad, Tristram and Iseult are characters whose exploits still echo with romance to this day. When the tales burst onto the literary scene of Europe in the twelfth century, they soon paled the popular epics of Charlemonge, and the Roman legends of Troy, Arneas, and Alexander the Great. Based upon real people and real events in history, they were not just adventures: they were
inspiring. The Tales of the Round Table showed how real men and real women could live better lives in a limited and imperfect world. Like biblical parables, they explicated an understanding.

Like most romances, the story of King Arthur and the Round Table is a tragedy. Arthur's life was doomed at the outset. Born under a spell cast by Merlin the magician, and raised to kingship by strangers, Arthur's wife Guinevere and his best friend Lancelot fall passionately in love. Lancelot and Guinevere ruin Arthur's life. They plunge his kingdom into civil war and destroy the fellowship of the Round Table. While trying to salvage his ruined kingdom, he is betrayed by his bastard son Mordred. Fatally wounded by him, he is carried to Avalon by his half-sister, the seductive Morgana, (le Fay) to return miracle-like in his country's most desperate hour of need.

The stories that Boorman read in T.E. White's The Once and Future King as a child are vivid interpretations of Malory's fifteenth-century Le Morte D'Arthur. White's account of several tales including "The Boar of Cornwall", "The Sword in the Stone" and "Perceval," reveal the miraculous and the iconoclastic elements that Boorman readily transforms in his films. Before interpreting the tales, it would be instructive to briefly recount White's rendering of them.

The Boar of Cornwall

Uther Pendragon succeeds his brother Aurelius as king of England by defeating the marauding Saxons. At the feast of celebration in London, Uther is struck with passionate desire for Igraine, the most beautiful woman
in the realm. Ingraine is, however, married to Gorlois, king of Cornwall and loyal subject of Uther. Sensing disquiet, Gorlois returns to Cornwall with Igraine, and refuses to be summoned. Uther is furious and invades Cornwall. Tormented by his passion for Igraine, Uther consults with Merlin the magician who gives him a potion to make him look like Gorlois. In this disguise, Uther enters Tintagel and Igraine's bed and, that night conceives Arthur. That same night, Gorlois, who has remained with his troops outside Tintagel, is killed. Soon after, Uther and Igraine are married.

The Sword in the Stone

Merlin claims the child, names him, and has him raised ignorant of his true parents, by a knight called Hector. At Fifteen, some thirteen years after Uther's death, Merlin summons the nobility of the realm, promising them a change from the uneasy interregnum with the rightful heir who would pull the sword he has frozen within the stone. Many knights of the realm try in vain to pull the sword, Excalibur, from the stone. The youthful Arthur easily pulls it out. Merlin reveals to the astonished knights the secret of Arthur's birth. The knights disclaim the bastard boy-king, yet Arthur's prowess and years of hard fighting bring them to heel.

Once king and with Merlin's advice, Arthur solidifies his kingdom, and gains some infamy in manhood. After one battle a girl, Lyones, bears him a bastard son. Having met Guinevere whom he promises to marry, he has an affair with Morgana, wife of his subdued enemy Loth, and Arthur's unknown own half-sister. Merlin tells Arthur he will have a son Mordred, born on May Day by Morgana, who will destroy the Round Table. Like Herod, Arthur decrees that all children born on this day should perish. Like Moses, Mordred is
saved by a storm and is cast upon a distant shore.

Meanwhile Lancelot has fallen in love with Arthur's wife Guinevere. They sleep together the night Arthur betrays Guinevere in the bed of the seductress Camille. Guinevere realizes that her sin will prevent Lancelot from achieving the Grail. Guinevere does not keep Lancelot from action. Her love inspires him to heroism. Yet Morgana, half-sister of Arthur, adds to Lancelot's conflicting loyalties between Arthur and Guinevere. Hating Arthur, Morgana sends him a ring Guinevere had given Lancelot as proof of their affair.

In another instance, Lancelot is tricked (as was Uther) by an enchantress to sleep with Elaine, virgin daughter of Pelles. Elaine's son Galahad grew up to surpass his father in battle and to win the Grail. Perceval, searching for the Grail through the place of skulls, finds Lancelot mad with grief and returns him unsuspecting to Camelot. Lancelot fails in the quest of the Grail. He is outstripped by his own son Galahad and humiliated. He does achieve some measure of redemption when returning to Camelot chastened by his failure. He is instrumental in healing the tournament wounds of the knight Urry. A sorceress had put a spell on him such that his wounds could only be healed by the best knight of the realm. Lancelot's remorse and simple faith cures Urry in an instant.

Perceval

Perceval is a young knight who demanded to join the Round Table. Arthur sends him away to prove himself. Perceval has to learn restraint. Often he says whatever entered his mind. Perceval's desire to belong to
the Round Table curbs his tongue, and makes him assume the role of the diplomat. In one adventure, Perceval is given a white lance by a lord. From its head a single drop of blood runs continuously down to his hand. At the dinner, Perceval sees the Grail "so radiant, the moon losts its brightness." Yet he says nothing. Asking questions of the bleeding lance and the Grail would have healed the stricken Fisher King. Because he fails to ask about the lance and the Grail, the Fisher King would lose his land, knights would die, women would be widowed, and children orphaned. Perceval's silence lays the landscape into ruin. The hideously ugly maiden who berates Perceval for failing to seize upon his opportunity makes him vow to wander until he discovers why the lance bled and whom the Grail served. Perceval is converted to Christianity by a hermit. He finds in the end his own path to God, like the hermit, in solitude. When at the end of the legend, the Lady of the Lake returns Excalibur to Arthur, she robs it of its supernatural power, and robs Arthur of his wisest counsellor, Merlin. The Lady of the Lake forces Arthur to grow up and face tempting females with the hindsight of his own experience.

Interpretation

The quest for the Grail is the quintessential example of a search for the inner ideal self. It is this search that causes a triumph over spiritual death. Taken originally from the pagan legends concerning immortality, fertility, and kinship, the Grail is the magic vessel which is at the source of eternal life. The Grail is protected by a fertility goddess, and is guarded in the castle of a king who is ill. His land is desolate and in ruins. The healing of the king restores life to the land. Faith and the quest keeps the land prosperous. The knight who searches and
heals the king inherits the Grail, and with it immortality.

The Iconography

The underlying theme of the Grail legends is that the protagonist can reach the ultimate source of self-knowledge through his own physical and spiritual effort. It was a view of man that clashed with the existing bureaucracy of mediating priests in organized religion. Psychologically, the sword Excalibur represents the male principle. It is a masculine symbol, with connotations of virility, action, war, and the violent discharge of energy. Drawing Excalibur from the stone signifies the hero has emerged into manhood. Action removes him from his childhood obscurity. It is a birth from which Arthur begins to really discover just who he is. At the end of the tales, physical prowess is softened by the female principle. Violence is softened by love. The Stone, like the Grail, is the female principle. It is feminine, passive, shining. It is a radiant symbol of light and eternal good. Moreover, it is linked with banquets and good cheer. It is born of the magic vessels of Celtic mythology that provided limitless qualities of delectable food and drink in the other world. The Grail and the Round Table are not simply vessels, or bits of furniture. They are representative of the highest ideals of fellowship. Pagan icons have been transformed by Christian ideals. The Round Table is, like the Order of Good Cheer, a fellowship of man imbued with a Christian mission. As Montarasso has translated Malory, "it mirrors the roundness of the earth, the spheres of the planets, and the elements of the firmament. It is a true epitome of the universe." The light of the Grail is the radiance of the Divine Spirit. Whether it shines itself or from the female figure who guards it, is unclear.
The knight errant is the champion of the Round Table. His love of adventure is rooted in the need to find courage and be renowned. In winning the acclaim of his peers (like Perceval) he wins his lady and is raised in stature in the eyes of the group. In winning he rights injustice. It is a quest of enlightenment in which sexuality is juxtaposed with a Christian morality. Yet his search often takes him far beyond these immediate aims.

The quest of Arthur, Lancelot, Perceval, Gawain, etc., represents a moral stance. The knight errant represents the human impulse to leave the safety of home and hearth. The questor is a risk taker. The object of his quest is to face danger, and to risk his life for a greater vision of what it ought to be. The search ultimately is for integrity. Integrity for the questor is the embodiment of everlasting life.

Morality

Outrageous morality is at the root of the Grail myth. The Arthurian tales are about womanizing men, and seductive and threatening women. Yet the role of women in the stories is complex. Arthur and Mordred are born out of wedlock. Both are reared in obscurity. It is as if Mordred were Arthur's doppelganger, or evil double, who one day replaces Arthur by seizing his wife and throne, bringing both to ruin. Mordred, the result of a union between Arthur and his half-sister Morgana, is imbued with a perverse, sinister passion.

Lancelot's encounter with Morgana and the virgin Elaine can be interpreted as counterpoints to his involvement with Guinevere. Morgana is a seductress who tries to keep Lancelot in the otherworld. Elaine is pure, but comes from the otherworldly castle where the Grail is kept.
Morgana can be interpreted as the feminine counterpart and opposite of Merlin. Where Merlin brings Arthur into the world, at the beginning of the tale, Morgana takes him to Avalon at the end. Merlin loves Arthur; Morgana is full of suspicion and hatred. Like the witch Hecate in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Morgana is a temptress that illicits passion, possession, and a machismo territorial imperative.

**Women**

Yet the role of women in the Arthurian Tales is not so clear-cut as to reduce femininity to simple brazen aggressors. If promiscuity prevents man from the Grail, it also inspires him to acts of heroism. In marrying Guinevere, Arthur lost Merlin, the father-figure who guided his career. Guinevere, brave and beautiful, is a poor substitute for Merlin. Her infatuation for Lancelot causes Arthur's downfall. Yet Arthur inspires Lancelot to quest for the Grail. His devotion to her causes him to be tricked such that Galahad, a son, is born to a Guinevere stand-in (Elaine). It is Galahad who finds the Grail. In short, women are both possessors and guiding lights for men. They give all for love, and take all for love. They are both enchanting and virginal, and enchantresses, full of devious magic.

**Magic**

Merlin is the magical father-figure of the Arthurian Tales who must be displaced by the softer feminine principle such that the questing Arthur can act finally with autonomy. Merlin is born of the union between a devil who became a handsome stranger in order to make love to a king's daughter.
Merlin's magic is itself displaced by his love of a woman. Merlin is the prophet, the shape-shifter, Arthur's mentor, and father-confessor. Merlin uses his magic to protect Arthur from danger; he takes him to the lake to obtain Excalibur; he asks for Guinevere's hand for Arthur; he decides which knights are to be appointed to the Round Table. Merlin transforms Uther into Gorlois, as Morgana transforms Elaine into Guinevere. The one failing that Merlin has is that he too, is helpless in the face of passionate love. Because Merlin can see the future, he foresees the tragic consequences of Arthur's interest in Guinevere. He cannot prevent Arthur's incest with his half-sister. Merlin lusts after Morgana who learns some of her black-magic from him. His lust for Vivian causes his downfall. Merlin, it must be remembered, is only half-human. His human half is female (the daughter of a king). Because his male half is demonic, he is capable of lust, but not of love.

Caught in the net of an irresistible passion for Vivian, Merlin is lulled into sleep by her promise to become his mistress. Once asleep with his head in her lap (recalling the legend of the unicorn which is tamed when it bows its head with the single phallic horn and rests it in the lap of a maiden), Vivian subjugates and depowers him by circling him nine times. Awakened in the morning, Merlin is prisoner, trapped as if tied to a huge stalagmite of mist. The girdle that constrains Merlin is, of course, sex. This spectacle of the great magician hoist with his own petard, trapped at the last by one of his own illusions, is one of the major images of loss that is at the heart of this medieval romance. Magic at the last must be exorcized for the risks involved in the acts of a free will.
CHAPTER TWO: BOORMAN'S TWENTIETH-CENTURY MYTHIC VISION

The Arthurian Tale then is the great moral "soap-opera" of the Middle Ages. Its theme is that the hero can find fulfillment and integrity with effort, and with faith. Illicit and compelling sexuality merely deter one from the purity of heart necessary for the quest. Basic to the quest is the notion of self-reliance. In the eyes of Malory or White, God may be man's for the asking, but man must ask. The Arthurian romances record only too well that human nature being what it is, that asking will indeed be hard. The Arthurian road from violence and lust to faith and love is littered with the corpses of human frailty.

The elements of the Arthurian tales go far beyond the quest theme that runs through all of John Boorman's work. The characters of Arthur and Merlin show up in all his works. Women are transformed, morality is equally outraged, the landscape is laid waste, and everywhere there is magic and mystery. Arthurian figures become in Boorman's work transformed into the private-eye, the soldier, the defrocked priest, the displaced aristocrat, and the wilderness adventurer. The iconography of Excalibur is transformed into a bow and arrow, a gun, a mind-synchronizing machine, automobiles, and even a telescope. The Grail more often than not is money.

The quintessential transformation of the Arthurian Tales in Boorman's feature films lies in the degree to which the quest is cathartic. Boorman's hero is an outsider: a con-man, a doubting priest, a youthful band leader, an ineffectual aristocrat, a soldier caught in a time warp, and an ancient warrior who is thrust into the future. All these men are loners, who find
themselves outside of their known element. They are compelled to violence through an anxious spiritual isolation. The quest for Boorman, however, is not completely epiphanic. Behind the compulsive search of his protagonists is only the dark horror of emotional isolation, victimization, and violence. Boorman's heroes emerge from their quest largely numbed. The camaraderie of the group has failed them. The knowledge they gain of man's baser, violent nature is unredemptive. Boorman's heroes emerge from a twentieth-century wasteland that has not been restored. They are transcendent, yet they have not been wholly transformed. At best they have fought to see only the given-ness of man's condition. Knowledge of life's absurdity is "won". The operative word is won. Like the protagonists of Kurosawa's films that Boorman admires, struggle and growth are implicit through action. Such a view I will show makes Boorman a particular kind of religious existentialist who is related more to Beckett, Nichols, and Ionesco than to the Christian authors who inspired and shaped his vision.

What follows prior to a more detailed examination of each of the feature films is a topical analysis of Arthurian elements that is at the root of Boorman's view of man.

Violence

The Arthurian Tales are full of violence. Arthur's court had a magnetic attraction for bold, fighting men. Lancelot in one tale fights his way into Castle Sorrowful to free prisoners held there by a spell. In another tale Merlin himself goes mad with grief over the carnage of a battle. Galahad in battle was not considered a man but a monster. In one tournament Arthur compared four of his knights "to a mad lion, a ravening
leopard, and a pair of eager wolves." The hammer blows of violence that mark the Grail Legends weld not only victory, but honour, integrity, and spiritual atonement. It is in violent conflict that the knight errant feels himself most fully. Through violence, every facet of his being is brought into play. In combat the hero is freed from his lack of confidence. Arthur heroes are not simply bovine men, too stupid to feel fear. They are emotional, sensitive men, who in battle steel themselves against their psychological failings. Violence in the Arthurian Tales is not just purgative, it is a means to transcendence.

Boorman transforms the meaning of the violence in his films. It is not the apotheosis for his modern counterparts of Arthur's knight errant. Boorman's heroes are men of power. They are skeptics, youths, warriors, workers, and aristocrats who have felt the need to seek a more basic life beyond the confines of the city. Like the knight errant, Boorman's hero is the quintessential loner who is driven to violence by cultural animosity, revenge, or the cruelty of other individuals. The violence of Boorman's questing heroes does not provide the image of Christ; it provides instead a confrontation with the absurd.

Violence in Boorman's films occurs at every level of human interaction. It occurs between men and men in "Deliverance" and "Hell in the Pacific". It occurs between men and women in "Excalibur" and "Zärdoz"; between women and women in "Having a Wild Weekend" and "Leo the Last". For Boorman the brotherhood of man is all but an empty notion. While loyalty, friendship, and courage often motivate interaction between his characters, love and commitment inspire only betrayal. Hence Boorman's heroes are inscrutable men. They are driven by the need to transcend the violence of the world,
yet that drive is full of violence that does have a strange mystical connection.

Take for example the violence of Walker in "Point Blank". In that moment between his being shot by a gangster friend Mal Reese, and his death moments later, Walker lives an interregnum life in which he resolutely seeks and destroys all those syndicate bosses who cheated him out of his share of a heist from the Organization. Walker's violence is a mental retribution, in the moment of his death. It is a justification for a criminal life. Yet the mental killing of Mal Reese, Brewster, Carter, and the "recovery" of the money, leaves Walker an unfulfilled dying soul. Retribution leaves Walker cold. The avenging of the betrayal of those he loved and trusted does not give Walker the release in death that his dying moments sought desperately to achieve. The violence of "Point Blank" is the violence of a man who sought transcendence by avenging those who did him wrong. The violence is not redemptive. Walker dies an unrejuvenated life because the code he lived in life was equally negative. Walker's desire for meaning in the moment between life and death gave him at the last only a sense of the absurdity of an existence based upon denial.

In "Deliverance", Lewis the sadist leader of the four-man canoe trip down the soon-to-be-flooded Cahulawassee River of Georgia, is expressive of the violence and the fear that reside in his three less macho companions. Lewis' insensitivity toward the hillbillies who will soon be displaced by the rising river sets them along a course of mutual destruction. Bobby's adolescent sexual urges are displaced by his being homosexually assaulted by the hillbillies. This act, an ontological schism in the definition of the group, forces Ed, the least violent, to face the violence of his own
heart. Ed must kill in order to survive. The lesson he learns is not redemptive. The wilderness the group entered for rejuvenation has become a wasteland through violence. The rapaciousness of the outsiders is reflected in the construction of a dam by urban planners. The river will be raised, and the hillbillies displaced. Ed does not kill and gain stature. He kills and loses a part of himself. Ed's act for survival remains in his heart a nightmare.

In "Exorcist II", Father Lamont, a defrocked priest, must cut the heart out of a young girl's possessed double. In caring for Regan, Father Lamont has given up a Catholic orthodoxy and set upon a spiritual quest for rebirth that takes him into a violent mysticism. The violence of "Exorcist II" is brought about by Boorman's collision of the world of science and the world of technology. Father Lamont's killing of Regan is an act of faith that is rooted in his knowledge of science. That Lamont dies himself unredeemed in a massive explosion of all that is unnatural, allows Boorman to reveal some startling cinematic pyrotechniques. Lamont's spiritual crisis and ensuing violent death is a meaningless sacrifice in that no one learns... Lamont's knowledge of the violence of any kind of religious possession dies with him. While the Church, full of mission in their Christian conversion of African villages, continues to effect social and cultural genocide.

In "Zardoz", Zed retreats from the twenty-third century violence of computer snooping. Zed remains little more than a thug throughout. His violence against the technological investigators is a reactionary retreat into a more personal debasement of individual violence based upon sexuality and machismo.
The violence of "Having a Wild Weekend" is, like "Zardoz, a media violence that sets the rock star hero Steve, and his model girlfriend Dinah, off on a quest for peace and salvation. The wilderness in the case of "Having a Wild Weekend" is not purgative. As in "Deliverance," Steve and Dinah cannot escape man's violent nature. The island to which they both flee is, like the Cahulawassee, merely an extension of the violent media-hyped world from which they fled. In such a violent world, love, Boorman says, is impossible.

The violence in Boorman's films is graphic. "Hell in the Pacific" ends in a violent explosion reminiscent of Antonioni's "Zabriskie Point". The American and Japanese soldiers who have survived post-war life together on a deserted pacific atoll where they have been shipwrecked, cannot completely exorcise their separate culturalization that has pronounced them enemies. The violent explosion of the deserted radar station they tumble across on their quest for rescue is symbolic. It has blown up any chance for a sustained mutual co-operation. "Leo the Last" ends too with a violent explosion of the mansion from which Leo the aristocrat has been kept away from the real world of suffering humanity.

Violence and Women

Much of the violence of the Arthurian Tales occurs for the sake of a lady. Lancelot fought better when he was in love with Guinevere. Uther stormed Tintagel in order to win Igraine. The code of chivalry that was basic to the romances saw knightly attitudes toward women that were essentially servile. In Boorman's "Having a Wild Weekend", Steve rescues Dinah from the "Meat For Go" campaign, only to be caught up in the greater
violence of media exploitation. Dinah does not, like Guinevere, settle for a monastery; she embraces the media and what it can give her, wholeheartedly. At the end of "Hell in the Pacific," the two American and Japanese soldiers are driven to a final separation by photographs of American and Japanese girls who are the sweethearts of warriors killed in war. In Boorman's films the role of women goes hand in hand with the theme of the outraged morality that is at the heart of the Arthurian Legend. In Boorman's films, women do not always initiate the quest; when they do, no gentle lady awaits the return of the hero. The knight errant's humility gives way to sadistic cruelty. Love and women is a complex issue in Boorman films. The romantic notion of the woman as the inspirer of action, Boorman turns upon its head.  

The violence of Boorman's films then is a violence that is based upon the action inherent in the quest, rather than that bound up in character. Boorman's films are full of violent action, so much so that he has been "criticized" for creating characters that are one-dimensional representations necessary to embark upon the adventurous quest. Critics have argued that the quest motif does not provide enough of a context for the violence in his films. In contrast to, say, a director like Arthur Penn, the violence in Boorman's films seems superficial. Penn, for example, sees the knowledge of man's violent nature bound wholly up in his character's physicality. The twitching death agony of Buck Barrow in "Bonnie and Clyde" is so bound up in the nervous way he lived his life that the violent death he suffers is understandable and acceptable. Helen Keller's violence in "The Miracle Worker" is a rage born of blindness. Clyde's death in "Bonnie and Clyde" comes shockingly, ironically, moments after he has overcome a sexual and personal impotence.
Violence As A Means To The Absurd

The violence of Boorman's films is not as numbing as that of Arthur Penn or Sam Peckinpah. Boorman transforms the purgative violence of the Grail quest, and makes it largely an inconsequential act. Though his characters search relentlessly for some sort of transcendence, the milieu in which they operate is often not commensurate with the force of their desire. The violence in Boorman's films becomes surrealistic by virtue of its juxtaposition with elements of the everyday that are sinister, yet comic. Boorman's violence is the other half of a world that is burlesque. The irony generated through such a juxtaposition depowers the compulsiveness of the violence, and moves it to a level beyond reality. The uniquely psychological landscape that Boorman creates by bringing elements of violence and comedy together is such that the result of the quest is found to be not transcendence, but a sense of the absurd.

In "Having a Wild Weekend," there is one episode in which a small army of tanks and infantrymen swoop down upon Steve and Dinah and a group of harmless dishevelled hippies who have taken refuge in an abandoned, derelict old house on a disused World War II air base. The tanks and troops encircle the confused, motley group with all the exuberance of a war game. The irony of military might, set in earnest combat with a few early flower children who are more hungry than aggressive, creates a scene that is gleefully absurd.

The violence inherent in Walker's compulsive pursuit of the syndicate in "Point Blank" is juxtaposed by a car-smashing sequence beneath a freeway overpass. The car is demolished bit by bit until John Stegman, syndicate member and owner of Big John's auto dealership, reveals the whereabouts of
the syndicate boss, Reese. The scene, though revealing of urban alienation, is also a slapstick celebration of the destruction of urban commercialism. The dialogue between Walker and Brewster is, as the interchange between Mifune and Marvin in "Hell in the Pacific," full of comic testiness. Bobby's decidedly sexual monologue during the first night's camp on the Cahulawassee River in "Deliverance," is a prelude to the sexual savagery that is to come. Yet it is of itself, a curious, genuinely funny re-enactment of the sexual frustrations of adolescence. The carnival dance sequence among the Eternals in "Zardoz" in which geriatric couples become sexually aroused is a comic put-down of the frigid female programmers who control life in the Vortex. In "Leo the Last," the impoverished blacks of the London slum that surround Leo's mansion are used and denied status. Such racial violence and bigotry is tempered however, with such wonderfully comic episodes as, an aristocratic group therapy session, a meeting of paranoid revolutionaries, and a ravenous banquet sequence, that reveal these patricians to be more eccentric than vicious, and more vulnerable than alienated. "Exorcist II" is full of comic irreverence. There is an Elmer Gantry figure, Ecumenical Edwards, who hustles religious figurines to the Catholic missions of Ethiopia from the back of his small plane. He is a transplanted mid-west bible salesman, with a disarming honesty and a sense of humour. Even more enticing is the doomed comic flirtatiousness between Father Lamont and the sexually repressed psychiatrist Dr. Jean Tuskin. Boorman's world is black, yet it is revealed as being violently absurd. His use of black comedy makes the violence an extension of men who are more out of harmony with their world, rather than simply willfully destructive. The violence of Boorman's world meets only the ordinariness of the everyday. The result is the limited catharsis in the knowledge of the absurd.
Though the Boorman protagonist is a loner, his is not a misogynist. His aloneness is often bound up in a strange blend of sexuality and religion. If the Hawksion hero is a macho figure who becomes timid and pliable in the face of women who domineer, Boorman's romantic loner does not simply coerce female sensibility. Boorman's depiction of women is much more complex than the simple "preying" of male machismo. The quest gives Boorman a chance to explore sexual waywardness with an almost religious sanction. Homosexuality, female frigidity, and carnal knowledge figure as metaphorical ingredients to the very nature of the male quest. At one level, man is soiled by women, and so must redeem himself by ridding himself of them, before the quest can be renewed. At another level, male and female characters undergo role inversions such that homosexuality becomes part of the knowledge of man's evil that is gleaned from the quest. Like the Arthurian Tales, at every level, sexuality and transcendence are merged.

Take for example the undercurrent of homosexuality that figures in Boorman's films. In "Point Blank," Walker's venge-filled quest is spurred by the memory and the betrayal of his wife, Lynn. So dominant is Walker's relationship to Lynn, that other male characters in the film come to echo female qualities. Brewster, like Norman Bates in "Psycho," is an easily flustered perfectionist whose home is filled with artifacts of baroque eroticism. Walker's friendship with Reese (a syndicate boss) is, too, clearly revealed as having a homosexual attractiveness. Mifune and Marvin in "Hell in the Pacific" continually exchange "housekeeping" roles within their beach shelter. Domestic petulance reveals an undercurrent of mutual attraction that is held in check by the strict demands of the code of
soldiering, and by the tattered photographs of the women "back home." In "Deliverance" Bobby's continual verbal sexual innuendoes and display, mark him early as the appropriate victim of a homosexual rape. Clearly, the issue of a sexuality that has liberating and humanizing influence, becomes in Boorman's vision, a threatening presence that is crucial to the knowledge gained from the quest.

In "Exorcist II," "Zardoz," "Excalibur," and "Leo the Last," Boorman's depiction of sexuality takes on a more traditional, more sexist, and more sinister role. In these films, sexuality is clearly linked with the rationality that is buried within the meaning of Grail legend. It seems that, women with intelligence embody the same power as the Grail. They, like Elaine in the Arthurian Tale, must remain pure. Father Lamont in the "Exorcist II" is sexually aroused by the cool phlegmatic psychiatrist Jean Tuskin. This arousal is given full play at the end of the film when the Evil One, Bazoozoo, becomes literally the seductive substitute for the possessed Regan. That Lamont neither arouses Tuskin, who remains pure, nor succumbs to Bazoozoo's seduction, is testament to sexual anxiety that is at the root of his odyssey.

Jean Tuskin in "Exorcist II" is in many ways an extension of May (the geneticist) and Avalow, the Vortex controllers in "Zardoz." These women possess very special intellectual qualities. As directors, as intellectuals, they become quite representative of the potency of the Grail. As such, they must forever be virginal. To seduce them would be to soil the image of the Grail, and to undercut the romantic nature of the quest. Only Consuella in "Zardoz" is capable of bearing Zed's children because she essentially is a "domestic," with no pretension of knowledge or power. Ingraine, too, in
"Excalibur" is as much a part of Uther's temptation as his own lust. Morgana, her daughter, in perceiving her mother's seduction by another, becomes like Avalow and May, a figure of authority and dominance. Morgana, like May, is killed therefore by virtue of her manipulative hold upon the male. Even in "Having a Wild Weekend," Dinah's commercial potential as a model, as a temptress, threatens her bond with her stuntmen friends. Their odyssey from swinging London is really an odyssey that reveals her to be an enchantress who, Vivian-like, will lure Steve to a psychological wasteland that is expressive of his betrayal and aloneness.

The women of the Arthurian Tales--Morgana, the Lady of the Lake, Ingraine, Vivian--etc., possess an altering but sinister magic. They are both enticing and dangerous. As the Lady of the Lake uses her magic arts to protect Arthur and Lancelot, Morgana uses her magic against them. Like Merlin himself, Boorman transforms his women into both fertile and murderous forces. They surface in male and female "skins" throughout his narratives. Their loving and cruel magic represents the forces of irrational and passionate desire. In the Arthurian Tales, such forces are converted into beings that are supernatural. Boorman transforms the women of the Grail legends into figures that are manipulators to be used, or barren enough to be destroyed. The creative potential inherent in genuine sexual equality is converted in Boorman's films into a libidinous repression that yields only sexual aberration. The enchanted palaces, gardens, castles, and secluded valleys of the fays in the original Grail myth are enclosed places. The Freudian interpretation of these places being analogous to female genitalia is clear, though entirely underdeveloped in the Arthurian myths. Boorman allows for such a Freudian view in his rendering of the more contemporary women figures in his films by allowing passion to be replaced by cruelty.
Mystery: The Wasteland

The old Celtic belief that the fertility of the land was dependent upon the well-being of the king was incorporated and developed more clearly in the Arthurian romances. In *Morte D'Arthur*, the king is seen to be an expression of the state of the land. With the Fisher King crippled by a lance, his land is barren. Ultimately the hero heals the king and fertility is restored to the land. Though the wasteland is the nexus of the Grail quest, it is important in that it marks the passage from impasse to the place of renewal. The place of mystery and renewal Northrop Frye calls the "green world". This green world is crucial to the Arthurian legend in that it equates a reaffirmation to serve mankind. Connected with the images of death and human depravation that in the wasteland is the forest. The forest of the Grail myth is another world. It is green and beautiful and enticing. It is too the place of whispers and footsteps, where people observe from the corner of the underbrush. The forest provides both the setting for the hunt, and a glade for the dreamy to make love. In *Morte D'Arthur*, Perceval and Lancelot leave the wasteland with the Grail and suffer verbal abuse from downtrodden peasants. In the forest are witches, enchanted castles, monsters, and fairies. Lancelot makes love to Guinevere in a forest. For the knight errant the green world of the forest holds great attraction. For the knight errant, the forest is a network of possibilities. In short, it is a place of mystery.

Boorman transforms the landscape of the wasteland and the green world in his films, and makes it a surreal expression of a state of mind. The wasteland in Boorman's films is at once a prison cell-block, a modern American city, a tribal cliff-dwelling in Africa, a London slum. The forest
is transformed into an Appalachian river gorge, a run-down mansion in a cul-de-sac, a pacific atoll, a suburban bungalow, and the English Downland. Unlike the movement toward life by the barren soul of the wasteland in the Grail legend, Boorman's passage offers no such clear promise of renewal.

In "Having a Wild Weekend," and "Point Blank," the wasteland is clearly the barren alienating confines of the modern city. In "Having a Wild Weekend," neon signs and road directions point people to the empty pleasures of the hedonistic life. Steve and Dinah try to flee London but find themselves travelling in circles forever spied upon by a huge "Meat For Go" advertising campaign. In "Point Blank," Boorman extends the road metaphor to express the epitome of the barrenness of the urban American way of life by having much of Walker's relentless search for vengeance occur under overpasses, above crowded city streets, and in storm sewers that, like high-ways, glisten with the empty, cold, concrete of alienation.

The chase from London to Bath provides the context for the "green world" in "Having a Wild Weekend." Boorman's telephoto camera seems to make Nan and Guy's Bentley float through the Downland toward their mansion outside of Bath. Yet it is all an illusion. The mansion is shot as yet another series of closed environments. It is a medieval "forest," at once enticing (a fireplace), yet foreboding in its hidden passages that allow Nan and Guy to spy. They are poor models of the future for the hopeful, fleeing young couple.

Bremster's suburban home in "Point Blank" ostensibly represents the promise of renewal in his new relationship with Chris. Yet at the house, Chris discovers that Walker is not interested in her. The appliances, symbolic of marital stability, taunt the very sexual root of their new
relationship. In reaction Chris turns on every electrical appliance in the home. The noise is a wild cacophony of utensils that mocks the stability the home stands for. The "green world" of Brewster's suburban home results only in increased alienation.

In "Hell in the Pacific" the jungle, like the forest of the Cahulawassee in "Deliverance," provides safety in that it provides cover for the stranded American and Japanese soldiers. Yet it also separates them, for like the secret passageways and corridors of Nan's mansion in "Having a Wild Weekend," it provides myriads of ways in which the World War II enemies can continue to wage war with each other. The wasteland, the bombed desolate radar outpost on a nearby island, reveals only the ruined artifacts of American and Japanese culture. For the American soldier, and the Japanese Captain, the South Pacific offers only reminders of destruction, and images that continue to foster antipathy.

The river gorge of the Cahulawassee is both a wasteland, and a "green world" in Boorman's "Deliverance." The soon-to-be-flooded Cahulawassee and its surrounding forest offers the promise of renewal for Ed, Bobby, Drew, and Lewis. Instead, their canoe trip through this vanishing piece of wilderness become the place where buggery and murder becomes the expression of common humanity.

The forest that draws the ineffectual aristocrat out from his wasteland in "Leo the Last" is an East-end London cul de sac. Leo's mansion is a moral wasteland. Bourgeois indifference and corrupt capitalism make the members of Leo's household wholly insensitive to the plight of the poor who live in the surrounding slum. The dark street outside Leo's mansion and the windows
of the tenement flats facing him are filled with a kind of social interaction Leo has never known. In the cul de sac Leo sees poverty, cruelty, rape, and brotherhood. He is drawn back into life by the adventure that beckons him from his isolation. In order to be re-integrated as a human being, however, Boorman has Leo descend into a violence that outstrips those of his household and those of the street. For Boorman, corruption means redemption.

In "Zardoz," the wasteland is both literal and surreal. A future holocaust has laid the landscape bare, save for a small community of female computer technocrats. These women controllers have formed an Amazon-like future community in which their computer prowess has given them the ability to control men. Zed, the outsider, is drawn into the green and glowing world of the computer screens called the Vortex. He is able to break the controlling power of the dominating women, but in so doing scours the landscape with his violent deeds. Zed replaces technological domination with only Neanderthal domination. The promise of intelligence is the least important human attribute to be rewarded through Zed's quest.

The landscape of the Vortex is surreal. Telescreens reveal to the women controllers the memory and the future of all those who inhabit their community. The Tabernacle room (heart of the Grail) is ablaze with flashing lights, and whirring computers. Boorman's depiction of human memory displayed on the telescreens is a bizarre juxtaposition of human needs and fears. The Tabernacle room is Boorman's simultaneous treatment of an inner and an outer reality.

Unlike the Arthurian tales, the relentless urgings of the quest in
Boorman's films is motivated not by hope, but by fear. The journey through the wasteland and the forest does not dispel apprehensiveness. Acts of bravery are not rewarded with a spiritual insight. Instead the violence of rescue drives Boorman's heroes toward madness.

The forest for Boorman is a place like the wasteland, of essentially negative impulses. From Boorman's contemporary renderings of the Grail "green world," characters peer from their cover with a nervousness that is not assuaged. Boorman's films are full of images of people watching each other. Nan and Guy in "Having a Wild Weekend" watch the two runaways Steve and Dinah from secret passages and holes in the walls of their upper class household. Establishment spies follow them, and the media watches everybody. In "Point Blank," Walker resolutely spies on Mal Reese, a syndicate member who shadowed, and cornered, and killed for his act of doublecross. Leo the aristocrat in "Leo the Last" watches the lives and events of the slum ghetto with growing interest. His spying, initially an extension of his ornithology, becomes finally a means for his redemption from upper class isolation and indifference. "Deliverance" resounds with apprehension. Retarded children watch bleakly from a limited consciousness, a world that has intruded upon Appalachia, and created in essence, their condition. The mountain men spy on the four canoe-tripping intruders, Ed, Lewis, Drew, and Bobby, as they themselves watch Bobby's sexually adolescent campfire display, spell out the real nature of their disquiet ... and their doom. Ed must become a guerilla, and seek and destroy the Cahulawassie hillbillies that makes him, at the end, little more than one of them. "Hell in the Pacific" is about two soldiers who adopt guerilla tactics on a peaceful pacific atoll. Preying and paranoia are learned defenses, Boorman tells us, that finally over
rules any personal common humanity. In "Zardoz," the women controllers of the Vortex computer spy by way of telescreens into the wired on the past, present, and future, of Zed, the virile, not-so-noble savage who has entered their celibate world. In "Exorcist II," Jean Tuskin's mind synchronizer allows Father Lamont to see and to enter the life of one possessed by demons other than religious dogma. In "Exorcist II," Lamont's preoccupation is the looking of a man who has lost his faith. In "Excalibur," Merlin the wizard spies on Igraine, with growing interest in the evil nature of Morgona. Arthur spies on Galahad who has stolen his wife and Galahad on Percival who finds the Grail. Characters emerge from Boorman's forest striken with paranoia. They have not reaffirmed a faith to save man. At best they have gained a limited knowledge that the darkness of their own hearts is mankind's wasteland. In consequence, all watch each other in fear and in fury. There is no deliverance to an Eden glade.

Iconography

The Lance, the Sword, and the Grail are the operative icons of the Arthurian legend. These artifacts give significance to feasts, tournaments, battles, and thrones. The Grail, the holiest relic in Christendom, and its attendant sword Excalibur, signify the struggle to wrest a meaningful life from adventure, glory, sexuality, and aristocracy. These icons Boorman transforms to match the needs of his modern warriors. The phallic sword has become the gun in "Point Blank," "Hell in the Pacific," and "Zardoz." In "Having a Wild Weekend" it is the probing television camera. In "Deliverance" it is a murderous cross-bow and an old rifle. In "Leo the Last," Leo does his jousting with a telescope. In "Exorcist II," the means to a knowledge
of man's limited condition is a mind-synchronizer machine that allows Lamont to search and destroy Regan's debilitating possession.

The Grail, promise of restoration in the Arthurian tales undergoes a more complex transformation in Boorman's films. In the Grail myth it represents the female principle, the restorative, rejuvenative, passive element that quells the savage warrior beast in man. Boorman's questing heroes seek the Grail, but it does not shine with the promise of eternal goodness.

The Grail is freedom in "Having a Wild Weekend." Steve and Dinah seek it, yet it eludes their quest. Dinah capitulates in the end for fame and money. Steve wiser in the knowledge that freedom is impossible, grows up in sadness. In "Point Blank," the Grail ostensibly is money. Walker's life-in-death dream to avenge those who doublecrossed him of his share of a syndicate heist, sets him resolutely on a quest not for truth but revenge. In the end, Walker gets his money, but gives it up. His Grail has been an icon that has betrayed him. The aloneness that Walker felt at the beginning is felt at the end. The knowledge of a greater doublecross that he played upon himself dies with him. In "Leo the Last," Boorman's most surreal comedy, the Grail is a frozen turkey. Rosco the vigorous defender of the subjugated blacks of the street where Leo lives isolated in his mansion, defends the stolen bird as the virgin defends the Grail. Shining with hope, the frozen turkey beckons to Leo who will seek the fellowship and commitment it represents. In the process he will discover the violence inherent in that commitment. In "Hell in the Pacific," the Grail is the promise of love that is manifest in the photographs of girls-back-home that the two Japanese and American soldiers find amidst a ruined radar installation on an isolated
pacific atoll. The pictures promising love and respite from war are however, juxtaposed with images of death (a tattered wallet, a name tag, etc.) In consequence the promise of fulfillment surfaces the reality of cultural antagonisms that result in the death of love. In "Deliverance" the Grail might be considered to be in the musical instruments Drew and the Albino retarded hillbilly youth play at the outset of the canoe-trip. The promise of joy from the give and take of "Dueling Banjos" becomes a resolute life and death duel between hillbilly and outsider. The Grail for Lamont in the "Exorcist II" is the promise for spiritual renewal through his act to exorcize Regan's possession. Manifest in Regan herself (she awakens sexual yearnings in Lamont) the Grail causes the eventual sacrifice of Lamont's life.

These transformations of the principal iconography of the Grail legend within Boorman's films render a significant change of focus to the themes of struggle and catharsis that is at the root of the medieval tales. For Boorman, the struggle is important. The quest, and its attendant deviations (feasting, sexual encounters, tournaments) bring only a partial revelation of man's potential. The knowledge of man's violent nature, given only to some of his characters make the Grail transformations in Boorman's film a limiting artifact. If Boorman's heroes set out with hope ("Deliverance") faith ("Having a Wild Weekend,") courage ("Hell in the Pacific,") and sincerity ("Having a Wild Weekend," and "Exorcist II") they soon lose these qualities and retreat from love, or else go forward with the limiting knowledge that love is bound up with compromise and cruelty.
Arthur, Merlin, Guinevere, the Fisher King and other Grail protagonists are to be found in one guise or another in most of Boorman's feature films. Arthur himself is an archtypal figure. He is the quintessential questor. In his search for a personal authenticity he created a Round Table of knights errant who sought justice through bravery and chivalry. Always the goal of the questor was self-knowledge. Arthur and his kin, Lancelot, Perceval, and Gawain, represent men with a mission. As such Arthur is as universal a figure as Ulysses. He shows up in various forms in literature and film where a spiritual crisis motivates the drive for renewal.

Other Grail characters are not however strictly archetypal figures. Merlin the magician, the Fisher King, Morgana, Arthur's seductive half-sister and Mordred a bastard son, are specific to Arthurian legend. Yet these characters show up in various transformations in Boorman's work, and reveal in the process his repeated influence of elements specific to the Grail legend. Boorman's transformation of Arthurian characters represents a transplant of character types to suit a modern context. Often his Grail figures do not achieve what they did in the medieval tales. Driven by similar impulses, Boorman's heroic transformations seek and do not find. They strive only to kill or be killed. They yield to cultural and psychological influences that make them more three-dimensional than the moral blindness of some knights errant. In utilizing the heroic figures of the Grail myth in a modern context where even the reason for the quest is skewed by alienation, Boorman's heroes are tragic figures in an anti-heroic age. Often their struggle is for nought. The wisdom they gain if at all is of life's absurdity and violence. Boorman's twentieth-century Grail character is not strictly a hero or a survivor. He is either a red-neck.
throw-back that is out of place in the twentieth-century, or someone whose inner spirituality forces him to seek beyond the given absurdity of modern life.

Arthur King (King Arthur) is the protagonist of an early (1964) B.B.C. television production called "The Quarry." It is a narrative about a sculptor who facing finally a slab of marble is unable to make that first mark. The quarry represents not only the source from which the marble is hewn; it also represents the meaning that lies at the end of a search. Having found his quarry, Arthur King is numbed in the face of it.

In "Point Blank," King Arthur is Walker an alienated vengeance-filled modern-day urban gangster. Walker is shot twice at point-blank range by his wife's lover. Between the shots we see in Walker's dying consciousness a resolute quest for retribution. Walker avenges those who cheated him, but his victory is hollow. His life (in his dying reconstruction of it) is without emotion. He has been a dead questor, long before his quest for meaning began. Walker sees the hollowness of his determination only seconds before he dies. Walker has misperceived the Grail, and as such "lost" his life.

The Arthurian knights errant in "Hell in the Pacific" are two wartime enemies (an American airman, and a Japanese naval officer) who are stranded together on a Pacific atoll. Cultural animosity clouds their chances to do much more than survive together. In "Deliverance" the questors are four. Drew an emotive musician, who cannot handle the violence of the human wasteland he is thrust into. Bobby an adolescent whose preoccupation with sexuality makes him (Arthur-like) a prisoner of it. Lewis (Perceval-like)
is killed by his lack of restraint. Ed somewhat like Lancelot, almost goes mad with the grief of the murder of Bobby. Like Lancelot, Ed is chastened by the violence he released in his ordeal on the Cahulawassee. Unlike Lancelot, his remorse gives him nothing save the knowledge of the violence he buries within his own nature.

Arthur in "Zardoz" is Zed, a twenty-third century tough who rejects equality with women (and the Grail) in favour of a master-slave relationship with an anti-intellectual girl called Consuella. There is no vision of a possibility of more in Zed. He is a rough-hewn, violent "knight" whose violence is not only unredemptive, it is also cruel. Zed is Arthur as thug.

Father Lamont's spiritual arises in "Exorcist II" makes him an Arthurian analogue. With the purest of intentions, Lamont seeks a renewed faith in the conservatism of the Catholic church. Lamont, like Arthur is sidetracked (psychologically) by alluring but essentially cold women. Like Arthur, Father Lamont confuses service and chivalry with more base feelings. His quest to save Regan from her pagan possession results not in a new integrity. It results in his death.

Boorman's modern-day questors then either fail outright, or gain a pyrrhic victory. The greater knowledge of man's own evil taints the struggle and fills it with action that has no real consequence. In short, Boorman's Arthurian transformations are motivated men who must confront meaningless circumstance.

The transformations of the lesser characters as Merlin in Boorman's films are even more interesting. Merlin figures as Arthur Frayn (Frayn
equals Friend; Merlin is friend of Arthur in the Grail legend) in "Zardoz" like Merlin, Frayn instructs Zed in the ways of the Vortex. It is Frayn who sets Zed upon discovering the truth of the women controllers of the Vortex. For his disclosure the women of the Vortex, like Vivian of the Grail legend, imprison Frayn into the body of an innocuous effete old man. Merlin is Rosco in "Leo the Last" who inspires Leo to fight for the black ghetto of his street, as Merlin inspires Arthur to fight for his throne. In "Point Blank" Merlin is Yost the man who we perceive as the policeman at the beginning of the film. Yost Merlin-like is also transformed into Fairfax, "godfather" of the syndicate which Walker is trying to crack.

Merlin of the Grail myth is Arthur's mentor. In "Exorcist II," Father Lamont's mentor is Dr. Jean Tuskin. It is she who acts as Lamont's guide in his spiritual quest to rid Regan of her possession and in the process rediscover his faith. Tuskin's magic is a mind-synchronizing machine that allows Lamont to travel imaginatively with Regan during one of her seizures. As Merlin of the Grail myth was capable of shape-shifting, he often appeared in many different guises. Merlin was at different times, a young boy, a cripple, a beggar, a hermit, a woodcutter, an old man, and even a shadow. Jean Tuskin, the psychiatrist-inventor in Exorcist II can Merlin-like share the experience and understand the nature of Regan, and of Lamont, the man who seeks to free her.

Merlin in the Grail legend for all his sagaciousness, was a victim of his own passionate desires. Vivian's charms subjugated Merlin and in the process took away his powers. Bobby in "Deliverance" is a Merlin-figure in that his preoccupation with his own sexuality becomes the means through which Ed and Drew and Bobby must eventually face their limited stature.
In playing to the latent buried sexuality of the all-male macho group, Bobby awakens the presence of homosexuality. When Bobby is raped by one of the Cahulawassee hillbillies, the sexual nature of the violence necessary to bury this fact essentially destroys Bobby, Drew, and Lewis.

In the Arthurian legend Merlin could not only transform himself, he could also transform the appearance of other people. Merlin transformed Uther into Gorlois in order to beget Arthur from Igraine. In "Point Blank" Lynn, Walker's wife who has run off with Mal Reese is assimilated into Chris (Lynn's sister, with whom Walker has an affair). Like Morgana of the Grail myth who is the female evil counterpart of Merlin, Lynn both hates and harms Walker. It is the memory of his marriage with Lynn that sets Walker upon his doomed quest. Without love Walker confuses Chris and Lynn. His love-making to them both (in memory) is as alien and as poisonous as the empty money he seeks.

Echoes of Myth

In discussing his seminal treatment of the Arthurian romance "Excalibur," Boorman himself admitted to his long-time fascination with the Grail legend. In those films in which Arthurian themes and characters are evident, Boorman had either collaborated on the script, worked closely with the writer, or had major production control. Those recondite motifs that surface in his films are echoes of themes and forces he found first in the Grail legend. Apart from the high-adventure of the Arthurian romances, Boorman's interest in the Grail myth made him like Jung interested in the nature of our environment, inasmuch as that environment provides a context to examine man at a particular moment of his social life. The Grail myth provided for
Boorman a vision of a perceptual world that was different to his environment. This "umwelt" this perceptual ideal, is the driving force behind the quest. The Grail quest gave to Boorman a Jungian-like base to consider man's sexual interactions that run counter to the mores of any given social structure in which we live. More, the Arthurian romances allow him to explore fully the spirit of man as that spirit is derived from a misty though still powerful mythological past. The echoes of the Grail myths that are present in Boorman's feature films reveal that the quest is one of the selective forces that shapes our sexuality. That quest Boorman shows us is fraught with sexual anxiety. Boorman's feature shows us again those areas of sexual contact that has jelled into a standard by which we have constructed our society. The message of the Grail legend is that apart from its repression of human sexuality, man with faith continually strives to transcend its limitations. Boorman's films though revealing the restrictions and violence of a worn-out ethic show us those areas of human freedom not solely determined by the sexual instinct, nor shaped by a simple Christian faith. In the face of the absurd, Boorman's questors have no guiding divinity. Yet his heroes are not reduced to Comus' Sisyphus functionary. Boorman's films reveal that there is something transcending man. Unlike the religious element in the Grail myth, this power is not present in history as say the manifestation of a God-figure. It is instead merged within man's drive to right what he perceives is wrong, or to seek an ultimate meaning. The echoes of myth in Boorman's films make his characters restless, driven souls, who in the face of life's absurdity often strive headlong into oblivion. That striving however, is not a Sisyphus-like bovine instinctive urge to blindly endure, it is a drive in which knowledge of human chaos is learned. Hope for man in Boorman's films is limited, but hope is immanent.
Boorman's technical uniqueness begins with the way he uses his camera. The particular climate or tone that Boorman injects into the camera's field of vision lies in his use of abstract framing, subjective camera, and carefully controlled use of colour. Boorman is not interested particularly in presenting slices of real life. For Boorman, cinema was invented to express the subconscious, the mysterious, the fantastic. His images unlike the neorealists, penetrate us deeply into poetry. His use of elliptical editing, and montage, readily subverts the traditional linear narrative process. Often the visuals are accompanied by the use of an unearthly, electrified, synthesized sound such that his films leap out beyond naturalism. The spirit of Boorman's work is clearly animistic.

Abstract Framing

Take for example, his use of abstract framing. In "Deliverance" as Bobby, Drew, Ed, and Lewis, speed toward the Cahulawassee River deep in the hills of Georgia we are presented with a fore-taste of those hillbillies whose life has been broken by an urban technology that has failed to tame this wilderness. Boorman frames the ruined and rusting hulks of old trucks and rotting building such that they merge with the forest. He presents us with repeated images of effort and desolation at the same time. Moreover, as Lewis' jeep races toward the river to begin their journey, Boorman frames Ed and Lewis behind the wheel of their vehicle. What is reflected off the windshield is the threatening overhand of the wilderness itself. Abstractly,
Boorman blends two images — of men and wilderness — that he will repeat over and over throughout the film. In "Point Blank" (1967), this same windshield shot is used to present Walker, Lynn, and Mal Reese, subsumed by the city. In "Leo the Last" rain against a car windshield distorts the slum reality that is east-end London. Leo is prevented from seeing the stark reality of hunger, of violence and of death, by a camera that reflects only surreal patterns of light and darkness.

Subjective Camera

In "Exorcist II" (1977) Father Lamont's journey to Africa to seek Kikumo is photographed subjectively, such that we feel the power of his mission. Boorman's zooming subjective camera, charges us with the power of that mission. In "Having a Wild Weekend" (1965), again in a mirror sequence, it is we, the audience who overcome the middle-aged aristocrats Nan and Guy ... who for a short time rescue Steve and Dinah the runaway young stars of the film. However, Boorman's subjective camera makes us feel the desolation of aging and powerlessness as a culture turns its gaze only upon the young. In "Hell in the Pacific" (1968), there is a sequence in which Lee Marvin, the downed American flyer creeps up upon the camp of a Japanese soldier (Toshiro Mifune) with whom he shares the same pacific atoll. Boorman's camera moves through the jungle undergrowth. We as Marvin, are forced to crawl through swamps, and slither through rain forests with the trepidation and excitement of a guerilla warrior. In "Zardoz" (1973) Zed the warrior has finally reached the heart of the Vortex and has become involved with a struggle between this super computer (the Tabernacle Crystal). We as Zed are subject to a light-show epiphany not unlike the surreal inside-outside
principle depicted by Max Ernst. We participate in a revelation because as Zed, the camera reveals to us past, present, and future glittering, and distorted and swaying about us.

Colour

It is "Leo the Last" (1969) that best reveals Boorman's controlled use of colour. Simply, a comic tale of racial injustice, becomes a bizarre fantasy of moral indignation through the carefully repeated patterns of black and white that are everywhere in the film. The interior of Leo's mansion is a geometric design in black and white. Tiled floors alternate in black and white. Furniture and curtains in shiny opposites of these two colours, lend an elegance to the violence that is Leo's world. House guests like Margaret (Leo's fiancée), are bedecked in white, the servants are in black. Everywhere the pattern is extended and repeated. The slum grocery shop is a surreal collage of blacks and white that mocks the racial tension that is at the root of the film. White cans are placed beside black boxes. Everywhere the basic dichotomy of race is juxtaposed by every black and white object and artifact in the film. The result is the creation of a "black" comedy more in the spirit of Bunuel's "That Obscure Object of Desire" than a less powerful narrative of a millionaire with misplaced values.

"Deliverance" (1972) works because of its desaturated colour. The Cahulawassee gorge and surrounding countryside are purposefully leached of colour by a developing process that removes any essence of the rich greenness of a lush and inviting natural world. Instead, Boorman "cools" the greens
such that the Cahulawassee is paled into a somber, threatening presence that is the thematic core of the film. In "Point Blank" (1967), we move from an opening of cold tones of gray and white (Alcatraz) through sequences increasingly rich in colour. From blues to greens we are moved to the lush reds of Brewster's Los Angeles home. Boorman is so intent on controlling colour in "Point Blank" that even the hair colour and clothing of Chris (Angie Dickenson) is dyed to duplicate each deepening colour of each successive scene. The result is a carefully added dimension of distance that we perceive in Walker as he resolutely separates himself, in his last imagined vengeance-filled act of murder, from any contact with the real world.

"Excalibur" (1981) is a light show of colour. It explodes in the vivid shimmering colours of television. Arthur's castle, the forest in which Excalibur is released from the stone, Merlin's chambers, the Cornwall coast, Igraine's bed chamber, are excessively brilliant. They are simply over-saturated with colour such that the magic, and the weight of the original myth is given the look of an exuberant television commercial.

Editing

Montage moves "Having a Wild Weekend" away from documentary and toward the surreal. The opening sequence in which Steve and Dinah escape London is presented as a collage of directions, arrows, restrictions and rules that the ordinary London consumer/motorist is faced with every day. Boorman's montage of pedestrian signs, highway directions, and commercial billboards, depowers these restrictions. They are seen to be flaunted by the youthful exuberance of the young couple as their flight from the city is musically
interacted with short barrages of signs signifying places not to go. Montage has become here the perfect visual analogue of effervescence. The ending of the "Exorcist II" (1977), is a slower montage of all the previous Christian and pagan elements of the earlier film. Locusts, Bazoozoo, Regan, her double, the Georgetown house, and a raging fire, are all brought together in a sequence that attempts to tie those elements of scientific humanism and mysticism together.

The wildest cacophony of images of course, occurs when Boorman sets out to distort time from any chronological real-time understanding completely. The elliptical editing of "Point Blank" makes it Boorman's most accomplished work. "Point Blank" is more than a dazzling gangster film that moves both ahead or backward in time in revealing its own narrative. It is a rich allegory that expresses the last vengeful mindscape of a dying urban imagination. Walker's imagination, revealed in that split second between one gunshot and the second at point blank range, is the subject of the film. Boorman structures the film like the human imagination, consequences often being revealed before events that caused them. "Point Blank" is Boorman at his expressionistic best.

One such episode that is a show-piece of elliptical editing occurs when Walker and Chris, an old flame, are searching in Brewster's home for clues to the whereabouts of the money that has been cheated out of him by the syndicate. Walker, faithful only to his quest for money angers Chris who attacks him. The fight ends in a sexual encounter that Boorman uses to insert Walker's former association with Lynn, with Reese (a syndicate boss), and with Chris herself. As Chris and Walker roll over on the floor, Chris
becomes, Reese, Lynn, and herself in an everchanging series of rapid dissolves that recall not only the power of women in the film, but also the slightly skewed manner in which past, present, and future are merged. Even in his documentary "The Great Director," Boorman cuts archival footage of Griffith's films to reveal the personal, romantic, struggle that was Griffith's own life. The result is a study of Griffith that reduces him to a caricature; he becomes through a purposeful editing style a character constructed out of his own product. Boorman's truth about Griffith makes him a Southern romantic hero whose genteel southern values were spurned by an unconcerned urban America. Other less inspired biographers avoid Boorman's reductive editing; they perceive the greatest American director as single-minded to a fault.

Sound-Track

Like Altman and Fellini, Boorman fills his frames with jostling humanity. For Boorman, the universe is expansive, full of potential, yet skewed into violence and absurdity through one's distorted perceptions and limited understanding. Distortion becomes the motivator at every level for his cinematic originality. Like Altman, and Fellini, Boorman does not neglect that his films have a sound-track. If bells, sirens, and gongs give a dynamism to Fellini's bizarre dream world, and bits of conversation, radio broadcasts, and music, become literally characters in Altman's universe ... Boorman's use of sound is no less original or significant in the realization of his themes. Repeatedly, Boorman uses a multi-layered, distorted, often synthesized sound track to secure in us the notion of the dislocated, alien world into which his characters move. In "Exorcist II,"
for example the surreal ominous low humming of Dr. Tuskin's electronic bio-feedback mind-sharing machine, reveals in its changing tone, just when Father Lamont has entered the possessed world of Regan. Reality and nightmare are linked by sound. In "Leo the Last," the two worlds of aristocratic ennui, and the social injustice of those of the street, are defined by sound. As Rosco, the black spokesman of the poor of the ghetto is lead away for civil disobedience outside Leo's mansion, the crowd's songs of protest are suddenly synthesized into an eerie echo that prefigure the slow, mood-generated echo of "Dueling Banjos" that shapes the nightmare of "Deliverance." "Hell in the Pacific" is eerie because Boorman makes a film essentially without a sound track. In utter silence we are forced to strain to hear any noise that might mark the presence of two enemy soldiers of a small pacific atoll. Sound here, is silence, and Boorman uses it effectively to magnify not only our attention span, but to sharpen and extend the cultural animosity demanded by war.

Technically then, Boorman is an innovator who has done much to advance the scope of cinema language. Despite an uneven box-office following, he has experimented with sound, colour, and camera, and in so doing reminded us of the stature of film-makers who came before. His narratives have more fully realized the ability of the cinema to break free of its literary and theatrical linearity. Boorman has brought the cinema of Bunuel, Fellini, and Godard, to the masses, albeit not always successfully. His psychedelic cinema is often attached to a view of man that is out of place with the changing mores of the times. Like Griffith, or Kurosawa for that matter, Boorman is a moralist whose values of self-reliance makes him a loner in the new pluralistic global village. Yet, when his narratives subvert his
tendency to be heavy-handed, John Boorman must still be judged as having made a significant contribution to commercial cinema during one of its most exciting times.
The most important mythic element in "Having a Wild Weekend" is Boorman's contemporary rendering of the questors amidst the wasteland. Beneath the surface optimism of his protagonists, who seek a world free from media exploitation, is a darker, pervasive anxiety. In the spirit of the Grail legend, "Having a Wild Weekend" is about initiation, and the rites of passage. Boorman's depiction of the anxiety of his youthful questors is achieved through his rendering of a countryside that Boorman makes appear ominous and suspended in time. The use of telephoto tracking shots gives the atmosphere of "Having a Wild Weekend" a surreal ambience. Moreover, those whom Steve and Dinah meet on their quest for freedom seem normal; yet Boorman places them in a mise-en-scene that is slightly skewed with soft light, tight corners, and heavy dominating architecture. The effect is to place those whom Steve and Dinah meet as being themselves trapped in middle-age inertia, freaked-out naivete, or bourgeois hedonism. Like the Eternals in "Zardoz;" or the household guests of "Leo the Last," Boorman's wasteland in "Having a Wild Weekend" is rendered as a place where ordinary people are pitiably out of harmony with the accepted surface reality of their lives. The ambience Boorman captures in this first feature film sets the style for a continued surreal, psychological rendering of the wasteland in films to come.

"Having a Wild Weekend," is a film about a cultural anomaly. Its perception of rock stars is not as spoiled narcissists. Rather they are depicted as slightly disillusioned, nice young men. The film belongs more
to the youthful genre pieces of Hayley Mills, "Whistle Down the Wind" (1964) and "The Truth About Spring" (1965), than to the nihilist encounter of the hippie generation in films like "Easy Rider" (1969), of a few years later. As such, Boorman's filmic perception of "swinging London" of the mid-sixties was so full of tomboy innocence that it could not last for more than a year or so.

Yet Boorman's stake in giving shape to the new social ethic of youth was important, and should briefly be examined in the light of what America would later do to the subject matter, for it gives us the first real clue to the structural motif around which "Having a Wild Weekend," was made. American filmmakers of the mid-sixties were still restricted by a restrictive production code that severely limited the treatment of certain subject matter. For example, "The Long Hot Summer" (1958), wanted to be more, but couldn't. Nicholas Ray's success in "Rebel Without a Cause" (1955), owed its success, in part, to the depiction of the rich, comfortable, middle class home that bore James Dean and his hoodlum buddies, than to Dean's own unsettled ennui. In Britain it was the youthful permissiveness itself that so fascinated the media. America was new to this fascination, and the Hollywood movie-makers came to look, and listen.

In Britain, the box office was tiring of the social realism of "A Taste of Honey" (1961), "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner" (1962), and "Billy Liar" (1963), and the emergence of a new counter-culture through its rock music gave impetus to a new legion of British directors who would use this social phenomenon to try to inject some new life into a dying industry. John Boorman would himself use this phenomenon to make a detour out of news and television documentary production. With the B.B.C. he would
direct a docu-drama series about how the young marrieds of his generation would respond to the change of the sixties. Such a background lead him to narrative, to the British film industry, and to the Americans. Once the Americans however, learned how to treat sexual and social mores with a British frankness, they went home to a relaxed production code in Hollywood and made "Bonnie and Clyde" (1976), "Easy Rider" (1969), and "Carnal Knowledge" (1971). In the process they took rising British writers like Alexander Jacobs, and directors like John Boorman back with them.

Boorman's style in "Having a Wild Weekend" is both an outgrowth of his documentary experience in British television. It is too, partly a result of Peter Nichols' rather loose screenplay. When the theme, a quest to escape the crass commercialism of television is allied to youthful idealism, the result is a surrealistic, comic-farce that is surprising in its amount of compassion.

Boorman's subject matter in "Having a Wild Weekend" is the Dave Clark Five, a rock group as enticing, though less popular, than The Beatles. Boorman's problem in shaping a film around them is two-fold. First, he must give shape to a narrative structure that allows them to sing, for ... like The Beatles' in "A Hard Day's Night" (1964) ... that is what the public wants. Secondly, he must visualize them as characters within a story, whose moral vision allows them to become uncertain spokesmen for an emerging new generation.

The difficulty of "Having a Wild Weekend" lies in the territory. No one has been there before. Richard Lester's "A Hard Days' Night" (1964),
was really little more than a madcap musical. The Beatles, harassed by their manager and Paul McCartney's grandfather, leave Liverpool by train for a television appearance in London. The likeable Beatles reveal every slightly irreverent, cinematic gag in the book, and Lester covers no moral ground other than youthful exuberance. "A Hard Day's Night" was really a happy satire about the Beatles own phenomenon of success. Lester's innovative dazzling camera caught the ambience of a swinging London, but it was a London of kaleidoscopic effects, not of people. In 1964, we are two years away from the nihilistic, freaked-out anger of "Alice's Restaurant" (1969). Haight-Ashbury, Kent State, and the Columbia University riots, are in 1964, little more than tremors of unease. Boorman plants one foot firmly in the known exuberance of what he perceives, and the other faltering, hesitantly, into the darkness that he senses ahead. His resulting vision is, in hindsight two-faced.

"Having a Wild Weekend" is a celebration of early pop-culture, yet at the same time it is a mild reaction to the optimism that same culture initially embodied. Being about youth, it is a love story ... electric, winsome, yet portentous of a tragedy it could not know. Perhaps in 1965, it was just impossible to make a film about the young, for their voice was still being born.

The plot is simple. The hero, Steve (Dave Clark) is the leader of a pop group of musical stuntmen who are part of a nationwide British television commercial campaign to encourage the consumption of meat. The heroine, Dinah (Barbara Ferris) is the face that carries the campaign and its slogan "MEAT FOR GO" to millions. Steve and Dinah flee from the advertising campaign that has begun to dominate their lives. Trailed closely by their
associates, they leave a conglomerate inspired media fantasy-world, in search of a more personal one. In their flight from London to the West Country they chance upon various life-styles that pose as alternatives to the world of media-hype that they have fled. Enroute they encounter a group of hippies who are rounded up by the sudden appearance of the Royal Marines. Steve and Dinah evade their capture by being rescued by middle-aged, affluent complacency in the form of the ever watchful and wistful couple Nan (Yootha Joyce) and Guy (Robin Bailey). From beat alienation to aristocratic catatonia to rural capitalism, Steve and Dinah are shaken by what they see. They seek an idyllic island off the South Coast in order to be saved from civilization. Alas, Dinah's island is little more than another corrupted tourist mecca. More, the island harbours the media bosses who have been waiting for them to show up (of course the media people know everything)! Dinah is deluged by the media in what has been a carefully scripted ploy of her "abduction" in order to gain even more exposure for the "MEAT FOR GO" campaign. Dinah is nudged back to London and the advertising life, and David sensing the futility of it all, is left behind alone.

The episodic nature of "Having a Wild Weekend" brings it close to melodrama. What saves it from being little more than an upbeat stylized bittersweet chase film, is that the melodrama in some of the episodes is very good melodrama. That is, the madcap chase is slowed in certain moments during the quest such that Boorman forays into areas of uncertainty such as: among the hippies of Dartmoor, and with the idle rich in Bath, that the two runaway lovers become less stereotyped and more honest in dealing with real sentiment. We are touched by their tenuous understanding
of who they are because Boorman ventures to say we do not really know who we are ourselves. Boorman plays carefully with our own youthful nostalgia in such scenes, and one or two of them deserves to be examined closely for the aesthetic that brings them off.

The first real pause Boorman makes with Steve and Dinah after their irreverent flight from London and the crass demands of commercialism, is an uneasy pause among a group of hippies who have taken over some abandoned buildings set deeply in the wastes of Dartmoor. Boorman prepares us for this darker episode through two enchanting sequences in which the improbable becomes real. While in London, both swim in an abandoned outdoor swimming pool ... in midwinter; and Dinah reveals to Steve an orange tree blooming joyfully in the protected shade of the Crystal Palace. For the moment, dreams win out.

However, with the encounter of the hippies on Dartmoor, a different more sober reality is to intrude. Boorman's depiction of the Dartmoor hippies reveals to us the range of his understanding toward this growing counter-culture. More within the narrative structure it provides a means for our very mad, very affluent, runaways, to sense their rootlessness in the extreme. The encounter is depicted through a discrete camera that keeps us mid-distance from the hippies. They have become squatters in one of the abandoned buildings that Boorman is careful to echo the dereliction of their own lives.

Boorman shows us a regression to primitivism by situating the hippies around a central open-pit fire burning within the one-time "living room" of one deserted building. Boorman pays careful attention to the mise-en-scene
here by arranging the drop-outs in a curve radiating from the fire to the doorway through which Steve and Dinah are to enter in a manner that reveals the degree of commitment each have, to this sub-culture. At the doorway, Steve and Dinah are greeted by one of the group who is unsure of her place in either environment. She appears, dressed as Dinah, with the remnants of high fashion, as if she belongs more easily among Steve's partying cohorts than she does among the first stirrings of hippie disquiet. Her speech is revealing; "You don't look like weekend rovers," she says to Dinah ... a comment meant to be suggestive of a boundary she has crossed. It is both a temporary disdain for those who "rough it" only part time, as well as a statement of longing for the cessation of the ongoing ennui that has enveloped her here.

As Boorman takes us closer to the nexus of this new culture, we move through the rituals of tribalism (pot-smoking alienation), past anger, and denial ("She's that butcher-girl ... "Meat For Go!"), finally at the fire's edge, we meet the hard-core committed mentor of hippie-dom in the character of Yano. Being "on the go" all are attracted to Yano's quest, for Yano has gone everywhere ... even to Tibet. Yet he cannot communicate what he has learned by dropping out. Yano is strung-out, burned out, and mixed up. Boorman presents to us in Yano an early Catholic vision of the future of the hippie movement.

Boorman does not take us any more deeply into the darker side of the spawning hippie movement. Rather, he keeps us with Steve and Dinah, on the still respectable edge of it. By not lingering for more than a passing encounter with Yano, Boorman brings off two things. First, he is able to maintain our sympathies towards the protagonists in their anti-establishment
stance. More importantly, he provides us with a greater shock value in our encounter with Yano, and what he represents. In moving away from Yano, as quickly as we were drawn to him, Boorman establishes the power of his documentary technique. Reminiscent of Pina's death in "Rome Open City" (1945), we see in Yano a fact of life; we see the action from the outside, objectively. The camera merely "records" a reality that is dramatic in itself. Steve and Dinah can do nothing, nor can we. To linger would be to diffuse the reality of his condition with pathos. Those about Yano draw from him not meaning but fear, and we are made to fear with them. All that is left is for Steve and Dinah to go on. Boorman's interview-like style describes a reality; we are left to perceive its significance ourselves.

The arrival of a squad of Royal Marines that round up the hippies and force Steve and Dinah on, has disquieting symbolic overtones. Here instead of documentary tenuousness, Boorman's style becomes excessive to the point of comedy. Tanks, guns, grenades descend upon the group of detractors, whom as we have just seen, are more helpless than harmful. The point of the excess is, however very black. Again Boorman reveals to us a world view that sees society wholly intolerant towards those who would flaunt the system. The effect of the excess however, masks this brutality in a strange innocence. Its a bit like the Keystone Cops films. Cops aren't "pigs", they are part of the fun. Here, the soldiers are almost dwarfed by the very magnitude of the attack, and Boorman shows us through this disparity a brutality that is illusory. Here, Boorman's stylistic extremes of "hit-and-run" documentary with redundant burlesque are complimentary, in that we go forward with Steve's and Dinah's hesitant anxiety whose locus is unclear. We don't fear Yano, and we can't really fear the army. Yet
beneath it all is a sense of unease. Boorman uses this surrealism to advantage to create this same unease in later films such as "Leo the Last."

The next encounter Boorman thrusts Steve and Dinah into, seems safe. It isn't. Fleeing the war zone that the hippie camp has become, Steve and Dinah are picked up by a spoiled but sympathetic middle-aged couple and taken into life among the leisure class. Bath and the "Great Homes" of the eighteenth century, provides a setting as rich as Yano's was sparse. Nan and Guy are effete, decadent and bored. With money to keep their anxiety presumably at bay, Nan and Guy become caricature-like functionaries. Their lives are reduced to game playing. They play "watch the other," and "coming on with the young." Life for Nan and Guy isn't based on purpose or belief. "We heard about your lark," says Guy.

Boorman visualizes them in closed environments ... a den, a kitchen, in the family "Bentley," in front of the fireplace ... all settings with tight corners such that Nan and Guy are revealed so as to be trapped by their affluence. More, Boorman utilizes close-ups of them ... an effect that creates an intimacy such that they are revealed as being frightened and vulnerable in moments when their upper class-consciousness is let down.

Like the hippies, Nan and Guy "don't do anything; they are 'collectors'." They live together but as Guy retorts "Nan has her pieces; I have mine." Guy collects old photographic apparatus, and Nan, old costumes. Both are artifacts wholly in keeping with the theme of the narrative. Simply Nan and Guy have become anachronistic; they are as threatened by youth as the hippies are by the establishment. The difference between Nan and Guy and the hippies, Boorman makes clear is that their ennui is less threatening
to society at large. Nan and Guy can however perceive their situation where the hippies cannot, and hence the encounter between this eccentric, sad couple, and Steve and Dinah is touching and revealing. Guy, "collects the pop art of history," he says to Dinah when he has maneuvered her into his den. Images of the past abound daguerrotypes, old projectors, zoetropes ... as do mirrors. His house is wired and full of passages for watching and listening. Guy's perceived threat is what Steve and Dinah represent ... "the callous hopefulness of young people." Nan echoes the nature of Guy's disquiet with Steve, whom she too has maneuvered into her kitchen ... "isn't it awful how everyone gets old." Simply, Boorman is showing us that this befriending of Steve and Dinah is not concerned with lechery, so much as with nostalgia. Nan and Guy have lost their power; Steve and Dinah must find theirs.

The layers of attractiveness and fear that permeate into Steve's and Dinah's own awareness, is itself defused again by a wonderful costume party that is as effervescent as it is symbolic. Within the narrative structure, it allows for the rest of the Dave Clark Five and their youthful entourage to catch up to the runaways; it allows for music; and it points symbolically to an escape into the past that portends as a viable alternative for our protagonists who can't seem to fit in.

It's fitting that Boorman should choose a masquerade party utilizing characters from the movies as his motif. At the superficial level, the party goers as Steve and Dinah (in their commercial enterprise) are media creations. More significant perhaps, is that Boorman is calling attention to a media that shapes and distorts a reality by its very presence. It is quite possible that Boorman's inability to reflect a changing youth culture
with a greater certainty is his own private comment upon the limited scope of his documentary style. It is interesting to note that Boorman would continue to move away from the depiction of a social reality, and ... with films like "Deliverance," "Zardoz," and "Excalibur," move into the realm of nightmare, fantasy, and myth.

The costume party bubbles over with a wonderful surrealism that is reminiscent of the comic interruptions of the Marx Brothers in "Night at the Opera." All are there; Nan and Guy and their "set," as well as the Dave Clark Five, the police and the media people who have been chasing everyone. Keystone Cops, Laurel and Hardy, cowboys, Indians, Sabu (Steve), the Sheik of Araby, Jean Harlow, Chaplin (Nan) ... all become dissolved into each other. Pursuer and pursued, anxious and complacent, are all melded into a comic farce of "catch me if you can" and "hide and seek," that spills over into the countryside and allows for the quest to begin anew. By now, we sense as do Steve and Dinah, that a solution to their disquiet is not forthcoming. Boorman again is pushing toward the allegorical. This madcap group of nostalgic eccentrics is its own meaning. The quest, at whatever level ... police after the runaways, Nan and Guy after their lost youth, Steve and Dinah after meaning ... itself has paled the bewilderment that Boorman has touched upon momentarily in an episode of sheer joy.

Connecting these episodes in which Steve and Dinah begin to sense their vulnerability are the chase scenes themselves. The structural formula for "Having A Wild Weekend" is largely episodic with the chase sequences themselves into the narrative. These connecting sequences are themselves not merely loose bonds. Each has a different cinematic style and
hence a different mood that Boorman utilizes to counterpoint those moments of seriousness in the narrative. By utilizing such clear stylistically different means in each connecting sequence, Boorman's overall effect is a somewhat confused film. Yet this freshness that pervades the chaos does, surprisingly, breathe the air of the new young.

The first chase sequence begins when Steve and Dinah choose to flee London and its arrant commercialism and to search with boundless optimism for a freer life in the country. The style of this sequence is pure documentary; the tone is irreverent. Boorman chooses to intercut their opulent flight with a London that intrudes. Signs are everywhere, traffic signs, commercial advertising signs, signs of demolition, and signs of direction present themselves literally in front of Steve and Dinah's escape route. Intercut with this, Boorman gives us glimpses of London of the everyday ... a young woman pushing a cradle, a banker going to work, school children drawing graffiti: The effect of this documentary montage is two-fold. Firstly, we see quite briefly, but from an objective distance the tedium and weariness of people's lives who have chosen to accept and fit-in into the required role. Men, women, children, all notice and are affected by Dinah's presence in the "MEAT FOR GO" campaign that is part of the montage. Their involvement we note is limited only to a vicarious enjoyment of the good life. Boorman early on is very much aware of the power of the media.

Boorman has Steve and Dinah flee from London in one day and night such that we see all the restrictive messages of the ads and road signs. Through this montage London becomes coercive with signs ... "Stop," "move left," "narrow bridge" are juxtaposed with commercial and career messages
that repress, bind, crimp, and control those who would stay. The flashing neon of "swinging London" by night becomes not attractive but blinding. Boorman has our protagonists drive through this maze with a speed and a verve that neutralizes all the prohibitions with an irreverence that establishes our sympathy with them for the rest of the film. That Steve and Dinah are in a "Jaguar" and their producer pursuers follow a "mini" makes no difference. If anything, the mini enhances the weaseling presence of creeping commercialism that plays a major role in the working out of the narrative.

The second chase sequence occurs when Steve and Dinah must flee their encounter with the hippies and the Royal Marines. Boorman's style here is much less frenetic than the rapid intercutting of a documentary reality that confined our heroes in the first sequence. Here, Boorman chooses a slow-moving almost lyric camera that is perfectly in keeping with the disbelief and doubt that is beginning to enfold them. The "Jaguar" has been blown up by the advancing marines, and Steve and Dinah have been picked up by the aristocrats and their Bentley. The lyric style that captures their second sequence creates a surrealistic mood that Boorman uses to cast even more strangeness into the plot.

Telephoto tracking shots make the Bentley float through the English countryside. Boorman's slow pans of the stately homes and parks of the West Country creates a sense of movement that is deliberately languid. More, Boorman has introduced into this sequence an agent provocateur, a spy, in the infamous "mini" that has spotted their flight to Bath. His telephone presence, and the grandeur of the depiction of the Great Circle in Bath where Nan and Guy will take Steve and Dinah, makes for a surreal
cops and robbers encounter that adds subterfuge and vigilance to a story of a couple who have done nothing but leave an ostensibly negative situation.

The overall effect of this second sequence is the creation of a sense of guarded interest. As the Bentley floats towards Bath, we hear in voice over, passing comments of ennui that will become significant when Nan and Guy are more revealing at home. The effect of the sweeping pans causes us to take the stance of a sentinel. We become on the sharp lookout for something that seems just about to happen. As we observe the runaways from a great distance speeding towards Bath, we are drawn to this black limousine whose purpose and direction is unknown. The ever-pursuing Mini-Cooper becomes in place of us, and the reality of the action moves beyond itself to an impending sense of something more. By purposefully slowing down this sequence, more things have become implied. This surrealism achieves an expression of Boorman's theme; that life outside the artificial fantasy of media commercialism is, itself, strange and impenetrable.

The third chase sequence occurs after the costume party when police, television commercial producers, and the Dave Clark youthful entourage, follow Steve and Dinah to their fabled island. This chase is a stylized copy of the cops and robbers classic chase sequence à la Mack Sennet. It is full of high-jinx and near misses. Its mood however is strangely intrusive, because as Steve and Dinah experience more of life in their flight they have become close -- drawn together in reaction to the increasing uncertainty they have witnessed about them.

In this sequence, there is too a shift of attention away from Steve and Dinah to a depiction of the group that pursues them. All ... the
bungling commercial producers, the police, and the Dave Clark group—are presented as stereotypes in the extreme, that lends yet another air of unreality to the narrative. The lead car of this particular chase sequence is a modified go-kart, cum dune-buggy. The Dave Clark entourage hanging from it, still in costume from the night previous is not unlike the vehicle or the pantomime group that Antonioni utilizes for his surrealist exploration of "swinging London" in "Blow-Up" (1966).

In this sequence, roads are forsaken for cross-country tracks through valleys and fields. Cops, robbers, and producers are shot cavorting through the Downland. Winter snow provides the appropriate skids and crashes while in the foreground Steve and Dinah, unmoved by all this activity, look beyond to the island.

The intrusive effect of this last high-jinx chase is achieved through Boorman's parallel development of what is happening to Steve and Dinah in the narrative. Shock, unease and fear has drawn them together, and they have expressed this closeness increasingly throughout. They have walked together on Dartmoor, and have frolicked in the winter snows on the Downland. Such development is corny and overdone, yet in relation to the desperation, violence, and absurdity about them, such closeness is welcome. When at last this chase sequence catches up to them at Louis' Ranch, Steve and Dinah are no longer caught up by the activity. We get a sense that they are just about to be revealing of their new emotional attachment to each other when the gang comes joyfully crashing in. Stylistically, Boorman has come full circle. The commercialism that distanced Steve and Dinah from themselves and each other at the outset of the film, has now been
transferred to the group that ostensibly has come to save them. Steve and Dinah have moved beyond adolescent exuberance; Boorman's hi-jinx chase sequence breaks into this new awareness and prevents it from coming to fruition.

In terms of the narrative structure, it is a brilliant move that the rescuers are depicted as intruders, in that the island -- the dream source of their flight -- must ultimately be the source for the final disillusionment. When at last Steve and Dinah do part on the causeway from the island, Boorman brings us sadly back to a recognition that their wild weekend was little more than a moment's respite, in a world uncompromising in its demand for conformity.

"Having a Wild Weekend" is then a short term frolic with respectably-alienated youth of the early 60's. The film is not just a vehicle for the pop music of rising 60's young stars. The Dave Clark Five don't sing directly in the film; their music merely adds a background for actions that place them closer to the fifties than to the seventies that beckons darkly ahead.

Boorman's film inevitably failed at the box office not just because it was too uneven in tone and character. Boorman tried I think to do too much. In making a moral statement out of essentially a musical genre offshoot, Boorman found himself in filmic material that is mutually exclusive. Yet, "Having a Wild Weekend" is a far better film than "Help" or "A Hard Day's Night" just because it introduces us to elements of unease within this youthful phenomenon. After an hour, rock music alone is boring. "Having a Wild Weekend" never bores. It confuses us with its pace, and it angers us with its tenuousness. It is a film that doesn't know its time, perhaps
because really its time never existed. We know that nice kids don't really play rock music, and when they do they make an ally out of commercialism. Protest would quickly become big business. Boorman's film tried to inject an idealism that is charming into a milieu that he secretly knew was self-destructive. "Having a Wild Weekend" reveals that John Boorman's moral vision must be considered as seriously as the documentary aesthetic from whence he came.
"Point Blank" was John Boorman's first feature film made in America. It was largely panned by the critics, but had enormous commercial success at the box office. It was popular not only because it was an original and energy-filled thriller that had its roots in the popular American gangster film, but also because it went beyond the confines of the genre to become Boorman's personal assessment of contemporary urban American life. In "Point Blank," Boorman reveals an ease in moving into new subjects and foreign cultures, while still retaining the ability to enter into a particular project with ideas that were an integral part of his own developing world view. What Boorman does in "Point Blank" is to work through a popular American genre, while at the same time concerning himself with those larger aspects of life he wishes to communicate. "Point Blank" then, uses the gangster formula, and in using it, Boorman shapes it, and modifies the genre with the perspective and aesthetics of a modernist. As such, "Point Blank" moves forwards and backwards in its own internal narrative (as do so many other Boorman films) towards an allegorical statement about man's relationship to his urban environment. Moreover, it builds upon those transformations of character that make sexuality so compelling in the Grail myth.

The narrative core of "Point Blank" is in the best tradition of the American crime film. It is, a story of betrayal, retribution, mystery, and affairs of the heart. Walker (Lee Marvin) along with his wife Lynn (Sharon Acker) is convinced to help an old-time syndicate friend Mal
Reese (John Vernon) steals $93,000 dollars from the Organization. The heist takes place during a regular helicopter pick-up of syndicate money from a pre-arranged drop point within an old cell-block courtyard on deserted Alcatraz Island. Reese plans to give back to the Organization some of its own money as a way of settling his debt. However, once he has the money, Reese shoots Walker twice at point-blank range, and leaves him to die in an Alcatraz cell. Reese and Walker's wife Lynn, then run off together. In that moment between Walker's fatal shooting, and his death the story really begins. Cinematically, Boorman brings to life a story told in the unravelling of consciousness that occurs in the process of dying. We live with Walker in his meta-life as he seeks a mental retribution for his betrayal. In the larger sense he like Perceval seeks a justification for his real life and death.

In outline, the story hardly seems worth a second look. It is reminiscent of the classic gangster film plot. Walker, perhaps like Rico in "Little Caesar" (1930), is inflexible in his assault on the syndicate. We admire Walker's drive, his choice to regain the share of what is rightfully his. But Walker, like Rico is a criminal. He is a cold-blooded Orpheus of the Underworld who resolutely seeks those inhabitants of the city who have betrayed him. Walker, like Rico finds his way to the top of the criminal element. He does in the end, recover his money if nothing else. Rico's death on the other hand allows us to stop taking sides with a gangster. Rico's drive for success has him cross boundaries of social convention and human dependency that we hold dear. Mervyn LeRoy must have Rico killed such that our own values of right and wrong are reasserted. Walker however doesn't die. He is, it must be remembered all throughout "Point Blank," really already dead. His meta-life, that
momentary interval between the shooting and his death, however becomes our nemesis. Walker's meta-life provides no resolution, no clue, to the spiritual element that might give his life a tragic catharsis. Walker in "Point Blank" is an anti-hero whose life-in-death not only forces a wholesale reshaping of the gangster genre, he is a questor that reveals the schism between the quest and the goal of the quest. For Walker, as for Steve in "Having a Wild Weekend," the quest is unfulfilling because the Grail symbol (money) is only a manifestation of ego.

The film is not episodic; it doesn't build upon what has gone before. "Point Blank" is constructed in a host of styles reminiscent of Godard, Renais, and the New Wave. It also pays homage to the slick directness of the James Bond thriller. Boorman's task in "Point Blank" is to bring to life the imagined life that exists only in a dying consciousness. Memory, hopes, past experience, and distortion, are the mechanisms of Walker's interregnum. Hence the mechanisms of memory become the controlling factors in Boorman's style. Imagination threatened by impending death, cannot be controlled. In duplicating this inner life Boorman utilizes flash forwards from consequence to causative action, repetitions in freeze-frame, and slow motion, feverish jump-cutting; obscure and multiplicate electronic sound effects, sequences that are extended echoes of ones we have seen before, inversions, and a highly bizarre use of colour. Aesthetically, it is Boorman's most ambitious and most successful treatment, and it clearly reveals a director who is in complete control. There is so much confusion in this highly stylized and expressionistic film that it is difficult at times to follow. But it is a purposeful and calculated confusion that is in keeping with its theme.
"Point Blank" marks Boorman's emergence as a director of note because its theme is a rich statement of the perverseness of the misperceived twentieth-century quest. The aesthetics of "Point Blank" are too similarly complex. It duplicates for us, a psychological process. More than that, it reveals a psychotic reality that is meant to be expressive of urban American life. "Point blank" is the best of Boorman's films in which character and style merge.

In Walker's interregnum life, we get a picture of a man who is haunted by a fuller past, and driven by urges pointing only to a desolate future. Action and memory in Walker's interregnum are wholly incompatible. As such, he is a man at odds with himself. Walker feels and is vulnerable. Yet he is embarked resolutely on a mission that does not allow for feeling. Walker is not what he pretends to be ... a coolly controlled man of action. He is a man who needs to reveal himself. The tragedy is that Walker exists in a world where such revelation is grounds only for betrayal. Walker's interregnum life is not just an imaginative life, it is a memory-hope of a life with no centre. The imagined life, the life revealed between the two point-blank shots, is a hollow life. The reality of it, as we perceive the intent of film's narrative, means nothing. Walker's imagined life becomes a vicarious experience. Walker's death a split-second after the second shot means nothing, because the life he sought ... based on retribution is essentially barren. His death means nothing because his life meant nothing in human terms. He is a questor without the nobility of a genuine epiphanic quest.

The nasty part of "Point Blank" however, lies in the connections Boorman makes within the imagined life he constructs for Walker, and the
real images of urban America he uses as a backdrop for his interval existence. Los Angeles and San Francisco are portrayed as indifferent, cold concrete wastelands. They are revealed as extensions of a gangster mentality whose existence is all deception. As Walker searches out in his interregnum for Reese, his killer, he takes us into the body of the American city, and into the heart of the heart of the urban soul. For Boorman, the organization, the syndicate, becomes the perfect metaphor for urban America. Walker's life-in-death search for Reese takes us through various levels in the hierarchy of the organization. There is John Stegman (Michael Strong), a syndicate man who tries to evade knowledge of Reese's whereabouts. He owns "Big John's" car dealership. There is Frederick Carter (Lloyd Bochner), an organization dealer who lives a hidden life in a penthouse that overlooks his particular stake of urban territory. Carter is the executive whose vision of the city is seen only in terms of real estate. His body-guards at his Stewart Apartment building are testament to a public legality in name only. Brewster (Carroll O'Conner), is the syndicate boss who lives beyond the territorial imperative of the inner-city. Brewster lives in a suburban dream house with all the gadgets of the affluent. His life has all the trimmings; a gardener, a pool, and a bullet-proof Cadillac limousine. Brewster comes and goes for all intents and purposes, as would a prominent lawyer, or a district attorney, or a public official. Brewster's connections however, lead him back to the very bowels of the city, to the storm drains where those like Walker, and others, who would cross the syndicate, are flushed away by unknown hit-men who lurk in the wings. Yost (Keenan Wynn), whom we suspect as a policeman in the opening of the film is, in reality, Fairfax, the "Godfather" of the sprawling urban
organization. Yost/Fairfax is the Merlin-figure in the film. All-powerful and untouchable, he needs neither a "castle," nor protection. Yost/Fairfax as godfather, is Boorman's expression of the deception that is so pervasive. For Boorman the gaining of rank within a criminal organization, is the mark of achieving complete freedom of action. Yost/Fairfax is so above the law, he becomes like Petri's hero in "Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion."

The city at large, office towers, night-clubs, penthouses, is for Boorman, the element that nullifies the possibility of a real life for any of his characters. Within this wasteland environment, Walker's interregnum search for his own Grail, the money, becomes symbolic. A larger synthesis of past and future, of action and dream, is denied to Walker in his "in-between " life, by virtue of the values inherent in urban America. If Walker's dream life is a sham, it is because his dream urban environment needs sham in order to exist. Hence Walker's vapid interregnum:life turns an essentially gangster story into something else. Walker in "Point Blank" becomes an archetype; he comes to express a fragmentation of self as a product of American culture. Walker's ontological angst touches us because it brings the rootlessness of the sixties away from youth, and places it squarely within the milieu of the middle-aged established, urban executive. Walker's exterior certainty, his ceaseless compulsive drive for his money, like the freeways, the towers, and suburbs of contemporary America, is built upon a perverse misunderstanding of the American dream. We are made to struggle with Walker in "Point Blank" to an understanding of his own delusion. Beneath the deception, Boorman shows us, there is nothing. Because ego drives
the quest, the wasteland cannot be assuaged.

The opening sequences serve to illustrate the maelstrom of contiguity that prevents us from entering Walker's world with logic. The film opens with the Alcatraz heist scene in which Walker has been shot twice with a sub-machine gun and left for dead. The credits intercut this reality with a series of freeze-frame shots that bear the title and other information. Here Walker is revealed as escaping a point blank annihilation by climbing cat-like out of his cell, along sky-walks, and finally into the chilling waters of San Francisco Bay. In voice-over we hear the narration of a guide who relates to tourists aboard a San Francisco Bay tour-vessel, the history of futile escape attempts from the fabled fortress. As the narration moves through the recalling of the desperate escape attempts of the 30's (itself a mocking retort to the artless drive of depression gangsters) we suddenly see Walker aboard this same very tour-vessel from which the phlegmatic voice-over emanates. Moreover, Yost appears beside Walker. They both look out toward "the Rock" that passes in the background. Yost gives Walker, as would an undercover policeman, information where the double-crossing Reese may be found.

This opening establishes Walker as existing in a meta-life. The freeze-frame title sequence must not be taken literally. It is a metaphoric statement of life that exists outside Walker's blasted body. The voice-over narration that counterpoints this action, acts as the link to the present reality of Walker's life-in-death dream. The repetitions of the shooting incident throughout this sequence serves to prove that the actions that follow are manifestations of Walker's own subjective dying consciousness.
Boorman goes to great pains to reveal the unfolding narrative as Walker's subjective awareness, throughout the echoing, resolute footsteps of Walker's "march" down the long Los Angeles Airport corridor. The sound of footsteps echoes to Lynn's apartment, lingers. We see him spying upon his former wife as she is made-up (coldly) at the hairdressers. Her face, echoes its former attachment to him by its repeated duplication (like the sound of the footsteps) in a series of vanity mirrors.

Lynn's life we see, suffers the same ambiguity as does Walker's. Her affair with Reese lasted three months after the fatal Alcatraz shooting. Yet she is delivered one thousand dollars every month presumably from the syndicate. Who keeps her? Why? In flashback we note her beginnings with Walker at Fisherman's wharf and later her meeting through Walker with Mai at an all-male underworld party she is privileged to attend. As this story unfolds, we are given repeated interruptions of Walker breaking into Lynn's apartment and emptying his gun into an empty-bed. A jump cut back to the present reveals Lynn falling and turning in slow motion upon a bed. This serves only to emulate Walker's own fretful sleep. This double memory of unease causes him to fall off the couch, to awaken and to discover Lynn dead on her bed of an overdose. Apartment window blinds are drawn closed, like the bars of an Alcatraz cell, and through them Walker sees the ubiquitous Yost staring up at him.

Walker returns to the bathroom where he first searched for clues of Reese's presence. He knocks down coloured bottles of Lynn's perfume and make-up. The resulting viscous mix of rich colours swirling in slow motion together on the bathroom floor stands as a leitmotif for Lynn's role (and the role of women in general) throughout his story. Lynn is a
mixture of attractiveness (the perfume) and repulsion (the red make-up base). Walker stands transfixed by the blood-like mix that reminds him of her infidelity with Reese and her own enveloping warmth with himself. He is as Arthur looking at Guinevere who makes love to his best-friend Lancelot, except the green-place, the forest, is replaced by the even greater mystery of the American city.

Boorman now intercuts Walker in Lynn's apartment in scenes that reveal it alternately furnished and bare. It is bare as Walker leaves the bathroom. We suddenly see him assume a position in a corner that is similar to his position in death in Alcatraz. Indeed the echoing Alcatraz gunshot that Boorman interpolates here confirms the intensity of Walker's inner conflict. The shot becomes however the doorbell and, as he goes to it, the apartment is suddenly fully furnished, in anticipation of Lynn's initial move into his life. Against these pain-filled contradictions of memory and perception, Boorman continues to lay waste to the traditional gangster plot, as well as the traditional quest motif.

Chris' role as was Lynn's is central in "Point Blank." Her actions are a repetition in echo of Lynn's actions earlier in the narrative. Walker finds Chris in bed in the same posture as Lynn in death. She too, we note through an intercut of bedside pills, is plagued by restlessness. Chris is more than Lynn's sister, she becomes literally an extension of her, in that Walker will use her to get at Reese within the organization. She is an Elaine-figure, who tricks Lancelot, and at the same time is used by him in his own search for the Grail.

There is a sexual element underlying Walker's relationship with Chris
that is important in Boorman's modification of the gangster film conventions within "Point Blank." Chris Merlin-like is transformed into taking the place of Lynn and Reese himself. She is revealed initially through the windshield of Walker's car, as were Lynn, Reese, and Walker in happier times. Chris will comply with Walker's use of her as a way into Reese's Huntley House because she cares for him. Walker coldly, will interrupt Chris and Reese in a love-making sequence in his Huntley House penthouse only to leave her unfulfilled. More, he will let her into Brewster's home in the suburbs in a mockery of domestic alliance. Her frustration and anger in retaliation for his disinterest begins in her attacking him, and ends in a sexual encounter that Boorman uses to recall for us Walker's relationship with Lynn ... Lynn's relationship with Reese ... and Walker's own initial friendship with Reese that has lingering intimations of homosexuality.

Boorman's cinematography here is marvelous, in that he utilizes a slow-motion sexual roll-over two-shot of Walker and Chris on a bed. At the top of a roll-over it becomes Lynn with Walker, then again Lynn with Reese, and finally ... in a re-echoing of the underworld party sequence in which Reese is sprawled upon a drunken Walker on the floor asking him for help ... with Walker and Reese, now in this purely sexual context.

The point of all of this is simple. In "Point Blank" as in the Grail myth, women are central to the intrigue of the narrative. Indeed men in the film possess many feminine characteristics. Carter, like Chris, takes sleeping pills. Like her, he too parades about in a bath robe. Brewster is cast as a fussy, perfectionist who, like a house-wife is
patronizing to his chauffeur with comments about the lack of attention his
gardener pays in watering the plants. Brewster's house, like the Bates
home in "Psycho" (1960), is adorned with baroque erotic statues. His
kitchen full of appliances is missing only a wife's delight. Indeed, the
nature of Walker's and Reese's own relationship is presented with over­
tones of sexual attractiveness as in the car sequence in which Walker,
Lynn, and Reese beside each other is suggestive of a menage-a-trois.
Walker has broken into the apartment of two homosexuals across from the
Huntley House so he can spy on Reese. Reese's own penthouse is guarded
everywhere by men in two's. Reese too, has a thing for Chris, but it is
she who must make the first move.

Part of the purposeful ambiguity Boorman weaves into the narrative
of "Point Blank" is due to a sexual presence that is at once like the
Arthurian romance both liberating and threatening. In a more typical
gangster film such as "The Public Enemy" (1931), male/female relationships
are complete failures. Tom (James Cagney) cannot make it with Gwen (Jean
Harlow). She seduces him, forcing him to rush out of this deceit to his
fate. In the classic gangster film, the woman's role was somewhat like
that of a western, fixed within the stereotypical mother, lover, mistress
or whore. Women were treated as background at worst, or instigators at
best, of an ideological truth that solely rested within the domain of men.
Women in the earlier gangster films, functioned as obstacles to the male
quest. Often the success of the hero "The Killers" (1946), depended
upon the degree to which a man could extricate himself from a woman's
manipulations. Once in "Film Noir;" such as "Double Indemnity (1944),
a man killed a woman simply because a man could not resist her enchanting
In "Point Blank," the role of women is much more complex. What drives Walker isn't jealousy. The promise of wealth is merely part of the larger deception that ensnares male and female alike. Revenge merely gives his angst an outer manifestation. Walker like Lynn, Chris, or Reese, suffers the angst of aloneness. Lynn just before her suicide says to Walker, "You ought to kill me." Her affair with Reese, and leftover feelings for Walker, causes a suicidal fear. Chris seeing Walker's cool manner after Reese's death says to him, "You were right when they said you were dead. You are dead." When he takes Chris to Brewster's house, she is deluded into believing he wants her. He does, but only as an enticement to Brewster as he works up through the syndicate. This knowledge of herself as functionary is representative of the ambiguous role sexuality plays in the lives of the protagonists. Sexuality in "Point Blank" further muddies an already unspoken isolation. As in the Grail myth, women are transformed to deter or to inspire men in the quest.

Nowhere is this more revealed than in the sequence in which Walker and Chris, enroute to Brewster's home after killing Reese, pause at a roadside diner. Boorman pans away from Walker and Chris again and again, to a teenage boy and girl seated together in a booth. They neither speak nor touch. Both are lost in an isolated reverie that undercuts their togetherness. They are together because that is the social convention. Boorman is careful to show us that romance, even among the youth, does not negate the isolation.
As the film develops then through Walker's mixed and rearticulated perceptions, the meaning of his aberrant style becomes clear. As we move with Walker to the core of the organization, we are taken into an urban environment that is closed. Urban America Boorman shows us, fosters an isolation so profound that action, any action, does, only for a moment obscure the darkness. In "Point Blank" Boorman reveals a desolation that has become a cultural psychosis.

As Walker has broken out of Alcatraz in his interregnum life, he must now break into the city. To do so he needs human bait, stealth, and the courage of a criminal. Boorman's urban mise-en-scene is full of verticals, blinds, and gleaming steel and concrete structures that become analogues to the bars and grids of the opening Alcatraz sequence. Like the footage of Alcatraz, Boorman captures Los Angeles such that it too, shimmers in white light. Its apartment buildings become cold glistening structures reminiscent of an Alcatraz cell-block. Venetian blinds in Lynn's, Reese's, and Carter's apartments, keep the world out, bar-like. Everywhere there are guards, men with rifles posed on parapets that overlook expansive open ground. Boorman's American city is clearly a prison. The irony is however, that once inside, it is not the structures themselves that keeps man closed; it is the rituals and artifacts of contemporary culture that lays siege to personal autonomy. Like a well-run concentration camp, Boorman reveals to us that the American city is self-policing. Cultural deception is the key that keeps a population Walker-like in motion. Deception is the prerequisite to an estranged and divided psychosis.
The most revealing sequence of this culturally conditioned isolation occurs when Walker goes to a discotheque after Lynn's suicide, looking for his sister-in-law, Chris. Lit in an enveloping sensuous purple glow, the patrons are swept into mimicking the screams of a black singer on stage. Throughout the performance, it is the black singer who controls the audience. The singer's set achieves a Walker-like retribution for decades of racial put down. Behind him a screen reveals close-up slide projections of a white woman (white trash?) whose open-mouthed facial contortions alternately reflect fear and sexual ecstasy that are buried in the music.

It is here too that Boorman reveals the sado-masochistic duality rooted in sexuality that will envelope Walker and Chris in the rest of the film. John Stegman has watched Walker enter the disco. (As Walker has watched Reese enter Huntley House.) A fight between Stegman's hitmen and Walker in retribution for Walker's own attack on Stegman in his car-lot, reveals a numbing violence. As the screaming music and projections continue out front, Walker viciously stops an attacker by hitting him in the genitals. Above, the face of the girl on the translucent screen continues her ravenous contortions. Clearly, urban entertainment, from a simple coke in a diner, to a sophisticated show at a disco, is grounded in deception and violence that is made inescapable by virtue of its complicity with sexuality. The echoes of Arthurian romance abound.

If Boorman only alludes to Freud in this sequence, he is more graphic in his depiction of the violence and alienation brought about by urban commercialism. In seeking Reese, Walker must get information of his whereabouts from John Stegman, a syndicate member and owner of "Big John's
Auto Dealership." Stegman at first, resists Walker's enquiries until he is taken prisoner in one of his slowest convertibles and subject to injury, humiliation, and contempt, as Walker mercilessly demolishes his car beneath a Los Angeles freeway. All the while, Walker's murderous resolution to get information from Stegman is counterpointed by a sound track from the car radio that extols the honesty of "Big John's" business. Stegman's innocence of his knowledge of Reese's whereabouts is we see, as big a lie as the phoney messages of his commercial advertisements. Walker, nor anyone else is safe from the betrayals and facade of big business. The side of the law that business may be on, is quite incidental.

Chris too, misperceives Walker's intent in bringing her to Brewster's suburban home. She is as deluded by the domestic setting (as others are by Big John's radio commercials) into believing that finally Walker is interested in her. He is not. Discovering she is again merely bait for Brewster, she lashes out at Walker's implacability by turning on every appliance and electrical gadget in the home. Toasters, blenders, oven, juicers, fridge, stereo, suddenly become taunting agents in a bizarre sexual cat-and-mouse game that mocks the very basis of domestic stability typified by the appliances themselves. Moreover, the television itself becomes part of this game by echoing Walker's unspoken libido in a telecast of Vincent Minnelli's "Tea and Sympathy." Walker hears Jenkins say, "Wasn't Lola's idea Wes, yours?" He turns the channel away from the possibility only to hear another, "What am I supposed to do, be grateful for the rest of my life?" Clearly, art has become enmeshed in life. The cacophony of appliances' noises and blaring stereo, produce the
opposite of domestic bliss ... they promote a savagely violent encounter.

For Boorman then, ritual entertainment and consumer technology fosters only personal dislocation. The degree of cultural deception is directly proportional to the quantity of man's industrial and media extensions. These extensions Boorman would admit, are most visible in the city. Walker's quest for a final personal wholeness, a marriage of action and memory though limited by his desire for vengeance, is mitigated further by the wasteland environment in which his quest takes place.

Boorman's iconography goes beyond the artifacts of the gangster film to include aspects of contemporary urban American life. He has wrecked havoc with the gangster plot by simulating a cinematic style that parallels our subjective awareness of life caught in the moment of death. Scenes echo one another in action, decor, and cinematography, because "deja vu" is as much a part of our perceptual arsenal as are images of wishes fulfilled. Emphasis is affected by repetition and freeze-frame techniques. Yet these are not the only means Boorman utilizes in moving beyond standard gangster genre-piece. As in "Deliverance" (1972), the use of colour moves well beyond the decorative to become an element implicit in the definition of the allegorical.

"Point Blank" at one level is about a criminal who seeks retribution. On another level it is about a man who comes back from the dead, warms up to life through his quest, and then dies. Boorman decided to shoot each sequence in a different colour beginning with cold tones of grey and silver. As Walker's interregnum life progresses, we move through sequences filmed in hues of blue and green, till finally at Brewster's
suburban home, the screen is rich in rustic red.

The opening and closing for example are shot at twilight. What light there is, illuminates the concrete with a ghostly gray. Walker is shot silhouetted between cat-walk and sky as a dark figure enhancing his fugitive status. Walker's early morning search for Reese is shot in Los Angeles. Cool whites reflect his estrangement from the apartments and offices of the city that hold his prey. Lynn's apartment is largely white as is the dress she wears. A Guinevere she is not! The discotheque sequence is shot in nightmarish purple. There is one scene in Carter's office that is shot entirely in green. As Boorman points out ... the furniture is green, the carpets are green, all ... Carter, his hitmen, Walker, all wear green suits, green shirts, and green ties. The resulting mix of greens interact with the films emulsion. It does not create a bizarre artificiality; instead the greens "bleed" into hues of pale yellows, browns, and blues, that effect a harmony of cool detachment wholly in keeping with the theme of the developing narrative. The green place of Boorman's "Point Blank" is as foreboding as the place of skulls in the Grail myth.

Chris too, undergoes a commensurate change of hair colour and costume colour as she moves with Walker through the narrative. Initially silver-haired and outfitted in white (a continuation of Lynn) she moves through blonde and pale yellow outfits with Reese (in his yellow apartment), to the rust wig and maroon dress as she accompanies Walker to Brewster's suburban home. In all of this, Walker has tried to merge memory of a lost relationship with the developing warmth of life he sees in his wish-
fulfillment moment before death. Of course it is all to no avail because Walker cannot warm up; he is already dead. However, the deep red tones that saturate him at the Brewster residence, is testimony to the psychological distance his interregnum life has come.

It is not the cinematography, iconography, or editing, that is at fault in "Point Blank." These do in fact, create a fast-paced action-thriller that leases us into an understanding and appreciation of its many levels. The major flaw lies in the characterization of Walker himself.

Walker literally, and metaphorically comes from the underworld. He is a gangster, and an allegorical reincarnation of the underworld questor. Being a representation of a special kind of life-in-death, Boorman goes too far in emphasizing the pitiless dimension of his quest. Walker's rancorous drive does reflect a spiritual condition, but it blurs the essential human quality that is necessary in allowing the narrative to function on two levels. Those moments in which Walker reveals a truly human vulnerability, as in his despairing movement into a corner of Lynn's empty bedroom after her suicide, or in the pain and memory-filled sexual encounter with Chris, are too few and far between for us to cultivate in Walker a humanity that gains status as his psychotic obsession for vengeance progresses. Simply, there is too little of Walker as a man. As such, he is too cold a character to breathe much life into essentially an allegorical figure.

Boorman succeeds in giving life to Walker, but he doesn't do it often enough. The scene in which he attracts Lynn for the first time on
Fisherman's Wharf, and goes about cementing that relationship with her is by far the most touching in the film. But it is gone as soon as it appears, and it never comes again. Chris' cruel but honest admonition of his death-in-life stance takes place at Brewster's home over an intercom ("You're really dead," she repeats). Boorman should have shot this encounter not distanced by the electric technology of appliances; but rather in a more human intimate act as screen play writer Alexander Jacobs suggested. There are other missing moments that Boorman should have added warmth to that are as Jacobs points out, in the original script. Notably, the first time Walker meets Chris (Lynn's sister) she is in bed in a position reminiscent of Lynn herself in death. She turns over, hair tousled, and looks at him in a manner that clearly brings sexuality into the quest. Not only must Walker deal with Lynn's death, he must deal now with this awfully cutting doppelganger of a girl who breathes a hint of passion into his deadened soul. Boorman shoots this sequence in a two-shot in which we see only the side or back of Walker's head. By shooting a close-up reaction-shot of Chris' early sexual role, we would have seen Walker's human pain extorted in a grimace, half of loss, half of compassion, that would have softened him a little in his drive ahead. He doesn't, and Walker's fallibility is revealed only in Lee Marvin's pale eyes that match the conservatism of his grey business suit. Walker is a man about a business in his interregnum life, that did nothing to embellish or develop the memory of that life. Boorman misses a chance to mix a little more humanizing frailty into this powerful allegory.

However at the last "Point Blank" is a remarkable film. It combines
the forceful pace of a James Bond thriller with Boorman's surreal vision of urban America. What starts out as a classic gangster tale of retribution is soon revealed as a metaphorical tone poem whose dependence upon the initial criminal elements is only superficial. As Jack Shaobian has written, "The film confuses us because the world we expect to be present in the film isn't there, [it] is negated by both form and content." What Boorman has done, I submit in "Point Blank" is to bring the genre up to date. His attention to colour, to multilayered sound, and to a non-linear narrative structure, is wholly in keeping with other developments in music, art, and film of the late sixties. It remains a gangster film, though it widens the context of culpability to include the offenses of one's own soul against itself. "Point Blank" operates on two levels; it is a story of criminal revenge, as well as a metaphoric study of man's urban inner conflict. I would argue that "Point Blank" derives its power from the second of these two levels. Boorman is to be credited with giving primacy to the allegoric in that he has pointed his finger in jest at the Grail myth and at the genre's conventions. He has revealed in structure, in style, and in theme, wonderful new ways to keep the genre fresh. For Boorman, the gangster in America of the sixties is an existential figure whose empty quest in life, is merely replicated in a meaningless and violent death. The quest is not epiphanic; it is a sort of cultural suicide.
The Arthurian romances are medieval tales that are rooted in feudalism. The exploits of Arthur the feudal king and his knights are based upon a system of government that was dominated by an elite corps of warriors, who followed a strict code of honour. The knights were medieval cavalrymen or "chevalier." Their code of chivalry made them aristocrats. Basic to chivalry, the code of the horsemen, was a strong religious, moral, and social imperative. Foremost, because the knight was a soldier, was the need for courage. To be courageous implied being honourable. Honour meant that Arthur's corps sought and gave respect. Honour meant being faithful. The knightly ideal of integrity through struggle and conflict implied a dread of being shamed. To be shamed meant to be separated from the duty and pleasure of his class; to be separated from the adventure of combat. The knight errant was, more than anything else a soldier, and proud of it. In "Hell in the Pacific," Boorman takes this soldiering ideal and reveals it to be a code that works to demean, rather than to enhance man's humanity toward man.

"Hell in the Pacific" was the second of two films Boorman made for Hollywood starring Lee Marvin. The film reveals his close working relationship with writers that had become habitual since he and Bill Stair had worked together on "Having a Wild Weekend." From such collaboration, Boorman would achieve commercial success and a kind of cult following with "Point Blank" (1967), and "Deliverance" (1972). Without such a team approach, Boorman would produce such vastly different films.
as "Zardoz" (1973) and "Leo the Last" (1969).

The task of the narrative of "Hell in the Pacific" is a difficult one. Contrary to the credits that cites Reuben Bercovitch as the writer, "Hell in the Pacific" began initially with little more than an idea translated from the Japanese. Screen play writers Alexander Jacobs ("Point Blank") and Shinoka Hashimoto ("Seven Samurai" and "Rashomon") worked closely with Boorman in developing a tightly constructed narrative that bears a closer resemblance to the works of Verga or Zola and the literary naturalists than to the action-packed adventure film that made money for investors. "Hell in the Pacific" is a film about the strength of military conditioning. As in medieval times, the backbone of this conditioning is the notion of honour.

A Japanese naval officer (Toshiro Mifune), and an American bomber-pilot, (Lee Marvin), are stranded on a small deserted island in the South Pacific during the last months of the Second World War. Neither speaks the other's language. Due largely to this restriction in the screen play, Boorman's film becomes a purely descriptive allegorical tale of the stages man must go through in attempting to de-program himself from culturally induced aggression.

With very little dialogue, Boorman's tale must be told through the faces of the two characters. He must maintain the narrative pace by recording those incidents that mark the movement from initial hostility to mutual acceptance and dependency. In other words, Boorman must diffuse his story from the outset. "Hell in the Pacific" has no climax in the ordinary narrative sense because climax implies action. It is a
story about warriors who must learn to be inactive.

As an example of its genre, "Hell in the Pacific" does not work. This failing is, a bonus. Classically, the War Film may be reduced to a relatively simple formula. The War Film in its strictest sense, demanded allied heroics, and Nazi or Japanese "come-uppance." Jack Hawkins, John Mills, Kenneth Moore, or John Wayne, always ended up giving the Japs hell! "Our guys" were always cast as chivalrous knights of the air, defending their women, and their personal honour, as in such films as "We Drive at Dawn" (1943), or "Objective Burma" (1943). Gregory Peck was always being pinned down on "Pork Chop Hill" (1959). Burt Lancaster, and Clark Gable always dove their subs to "Run Silent and Run Deep" (1958). All were officers and gentlemen. They were limited, and blunt men like Patton as in "Patton" (1975). The war it seemed, never changed, nor ever ended. Such films were simple smug, uniform, tributes to British and American heroism.

"Hell in the Pacific" decidedly doesn't fit either into the more atypical War Film that went against this simplistic trend. There is no winning camaraderie as in "Bridge on the River Kwai" (1957) or "The Wooden Horse" (1950). Nor, is there the catharsis of the absurd, as in the black gory humour of "M.A.S.H." (1970). War in "Hell in the Pacific" is a residual, a left over from a cultural tradition, that forces enmity between two who must co-operate in order to survive.

The way into Boorman's film is not so much through a strong narrative, as through the holding power of its style. The territory at stake in "Hell in the Pacific," is not Iwo Jima, or the Islands of Japan; it is
the more personal psychological wasteland of fear, jealousy, spite and sullenness, born of two different sets of perceptions that make murder easy in group warfare, but nonsensical in isolation. The terrain in "Hell in the Pacific" is psychological. The geographic terrain of the island must mirror those incidents in which minds must deal with older, reinforced responses of aggression, and strange new instincts of survival. The landscape in "Hell in the Pacific" becomes mindscape. Boorman's first task in this psychological drama is to capture the metaphor in the terrain.

There are five major incidents in Boorman's narrative that give clear evidence of his control over his technique. In terms of the psychological, each episode becomes expressive of a particular emotional position that each warrior feels in his encounter with the other. These "emotional episodes" might be described in the following manner: open hostility, territoriality, a war of nerves, the frustration of communication and guarded acquiescence. Each deserves to be examined in terms of just how the style, advances the plot.

The opening sequence with the credits establishes what we will see expressed in Mifune, the first stranded warrior, moments later. The film begins with sunrise over an implacable ocean. The beauty is drained by the isolation and the complete absence of sound. Boorman wishes us to feel that this place a sort of "green world" has been like this forever. He shows us an island dwarfed by the ocean, it is subject to the chaos of nature as opposed to the violence of war. Suddenly we see Mifune sitting cross-legged in a yoga position. We note he sits facing the sea; he is attentive. He is half-in and half-out of a cave-like indentation at the
base of a small sandstone cliff from which the jungle intrudes upon the beach in overhanging menace. In close-up Boorman shows us Mifune's strained face and careful breathing. His vigilance and attentiveness seem disproportionate to the isolation of the setting. Beside him, like the knight's horse, are his binoculars hanging on a vine. They are a symbol of his status as a naval officer. Mifune walks to the shore, and scans the horizon as he might do from the bridge of the battle-ship he once must have commanded. At the shore's edge he notices something, yells and looks off into the dark and impenetrable jungle. Boorman now moves down from that look, and allows us to perceive what the Japanese officer cannot. An American (Lee Marvin) is sitting on the jungle floor. A close-up reveals Marvin watching, intently, as was Mifune moments before. Through a series of close-ups, Boorman tells us that each has sensed the other. In close-up camera subjective, we now see what Mifune sees ... Marvin's leather flying helmet among the contents of the raft. It signals the presence of an adversary. In a rapid succession of close-ups we participate in the dawning of that presence, each has felt of the other. The power of this emotion pushes them both into the clearing and open confrontation. Like the medieval tournament, discovery has shamed them into combat.

Boorman establishes both men as warriors. More, like knights, they are officers of some rank. What is at stake here is this condition of rank. At the outset of the film sovereignty and status become personalized.

Boorman crafts for us images of the outcome of this inevitable military encounter, long before it actually occurs. The master-shot is
wide, and because each has been drawn together in a long shot along a narrow strip of beach and frozen at a respectable distance from each other, Boorman takes us easily into the mind's eye of each. Suddenly Mifune attacks and cuts down Marvin, who falls, eyes pained and defeated. Just as suddenly Marvin attacks and kills Mifune, and he too is cut down, eyes pained in defeat. By placing each at the critical edge of the frame, Boorman effects a preview of the pernicious devastation one soldier imagines doing to the other. Annihilation, Boorman shows us early, is set first in the mind. This mental rehearsal as in "Point Blank" prepares us for more violence to come. It doesn't. What comes instead, is a shift of attention to a water container Marvin has spotted near Mifune's "shelter." A close-up of it reinforces its significance. Fresh water means survival, and in the instant of that shift of attention, everything changes.

The confrontation and aggression of two warriors made enemies through history, becomes now personalized in survival. Water means survival. In the knowledge of that instant, both turn away from their conditioned aggression and begin to respond to the callings of a more personal sovereignty. At that moment too, the strange piercing dissonant sound track whose synthesized intimations of oriental music shifts to a more naturalistic and melodious plopping of water into that all important container. This shift is significant in that it pushes the movement of the narrative toward a more natural kind of determinism.

What Boorman establishes in the opening of the film is a context for the way violence is depowered throughout. Boorman shows us how stealth becomes ritual. Artifacts, such as binoculars, helmets, and a
raft, become expressions of the depth of the ritual of soldiering. More, they bespeak of the means of survival available to both. Utilizing close-ups, Boorman brings the jungle right up against his two protagonists. For Mifune, who won't leave the beach, the jungle becomes like the sea, an expression of impenetrable isolation and hostility. For Lee Marvin, the jungle signifies cover and safety. Its darkened (over-exposed) green element, like the sky he once flew in, gives him room in which to maneuver.

Without dialogue Boorman creates a ballet of emotion in a host of settings. He is careful to express the power of this strange environment by photographing even long shots with a telephoto lens. In consequence, both characters are forced to face the presence of the jungle. Mifune won't leave the beach, the jungle has become for him, an extension of the sea. For Marvin, the jungle becomes as the clouds that he can emerge from to do battle, then disappear into again. What is different about these two environments is that unlike sea or sky, jungle and beach are finite. Room to maneuver in this warrior wasteland is, very limited.

Without dialogue Boorman presents for us a strange ritualistic dance, rich in the attachments of military nationalism. Lack of dialogue forces us to perceive his subjects as documents. We see them as historical entities, warriors first, not individuals. More, Boorman's attentiveness to the jungle is such that we are rapidly taken beyond the surface, to a dimension of fear, of psychological ugliness that itself becomes an aesthetic entity. The jungle is at once, a battlefield and a place of mystery. It is like the forest of the Grail myth, an otherworld
life-giving and destructive, enticing and unexplored. "Wood" in Malory's Morte D'Arthur means mad. The jungle in "Hell in the Pacific" is the place where the conditioned might of militarism snaps.

However, Boorman goes well beyond the aesthetic of neo-realism through the means he uses to move us from the close-up encounter of one warrior, to the close-up encounter of the other in the jungle. Boorman uses a stylistic device that is little more than a shift, up or down, in his private, probing camera eye. What Boorman does, is to extend past a camera subjective shot of what one very wary warrior sees, and, through a slight tilt up or down, rest upon the face of the other. In a continuous movement, we see what the originator of the initial piercing gaze could not. Such an aesthetic creates a visual dramatic irony. We know more than either, and we know it through a languid (almost circular) moving camera that draws us into the stealth as surely as suspense draws us into a more action-packed narrative. Here Boorman has I think, achieved the perfect selectivity of the camera eye. He has involved, yet controlled our perceptions, so his vision of man can dominate the created world he has drawn. It is akin to Welles' use of deep focus. In Boorman's case, it is deep focus with a mirror.

This camera style is effective and significant, but it is not distracting. We are drawn into a psychological narrative because we are given only a little extra knowledge. That knowledge, the presence of the other soldier in the jungle is revealed in a languid, slow-moving, almost hypnotic camera that is entirely in keeping with the environment the protagonists find themselves in. With economy, and clarity, Boorman moves us easily past the necessity for action.
The success of this initial visual intensity remains in how it is varied in the episodes that follow. If nothing much is going to happen physically, Boorman must show us psychological movement with spirit and ingenuity. "Hell in the Pacific" is full of such inventiveness.

Though the jungle provides cover for Marvin, it provides little else. Mifune's shelter contains water and Marvin must have it. Mifune is only too aware of this fact. This next episode takes us beyond the conditioned aggression of race, to a dominance based upon territory. The significant factor here is that the violence bred into both is moving away from actualized physical violence, to a violence based upon its surface presentation. Like the display of accoutrements before the knight's tournament, the violence of territoriality is one of might. Before a General, or a lady "show" is better than "blow." A depersonalization that occurs normally, in actions gives way in "Hell in the Pacific" to a much more threatening psychological reality. Such a move allows Boorman to transpose the spying, and the intrigue of conditioned soldiers to the more creative ingenuity of individuals. Cold war in Boorman's "Hell in the Pacific," rapidly becomes very "hot" cinema.

Mifune, in response to Marvin's shift of attention toward the water, responds defensively. He builds four fires around the front of his shelter that effectively walls himself and the water off from the intruder. Pleased with this defense, Mifune takes the offense, and begins to hurtle fire bombs into the jungle. Not only does the smoke give Marvin initially more cover, it also makes it hard for him to breathe. The initial rage that Boorman reveals in Mifune's defensive act, becomes the spark for an
idea of even more threatening dominance. Mifune will smoke out the enemy.

Yet, as Marvin is for the instant sealed out, Mifune is sealed in. He needs his food from his fish traps just as Marvin needs water. The territorial imperative becomes too big for the territory. It impinges upon soldiering-courage. Boorman reveals to us the ridiculousness of this contradiction. Mifune in the foreground, has edged from his shelter and is revealed waist-deep in the lagoon heading for the fish trap. Marvin in the background, has edged from the smoke-filled jungle and is closing in on the shelter and the water. Of course, as each spies the other, each retreats to their respective territory to inflict even more honourable harangue.

Now it is Marvin's turn. He will bang his water-jug (an ironic inversion of the Chinese water torture?) incessantly from various positions within the jungle-cover in order to prevent his Asian enemy from sleep. Mifune in response will walk off his shelter not with fire that can be breached, but with a ring of sharpened bamboo-poles. He builds an early warning system of shells, bamboo sticks, and string. This taunting explodes in nerve-racking suddenness, to the final humiliation of Marvin urinating upon his enemy from the top of a sandstone cliff.

What is interesting in all of this is two-fold. In terms of the narrative, we see a regression in character that rightly reduces war to little more than childishness. Marvin and Mifune have become, in the fight over territory, as two brats smashing each other's toys. More, this action is pleasurable for each. We see a smile on Marvin's face as he urinates on Mifune. Mifune smiles as he places the water-jug clearly out
of Marvin's reach. Besides this mutual regression that each enjoy, we enjoy. The territorial imperative is funny; it provides for us a comic relief from the real intent of their action. Humour and an intrusive camera style provides "a distance" from the tension that underlies this encounter. Thematically, Boorman has moved us from aggression, to an acknowledged delight in the threat of aggression.

Boorman is careful however not to let this comic relief turn his story into blackly humorous allegory such as "M.A.S.H." Rain, torrents of it, will, quite literally, dampen their mutual spirits. It reminds them both that they are soldiers who must survive with honour! The rain, a "deus-ex-machina" device that weakens the narrative, does however move Boorman to the next episode. Here he will move his protagonists from a personal disarming brought about in private glee, to a mutual unmasking that is revealed in the humiliation and responsibility of being, and keeping, a prisoner.

The war of nerves that began in territoriality now comes home to each when the threat of aggression is, itself, diffused into the keeping, rather than the killing, of an enemy. Lack of sleep, lack of food, mutual humiliation, smoke, and just plain over-extended attention have brought Marvin and Mifune face to face once again. A chase through the jungle evaporates when Mifune finds Marvin unconscious and face down in a jungle bog. He goes to kill him and cannot. He cannot of course because Boorman has shown us that he has been challenged, awakened, and even found a pleasure in the gamesmanship his foe has revealed. This guardedness, this awareness that is not allowed in real conflict becomes
now the literal extension of, and substitution for, violence. Marvin is blindfold, and forced to carry a yoke. He moves about the beach pulling a tree-stump "chained" to his ankles. He seeks blindfolded those same noises that so threatened Mifune that he heard from the jungle. Boorman is careful to show us the cost of this guardedness. The island, like the mythic forest remains indifferent. It is implacable. Mifune stands watching the sea. He cannot give up his prisoner, nor can he release him. Feeding him is a labour and a duty he cannot endure for long. The yoke is removed for meals, though the contradictions implicit in this act of saving and hating, of feeding and killing, of militaristic respect, and human sympathy, are too much. Mifune chains Marvin and beats him.

Of course Marvin too must feel the weight of these contradictions. Boorman has him escape, and in turn, attack and imprison Mifune in the same yoke. With the positions reversed, Marvin looks for means of absolving the contradictions he too, now feels. Boorman gives Marvin the same frustration. He thumbs through the "survival book" for some sort of guidance. He reads from the manual as Mifune walks the beach Christ-like in his chains and yoke:

"in the jungle one is in no position to maintain a prisoner of war. If captured, destroy them immediately." 3

Boorman is being symbolic. Both have been yoked by conscience born in the same spirit of survival. Playing "by the book" means immediate annihilation of the other. They cannot. Each is burdened by the contradictions that have arisen from the revelation that each is human. This fact is too much for Marvin who must repress this strange new awareness.
He treats Mifune literally as a dog, and has him fetch sticks. Mifune glares in anger. Boorman repeats his reductive motif with Marvin later. Freed from his yoke so he might cook, Mifune has in a moment of "freedom" fashioned a religious rock garden on the beach. Marvin, sensing this as yet another ritual act of a human spirit tries to destroy it; he cannot. For he too senses the bond between them has its roots buried deep in ontology. The soldier ethic is challenged by deeper stirrings of the human heart.

Threat then, becomes threat in name. Violent confrontation has moved through ritualized violence to name-calling. Boorman continues to move his characters away from violence. Mifune now uses a log that Marvin has lain against on the beach to build a raft. Marvin retorts with childish petulance, "It's my log, if I've told you once, I've told you a hundred times. You want my log? You can have it, don't be sneaky. I can't stand a thief." Name calling becomes the last vestige of aggression. It will, itself, be diffused into a misunderstood argument over the design for a proper raft that promises them both real freedom. What Boorman is telling us, is that something has happened to them both that goes far beyond the differences brought about by their duty as soldiers. From the known acts of soldiering must now come stranger acts of love.

The sequence on the raft as they attempt to sail through the atoll reef to other, hopefully inhabited islands, is shot for the most part, in sepia tones. What Boorman does here, in paling the deepened colours of the island to an almost monotone black and white is preparing us forthe
island and civilization they will both soon encounter. They drift to an island that was, like the atoll they have just left, once inhabited by both Japanese and American forces. Having survived a common foe (their own military aggression and an indifferent nature ... in two murderous typhoons at sea) they smile, though not at each other, or even together in their mutual success. Such vulnerability must still be admitted alone. They explore their new surroundings and find artifacts of the civilized world: malted milk tablets, pots, a lamp, cigarettes, a bottle of Saki, clothing, and Life magazines. Boorman shows us old conditionings are not given up easily. Rummaging through the abandoned communications station (ironic) Marvin is again taut for noises. His comment upon Mifune's silent return "Whew, I thought you were a Jap" reveals the degree to which the soldier ethic still divides them.

Ironically, the closer to civilization they get the more distant the two protagonists become. Marvin has discovered photographs of the bodies of slaughtered Japanese in American Life magazines. Mifune sees them too, in the startling black and white thrust of the recognition of old hatreds that they portend. Boorman's sepia-toned voyage to freedom is revealed for us in the same shocking manner. We see their togetherness as they see their separateness. Both co-operation and violence are seen to be strange, unworldly, acts. The surreal mise-en-scene makes their mutual effort unable to be perceived for what it really is. Through his use of stylized colour, Boorman thrusts us, as the two protagonists into a world that is strange with contradictions. Hence, his style effects a participatory mental tension that propels us as surely as action does within the adventure narrative.
The final sequence of the film is a classic inversion of the first. Just as rituals of violence begat peace, Boorman uses rituals of peace to move us again to his final dehumanized statement about man. Boorman uses the perfect artifact in the bottle of Saki to bring home his message with the power of irony. The bottle of Saki, one has discovered amidst the ruins, veils old animosities. It allows finally for asurfacing of mutual vulnerability. At the same time, it promotes the rise again of even older more primitive aggressions. As both sit now clean shaven among the ruins of both their civilizations, old stimuli begin to impinge upon the co-operative human ethic that has allowed them to survive. Boorman reveals moments of loss and nostalgia that brings them finally face to face. Both have been moved by the picture of a girl (Marvin in a Life magazine and Mifune's sudden discovery of a Japanese girl's picture that belonged once in a countryman's wallet). The pulsating brilliant colours of wild flowers and the striking brightness of this hill-top environment, is intercut. In unspoken, half-acknowledged admiration they turn and raise their glasses, the toast will go beyond a signalling of friendship, to a recalling of honour, not of soldiers, but of men. The end has become again the hope for a new beginning.

The ritual toast sequence, however, becomes full of similarities that harken to the aggression that opened the film. In the opening both wore the remnants of military uniforms. Now both wear bits of pieces of civilian clothing each have found. In the opening sequences, dirty faces revealed a warlike stance that hid fear. Now an undercurrent of ill-defined feeling runs through the formality. At the outset music was denied. A mood synthesizer replicated oriental ceremony with inharmonious,
grating tones of unease. Now Mifune sings a ceremonious Japanese melody as uncertainly as he played a home-made flute in constructing the raft. Now Marvin tells the story of the loss of his buddies in the crash-landing. At the outset, religion was little more than a sitting position, or a garden on the beach, without reference. Now Marvin will raise the issue of Christian supremacy ... "I was gonna ask you ... how come you don't believe in God?" At the outset, Mifune and Marvin were alone in their warrior ethic. Being alone, doubt could penetrate their conditioned faith in annihilation. Now, Mifune and Marvin both see in magazines, and in the ruins about them, the collective atrocities of war. What Boorman tells us, is that civilization is just too strong to allow for individual differences. As man civilizes himself, in music, in memory, and in ritual, the commonality of vulnerability and fear is lost. The last episode of the film represents the evolution of cultural consciousness in fast motion. Once again Marvin and Mifune become re-programmed to differences rather than to common bonds. Fear in the differences becomes anger (they begin to shout and swear at each other), and this anger will once again become war. In Boorman's original ending of the film, he has Mifune and Marvin pause in their new-found aggression to realize that the culturally shaped differences are irreconcilable. There is nothing to do but turn, and walk away from each other, forever. Action-minded producers at "20th Century," misperceived the allegorical significance of Boorman's psycho-drama and imposed an ending not unlike "Zabriski Point." In the heat of argument, suddenly the whole station about them, is blown to smithereens. This ending destroys two important elements crucial to Boorman's theme. First, it disavows the power of
the lingering ambiguities within Marvin and Mifune that have sustained themselves throughout. This sudden devastation nullifies the significance of their interaction. We are tempted to reduce Boorman's theme with an "Oh well, c'est la vie!" reaction. Secondly, the explosion returns us again to a world view of action. Violence occurs above and beyond human consequence. Boorman would argue that violence and aggression does occur, and is inevitable in man's fear of man. He would however, qualify that view, as he tried in "Hell in the Pacific," with a belief that man alone does suffer the consequences of aggression, and that suffering forces him to confront in naked uncertainty, the foundations of his social and religious rituals. The knowledge of that nakedness is short-lived. With his guard down, Boorman's knight-errant has a small chance to be a man.

"Hell in the Pacific" is a rich allegorical drama in which man's culturally shaped fears are exorcized in violence. For Boorman, civilization negatively reinforces behaviour that prevents man from exhibiting animal altruism. His story is a parable of two mental states who quest unsuccessfully for an expression of public philanthropy. Man alone has the capacity for transcendence. Mankind Boorman would argue, does not.

The critics largely rejected "Hell in the Pacific" as being an "intellectual exercise rather than a sincere plea for understanding." David Wilson announced "the symbolism is at once too vague and too facile to provide any indication of just what the message is supposed to be." I would disagree. Boorman has shaped in "Hell in the Pacific" a
stylistically engrossing little film that posits vagueness as the beginning of a very human quality. The protagonists peer, and pause, and plead, for a world beyond violence. That the world is destroyed at the end is not a good enough reason for us to feel uncomfortable in a film about the cessation of hostilities.
"Leo the Last" is a film that celebrates the magic of an epiphany. It is Boorman's most surreal work as well as his most optimistic statement of the genuine catharsis resulting from a quest. The violence in "Leo the Last" is a jubilant violence; it prods Leo into action and enhances the celebration of his new-found awareness. Although aristocratic decadence, and underprivileged cruelty are destroyed, by and large, people are not. Leo is the last of a line of European aristocrats, who like the von-Richtoffens impede man's equality for equality. His privileged household is peopled largely by misguided innocents more to be pitied than conquered. "Leo the Last" is a sparkling black comedy about the struggle between social class. The bizarre extremes to which Boorman goes makes the violence in "Leo the Last" jolly good fun. It is a film full of magic, and full of heart. It is Boorman's most warm-hearted plea for universal tolerance.

"Leo the Last" is without the nihilism of "Point Blank" (1967), or "Hell in the Pacific" (1968), and without the violence of "Deliverance" (1972), or "Excalibur" (1981). Its message is about magnanimity, not revolution; excess not efficacy. It is advanced by indulgence. "Leo the Last" is a film full of grand gestures. Flamboyant in style and content, Boorman takes us to the very edge of disbelief. Critics have argued that this movement, so far toward hyperbole, diffuses the statement the film tries to make. I would argue instead that the whimsical and outlandish
exaggerations, though always poised for total failure, instead create a film with the quality of a bad dream. Hence, the Notting Hill slum that Leo looks into through his telescope from his mansion becomes as a projected fantasy. It projects him into acts of will that counterpoints the bizarre emptiness of the upper-class elements about him. Hyperbole in "Leo the Last," operates not as an element that limits, but as an agent that frees. Boorman's surreal, comic fantasy allows for the creation of caricatures of villany. The genius in "Leo the Last" is a comic genius in that characters are given a quality of irreducible foolishness. This foolishness established through the bizarre, becomes by the end of the story the emblem of their humanity. Fantasy is for Boorman in "Leo the Last," a way of linking the world of the dream with actuality. Hyperbole doesn't bury the message, it sustains and magnifies the evil in man, and in so doing it magnifies the good.

The story of "Leo the Last" is simple. Leo, son of a dead archduke (Marcello Mastroianni) is a displaced European count who has been living the aristocratic drop-out life in the Galapagos, nurturing an interest in ornithology. The disappearance of his kingdom, and the depletion of his family fortunes, forces him in sickness to return to his father's exile-house ... a mansion set amidst an East-End London slum. Once there, Leo's enormous naivete fails to alert him to a household that is full of opportunists and hangers-on who have turned the surrounding neighborhood into a ghetto. Those of Leo's household keep the neighborhood in economic subjection. Ill at ease with the decadence he sees within his house, and restrained by the bourgeois, demanding attention of his fiancee (Billie Whitelaw), Leo withdraws to a window, where in the process
of observing the pigeons of the neighborhood, he is drawn into the human drama of the neighborhood. Leo's Excalibur is his telescope; his Grail, the social activism of the dispossessed.

Leo is a voyeur whose moving telescope reveals a world of injustice, violence, energy, and noise, that captures his imagination. He is induced from his naivete and social catatonia by an increasing fascination toward the Madi family, whose tenement lies opposite his mansion window-perch. The Madi family like Leo, are neither British nor secure. They are Jamaican immigrants who struggle against racial aggression and financial usury. The difference between this family and the bourgeois "family" that Leo has inherited, lies in their fierce collective effort to survive. In spying upon their primitive, struggle against hunger, rape, imprisonment and prostitution, Leo learns about the spirit of community that is so missing from the life of his own class. Leo watches with increasing horror the chaos of life in the street. Through such observations, he is forced into action. Having discovered that, as head of a stately mansion-house he is the neighborhood slum landlord, Leo leads a mini-revolution. The resplendent onslaught against his own class leaves his own stately mansion in the end in flames.

At its surface, Boorman's parable seems an innocuous little fantasy about the politics of commitment. This indifferent little aristocrat who becomes advocate for the indigent is more in keeping with a Keaton-esque melodrama. It is this link with melodrama that gives Boorman a chance to create a wonderfully expressive wasteland. Yet, in choosing burlesque, Boorman calls upon elements of theatre that give his farce an
edge. The cul de sac is little more than a theatrical set done in clashing
tones of blue, black, and green. These high-contrast visuals are wedded
to an overlapping sound track that results in a milieu that is as much
psychological as unreal. Boorman creates a world that is a manifestation
of Leo's sensory overload. His quest, his retrieval, and his future
necessitate a set that mirrors regression, schizophrenia, and mania at
every level of social interaction. The magic Boorman conjures up is the
magic of melodrama that goes bizarre. "Leo the Last" is an insanely happy
quest.

The opening sequence serves to reveal the iconography and to lay
bare the antinomies of Leo's world. Mirrors, reflections, cut glass, and
baroque ornamentation reveal the closed, self-reflexive world of Leo's
aristocratic household. The world of the street in contrast hardly
perceivable, in blues and black. As the film opens, rain spots the wind­
shield of a moving car. From the outside, we see the reflection of slum
houses. A beggar woman with an umbrella flashes past. Lightning casts
an eerie blue flash upon a tenement street. In contrast, Leo's mansion
at the end of a cul de sac presents a startling stately black and white
facade of bourgeois indifference. Inside mirrors and glass become an
index of aristocratic embellishment, and a sign of the in-turning self­
reflective narcissism and separation of those who dwell here. Chandeliers,
and inverted glass stem-ware set on a glass dining-table refract the
glaring light of the mansion's interior. The house decorated in glaring
black and whites, is a sort of baroque chessboard. This outlandish
decor reflects the reserved, static, coldness that causes Leo to withdraw
to his window perch. It stands too in mockery of the rape of black by
white that Leo is soon to observe.

Leo's movement from naivete to knowledge; from catalepsy to involvement, is accomplished by Boorman utilizing what is common to Leo's fractured existence. The birds he watches become a bridge to the world he must soon enter. Entrenched on his window-perch, Leo takes refuge from his culture-shock to watch (as an ornithologist) the flocking pigeons of the neighborhood. Boorman intercuts the one-dimensional characters of Leo's household with the exploited humanity of the surrounding tenement slums that are ever-present backdrops to the blight of the birds he observes. Lazlo (Vladek Sheybal), is the Merlin-figure. He is a self-appointed leader of the gang of revolutionaries that lives in the basement of the mansion. He uses the house as a base to exploit the surrounding neighborhood in order to raise money for a conservative takeover of Leo's former European dukedom. Lazlo's basement magic is the magic of a Merlin gone wrong. Lazlo's alchemy is not the alchemy of curses, or transformations, as in the Grail myth, it is the alchemy of modern gunpowder. The basement of Leo's mansion is nothing less than an armory from which Lazlo can wage war. Lazlo's black magic "bleeds" the surrounding neighborhood to death. The sight of this living death drives Leo to action. With his binoculars and telescope, Leo himself becomes a bird of passage, migrating for the first time into unknown human territory.

Structurally, this opening sequence reveals Boorman's understanding of pace. He constructs Leo's voyeristic predatory incursion into the passion-filled lives of the tenement dwellers before him with a carefully
choreographed commotion. Throughout, the unvarying rhythm of banjoes emphasizes the primitive, the world of the taboo, the world of passion and violence, of real emotion, that contrasts fractured snippets of T.S. Elliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and remnants of conversation that emanate from the mansion behind Leo's peering. This discordant sound track a la Altman not only mirrors Leo's wrenched psyche, it magnifies the cries of rage that emanates from the street. Lazlo the magician has created a fractured world within and without, into which Leo must soon emerge.

In classic melodramatic style Leo first ventures vicariously away from the reactionary and stultifying conservatism of his class. One day while at his window-perch, his telescope locks upon a crowd of street women who sing a cockney song that reverberates throughout Leo's territory. The exuberance of the song ("Goodbye Dolly Grey") provides for Leo's first genuine smile. He is breaking away from the dry life about him.

Stately house and apartment ghettos act as extensions of Leo's schizoid personality. Boorman's style is decidely theatrical. What he does is to re-invent two-opposing multi-layered stage "flats" for the cinema. Hence, in a surreal "cell block" fashion, Leo's peering reveals the full sweep of human activity. As Leo's telescopic eye ranges up and down the flat opposite his perch, he perceives with horror the humanity that is his own making. At ground level, Leo looks down into human degradation as its most repulsive. A pimp takes money from a lady of the street. A body in a corner shop is being beaten up by a vicious
shopkeeper. The pimp delivers the money to Lazlo of Leo's household, who forces tenants into prostitution in order to pay rents. Leo, at first is innocent of his involvement. In one window a black drummer plays dolefully. In another, a white girl is raped by a black man. In yet another, a black family and an animated young girl, Salambo (Glenna Foster Jones) argue over food.

All of this initial voyeurism is intercut with the immediate previous activity within Leo's own household. As violence between sexes and between races is revealed to Leo in the street, those within his mansion exhibit behaviour that is all surface manners and breeding. Silver service, cut-glass crystal, and reserved dining-room etiquette, are juxtaposed with images of the impoverished Madi family without food. The rough purely sexual gratification between black man and white girl that Leo watches, is countered by Leo's and Margaret's own physical impotence in the white, mirrored, pristine, and dispassionate bedroom. Through his telescope, Leo is faced with life's pressing elemental issues. The sound track, fragments of Yeat's poem "The Second Coming," duplicates the intensity and the emptiness of his own life.

If all of the irony pushes the melodrama deeper and deeper toward the bizarre, it functions too in pushing Leo further and further into psychosis. The contradictions Leo witnesses drive him mad. What saves Leo from certain catatonia is the appearance of Rosco (Calvin Lockhart), self-proclaimed champion of the black community of the street, and fiancee of Salambo Madi. Rosco saves Leo by becoming his alter-ego. He also saves us from an outright rejection of both the extravagant and
violent worlds, by acting as a moral force between the two.

This link between Rosco and Leo is forged by the iconography of birds throughout. Boorman neatly plays one world against the other through his motif of birds; they are both index and symbol. The pigeons that Leo as ornithographer observes, are genuine foraging residents of the slum neighborhood. Yet, they are too, much more. Initially, the pigeons signify Leo's detachment from his own world. Yet in following them to the rooftops of the tenements they lead him first to Rosco, and finally to his own redemption. Through Rosco, the birds become agents of freedom, manifestation of the Grail.

We see Rosco first through the iris eye of Leo's telescope. He is full of vigor, force, and decisiveness, as Leo is not. As Leo watches with increasing intensity, the lives of the people of the street, he is drawn first to the horror. He witnessed the father of the Madi family die of a heart attack in the street, and could only grimace for help from behind the barrier of glass that is his bedroom window-perch. Finally if he is to understand the necessity of involvement, Rosco must provide the way. With incessant care for his own people in the neighborhood, Rosco perches carelessly on a roof edge and captures a large pigeon with a net. Leo is intrigued. He spys upon Rosco with increasing admiration. The bird of course is a rouse, a decoy, that Rosco will release in the local green grocers such that amidst the commotion, he can steal food for the Madi family. Rosco steals a frozen turkey, then rushes to a tenement rooftop waving it overhead, emblematic of a short term respite from destitution.
Rosco's vivaciousness Boorman contrasts with the insipid flatness of those of Leo's stately house. Rosco, as alter-ego, must summon up Leo's own moral magic. Rosco as talisman is removed from the narrative to provide a way for Leo's own engagement. Rosco's proletariat victory gives way suddenly to a more alarming reality. As Leo's wandering eye moves randomly from the richly passionate (and sometimes violent) ethic of the tenement, he witnesses an action that precipitates a psychological crisis. Salambo (Glenna Foster Jones), Rosco's fiancee is being raped by Kowalski (Kenneth Warren), a Polish junk shop merchant. Leo is struck momentarily dumb. He recovers to call out, but the barrier of window-glass serves only to magnify his angst. He is driven from his bedroom perch to the street, as a man possessed.

If this crisis precipitates movement, Boorman is careful not to release its power too soon. For Leo to be redeemed he must not only turn emotionally toward the proletariat, he must intellectually repudiate his own aristocratic malaise. Boorman achieves this through the manipulation of his sound track. Summoned from the roof by the commotion outside Kowalski's shop, Rosco draws Kowalski from his shop by sounding the horn of a truck. Once outside, amidst the rising din of horn, enraged street people and Dóris Clark's square physiognomy ringing out social protest in song, Rosco is lead away by the police. The scene is a cacophony of noise, an ominous reminder of the power of the people. It is at this point in the film that Margaret, Leo's aristocratic fiancee throws a party for her bourgeois friends. Margaret's party turns Leo from crisis to utter desolation.
Margaret's party sequence is a bizarre, chilling, and hilarious statement of upper-class ennui. Reminiscent of the party sequence in Fellini's "8 1/2", Boorman creates a sequence of surrealist fantasy within a fantasy that stands as a parallel in-embryo to all that is decadent and incommunicative in Leo's aristocratic world. Set largely in Fellinesque whites (white gowns, white drapes, white walls, white tiled-floors), Margaret's party becomes an orgy of excess. Leo's icons, the birds become the main course. Chicken, turkey-breasts, and legs are gorged away in complete indifference to the significance Leo has made of them. Boorman gives us close-ups of chomping jaws, and greasy fingers to reveal an egocentric gluttony that is enhanced by the fragmented sound track of existential rage and personal chatter. Amidst the din of gluttony Leo desperately tries to use the house phone to save Salambo. The operator's reply only magnifies the narcissistic and impersonal. She repeats, "I am trying to connect you." It is a scene as Gordon Gow observed, "one of the cinema's most forceful impressions of the communications block." The impossibility of people touching one another is given a final sumptuous gesture at the end when Margaret crushes out her cigarette against one of the room's many mirrors. In misjudging Leo's embrace, she lunges into yet another mirror, and kisses herself instead.

Boorman's surreal wasteland grows and grows. Leo flees to the basement as a means of avoiding the upstairs bizarre hedonism. Leo stumbles into a basement, Lazlo's the secret arsenal for his own revolution. The world of Leo's mansion moves from the bizarre to the facist, while the world of the street moves more and more to utter deprivation. As Rosco is lead away by the police, the way is clear for Leo's ascent from
Leo's liberation from his culturally induced schizophrenia is accomplished through one of the most extraordinary sequences in the film. In a mocking, black, put-down of the fashionable group-therapy sessions of the late sixties, as in the opening sequence of "Bob, Carol, Ted and Alice," Boorman puts Leo and his household in a nude swimming-pool therapy session. Exposed in their nakedness as simply aging mounds of sagging flesh, Boorman reveals the aristocrats bouncing in the pool to the incantations of a "guru." Boorman's continually tracking camera reveals the groups' undulating, sagging breasts, and hollow thighs as they anxiously bob up and down searching desperately for the commitment that is outside the nature of their class. What Boorman does here is to reveal a defenselessness that softens the edge of the aristocratic presence. Suddenly they have become merely reflections of the people of the street. They too are victims of a social stratification that prevents them from crossing barriers. The fear of the aristocrats that manifests itself in decadence and red-neck conservatism, is little different from the instinctive violence of the street revealed by those who must fight to survive.

As a result of the group therapy session, Leo decides to send food to the destitute Madi family. Boorman maintains the surreal, and extends the allegorical. The corner store in which Leo buys food for Rosco's family is yet another surreal environment. The corner shop is set in unearthly black and white as is the foyer of Leo's mansion. Boorman makes the corner shop a liberal's misperception of the needs of the poor.
Store goods are arranged in a classical black and white mix of cans, and dry goods. Nothing is real, because food for the bourgeoisie is just not an issue.

Watching from the safety of his window-perch, Leo sees the effect of his anonymous gift. Gorging themselves, not from hedonist excess, but from real hunger, Leo watches the gluttony result in Rosco's father-in-law gasping, choking, and dying of surfeit. Staggering before the window of the Madi apartment, he dies right before Leo's horrified eyes. Leo snaps in both agony and in defeat, and howls as a mad dog from the pulpit of the church in which the funeral takes place.

The madness continues. Before Leo's telescopic eye, Kowalski continues his rapacious behaviour. Salambo in response to Rosco's imprisonment is forced into prostitution. Jasper, Lazlo's stand-in and Merlin incarnation is seen as the pimp collecting the monies raised through such depraved activity. Leo's sudden awareness of his being ultimately responsible as landlord for the waste he sees about him, forces him finally, into the street. Boorman places Leo shrewdly among children who are preparing for a Guy Fawkes Day parade. With the children Leo witnesses first-hand the destitute lives of the slum-dwelling women in a street-corner laundry. This is to be moved to an eloquent outcry against his own household. The women champion him, and Leo is regenerated by articulating the justice of those he will now serve. The women elect Leo as Rosco's heir and all together they lead a mini-revolution against the mansion that has caused them to suffer for so long. As the cockney songs of Doris Clark create the first-wave of
Leo's new active self, the mansion is blown up with the same fireworks
the children have gathered to commemorate a more historical act of
revolution.

If the film ends with an enflamed wind forcing new resolve into Leo's
color, it points too, to a phoenix vision of a brave new world
rising from the ashes of destruction. Boorman stops short of an apocal­
ypse. Margaret is drawn to the new passion-filled Leo. She joins him
on the battle line, where love and commitment have flowered over denial.

Boorman's "Leo the Last" then is a comic allegory whose complexity
is hidden behind a dazzling visual style, and an excess of the burlesque.
Critics have argued that this very excess depowers Boorman's theme, by
preventing it from its being taken more seriously, "Leo the Last" is a
comic farce that echoes with the bizarre, the grotesque, the melodramatic
grand gesture. Yet I would argue that the very triumphal destruction of
Leo's own mansion is the one gesture that diffuses the exaggerations that
typified Leo's decadent lifestyle throughout the narrative. By destroying
the symbolic source of the bizarre, Leo's bourgeois idealism is able to
be replaced by a simpler, more direct sense of loving. The hyperbole
allows for Boorman's directorial boldness, while at the same time it
avoids the heavy-handedness that comes with treating a subject too
seriously. In "Leo the Last," Boorman creates a series of encapsulated
wasteland environments. These environments collide by virtue of their
comic excess. That excess expresses the chaotic desires of Leo's own
emotional life. The humour, accentuates the humanity in Leo's detachment
from experience, and the separation of his inner and outer reality.
Boorman's surreal vision reduces man's incipient violence to a madness--of-the-moment that is both endearing in its emotional force, and positive in its ultimate role in man's salvation. Boorman's barriers are glass, not politics; perception, not race. In choosing farce, Boorman chooses a form that allows for the absurd to provide the means of integrating one's inner and outer life. With a multi-layered sound track more akin to Altman, and a structural brilliance that reveals a narrative in a series of opposing tableaux, "Leo the Last" is a positive little film that shows Boorman to be a director with a sense of the subterranean that is basic to the Grail myth.
The eerie landscapes of the Grail legend, the Enchanted Castle, Castle Perilous, the garden, and the ominous forest, are places where the Grail hero must run a gauntlet of challenges. In these places, he must prove and discover himself by gaining control over natural and supernatural forces. Here, the Grail questor meets beasts, dragons, monsters, and enchanting women, all of whom represent forces of evil. It was in the forest that King Arthur was tricked into making love with his half-sister Morgana, only to conceive Mordred who rose against him.

Like the Grail itself, the forest in the Arthurian romances is the home of the female principle. Typically, in the forest a knight such as Lancelot or Arthur, meets a beautiful enchantress. The knight is soon bewitched by her beauty. For her love, he agrees to do anything she wishes. This brief, happy encounter soon makes the knight drowsy and he falls asleep in a meadow. Upon awakening he finds himself in a castle from which he cannot escape. Simply, by subordinating his will totally to another, the knight-errant has become little more than a functionary. He has in short, become victim to something inside himself that resulted in his forest refuge from real life.

John Boorman's "Deliverance" (1972) weds these Arthurian notions of the forest with the expression of American character as influenced by the wilderness. The American wilderness as seen by Mark Twain, Cooper, Hawthorne, and even Hemingway, was treated with a kind of Arthurian
reverie. The forest was a place where a personal code of honour was learned. Terror awaited those who penetrated into its interior. It was the landscape that provided the initiation ground the American boy-man; it loomed metaphorical with new hope, and lost ideals. In "Deliverance" Boorman reveals his most faithful understanding of the Arthurian forest, while at the same time, brutally challenging the American notion of the forest as the place of redolent renewal.

Boorman's treatment of James Dickey's first novel is a biting unmelodious counter to the myth of gained manhood that is achieved through an interaction with nature. For Boorman, there is no deliverance; and the Garden of Eden is stained with blood. "Deliverance" is a harsher treatment of Dickey's romantic vision. As such, Boorman undercuts an ethic that is such a part of American life, while at the same time, remaining true to the more complex sense of the forest inherent in the Grail myth.

The opening episode establishes two motifs that become joined in the film's narrative. In "Deliverance," Boorman reveals that contemporary urban man is merely an extension of a technological society that denies completely any possibility of an inner life. Such denial forces his characters, away from this stark reality into an even starker world of nightmare. This modern destructive ethic is revealed in the opening titles montage. A long shot of a newly constructed rural water reservoir is replaced by two four-wheel drive vehicles moving almost imperceptibly through the misty blue hills of Appalachia. Earth-moving vehicles supersede the hills and reveal the completed reservoir we have just seen.
previously under construction. The two vans intrude into this interior speeding along a winding country road. A crane shot moves us down to the vehicles and we travel with them noting gear and guns. A voice from one of the vehicles imparts that their trip is on the "last, wild, unpolluted, unfucked river in the south." Suddenly the opening majestic view of Appalachia is gone, and the title "Deliverance" is cut into the previous shot of the reservoir. Lewis comments undermine the beauty and the awe the landscape ought to generate in those who enter it. Lewis' continues talking in voice-over as the warning siren of an impending explosion halts the bulldozers certain destruction of the forest. This silent immutable forest is revealed to be totally incongruous to Lewis' limited sensitivity and the rapaciousness of a technical society.

This opening creates a terrible portent, a parallel-in-embryo, of the subsequent action of the film. Technological man, and all his works, is out of place in these Appalachian hills. More, he is out of place with himself. Lewis' opening diatribe to his companions about ecology as they race toward the Cahulawassee River is not revealing of an ecology of mind. His sermonizing to the others about the rape of the landscape is merely verbal bombast. What we hear juxtaposed against the cold but enticing scenery of the Great Smokey Mountains are comments of a supposedly civilized, yet still instinctive mankind. That the four weekend canoe-trippers could be lost in any greater sense of having taken a wrong road in their drive for the river, is wholly alien. They are men of control, ostensibly in complete control. What they talk about makes them neither intellectuals, or poets. They are just four ordinary American "guys" who have fled the wicked city for a weekend of some freedom and a little
canoeing adventure. The red-neck commentary and sexual innuendos heard in voice-over, as we watch their vehicle move through backwards roads is as acceptable to us as is their boyish, if loud, camaraderie.

It is only finally when we meet them against the arresting depiction of the back-country shacks of the mountain-men of the Cahulawassee, do we gain any real measure of their limited character. They are not so much stereotypes, as archetypes in what will become an unforgiving challenge against the mystique of the American sportsman. Boorman's tale is a furious moral fable.

Lewis (Burt Reynolds) is not unlike the dialogue that has preceded him. The readily-acknowledged leader of the trip is ironically, the one most ill-suited to convey any meaning. He is an abusive, cold, warrior who substitutes bravado for feelings. Lewis sets the terms for entering this soon to be destroyed wilderness. Those terms remove him completely from any emotional response except fear. Boorman undercuts Lewis' opening commentary about man's destructiveness toward nature by bedecking him in a technological armor that itself calls attention to his deep-rooted uncertainty. With wet-suit top, steel bow and arrow, diver's watch, "he-man" talk and physique, Lewis is little more than a boy-scout with a dose of sadism. Lewis has all the cliches of an outdoorsman, "you've got to lose yourself before you can find yourself," yet his language reveals him to be one who sees the forest only as an adversary. Playing the "game of survival" for Lewis is a deadly serious business.

Bobby (Ned Beatty) is ever wistful of his lost adolescence. He remains throughout incapable of moving beyond adolescent sexual fantasy.
He is fat, slow, whining and immature, and is cast to reflect the very opposite of Lewis' physical dynamism. The rusted out wreck that greets them at the hillbilly settlement from where they are to enter the river, makes no sympathetic bond with Bobby. He misses the significance of the poverty and soon-to-be displaced people. The wreck becomes instead an ironic disclaimer of his lost adolescent sexual prowess. All he can mutter about the car wreck is an egocentric, "All my youth and passion was spent on that back seat."

Drew (Ronny Cox) is the most emotional. He is the most vulnerable of the four. He has the engaging innocence of a child in that he communicates through his music. Yet Drew is trapped in his very musical and lyric sense, in that it takes him no farther than an initial musical interlude with an albino hillbilly boy. He does not understand the nature of the duel between the "Dueling Banjos;" and can sense only distantly the futility of life that turns the hillbillies of the Cahulawassee River into morons, or savages. When he must argue for reason after the first murder is committed, Drew is so emotionally involved, his attempt at an objective rationality is lost in emotional hyper-ventilation.

Ed (John Voight) at the outset is an Atlanta businessman who "likes his life." Yet, he is uncertain as to why he accompanies Lewis on these weekend trips. Ed, initially is clearly afraid of the wilderness ("Why do you go so fast, Lewis?"). He is too, afraid of the mountain-men who perceive the four as agents of a "citified" technology that would cut their power-lines, remove them from their homes, and flood their territory
in the name of progress. Yet Ed is the one most captivated by the forest wilderness about him. In Dickey's novel, Ed perceives the river in terms of fantasy. For him, it embodies a magic that can only be assuaged by one other. His opening faith in Lewis is made very explicit in Dickey's novel.

For Ed, the river;

unrolled slowly, forced to show its colors, curling and snapping back whenever one of us turned loose. The whole land was very tense until we put our four [beer] steins on its corners and laid the river out to run for us through the mountains 150 miles north. Lewis' hand took a pencil and marked out a small strong 'x' in a place where some of the green bled away and the paper changed with high ground, and began to work downstream, north­east to south-west through the printed woods. I watched the hand rather than the location, for it seemed to have power over the terrain, and when it stopped for Lewis' voice to explain something, it was though all streams everywhere quit running, hanging silently where they were to let the point be made. 1

Ed is closed to a full communion with the meaning of the wilderness until he has overcome his own simple faith in Lewis and becomes aware of the violence of his own nature. Only then is he awakened to a new spiritual maturity through the range of emotions demanded of him by the environment of the river. In the novel, at the end, Ed achieves a pantheistic bond with the Cahulawassee River, it becomes his own "private possession." In the movie he learns about his own violent heart, but their is no bond with the river.

Boorman's film reveals the tension being the two opposing forces of
personal terror, and collective technology, by the careful juxtaposition of artifacts in the opening. Boorman's images of the mountain-men and their homestead affects the early narrative structure in two ways. First, it continues the terrible portent of what happens to mechanization in the face of an immutable nature. Secondly, it lays bare the more fearsome aspects of human nature that will be realized later, on the river itself. Wrecked and rusting cares are everywhere. Barns, houses, hubcaps, torn-out automobile seats, and tool-sheds spill over into the forest. They become at its entry, indistinguishable from it. We are uncertain just what buildings are inhabited by people. Broken-down machines are left abandoned. Dilapidated dwellings seem to merge with the very landscape. People have never quite moved in, or out. Boorman's opening achieves more than just a sense of desolation; he achieves a sense of a terrible futility that is tinged with an awful innocence. He achieves this by intercutting images of worldliness -- the two vehicles carrying the new canoes, and gear, the adventurers, their new clothing, cigars, hats and guitars -- with shots of mountain-men in ill-fitting overalls, and interior views of laconic children lost in the catatonia of retardation, who are presided over by grandmothers, powerless in senility. Ed peers into this darkness and tries to fathom the nature of this discrepancy. He cannot.

Boorman keeps us away from anything more than an initial stunned vagueness by middle distance shots and a closed cinematic style. In documentary fashion, Boorman does not linger. Immediately after Ed's encounter with the retarded children we are given Drew's meeting with the
albino child. Through this meeting, we are given the all-powerful musical leitmotif that dominates the rest of the film.

The strange thing in the duel between Drew and the albino-boy with the banjo, is not the comic respite it gives to what is an essentially bleak world. Though indeed Boorman builds in relief to restore our feelings in what has been a horrific situation. The dueling musical encounter becomes an ominous touchpoint. Drew and the mute Albino boy are little more than dueling musical technicians. The joy is momentary, and not returned. The albino-boy turns away from Drew's thankful handshake because in some deep half-felt way, he knows these strangers are still outsiders, and they have threatened his homestead.

The opening sequences then establishes that the Cahulawassee is a closed environment, peopled by incommunicative hillbillies who, by virtue of their threatened situation with the dam, are closed and suspicious of all outsiders. Their fear is confirmed as Lewis "pays off" one hillbilly to drive their vehicles to a pre-arranged, decided-upon location downstream. What Boorman has done is move these two opening themes of terror and technology closer to the immediate realm of the river journey itself.

Boorman's camera style reveals the most fearful aspects of the wilderness. The forest is first presented in a cold greenness. It is revealed to Ed and Lewis in the mirror of one of the vehicles, as they speed towards the river. They are almost obscured by the wilderness that races by in the reflection. Such a shot is a visual portent of the
sparkling water of the rapids that will, later, obscure them too. The wilderness obtrudes everywhere. Roads become dead-ends. The four adventurers are photographed tunneling their way to the river whose immanent presence is a source of increasing, nervous tension. Once at the river, a rusted-out abandoned car causes us to link again the river with its desperate, reticent people. Boorman's haunting image of the mute albino boy looking down at the canoeists from a primitive bridge spanning the river, raises further questions of unease. How did he get there?

The canoeists driven to the river, ostensibly some distance away. If the boy is here, who else is here? What is he doing here? Is it a face of a boy who wishes to impart knowledge of danger? Or, is it a face that silently mocks their presence? The face will remain with us to the end of the film.

The river and its surrounding forest is photographed in such a way that reveals the adventurers will not easily leave. Boorman's cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond "Sugarland Express" (1964), "McCabe and Mrs. Miller" (1969), "Obsession" (1973), "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (1977), achieved the river's somber and threatening presence through a physical prowess that enabled him to get into corners closed to other cameramen. More, Zsigmond used a color desaturation process that removed the picturesqueness that usually accompanies color photography. Zsigmond's high angled shots of their beginning river journey, lends a quality of awesomeness to this wilderness experience. The two canoes are diminished in size by a wilderness that engulfs them. Zsigmond's high angled shots makes it clear, that once they have entered the forest, all other entry and exit points are, in effect, closed. Zsigmond creates for Boorman a
gorge-like initial view of the river that aids the narrative by emphasizing the motif of terror that is to soon emerge. Once, Ed, Lewis, Bobby and Drew, are under the primitive bridge, the visual world that Boorman creates reveals a sense that their journey is one with profound, yet inaccessible dimensions.

The forest is revealed in a myriad of ways; creepers, deadfall, dead trees, water snakes, overhanging branches, sphagnum moss, and vines, surround the characters who are kept a middle distance. Depth of field is short, so background and foreground are quickly blurred. Hence, movement is exaggerated. All this emphasizes the paranoia that is to take charge of the characters after the first hillbilly murder. The movement toward that murder we realize, is inevitable.

Having "survived" some early rapids that renews their mutual confidence in each other ("you did good Chubby" Lewis says to Bobby), they camp for the night. The camp episode reveals the limits of experience that mark these four. Lewis reveals immediately the killer-instinct by spearing a fish with his bow and arrow. Bobby creates an "instant brothel" for himself with his bottle and air mattress, and Drew's melancholy song ends with the opening obligatory chords of "Dueling Banjo."

He sings:

red meat when I'm hungry, moonshine when I'm dry greenbacks when I'm hard up, religion when I die. [The] world's just a battle, and life just a dram, and when the bottle is empty, it ain't worth a damn.²

Clearly Drew's lyrical ennui suggests the passive mode of the emoter. Boorman reveals to us that he is not capable of being much more than a
scribe. Drew responds to experience by emoting upon things past. The continual two-chord repetition of the haunting "Dueling Banjos" theme signifies Drew's essential passivity. The foreboding that the "duel" in fact presented, is as closed to him, as are the stirrings of mutual affinity that possibly urged the albino mountain boy to the bridge. In Drew, ambiguity reigns. He responds, yet that is as far as he will come. He like Bobby, still lingers in fantasy.

The first real change, from a tolerated apprehension of the forest wilderness to a sense of numbing terror, takes place on the second day of the journey, when Bobby and Ed are confronted by two mountain-men who are bent on sexually assaulting them. As transformations of the enchanting beauties of the forest, this episode is pivotal not so much for its own violence, but for the violence it calls up in others. Bobby's sexual lingering adolescence is abruptly wiped away with his homosexual rape by one of the mountain-men. The hillbilly, like the boy on the bridge, has literally appeared from the forest as if from nowhere. Ed, just about to be violated in the same way by his toothless companion, is spared by the appearance of Lewis who suddenly appears from the barrier of the forest. Lewis kills Bobby's attacker as calmly as he killed a resting fish. The third remaining hillbilly disappears into the forest cover.

Suddenly, all is changed. Lewis has found finally a combative situation that is worthy of his warrior ethic. He is bound to bury the body and "win" his way back to civilization with cunning and more violence if necessary. The boy-soldier has found his Mai-lai. Bobby, in shock, wants only to avenge his violation with violence, and Drew in his finest hour, fails to convince Ed to bring the dead hillybilly "out" for the
appraisal by the laws of society. Suddenly the camaraderie of bravado is
over. The motivations of each except for Drew, no longer represent team
interest. Each acts in accordance with the violent knowledge the sexual
assault has released upon them. Bobby, violated, in shock, confronts the
dead mountain-man, whose stance-in-death (head wedged between a tree-
branch), Boorman uses to prefigure the disoriented stance of Drew's corpse
later on. "Did he bleed?" Bobby asks seeking some like-sign of his own
humiliation. Bobby wishes to bury the murdered hillbilly along with
Lewis for similar, though different reasons. An investigation into the
death would inevitably bring to light Bobby's homosexual rape. As such,
the sexual overtones of these men alone would shift from the boasting
of male chums, to intimations of a more sordid nature that would jeop­
ardize this wholly male ritual outing forever. More, Bobby's own
sexuality, he being the recipient of the assault, would be examined first.
Hence Bobby, like Lewis, wishes to close ranks on the affair, for the
horror that ripples beyond this act is too horrible to imagine. Lewis
too, realizes he has, in killing the assailant, stepped beyond a clearly
marked boundary. A trial we are told will bring Lewis retribution, and
that becomes for him the ultimate game he must now try to avoid. Ed,
despite Drew's emotional protestations, says "it's not one of your
fucking games ... it's a matter for the law." He chooses also to bury the
body. The reasons for his actions are clear. Ed has failed to under­
stand just what it is inside of him that draws him to suffer Lewis'
patronage on these trips. He has too, failed as a hunter to kill anything.
In that he was incapable of killing a deer he encountered with bow and
arrow that morning. Lewis for Ed, represents a manhood he feels incapable
of achieving. Full of ambiguity he cannot accept the responsibility that he must. Ed is "with Lewis" because for the moment Lewis presents the strongest way out of a personal dilemma. As in the Grail myth, the sexuality that surfaced in the forest has laid them bare.

For "Deliverance" to maintain its narrative credibility, the actions of its character must be consistent throughout. Why should the two mountain-men commit the assault in the first place? Boorman has been careful to build a background for them that makes their actions acceptable. From the outset, Boorman creates for us four urban adventurers who are in effect, wholly unprepared to accept the forest wilderness on willing and restrained terms. Ed, Lewis, Bobby, Drew ... all suffer an apprehensiveness in this new environment. It sharpens the particular emotional or personal deficiency that each bears. To this "natural" apprehensiveness, Boorman adds images of wilderness inhabitants who are more closed, more suspicious, more threatened, and more violent, than the protagonists themselves. The stance of the mountain-men that we are presented with as the adventurers move to the Cahulawassee, ranges from mute desolation (the image of the grandmother beside her retarded grandchild), to distrust ("hell, they're trespassers!" one hillbilly acknowledges to the other), to sado-masochistic rage (the self-immolation one mountain-man inflicts upon himself after an accidental injury). None of the mountain people are communicative among themselves, or with the weekend adventurers. What communication there is, is highly charged with emotional confrontation ("What the hell you wanna go-fuck around with the river for ... once you git in, you can't git out"). Boorman shows us their rifles as visibly as we note Lewis' neoprene "armour" and steel
bow and arrow. More, the horrific images of the retarded children are echoed in the limited mentality of the mountain-men themselves whose insidious smiles, piercing eyes, and broken teeth, gives testimony to a deterministic survival ethic that reaches subterranean levels far beyond Lewis' clean militarism. Not only then, are the mountain-men closed; they are closed to any knowledge of themselves. Boorman is careful to have us compare them to Lewis, and we sense the moral product of this incestuousness is a latent violence that has doubled upon itself. It will be remembered that incestuous sexuality appears first in the forest.

The effect of Boorman's exploration of the inhabitants of the Cahulawassee hills is a felt truth about the violence in man that is perceived but not yet made real. Boorman portends the action long before it arrives. The hillbillies action is wholly consistent with larger issues at stake, in that they act to fuel a slow awareness with the same unrelenting presence that is the forest itself.

There is another interpretation of the homosexual act on the part of the hillbillies. Its roots point to a narrative shift of attention from man, to the river. Boorman has shown us previously the negative effects of the sexuality that lurks in all men ... from Bobby's adolescent preoccupations that leads him to treat people as one would a prostitute ("give him a five," he says to Drew after the dueling duet), to the irrepressible sexuality of the mountain-men that spills over into the children born retarded in abject poverty. It also points to the sexual depiction of the wilderness itself as revealed in folk vernacular ...
"what do you want to go fuckin' around there for?"). Such a way of perceiving the river not as a "mother nature," but as an extension of a sexual libido, gives the river not just profane qualities, but sexually profane qualities. "Deliverance" is more about a deeper metaphoric understanding of a forest-wilderness than it is about adventure or natural chaos.

By the time the four adventurers bury the murdered mountain-man in a panic that Drew at least, hopes will exorcise his guilt, what is becoming dominant is the link between the destructive mind-set that the urban dwellers bring to the wilderness, and the loathing repression of the mountain-men themselves, who resent their intrusive technology. His theme of hatred and fear now amalgamates within the idea of the river. The Garden of Eden despoils man; it does so sexually. Nature and animus have become one.

This change in the thematic focus of the narrative necessitates a change in Boorman's aesthetics. Previously cinematography avoided largely the close-up. Characters were kept largely at a distance. Boorman kept us distanced from them, and they from the wilderness. With the rape scene, all that changes. Boorman now opts for a much wider use of the close-up in order to take us into the nightmare. We are no longer excited by the groups navigation of the river, as we were with the brilliant, sparkling, establish shots of canoeists on the Cahulawassee, now, menace and violation lurk behind every tree. Through the use of the close-up, we see Ed, Bobby, and Lewis, watching, waiting. Through the use of the close-up and a camera subjective, we are forced to watch and wait too!
The quality of nightmare that is the forest, is shaped further by a colour bleaching process that pales the greens, and gives an even more sombre and threatening quality to the wilderness. After the rape sequence, Boorman removes all the primary colours by using a desaturation process that leeched the vivid rusts, of the abandoned cars, and soft greens of the forest. Shots of trees and of the river, avoided the sky. The resulting colour loss achieves a surrealistic effect. The river is not out there; it becomes metaphoric of a darkness with us.

Boorman achieves this quality of aberration in a significant moment earlier in the film. When Ed and Lewis are speeding toward the river and the forest is reflected in their vehicle's windshield, both images of man and forest become superimposed. The effect is momentarily hallucinogenic. Is the forest real? Are the men really there? The demarcation line between reality and nightmare Boorman plants early for us, to notice and to forget, such that he can resurrect it again when river and mentality become one.

Boorman's colour desaturation process is used with greatest effect in the episode in which Ed alone must climb the cliff-face out of the gorge that has destroyed the canoes, maimed Lewis, and turned he and Bobby into whimpering children. The episode marks the climax of the narrative, and it brings together other technical aspects of Boorman's craft. Ed's involvement with the cliff-face is revealed as almost a beatific experience. Drew never recovers from the shock of the murder. The river claims him as it becomes move savage with rapids in their flight. Lewis, ever vigilant for the outside threat, claims Drew was shot, but the sounds of the rapids, smothers the report.
We are left to ponder Drew's death. Is it the result of the embodiment of evil that the river has become? Or is Lewis' paranoid claim true? Ambiguity reigns. Ed alone, must climb out of the raging gorge to nullify the panic that has taken hold.

Boorman takes us up with Ed on his climb in a long close-up crane shot. As he nudges past overhangs and literally pushes his face into the rock-clinging weeds, Boorman desaturates the background presence of the river and gorge so much so, that it appears solarized. A mood synthesizer effects an eerie echoing of the "Dueling Banjos" theme in slow, low ponderous, ominous tones. The river truly, has become a nightmare. Ed must crawl up the gorge to the knowledge of the darkness that lies in his own heart. Above the river he kills a stalking mountain-man with Lewis' bow and arrow, and falls with him back into the gorge. Ed and the victim of his own violence become entangled underwater, and through that image Boorman signifies that the menace of the forest, and the river is essentially in him. Through the climb, the mystical, properties of the wilderness are removed. For Ed, terror has become a kind of beauty. Ed's personal ambiguity has become action. Through that action, he has gained knowledge. This knowledge doesn't bond him to the river, he is repulsed by it.

Boorman makes clear the change in Ed with an aesthetic full of replications and inversions. Prior to Ed's confrontation with his own violent nature on the cliff-face, the echo of the rape and of the murder rings down the length of the Cahulawassee. In post-synching the sound track Boorman uses sound "to direct the eye to something on the screen
that he] would like people to look at." The pig's shriek of Bobby's sexual penetration by the mountain-men is echoed by a sound distortion not unlike what Boorman does to his use of color. We are directed to the scraping of one metal canoe over the rocks as it plunges towards the gorge; it has become Bobby's shrieking writ-large. Through Boorman's distorted sound track, a double entendre is achieved. Bodies, both dead and alive have become fully integrated with the idea of the wilderness. Figures of death have extended beyond themselves and have now become part of a threatening and yet richly impersonal landscape.

Boorman has been careful to portray a wilderness that embodies, and personifies the animal in man. Yet, in terms of the narrative, he must, especially in terms of Ed, begin to diffuse this same horrific presence in order to confirm for us that Ed's climb is epistemological. Boorman confirms Ed's growing awareness through the episode in which he buries his friend Drew. Ed lays Drew to rest in the river in exactly the same way as the hillbilly that Ed killed was himself interned. Drew is weighted and sunk in the river beside a huge boulder that Boorman is careful to compose mid-frame, such that it is suggestive of an upthrust screaming naturalistic reaction on the part of the wilderness towards the calm eulogy that Ed delivers.

Ed's eulogy for Drew tells all. It can be interpreted that his statement is really a eulogy for that "Drew-like part of himself" that has died. "The best of us" has died in Drew, and Ed knows it; Drew's poetic incapability and emotional decision not to enter the world of violence ("it's a matter for the law"), Ed also felt at the outset of
the story; ("Let's go back" he tells Lewis after the first meeting with the mountain-men). Ed has entered the world of violence, done violence, and now like Lewis, must cover up the horror that he has willed. Ed has met the wilderness on its own terms and in the process he must now continue to use that violence in order to "survive." Ed hasn't gained a manhood, and this is the critical point ... he has lost a part of his gentle soul.

Boorman confirms this interpretation in the continued deceit Ed must do when he, Bobby, and the stricken and broken Lewis finally do manage to canoe out of the Cahulawasse. A synthesized minor key version of "Dueling Banjos" attests to this shift of focus. Boorman's distortion of his music becomes symbolic of a basic change within Ed's mode of thinking. As Ed works slowly out of the Cahulawassee, and across the rising reservoir (shot now in safer hues of autumn rust), Boorman reveals for us with a subjective camera, the real nature of that change. In a haunting parallel between the bulldozers immutably destroying the wilderness in the construction of the dam, and the survivors canoeing out of darkness, we see just how pyrrhic the victory is that man has gained. Technology will bury the idea of the wilderness. Progress will displace knowledge. In the process the violence that has been done will be submerged. Modern man and mountain-man have become one. In turning away, in covering up, the awareness of violence that has embodied in the wilderness, repression, alienation, and violence emerge.

Through the haunting images of the exumed coffins and Church of Christ that are being moved to higher ground as Ed, Lewis and Bobby, make
their way slowly to Aintry, Boorman makes his violent theme universal. The sequence clearly echoes the sodomy and violence that surfaces with the loss of spirituality. Here Boorman is at his best in that he replicates in the same numbing way, the power of earlier scenes, such as the boy on the bridge that cries out for meaning. Here, Boorman shows us in true Freudian elegance, just how religious pathos can cross a trip-line and allow for a cruel complacency in its stead. Lewis, Ed, and the mountain-men have left conscience, and entered the territory of Winchester jurisprudence. Technology (be it the rising reservoir, or the mountain-men's guns) has replaced transcendence. Sheriff Bullard (James Dickey) knows Ed's cover-up story of Drew's accidental drowning is untrue. He knows too that their "accident" is connected to the disappearance of a fourth mountain-man, and for a time, makes a half-hearted attempt to drag the river. Yet Boorman is careful to make Bullard's suspicions like Ed's, or Lewis', or the mountain-men themselves, ambiguous and unclear. Bullard like Ed, is dimly aware of the cost of the loss of humanity within his territory. Bullard wants to "let things die peaceful" because he, like Marlow, in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, knows some things are just too awful to pursue.

Ed's breakdown at the table of the Aintry rooming house where he convalesces, Boorman uses to confirm in us the psychological distance Ed has come. Here however, Boorman casts the locals with a hillbilly likeness that is exterior only. In fact we see them around the supper table as being simple, shy, sympathetic, and sensitive. Food is the topic of conversation. The violence Ed realizes, rests not in them, but within himself.
Boorman never allows us to forgive Ed, and hence to dispel the metaphor that is the wilderness. He need not have climbed the cliff-face and have killed a mountain-man. He might like Drew, have fled the scene. Ed chose to climb the face, and in that climbing saw the spectre of murder that revealed itself as a possibility to him. More, Bullard's missing mountain-man has witnessed a murder and has disappeared into the wilderness. Was he shot? Was he shot by Ed? Did the toothless mountain-man kill him? We do not know. Boorman does not displace the ambiguity because that ambiguity has a direct purpose in his moral fable. Unanswered questions reverberate from "Deliverance" and give shape to the nightmare. Ed's phantom-like witness of the hand that comes from the water, becomes the nightmare that we all are pushed to share. As Stephen Farber has pointed out, "Deliverance" has an allegorical quality that nonetheless presses its message with a sense of adventure, and with a tight, visual, almost poetic sense of great reserve. The secret of "Deliverance's" punch lies in Boorman's merciless compounding of messages such that it becomes much more of a mystery than one of merely solving a crime of murder.

"Deliverance" is a mystery of sorts: But, I would argue that it is a very special mystery. Boorman's film echoes with mystical significance. Boorman's theme explodes completely the Jeffersonian dream of a rural utopia. The geometric progression of images that echo one to another takes us into a tale with even greater secret, and more mythic, dimensions. Boorman's "Deliverance" forces us to face the disorder within ourselves that is chaotically inherent in the river. For Boorman, the wilderness experience is one that does not reconfirm our lost values. Nor does it
reaffirm our cultural definitions of gender. What "Deliverance" delivers is a numbing recognition of the outrage that is buried in our sexuality.

The film opened to mixed reviews. Vincent Canby (New York Times, July 31, 1972) felt the ponderous dialogue of the screen play made the film "a lot less interesting than it has any right to be." Canby did catch however, the necessity of the frighteningly realistic adventure story as the basis for a surrealistic moral fable, and as such, praises Boorman's sense of the schematic, the allegorical, existing side by side with the absolute sensuous immediacy of authenticity. For Stephen Farber (New York Times, August 19, 1972) "Deliverance" was "the most stunning piece of movie-making released this year." Faber too, praised Boorman's ability to pull an abstract surrealistic dream-like quality to the film from a story grounded solidly in dynamic realism. Farber's understanding of Ed's final "total desolation" that is the fruit of his journey past the confines of his own manhood, confirms the irony that undercuts the certainty of the adventure. Farber felt that Burt Reynolds own projected smugness was utilized well by Boorman in depicting Lewis as "a sardonic comment against the sportsman mystic."  

Critic John Simon is easily the harshest of those who reviewed the film. Simon felt the film failed because the characters were miscast; Reynolds being virile but shallow; John Voight, too unthreatened; and Ned Beatty, too comic. More, Simon believed Boorman strayed too far from the novel's deeper sexual intentions by totally eliminating the prelude and after piece. For Simon, to miss the vital passage of the novel in which the title word appears is for him, inexcusable. At the end of the novel,
Ed is not merely lying with his wife (as in the film), he is sodomizing her, remembering the fashion model's golden iris that he encountered in the prelude.

In the centre of Martha's heaving and expertly working back, the gold eye shone, not with the practicality of sex, so necessary to its survival, but the promise of it that promised other things, another life, deliverance. 8

For Simon "this conjugal buggery connects with the brutal sodomizing of Bobby ... emphasizing the nature of sexual relations real or implied, between men and women, men and men, and men and idealized figments of their imagination."9 These are serious charges. Yet, I think Boorman cannot be faulted for what he did not show. He does not let Ed kill with impunity, an inferior human being, and hence ascend to manhood as he does in the novel. Ed kills someone who apart from some cultural differences, is as incommunicative as himself. If Boorman shied away from the sexual implications that clearly dominates Dickey's novel, he did so I believe to move his quest beyond mortal transcendence through sex. Far from impoverishing the film, in restraining the overt sexual episodes by utilizing those images of hillbilly incest, Bobby's comic sexual diatribe, and the all important rape scene, he has I would argue enhanced Dickey's novel in that it points to a quest that is rooted more deeply in place, in custom, and in action. The Freudian elements are clearly evident in Boorman's "Deliverance," yet I would submit, Boorman connects them more to equally demanding social elements of his religiosity. The rape in the wood, like Elaine's sexual encounter with Arthur is about men who submerge autonomy for a sexual idealism. The real knowledge of
self, is, in Boorman's film as it is in the Grail myth, bound up with the role sexuality has upon the definition of character. That Ed learns of his sexual and violent nature does not free him. The wilderness does not provide renewal as in the American mythic understanding; nor does it provide an epiphanic experience as in the Arthurian romance. For Boorman, the enchanting forest remains a place of nightmare. The cost of knowledge Boorman tells us, has never been as great.
Caught in the land of Oz, Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodsman, and Cowardly Lion, have sought and melted down the wicked Witch of the West. They have done so for various reasons: the Great Oz promised Cowardly Lion courage; a heart for Tin Woodsman; brains for Scarecrow, and most important of all ... a return to reality and Kansas for Dorothy Gale. The four return to Emerald City and the Throne Room of the Great Oz to receive their promises, only to discover that Oz is not a wizard at all, but a little old man with a bald head and wrinkled face.

"But I don't understand" said Dorothy in bewilderment, "how was it you appeared to me as a Great Head?"

"That was one of my tricks" answered Oz. "Step this way, and I will tell you all about it." 1

The four follow the old gent to an anteroom off the great chamber, only to discover that the Great Head was little more than a paper-mache mask.

J. Frank Baum's children's classic The Wizard of Oz is one major genesis of John Boorman's "Zardoz" (1973). Not only is the title of the film a contraction of Baum's novel (The Wizard of Oz = "Zardoz"), it plays a significant part in Boorman's treatment and style of his narrative. Thematically, it sets Dorothy's quest from innocence to knowledge its the future; and in so doing, transforms her into Zed (Sean Connery), a twenty-third century macho murderer who is programmed into a brutality that has its roots set firmly in our contemporary sexual revolution.
The film is a flop ... yet I would argue, it is a really interesting flop. Science-fiction fans stayed away in such droves that it was soon withdrawn. It was a low budget original effort by Boorman (writer, producer, director) that cost one-fifth of its original estimate. Its low budget revealed itself in poorly crafted effects, especially after "2001: A Space Odyssey" made six years earlier. Science-fiction film buffs had become used to more. Its amalgam of Arthurian Legend, children's fantasy, and social commentary on the technological and sexual mores of contemporary culture, made it overwritten, pretentious, and confusing.

And yet "Zardoz" is such an interesting failure because it reveals so readily, so many startling elements that are basic to Boorman's aesthetic and moral view. It should be viewed perhaps as a first, an experimental film, made strangely in mid-career. Its best critical analogue is perhaps George Lucas' "THX1138" (1971). This film was the first production feature of Francis Ford Coppola's newly formed American Zoetrope, and it was a remake of a short subject ("THX 22384EB") Lucas made as a film student in southern California. "THX1138" and "Zardoz" were both failures; yet both provided each director with clearer visions of future projects. Lucas' "THX1138" overlapping and computer-generated sound track would reveal itself again in "Star Wars" (1977), while Boorman's preoccupation with the Grail legend would finally gain a fuller expression in "Excalibur" (1981).

Science-fiction cinema is a difficult media to work in, in that so much of its success lies in an audience accepting those elements of the fantastic with a willing suspension of judgement. For example, the
homicidal plants in "The Day of the Triffids" (1963), must look lethal, and be believable in the stuff of the story. In science-fiction cinema, one is competing directly with the imagination: The distortions of time, people, places, and other aliens of the fantastic that is accomplished so readily in one's imagination, must in effect, be duplicated on the screen. When elements of magic and myth are allied to science fiction as in Boorman's "Zardoz," the problem of believability is compounded. Not only must the protagonists exist within an acceptable futuristic milieu, they must be seen as archetypes that echo themes readily understood in modern culture. "Zardoz" suffers from too many ideas, operating on too many levels. In choosing to deal with the magic and mystical elements of myth, Boorman must find a cinematic representation of these darker aspects of our collective conscious such that they also embody a logic within the narrative. Boorman's failure in "Zardoz" is due in part to his desire to sermonize rather than to simply tell a story.

"Zardoz" doesn't work because it fails to express in adequate cinematic terms, the magic inherent in real myth. Boorman in utilizing the Great Head from the Wizard of Oz as an expression of Zardoz, has chosen unfortunately a device that lacks the sophistication demanded by the narrative. Zardoz, the great god-head of the Eternals (a future race of super-intellectuals), appears as a tacky device in the story. It doesn't serve Boorman well for what he wants to say because it is an essentially cheap cinematic device. As such it reduces the scientific magic of this futurist tale to ridicule.

The story is set in the year 2293. Some cataclysm has destroyed
the world as we know it and left the landscape poisoned. Those who survived have formed into small primitive bands that roam the countryside and pillage whatever they can. One small group, by selective and controlled breeding, have formed an oasis not unlike the environment of the Alphas in *Brave New World*. In time this group has created for themselves a place called the Vortex, a haven of intellectual domination. Those in the Vortex have discovered the secret of eternal life. They have too, created the Tabernacle, a super computer providing them with total information (memory scans of their enemies), and control of their environment. One of the Eternals, Arthur Frayn has seen the roaming primitive bands as a threat to life in the Vortex, and so he devises Zardoz, the great god-head figure. Like Oz, Zardoz commands one group of primitives against another through a quasi-religious domination. Hence as in the Arthurian romances before the search for the Grail, the knights errant have lost their keen edge of chivalry by endless rounds of empty rituals. The occasions for the tournaments are without the spirituality that should be behind them.

All is not well in the Vortex. The Eternals, members of the inner sanction of scientists and intellectuals are largely women who by subliminating sex, control their oasis with a bitchiness and a paranoia that is testimony to their repressed libido. Others in the Vortex are the Apathetics who find immortality too much. The Apathetics wait eternally in frustration for a death that does not come. Still others, the Renegades would overthrow the Eternals, but they are few in numbers, and can't seem to get it together. The Renegade leaders of such insurrections when captured by the Eternals are instantly aged by the women
controllers into an innocuous and static senility.

Outside the Vortex is the Outlands, one group of primitives ... the Brutals, have been programmed to supply grain to the Vortex. The Brutals have bred like rabbits. Their excess are hunted down and killed by the Exterminators, a physically superior Outland band who effect the Eternal's population control with a vehemence and elan that quickens the blood of their intellectual guardians.

Boorman's "Zardoz" brings together these two well worn ideals. Passion, energy, and risk ... meets celibacy, inertia, and complacency. Sexual primitivism meets the technological effete. Such a world view is common to Boorman's work. It is central to "Deliverance" (1972), and "Point Blank" (1976). The mountain men in "Deliverance" become perverse when their territory is obliterated by urban technology. In "Point Blank," the organization has become decadent and it provides for Walker a means to penetrate it. As in the Grail myth, sexuality causes a breach in attention. What is particularly startling in "Zardoz" is the nature of this ultra-conservatism. Not only has Boorman revived the woman as wicked enchantress as in the Arthurian romance, he has allied this domination with intellectual sterility. In "Zardoz" relationships have ceased to exist. The Eternals live in a state of enforced lovelessness, ever yearning for love, every gazing bleakly into a barren future. The women master controllers are suspect and afraid of men.

Like Guinevere's cold treatment of her rescuer in Lancelot, Boorman's women in "Zardoz" are depicted as being attractive yet repulsive beings. In one episode, Avalow (Sally Anne Newton) is revealed standing at the
centre of the Tabernacle, holding out at arm's length, the diamond crystal that is the heart of Vortex's computer. Her face is dappled in light and her hair radiates from her as if taking energy from the iridescent crystal. Zed is present off camera, but Avalow is intent only upon the crystal. Eerie green light bathes the whole scene. She is enticing, a beautiful personification of eternal beauty. Yet her sexuality is clearly focused upon the diamond. For Boorman, diamond crystals that promise power and control, have replaced the carbon diamond trinket that are a girl's best friend.

The opening episodes illustrate however, just how awkward the film is in bringing good old fashion sexuality and intellectual prudery together. What begins as a futuristic parable of master-slave relationships, very soon degenerates into a series of ill-fitting, one-dimensional sketches.

The face of Zardoz confronts us at the outset. It moves from an establishing shot high in the heavens, to a close-up before us, spewing guns on the ground before it. And though it acts as a bridge from one survival ethic of violence versus another logic, its depiction clearly reveals Boorman's lack of understanding of the deeper psychology and power of the mask-figure. The Zardoz face is depicted as a very unfrightening blend of Blake, Magritte, and the mask in The Wizard of Oz. It is devoid of movement and is frozen into a blank paper-mache scowl. It works with less credibility as the monsters in early Japanese horror films. Arthur Frayn is the source, and mouthpiece of Zardoz. Frayn extolls "I am Zardoz, ... immortal, rich in irony, lost in the future."
Merlin is my hero, I am a puppet maker, I am invented to you, for you, for God is show business too." The voice of Zardoz continues as medieval-like warriors on horseback emerge from the fog pick up the weapons and proceed to slay, rape and pillage other primitives about them. "The gun is good, the penis is evil; go forth and kill, Zardoz has spoken. With that one of the warriors, Zed (Sean Connery) climbs into the grain-filled mouth of Zardoz, and is whisked away within the flying head to the land of the Vortex. There he emerges "Deliverance-like," rising fist first from the grain, supposedly a threatening spectre of things to come.

It all doesn't work. Frayn's opening disclosure to us as being the source of Zardoz, depowers the story before it begins. Is Boorman having us on in a cosmic joke of his own, telling us God is in show-biz? The prelude is unnecessary and contemptuous of the story Boorman is himself trying to build. Zardoz's commands are wooden, clumsy, and reduces the gun-phallic connection to ridicule. When Zed turns to us from within the head and shoots us point-blank, are we supposed to become involved in the killings? It is a cheap shot; and worse, it is poor symbolism of the pervasive violence that Boorman wants to tell us is in all men's hearts.

Boorman's heavy dialogue takes away what essentially should be revealed visually by the mask-face. The mask in cultural ritual, allows for the projection of the taboo. Masks, like works of art add a dimension to our experience by exposing those ideologies that are kept suppressed in our culture. For example, conspicuous consumption is a fact basic
to western industrialized society. Advertising uses the "mask" of success (Twiggy, Cheryl Tiégs), to motivate people toward that consumer ideology. Most importantly, the mask allows for the projection, and hence the exorcism, of the repressed needs of a culture. Therefore when for example a Haida warrior "dances" ritualistically wearing the "head" of "Raven," he is not just affirming through mime, stylized strategies for encompassing man's animus in nature; he is alluding to the horror that such animus is grounded in sexuality. Masks, like myth carry high powered, allegorical, meanings.

Boorman's mask-face of Zardoz has neither religious stature, or symbolic power. It is instead a deus-ex-machina device whose context is neither clearly established, or whose force sufficiently revealed. As the film opens, moments before Zardoz speaks and ruins everything, we get a shot of the south-coast of Ireland. Bathed in fog and early morning light, Geoffrey Unsworth, the photographer ("Cabaret," "2001"), pulls back up the coast to reveal strange Easter Island-like heads gazing implacably out to sea. If, at this point Boorman had the Exterminators make a sacrifice, or hold a ceremony half hidden in the morning mist among these silhouetted ruins, then a clearer link to the real power of the mask would have been made.

Once inside the Vortex, hormones begin flowing. As Pauline Kael has written Sean Connery as Zed "looks like Burt Reynolds in a loincloth." He seems to be always on the verge of bursting out in laughter. That's ok, because what he sees is laughable anyway. A brightly colored blue house hides shy Miller's daughters. An upstairs laboratory conceals a
science-fair display of man's evolution. Skeletons and diagrams are everywhere half-hidden by cob-webs. More, spindly-legged old men sleep in a suspended animation from cocoons of saranwrap. Greenhouse plants sigh erotically when touched. Strange voices emanate from a box that compel Zed to approach. Suddenly Zed is projected into the heart of Vortex Four, a computer that mirrors his mind on a screen before us. Suddenly revealing Zed in the middle of his own replay, Boorman pulls back to include a circle of Vortex ladies, who are more intent on ogling this fine physical specimen of a man, than they are watching the computer visual display of Zed's past and future. The maze of mirrors that is the Tabernacle, heart of the Vortex is really a sublimated glass womb in which the barren women can perceive, if not feel, the effects of life within. It as close to motherhood that Boorman wishes to come and, in keeping with the moral of his tale, it is a very cool, surrogate, motherhood. The ladies watch Zed's past and future life on the multiple computer screens before them, as a mother watches and wishes for her child. Yet there is no suckling, caring, or simply a longing to be with this child-man.

It is in the reactions of May (Sara Kestelmon), and Consuella (Charlotte Rampling), towards Zed that provides us with Boorman's most sexist view of women as managers. May, the geneticist, wishes to hold Zed captive for further study. Consuella, high Priestess of the Vortex, only wants him dead. Both express a way of dealing with a dormant libido. May and Consuella can be likened to the two sisters of Castle Perilous in the Grail myth. Lady Lyonesse like Consuella is generously passionate. Linnet, Lyonesse's sister like May is calculating and
possesses eerie magical power.

In the Vortex, Boorman explores his vision of life in an intellectual technocracy. This vision marks him as a reactionary. For all of its cognitive power, life in the Vortex is depicted as essentially barren. The barren female controllers who run the Tabernacle are echoed in the lives of the Eternals, who live without imagination, without organization, and without hope.

One sequence in particular captures the elements of the surreal that Boorman will use to undercut the milieu of logic that prevails in the Vortex. George Seadon (Bosco Hogon), one of the Renegades who has befriended Zed and led him to the Merlin figure Arthur Frayn (Niall Buggy), has been accused of "psychic violence" by the upper echelons of the Vortex. While he is being brain scanned by the Tabernacle computer, he portends to Zed that life in the Vortex is not what it appears. In consequence of his public critique, the women controllers age Seadon five years; and, in so doing set Zed upon a quest to seek the truth about the Vortex. Suddenly, Boorman cuts us to a slice of life amidst a Renegade camp, and we see a la Fellini's "Satyricon," the aged and mutilated censors in an environment that is a surreal mix of carnival and old folks home. For Boorman, the separation of will from potential creates a bizarre world self-cancellation.

At the heart of the Vortex, absurdity abounds. We see within the carnival sequence, a young girl walking listlessly amidst the throng passing out bread. She echoes the ritualistic breaking of bread ceremony that occurs at the Vortex dining table. She, as they, has forgotten the
Christian origins of the ritual. Clowns become grotesque in their inactivity. A Renegade is attempting a rape of an Apathetic. Achieving neither response or gratification, it is the perfect image of human action that has become divorced from feeling. All straggle about as if we have suddenly come upon a common room within a mental hospital.

The Renegade camp is Boorman's image of decadence in the extreme. It is quite literally an extension of life in the Vortex. The Vortex is about domineering women and timid, pliable, men. It is the party sequence from "Leo the Last" pushed into the future. Boorman reveals in this sequence a surreal dream-like collective inertia. Group action has no group effect other than revealing a grotesque absurdity.

Seadon's plea during his trial that the Tabernacle reconstructed him with defects points to Zed's mission to determine the source of Vortex's power. Seadon pleads, "I was imperfectly repaired ... these things leak out of my head wound of my third life." Such comments become for Boorman, the way to imbue his world of logic with a little craziness. That craziness is soon extended into the surreal world of the Merlinesque Arthur Frayn.

Boorman's Arthur Frayn is clearly out of the Grail legend. The Merlin of the Arthurian cycle is a famous magician, prominent in Arthur's court. In the Grail legend, Merlin is thrown into a death-like trance and enclosed forever in an oak-tree by a mistress Vivian, through a spell he, himself, taught her. Boorman's Frayn is, too, a magician. He was instrumental in creating the Vortex, and he, like Seadon, is only too aware of its shortcomings. Frayn alone had taught the women of the
Vortex how to use the Tabernacle computer. Yet Frayn has, by the very imperfectability of that same computer, become a little flaky. Like Merlin, Boorman makes Frayn an eccentric, frozen into a character that is both quixotic and bizarre. Boorman bedecks him with painted beard and resplendent pantomime clothes. Frayn, like Merlin is forever restless. He befriends Zed (Frayn = friend) as Merlin does Arthur, and reveals to him the deficiency of life in the Vortex.

Boorman makes Frayn, Zed's alter ego. He is as Rosco in "Leo the Last." Frayn transfers to Zed the requirements of that which is denied in him by virtue of his eccentricity. The women of the Vortex, like Vivian of the Grail legend, have imprisoned Frayn, Merlin-like, into the body of an innocuous effete old man. Frayn's wisdom like that of Merlin, has backfired. Boorman tells us the Vortex women are interested only in a world of order, not in a world of freedom.

Boorman is at best here. Surreal images abound. From the musty disused library in which strange hooded figures cavort and hide, Frayn reveals to Zed the Wizard of Oz as source for Zardoz, the god-head. We explore Frayn's room, replete with a Rene Magritte painting of the "Painted Plaster Mask" (1935). Zed the innocent must break the hold of the Tabernacle computer over these people.

The juxtaposition of the two worlds of decadent lethargy and intellectual imperialism, is accomplished by Boorman's use of the surreal. An incongruous party of Eternals, renegades reduced to Edwardian gentry, complete with a lively dance band to which none respond, soon dissolves
into images of May in the Tabernacle brain room. The Tabernacle brain room is like a people bell jar inverted in a large aquarium. Through the glass we see bodies of Eternals in for analysis or repair, float about in profusion. They are suspended amoeba-like amidst strange party streamers ... umbilical cords of Eternals' past and future. The scene is a further echo of the challenging Magritte head revealed in Frayn's room. The sense of wonder is heightened by the distortion affected by shapes seen through glass. In the brain room Boorman creates a huge gulf between the conventional role of science, as an ideology that frees man through knowledge and makes it, in its stead, a means of technocratic domination.

Boorman's most successful surrealist sequence in the film occurs when Zed becomes involved in a struggle with the source of all knowledge, the Tabernacle crystal. Zed, in his search for the truth of the Vortex, has been energized at once by Frayn, the computer itself, and by the women controllers. He grows in consciousness as they grow in feeling. In a light-show epiphany with Zed lying prone on the Tabernacle receiving slab, Boorman tries to unify the bond between the animal and the intellectual in man. It is a scene reminiscent of Magritte's "Objective Stimulation" (1939). Boorman refers us to Zed on the table and Zed is revealed in agony in his past, present, and future. He absorbs all the knowledge of the world. Boorman is trying here to capture the inside-outside principle as depicted by the artists Max Ernst ("Revolution by Night," 1932), or Giorgio de Chirico ("The Child's Brain," 1914); function has left the realm of revelation beyond words. In this surrealist
crisis, Boorman gives us only the visual experience of the shock of this transformation. Visually it is exciting cinema.

Boorman then has called up aspects of a religious and mythic past and wedded these elements into a science fiction adventure that responds better to a surreal gestalt than to our demands of a film narrative. The surreal sequences are among Boorman's best, but they fail to form a narrative with appropriate movement. "Zardoz," is less of a film narrative then it is a cubist-futurist version of "Intolerance." It is not just that Boorman's four elements (women, technology, barbarism, and intelligence) do not merge, they do; it is just the touchpoints become an end in themselves. Effects and glitter replaces the narrative. What began in Boorman as a consciousness of philosophy and theology not unlike that of Coleridge's "construction imagination;" turned mid-film, into a surrealist preoccupation with the plastic and spatial possibilities of form.

The ending, as the beginning is contrived. Zed being "inside and outside" himself in the Tabernacle has finally gained complete knowledge. He sees through his quest the flaw of imperfection in the Tabernacle crystal, and shoots at it as he did at us in the opening. Of course, everything collapses. Zed's mirrored self "dies" as do finally, the grateful Eternals. May, the manipulator geneticist, coldest female of them all, is hugged then killed, as Zed and the less rigorous Consuella run off like Dorothy's return to Kansas to make babies and begin the race anew. The Brutals break into the Vortex and rape and plunder as before. And, as the sun sets on the ashes of their parents, we see Zed and Consuella's progeny growing up in a wonderful unambiguous, new world of
anti-intellectualism and violence.

What is wrong with "Zardoz" besides the script, is that it is a film largely without charm. The enchantment of The Wizard of Oz lies in the innocence and delight of its characters. Zed is little more than a mute "tough" whose understanding stops at the end of a gun barrel. Even Zed's confrontations with the computer in the Tabernacle hall of mirrors is wholly predictable. Consuella's role as leader of the Vortex is ill-defined. Though ultimately responsible for May's program of repopulation, Consuella wanders about, Falcon upon her shoulder, obvious in her sexuality as Marilyn Munroe. The Vortex is a left-over sixties version of a commune. Boorman's use of the commune ideal backfires on him. Unlike Oz, the Vortex is unalluring. As the setting for myth, it is largely without magic.

It would have been better had Boorman not strayed so far from his original idea. In an interview in "Sight and Sound" (winter, 1974) Boorman reveals to science-fiction writer Philip Strick that "Zardoz" began wholly outside that genre. Zed was originally, a university professor who having become interested in one of his female students, begins a long search for her throughout the California communes where she lived. However, Boorman felt the communes of the late sixties could not carry the weight of his ideology about women's liberation and computer technology, so he pushed the tale further and further into the future. Yet his creation of the Vortex as a commune a la 2293 A.D. leads him only to obscure the real thrust of his tale in camp techniques. Through the Vortex, Boorman himself has become a marionette of his own cinema technology.
"Zardoz" fails as a narrative because it reduces myth to cliche. It is a somewhat frightening reductionist tale that poses no future for man except as aggressor. Zed's knowledge of the sterility of a wholly conditioned life, results in his children witnessing an equally closed world of plunder and violence. Boorman's preoccupation with archetypal themes is admirable, but in "Zardoz" such a preoccupation reveals a basic uncertainty in characterization and narrative structure. Dramatic tension, tragedy, and catharsis is the stuff of myth, its revelation is through character. Remove the dazzle of one or two moments from "Zardoz," and you have a film top-heavy in predictability.

The most revealing and most frightening element in "Zardoz" however, is the revelation of Boorman's vision of life. It is a little difficult to get at in "Zardoz" because one is never quite sure whether he is taking himself seriously, or if indeed he created a parody that mocks itself. The ever-smiling Sean Connery, and his activity among the Aged Renegades, creates a bizarre blend of violence and comedy. What should be ominous and sinister for us, is treated expressionistically, undercutting our brooding with humour.

The root of "Zardoz" then lies in Boorman's preoccupation with the Grail legend. If Boorman is excited by the possibilities the legend reveals, it is I would submit, an excitement born of the reactionary. Knowledge in the Grail legend implies a loss. The discovery of the self, as in Arthur acting without Excalibur forces the death of mysticism and magic. In "Zardoz," man retreats from knowledge. Mysticism and violence it seems is better for Boorman than logic and order. Boorman's
future world excludes the possibility that violence is curative is lost.

In "Zardoz," Boorman reveals an ethic akin to "Deliverance." Sexual perversion, in this instance repression, surfaces in an electric voyeurism that allows women to control the world with a quasi-religious endorsement. The role of the male is either as Arthur Frayn, the Merlin-like magician who creates the symbol of the Vortex's power, and who is ineffectual; or Zed, the machismo thug who displaces magic and authority with violence and machismo self-satisfaction.

As in the seminal Grail legend, May and Avalow, the Vortex controllers Grail guardians, must remain virginal. They are symbolic of the vessels of all knowledge. Others who lack this "purity" of understanding are fair game. Consuella, having no intellectual capacity, functions in the film as the rightful woman to bear Zed's progeny. Brainy women soil the Grail quest: In the christian version, the seeker of the Grail had to be sexually pure. Boorman extends this metaphor in "Zardoz" by making women with knowledge and power, clearly off limits. Innocence in "Zardoz" is not a state of grace achieved through knowledge; it is a level of functioning that must deny the power of mind. Sexuality is a threat to be avoided where it, and power, merge.

Boorman's interpretation of the Grail legend as it appears in "Zardoz" is reactionary and frightful. Yet it is true to spirit eschewed by the Grail quest. Women where they interfere with the quest as Chris in "Point Blank," or Dinah in "Having a Wild Weekend," must be displaced. This displacement however in "Zardoz" is not rendered with any complexity or depth. Zed, to May and Avalow, is a curiosity figure to be examined
then killed. May and Avalow are depicted simply as classic "bosses" who must be commensurately treated with male contempt. As such Boorman does not try to get beyond the constraints of the quest, and to develop relationships between men and women who suffer ontological terror. He is satisfied with the stereotypical depiction of women as bosses who must oppose the quest by virtue of their very intelligence.

Boorman's vision of the world then in "Zardoz" must be faulted on many levels. Firstly, we are unsure if his film is not a spoof ... it's just too tacky for him to take all seriously. Secondly, as a cautionary tale about technological impotence, it lacks development. The questing hero lacks character. As a science-fiction film, it has no charm. "Zardoz" however does work in some isolated moments, such as the Eternals party sequence, the visit to Frayn's room, and Zed spread-eagle in the Vortex Tabernacle. Here Boorman's depiction of the surreal is as thrilling as it is in similar sequences in "Leo the Last" or in "Point Blank." Yet, the cinematic control exerted within these moments does not make a successful film narrative. "Zardoz" lacks the humour of Leo, and the tightness and grim resolution of Walker (in "Point Blank"). The magic Boorman tried to summon up in "Zardoz" just could not be done for one million dollars. The battle Boorman wages against women in "Zardoz" reveals an ethic that is out of keeping with his setting. The psychology that this renders within Boorman suggests a Freudian darkness he has not fully explored. He ventures very gingerly into that new ground within his next film, "Exorcist II."
Central to the theme of "Exorcist II" is a clear conciliatory attitude toward the two polarized worlds of science and primitivism that made "Zardoz" so harsh and unforgiving. In "Exorcist II," Boorman grows thematically. Initially conceived as a sequel to William Friedkin's "The Exorcist," (1973), Boorman was given almost complete production control. He chose not to fulfill the expectations generated by Friedkin's original film. As a result "Exorcist II" was a bust. Re-edited in order to save a disastrous box-office showing, "Exorcist II" lost fifteen minutes. It was soon withdrawn.

Failure at the box-office did reveal to Boorman that patrons felt cheated in his sequel. It did not mean however, that the film itself was beneath critical judgement. The success of "Exorcist II" has little to do with its predecessor, though many felt strongly that this was indeed so. "Exorcist II" is a contemporary rendering of the quest that owes its power not from the spiritual impetus of the protagonist, but from those transformations of self various characters in the film undergo. These transformations and their attendant context gives "Exorcist II" a special kind of magic that is wholly different than the blood, gore, and torture of the original "The Exorcist." In diffusing the blatant violence of the original film, Boorman's "Exorcist II" becomes a lively, penetrating, study of the trauma involved in a spiritual rebirth.

In "Exorcist II," Boorman suggests that the original exorcism of
Regan MacNeil ("The Exorcist") didn't work. More, Boorman claims at the outset that Father Merrin's death was a waste. In consequence what Boorman does is to set about freeing Regan from her troubled soul. In the process, he brings his protagonist Father Merrin, back to life. It is interesting to note that in this sequel, Father Lamont who turns his back on his Catholicism, is not the only heretic; Boorman makes us disbelievers in the original. The narrative plays out its own cosmic joke upon us, and Boorman loves it.

What makes this film really work is its own irreverence ... its humour. "Exorcist II" does not take itself so seriously as did "Zardoz," and because of this it is a much more mature statement. "Zardoz" was unbearable with its pretentious and heavy dialogue. Only the surreal sequences saves us from its complete lack of charm. "Exorcist II" is literally peppered with humour ... from the "eysies" Father Lamont and Jean Tuskin the psychiatrist, play with each other, to Ecumenical Edwards, who hustles religious icons the length and breadth of Ethiopia. Boorman has in "Exorcist II," found that since the pathetic element in life cannot be exorcized completely, it can be made bearable by accompanying it with irony. His use of irony is important in that is undercuts the sinister violence that lurks within the very idea of someone or something "possessing" another. Boorman's film unlike Friedkin's does not capitalize on this darker element. Instead it smiles at us with moments of mockery, and irreverence. Moreover, it is a film full of compassion.

The other element that makes "Exorcist II" a success is Boorman's continuing preoccupation with special effects. Here, as in "Zardoz" and
"Point Blank," Boorman utilizes such favourite stylistics as the use of mirrors, a collage of varying forms of light, a multi-layered sound track, cross-cutting and flashback. The result is a narrative with a circular rather than a linear structure. The issue that the most serious critics (Richard Combs, Vincent Canby) raised, is whether these effects are justified in terms of the narrative itself.

Because of its close ties to "The Exorcist" (1973), what we learn from Boorman's film is much more than the knowledge gained by Boorman's protagonist. Our memory of Regan's original possession in "The Exorcist" calls up her interaction with Father Merrin. This muddies our understanding of Boorman's Father Lamont. Moreover, we reach past the immediate narrative to find touchpoints in our own ethics. Father Lamont's loss of faith and his subsequent journey into the pagan rituals of mysticism, becomes our journey. His use of science, rather than formal religion, to enter this world becomes a position we must simply accept at the outset of the story. If one cannot accept Boorman's "hypnotic mind synchronizer," one must reject also the ontological dilemma that Boorman tries to reveal through his main character. It's a pity in "Exorcist II" that so much of the film's understanding falls upon the use of "science-fiction" special effects, because it blurs an understanding of a character type that is an essential feature of Boorman's cinematic vision.

What Boorman has done in "Exorcist II" is to combine the godly, the ungodly, and the absurd, into an aesthetic. Unfortunately, by the end of the film we are uncertain as to who has gained the most ... Boorman's protagonist Father Lamont, ourselves, or the camera itself.
One way to interpret "Exorcist II" such that we do centre upon the character of Father Lamont, is to see the film not as yet another failed science-fiction drama or as a diluted sequel, but to see it as an assumed-identity film. The Grail myth is replete with Merlin's magic in which he transforms characters into other identities. Uther is transformed into Gorlois, Elaine into Guinevere, Morgause into Morgana. Merlin effects these transformations in order to play a part in the lives of those about him. Magical transformations are for Merlin also acts of sublimated sexuality. Often those who have been changed seek vainly to find the source of the transformation. Such character changes then, set up changes in the narrative structure. These narrative changes become the backbone of "Exorcist II." They include:

1. a masquerade of one character within another that often ends in death
2. the pretender becomes a kind of outlaw, forsaken by those closest to him
3. the assumed identity has connections in the Other-world
4. the pretender becomes obsessed (possessed) by his odyssey to find the source of the misperception
5. the key figures in the deception all assemble in the same place at the end.

Normally the assumed-identity conventions operate within the larger context of the American gangster film. However, Boorman has in "Exorcist II" brought about a wider use of these conventions such that a spiritual vacuum, not greed or criminality, becomes the source for the masquerade. In "Exorcist II," Boorman attempts to infuse a personal metaphysic into Friedkin's more vulgar, more basic exploitation of violence. His roots
lie closer to Antonioni's existentialism and to his own Catholicism than to Friedkin's more horrific negation.

Boorman's Father Lamont doesn't literally change place with another character; he changes place with another part of himself. The idea of possession is after all, only a means of talking about the essential schizoid dilemma of modern man. Man is a part of the world, but because of his self-consciousness he is too, apart from it. Boorman's Father Lamont suffers the quintessential paradox of being-in-the-world, and being-of-the-world. He is a man without effect, aware of the horror of contingency. Through his interaction with Regan, he changes places with himself. He cannot simply be a priest; he must seek to become part of the world through a greater meaningful act. Only then can he achieve an essence. For Boorman the road to holiness lies through action ... action necessarily outside the realm of dogma. "Exorcist II" begins where obedience ends.

The film opens with Father Lamont (Richard Burton), powerless and afraid in a barrio above Buenos Aires. A young Spanish girl (Rose Portilló) lies possessed in a fit of psychosis. Her disquiet is echoed in the religious hysteria of older women who are all about. The girl's trance-filled movement causes her to accidently knock over the offertory candles. Flames envelop her and she dies while Lamont, horrified looks on. Faith and contingency, Lamont has seen, are mutually exclusive. Lamont in consequence, feels "unworthy" of his ordination. It is at that point he wants to become something else.
In an irony that matches the religious excess of the flames that devour Rose, Boorman cuts us to a hearing with Lamont's superior. Cardinal Jaros (Paul Henreid), parades pompously before a huge red, gauche tapestry of "The Crucifixion." The tapestry is an artistic fixed, safe, version of the girl's own "passion." Lamont must find reason to remain in the church. Jaros sends him deeper into the chaos he has just witnessed by demanding he investigate the strange death of Father Merrin at Regan's original exorcism.

Boorman's irony is clear. The Church has become insensitive to suffering. It has in Cardinal Jaros, confused humility with humiliation, and icon with event. Boorman offers us a stereotypical Catholicism, but it does serve to wed the leftover elements of Friedkin's narrative into this more psychological mystery. We know Lamont will immerse himself more deeply into the destructive element; and we know he will do it outside the Faith. Boorman's exorcism will mock its own religious lineage. In Lamont, a philistine stands outside the gates of the temple.

The opening finds Regan (Linda Blair) in Washington. It is four years since her original exorcism. Regan now a teenager is not completely cured; she has periodic fits. As the episode begins Regan's residual psychic properties, a result of her original possession, are being revealed to Dr. Jean Tuskin (Louise Fletcher), a psychiatrist in a Washington institute. Tuskin has perfected a "mental synchronizer," an electronic bio-feedback hypnotizing device that enables two people to synchronize deep brain wave activity, and share imagery from one's unconscious. The machine, is of course, Boorman's updated version of "Zardoz," the god-head. And, although
it is far more convincing ... with its hypnotic flashing white lights, and surreal electronic monotone humming ... (that moves down scale to an ominous repetitive low drive indicative of one unconscious being in-synch with another) ... it is still, a device, a deus-ex-machina mechanism, that obtrudes above Lamont's narrative like the dance sequences in a Herbert Ross musical.

The setting Boorman provides for his "mind synchronizer" is however, a marvel, and it goes a long way to providing a context in which we are more likely to accept his "brain swapping" machine, and the change of identity that will overcome Father Lamont. The psychiatric clinic is a remake of the Tabernacle control room of the Vortex in "Zardoz." Everywhere radiating out from Tuskin's office are one-way mirrored glass cubicles. The effect is similar to perceiving a scene from a multi-paned window. Each rectangle of glass frames a character caught in a particular psychosis. Boorman's setting is like perceiving the world from the centre of a honeycomb. Characters wander freely in a huge recreational anteroom, but they are perceived as being trapped by the separating effects of this strangely mirrored set. Boorman is merely extending the metaphor of entrapment through this dazzling, eerie, and evocative decor. It works. That Lamont should utilize the new "hypnotic synchronizer" as a means of freezing Regan from her particular entrapment is a logical extension of the sense of closure that Boorman's environment provides.

Lamont on a visit to the institute, witnesses a synchronizer session between Jean Tuskin and Régan, only to find the young psychiatrist loosing control in her descent to Regan's unconscious. Lamont pulls Tuskin back
to her own consciousness only to find himself drawn to the machine that
can accomplish what liturgy cannot. Lamont then duplicates Tuskin's mental
adventure. In effect he becomes an incarnation of her still-troubled
psyche. He is whisked into Regan's preconscious and here Boorman presents
us with the first story-within-a story. Lamont travels (within Regan's
mindset) to Africa where Father Merrin (Max Von Syndow) has successfully
exorcised Kokumo (Joey Green) a young black tribesman who possesses the
ability to ward off the evil force Bazoozoo within his culture. Bazoozoo
is manifest in the plagues of dreaded locusts that threatens the crops
of Kokumo's tribe.

Boorman has prepared us for Lamont's psychic African journey by
previous images of Regan's own nightmare. For example, early in the film
he reveals a sequence in which Regan is shown fitfully sleeping in her
New York apartment. Suddenly, Regan is seized with the nightmarish images
of a tribal village in which a medicine man practises his craft over a
sick child. Yet another image of a giant locust shocks Regan into
momentary wakefulness, only to be lulled back into the continuing dream
sequence in which the cured young Kokumo saves his village from the
dreaded locust plague by magically beating the air.

Why Boorman should choose to attach Regan's psychosis to a primitive
cultism is never established. Within the narrative structure it does
provide a context for Father Merrin to appear and to establish his role as
a successful exorcist. Yet, presentation of evil as being tribal and
pagan, rather than Christian or Freudian, takes Father Lamont away from the
existential dilemma which is at the core of the film. That Lamont should
meet Bazoozoo, the Devil, Raven, or Mr. Dressup, as an incarnation of evil, is immaterial. What is material is not that these forces should exist in various forms in the world, but that Lamont a failed exorcist, should seek meaning only in an act of human caring. The fact is that Regan is still possessed, and she must be freed of that possession by a man who assumes an atypical identity. It is predictable that Lamont's masquerade will end in failure. What is essential in keeping our focus upon Lamont's spiritual dilemma is that his failure should not carry the genesis of a new myth.

Dazzling visuals make connections that are poorly developed in the dialogue. Regan has been lured from her bed by Lamont's invasion within her subconscious. As the young Kokumo waves the air in exorcising Bazoozoo who appears in the form of a locust, Regan is seen in a somnambulistic trance. She walks perilously close to the edge of her New York penthouse balcony. The mirrored walls break up and reflect her image in a thousand ways. As in the glass decor of the Institute, this image-replication in glass is a very surreal sequence that echoes the fragmentation of self that is her troubled psyche.

In experiencing Regan's possession Lamont has been charged with a mission. It is a mission in league with a strange mysticism that originally was kept distanced by Catholic dogma. Lamont too has been aroused by Jean Tuskin's sexuality. Boorman is careful to undercut any religious ardor being at the root of his quest by revealing the stirrings of a more basic passion. He is careful to portray Lamont as a man, a sexual being. Lamont is not just a religious zealot charged with saving yet another
soul. Though his talk to Regan's psychic disorder with Jean, is in Christian terms of evil and possession, he still casts clearly intimate glances toward her. Jean Tuskin in response is a phlegmatic scientist, who like the Vortex women in "Zardoz," doesn't effervesce with feminine ways. Lamont's stirrings toward Jean Tuskin, I would argue, are necessary in depicting the wider malaise that promotes Lamont's odyssey. Lamont is a man in search of a meaning for his life at every level. In this context, Boorman's transformation of Bazoozoo as a seductive Regan substitute is not as incongruous as first claimed by critics. The blurrings of the drives that push the protagonist Lamont is purposeful. He cannot be simply a defrocked priest consumed with lechery. Nor can he be simply, a zealot. We must witness terrible ambiguity in Lamont's odyssey for that is the nature of his dilemma.

Boorman continues this latent sexual element when Lamont defies both his superiors to become an outlaw of the underworld. He journeys to Africa to search for a grown-up Kokumo whom he believes can help him release Regan from her torment. In Ethiopia he meets up with Ecumenical Edwards (Ned Beatty). Edwards becomes Lamont's guide and companion in his search for the cliff-dwellings of Jepti, (Lamont's dream source of Kokumo). Edwards plays a very subtle but important role in the film. He leads Lamont to the sepulchral city as Merlin leads Arthur to his rightful place at Camelot. In effect, Edwards plays much the same role in "The Heretic" as Bobby in "Deliverance." Like Bobby, he is the most feminine character. In effect, Boorman makes Beatty Lamont's animus, the feminine part of himself that his Catholic celibacy has suppressed. If his travelling companion cannot be a real woman, it can be this softer, self-
depreciating outcast with whom he can share a short, but completely
delightful interlude.

As an expression then of Lamont's own latent sexual stirrings,
Edwards becomes the most enticing character in the film. Boorman infuses
his brief, but important appearance with double meanings and irony.
Edwards has shorn the hassock of the world and become, like Lamont, a
kind of adventurer-outlaw. He is a bush-pilot who hustles religious icons
to the newly established Catholic missions throughout Ethiopia. He is
first revealed emerging from his trusty Cessna 172 with a crucifix for a
group of mission sisters. Edwards stands as the perfect foil against the
pretentious Cardinal Jaros. More, he becomes an expression of what Father
Lamont might become. Edwards is open, honest, disarming, and unsentimental.
"Religion's my business. Plastic saints, icons, buddhas, voodoo gris
gris ... Ecumenical Edwards, they call me." The fresh air, and sweet
contempt Edwards breathes into the film, stands out among the best things
that Boorman has ever done.

In keeping with the conventions of the assumed-identity narrative,
"Exorcist II" now becomes a road movie. We fly with Lamont and Edwards
in a surreal journey over the dry unearthly African landscape. Again
Boorman orchestrates special effects that are truly astonishing. They
work as expressive of the apocalyptic dimension of Lamont's quest. We
are with Lamont aboard the piper-cub as he flies toward the cliff-dwellings
of Jepti with the surge of a truly metaphysical adventure. Rich Combs
says it best. "Cameras plummet, twist, and dive over the African landscape
... [Boorman's] recreations of primitive scenery, through his use of
fierce burning colours suggest a world still in a state of primal flux."

In Lamont's initial adventure in Jepti, within Ragan's unconscious, Boorman reveals a pagan religious ritual not unlike the barrio hysteria that Lamont witnessed at the outset of the story. As the frenzy for the search for Kokumo increases, Boorman reveals synchronization between Regan and Lamont that occurs without the use of Tuskin's machine. Now, as the real exploration of the cliff-dwelling takes place, Regan's unconscious connections with Lamont is such that her nightmare vision of his quest intrudes upon her everyday life. As Lamont searches among the silent ruins of Jepti for the adult Kokumo, Regan faints in the middle of a tap-dance review. As Lamont is hit by a native after stumbling upon the young Kokumo, who is dead, Regan goes into a seizure. Throughout, Boorman increases the inter-cutting between Regan's recovering in a New York hospital, and Lamont's fevered searching for the source of her possession. The dreaded source lies in the character of the older Kokumo who is dressed as a locust.

In order to expiate Regan's possession, Lamont must enter the darkness completely. Like Simon's conversion before Beelzebub, the Pig's Head in Golding's _Lord of the Flies_, Lamont renounces any former hesitancy and enters the pagan element completely. In return he gains a vision of a contemporary adult Kokumo, who is suddenly formed into an entomologist (Steven Kutcher), intent upon finding a means of diffusing the swarm instinct of the deadly locust.

As the monotone slow drone of the sound track reverberates, with
indications of minds-in-synch, Boorman juxtaposes Lamont's return to America aboard a 747, with a giant incarnation of the Evil (Bazoozoo) as a deadly locust. All . . . Regan, Sharon, Jean, Lamont, and the Evil converge upon the Georgetown house, site of the original exorcism.

Here, past and present, Christian and pagan, genesis and apocalypse, merge. In keeping with the assumed-identity plot, all the key figures in the deception assemble in the same place for the denouement. Boorman however, clouds the original focus of Lamont's spiritual conversion by doubling the deception at every level. Lamont's assumed-identity (pagan adventurer) was undertaken solely in his desire for a meaningful act that would restore his faith as a man-in-the-world. That the Evil Force, Bazoozoo, is revealed as a double of Regan and as a seductress is in keeping with the latent, ambiguous drives, that pushes Lamont on. At the end Dr. Jean Tuskin is revealed herself as possessed. She dies (as did the Catholic girl at the outset of the film) in a fire she does not resist. Locusts swarm throughout the Georgetown house as they did upon the boy Kokumo's African village. As Lamont dies in cutting the evil heart out of Regan's seductive double, Regan subdues the cosmic destruction (the house splits apart) by beating the air in a echo action the young Kokumo took in saving his village from a similar cosmic holocaust.

The ending is too busy, and reveals only that Boorman's original focus on Father Lamont has gotten away from him. Lamont has achieved a meaningful act; he has cared for another, deeply, and in this act he has sacrificed himself for it. That such action should release Regan from her possession is really immaterial. Essential to Lamont's story is
that he make a meaningful act. That Boorman must attend also to the
demands of Friedkin's narrative only obscures the thrust of what essentially
is a drama about Christian existentialism. Several real problems make
"Exorcist II" much less of a film that it should have been. There are
just too many circular references that are tied together mechanistically.
The link, for example, between Jean's increasing anxiety throughout,
and final incineration is just not clearly developed. There is too, no
satisfactory context made for the embodiment of Regan's possession by the
Evil Force as there was by it embodying the locust. For that matter, the
Evil (Bazoozoo) might have been more successful embodied in streetcars
out of control. In choosing such esoteric manifestations of Evil allows
Boorman to engage in pyrotechniques.

Boorman's preoccupation with Lamont's spiritual crisis is a theme
in keeping with his own vision. Yet, by virtue of the demands of Friedkin's
precedent narrative, Lamont's act, restores to him a kind of heroic
status. This ending is inevitable in that the possessed must finally be
freed, yet Lamont gains freedom in the act, and that should have been
Boorman's expression of his story. That Lamont frees another is super-
fluous and essentially destructive of the nature of contingency upon
which Lamont's quest began.

The ending then is a mix of several points-of-view, neither of which
serve the narrative he has constructed well. Does Lamont's sacrifice
make him a Christian again? Will another force enter the exorcised Regan,
and as within Kokumo, make her an embodiment of yet another evil? Is
Boorman suggesting that Christian dogma and pagan ritual have similar
curative powers? Does science have a role in mental health? Will a Boorman hero ever get a woman who is more than just a seductress? Do we care? At the end, we have lost sight of the important metaphysical question; what is the distinction between an avowed humanism and a sense of humanity in a world full of evil? Boorman's Father Lamont is, initially a complex, embodiment of an ideal that has appeared in various forms within most of his films. The unfortunate attention to precedent plots and actors conspired in "Exorcist II" to take Boorman away from dealing fully with his questing ideal.

Nonetheless, "Exorcist II" does, I would argue, contain some of Boorman's best work. His continuing attempt to lend cosmic expression to a personal anxiety, is clearly a statement of the importance of his metaphysic. While he searched for a cinematic expression of the epiphanic, Boorman lost sight of his character and his narrative. Yet within his technical concern in achieving a visualization of man's quest, on a grand scale, Boorman has operated like Fellini or Antonioni, always at the edge of a cinema. If he could tell a story with the same elan as he achieved in some of his effects, Boorman would indeed be a director of stature. Perhaps the seminal quest theme that runs through all of Boorman's work needs to be tackled directly.
In the Grail legends, two oppositions are at work. The personal instinct for violence and passion, versus the ideals of community and harmony of fellowship as demanded by the Round Table. The Arthurian romances are simply tales about men who were stretched physically and psychologically beyond their means.\(^1\) Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* was written at a time when feudal institutions could no longer stand up against more democratic urges. Time-honoured political institutions of the fifteenth century were in chaos. As Elizabeth Pochoda has written, "the change from the paternal society of Uther, to the fraternal political society of Arthur's Round Table, meant the Round Table must generate within itself, the renunciations and restraints, which in a former age were imposed by the ruler."\(^2\) In the Arthurian romances, man as aggressor caused the fellowship of the Round Table to become decadent. The Grail quest became the vehicle for personal and social renewal. The "quest" became both an opportunity and a symbol. It was an opportunity to seek out and rectify injustice, as well as a symbol of whole-heartedness in the face of temptation.

Boorman's filmic treatment of the seminal legend does not centre on the meaning of the Grail. It is instead a film that makes a spectacle of adolescent violence. It is a film in which Boorman's preoccupation with images lies at the heart of its failings.\(^3\) The distortion of colour, and visual pyro-techniques creates a lushness that makes the Arthurian world he is depicting seem a fake. Boorman's filmic landscape in "Excalibur"
has simply become too rich. The chaos and ruin of sixth-century Britain after the departure of the Roman Legions is a very staged ruin. The film is too bright to capture the lure of alchemy and pantheism, and too clean to capture the darkness of Celtic mysticism. "Excalibur" suffers an excessive attention to decor, costume, and lighting, at the expense of a solid script. Boorman's sense of the surreal backfires. Myth is depowered through the excesses of artificiality.

The film does recreate the major narrative incidents of Arthur's life; the birth of Arthur, his winning of the kingdom with Excalibur, Lancelot's affair with Guinevere, the Grail quest, and Arthur's death. At the forefront of these incidents is not however the depiction of character, or the medieval chaos that spurned a new order. At the centre is the "look" of Boorman's mise-en-scene. Boorman's frame is decidedly without chaos, or magic. Boorman's "Excalibur" is too full of pristine colours to be about darkness. It is closer to a rock-video, or a television commercial.

The opening episode reveals the degree to which Boorman has ignored realism. The ambience he posits in its stead does not work. Uther Pendragon a Celtic Lord and Arthur's father is engaged in battle with another knight, Gorlois. The whole battle-scene is back-lit by arc lights cutting through a glowing fog. Reminiscent of Kurosawa's "Ugetsu," warriors wage a battle in silhouette. Dressed in black and shining armour, the sequence has a futuristic look, rather than the worn-down ruinous look of medieval, feudal chaos. The battle goes badly for Uther so he calls upon Merlin, the magician who delivers Excalibur the magic sword, green and glistening from the lake. There is neither context for Merlin's action,
or sufficient connection with him to Uther to establish any kind of lineage or loyalty. Suddenly, Boorman reveals Uther's victorious banquet that is more appropriate to an Arab Sheik's tent, than to the cold wet climes of Cornwall. The victory spectacle is a display of belly-dancing by Gorlois' wife that spurs the hot blood of all the warriors present. A track-shot down a table reveals warriors roused by lust. Suddenly, Boorman interacts a rather obvious symbol. A huge battering-ram smashes through yet another entrance of Gorlois' castle. Rather than depicting the self-indulgence that is to destroy a kingdom, Boorman's sexist, banal, symbol reveals the knights to be having one round of jolly good fun after another. Boorman's knights are little more than hormone-rich school-boys. Such stereotyping depowers the power of the Grail quest when it appears in the film, because Boorman depicts his protagonists without any sense of dissolution whatever. Uther, their leader is simply the most macho of all. He goes after Igraine resolutely, and seemingly without the sense of obligation of Merlin's part in this lechery that has been unleashed.

Warrior aggression was part of feudal chaos; Boorman's rendering of it is however, far too decorative. The debauchery in Gorlois' Great hall goes on while Uther, transformed into an image of his enemy, seduces Igraine. It is however, a debauchery without the squallor that should attend it. Boorman's frame is as arresting as a Constable canvas, but his characters lack will. In this sequence, Uther's knights sit about banging away with swords on tables. The staging depowers the violence. Where the orchestration of this sequence should be bristling with montages to reveal the varying levels of self-interest, Boorman's "long take" reduces the
baseness to ridicule. It is as if the debauchery were part of the curriculum at Chartwell. It has all the lifelessness imposed by an over-attention to form.

Unfortunately this scene is played over and over throughout the film. Aggression and sexual debauchery is not enough however to pass off even as a collegiate version of the Arthurian legend. What the story needs is the magic of red squallor, and a sense of esprit de corps that goes beyond common lust. Boorman's attempts to reveal these two elements, the essence of the Arthurian Tales, fails.

Take for example, the episode in which the young Arthur saves the besieged castle of Leon de Gratz. Arthur's loyal campaigners ride into battle, bedecked in glistening stainless steel armour. His enemies of course, wear black. It's as silly as Lone Ranger's white horse "Silver"; and even more ridiculous when you consider the world Boorman is revealing. The would-be knights of the Round Table a la Boorman, belong in a television "garbage-bag" commercial. The fight scenes seem to extend that same television look. Battle scenes are shot without the rapid editing so amenable to film. Each image, it seems, competes in composition with another. The "look" has become important ... the narrative thread is lost. Arthur's heroism is revealed solely by his lack of armour and chimpanzee-like ability to scale castle walls. That he too, is struck dumb by a face of a girl (Guinevere de Gratz) like his father, does nothing to mark him out as one who will jell his adventurous knights into a new moral order. Other than his boyish face, Boorman creates an Arthur without any intimations of that inner call that will unite his knights into a political
ideal.

The scene in which Boorman depicts the Round Table is yet another example of "look" having consumed plot. Shafts of white and blue light reflected from modified Christian crosses fall on all the "right" faces. It might have worked in "Scarface" in 1931. Fifty years later, such visual expressions are banal. All are revealed sitting about in glistening stainless steel splendour. Yet, that is all they do, just sit about. From this decadence, to Arthur's decision to seek the Grail, occurs in about five minutes of film time. Previous to Arthur's sudden mention of it, the Grail has been wholly absent from the film. Social interaction has been entirely ego-driven. With Arthur's mention of, "we must find what we have lost," the silvered knights all suddenly scurry away, suddenly redirected with purpose. One knight retorts, "we will find the Grail, or die." This kind of infantile reductionism, and forced dialogue makes the Grail quest meaningless, and the film quite silly.

From a myth filled with dramatic tension between a democratic ideal, and the struggle for personal motivation, Boorman in "Excalibur" creates only a pyrotechnical adolescent sci-fi flick. Visually the film is so impressed with itself, that it fails to delivers its intended narrative. The more Boorman tries to capture a special look of magic and mystery, the more the power of the Arthurian romance recedes from him. In the original legend, two elements of enchantment are basic to the narrative. One is the pagan concept of renewal inherent in the landscape. The other is the wizardry that Merlin represents and brings to Arthur. Both these elements are important, in that through them, a tone of magic is created
that helps move epic toward myth.

In the original Arthurian legend, two elements within the landscape achieve the ideal of renewal ... the Grail, and the sword, Excalibur. Through the Grail, the knight-questors are forced into an awareness of the wasteland that is an expression of their barren and ego-driven souls. Excalibur, the sword, represents that movement from impasse to renewal. Through Excalibur, it is man who is charged with affecting destiny. With Excalibur, ideals that are grounded in purpose, move from action to completion. Boorman's film fails to conceptualize these two important elements beyond the visually superficial. This superficially depowers his whole spectacle. More, these two icons fail to become the centre around which the narrative should revolve.

More serious however, is Boorman's rendering of Perceval's quest for the Grail. As we follow Perceval's quest for the Grail through the Wasteland, an inversion takes place that depowers the whole meaning of the quest. Boorman takes us with Perceval, through mountain-tops and hill-side glens. The vision is one of man being superior to the elements. In revealing Perceval as persevering against the elements, such as the blizzard he sets up for us, Boorman reveals not a tortured, but a triumphant soul. Boorman makes machismo fortitude, not inner desolation achieve the Grail; and it is this very inversion that Boorman's interpretation of the Grail legend becomes shallow. Action rather than angst prevails in Boorman's vision. That action is so direct that it buries completely any notion of an inner spiritual crisis. Boorman's wasteland becomes, rather than a surreal extension of self, a very literal set. Less fortunate, and presumably
less macho knights are revealed hanging from dead trees. Boorman's graphic realism here is quite outside the Grail spirit when he reveals ravens eating the eyes that hang from a dead man's skull. Gratuitous violence is supposed to cover for mystery, only it doesn't. The violence gratifies, but it also confuses. Who hung these knights? Why? If Mordred and Morgana are at the core of the vortex that draws the knights, why is Perceval saved from the same fate? We don't know. Boorman relishes us with colour, instead of intriguing us with the magic of narrative detail.

Inherent in the Grail quest is the passage from impasse to the place of renewal, the place Northrop Frye calls the "green world." This green world is crucial to the Arthurian legend in that is equates a reaffirmation to serve mankind. This medieval notion of landscape coming to reflect a mindscape that is in synch with the ordered hierarchy of the cosmos, reveals the extent to which iconography plays such an inherent part of the magic of the original tale. Boorman seems to ignore the metaphoric in favour of a highly expressionist view. Although a brilliant green light emanates from the blade of Excalibur in the forest, it is just too bright and too literal to fuse the symbolic nature of Excalibur into the rest of the narrative.

Boorman takes the metaphoric greenness too literally. For example, there are sequences in the Arthurian romance when green abounds. When Arthur pulls Excalibur from the stone, greenness reverberates about the whole forest. When Arthur plunges Excalibur between his wife and Lancelot who are sleeping nude together in the forest, greens explode everywhere. When the knights led by Perceval and Lancelot go forth from the wasteland
to do battle with Mordred and Morgana, all is cast in a glowing green. Ostensibly Boorman is representing the element of renewal inherent in the sword. It does not work. Boorman's depiction of Arthur as a child of nature fails because the effects surrounding his spiritual rebirth are overblown. The surreal effects achieved by the colour desaturation process in the sequence in "Deliverance" in which Ed climbs the cliff-face above the gorge on the Cahulawassee, works because of the incredible intimacy Boorman achieves with his camera. We become Ed; the solarization process Boorman uses here works because the rest of the film is shot in a contrasting pale, foreboding colour. In "Excalibur," the highlighting of green is done so vividly, and so often, that any sense of mystery is undercut by artificiality.

There is one scene in which Sir Gwain while searching for the Grail is shown wandering among a distressed settlement of peasants. Here, the poverty of the natural setting, and peasants denuded of dignity and wealth are seen cutting furze from an unyielding barren downland. As Gwain rides through their settlement he rightly suffers their verbal abuse. His own sense of desolation surfaces as he receives their indignity, not with contempt, but with compassion. Here, Boorman does achieve the ironic element inherent in the quest. However in the rest of the film, adventure and not loss, prevails. The insipid green that over-glow from Excalibur mocks its own restorative, and spiritual power.

The sequence in which Perceval and Lancelot leave the wasteland with the Grail, is yet another example of Boorman's failure to take his film beyond the light show that it has become. As horses and men charge onward
ostensibly renewed, the foliage they pass turns magically from deadening grey to brilliant green. The problem is that looking closely one can see the green lights go on. More, as the "renewed" knights hoof through fields of apple trees in full blossom, white apple blossoms are seen to be dropped just in front of the camera. If Boorman is pointing to the blossomed filled death place of Arthur in Avalon, it is yet another crude colour effect that simply does not work.

Boorman's failing in "Excalibur" is a failing of the literal. His depiction of the seminal legend has become stuck in its own adventure. The green world, the mythic magical landscape of change that is so much a part of the original metaphor needs an interpretation vastly more complex than violence and rich coloration. Boorman's greenness is too crisp, too clear, and too artificial. The legend requires a "Middle Earth" quality something akin to the surreal landscape of Altman's "Popeye."

Shakespeare knew this well. His dream world in A Midsummer's Night Dream is peopled by fairies; it is a place of dreams and magic. In A Winter's Tale, the rural society of Bohemia represents that other, green world. In The Tempest the idyllic island serves to energize Prospero, and enable him to summon up the power of the cosmos. Boorman, who did so well in developing an interior landscape in previous films (notably "Point Blank," "Leo the Last," and "Deliverance," ) suffers from the limitations he imposed by remaining literal. His own filmic background, should have served him better. For example, the romantic comedies of the forties such as "Bringing Up Baby," or "The Philadelphia Story" placed the mythic green element in "Connecticut" ... a location safely beyond the verbal
barrage of cosmopolitan New York. The mention of Connecticut holds subtle promise that the battling lovers in these films will get back together. Boorman's literalization of the ideal of renewal is technically too brilliant, and structurally unsound to serve his treatment of this seminal legend well. He might have, for example considered a surreal treatment as in Antonioni's "L'Aventure," or utilized a more lyric camera, instead of his own stagey and discrete camera a la Scorsese. He might too have considered a less prosaic dialogue filled more with nuance than of bravado. In his own case, his heavy-handedness both in terms of colour, and other elements, creates a space-age look. "Excalibur" becomes a medieval "Star Wars," and less because of it.

Boorman's task in "Excalibur" was to reveal for us the rise and fall of a dynasty founded upon a Christian faith, and led astray by mysticism. The role therefore of Merlin, as a foil to all the supposed forces of good in the tale, is crucial. In Malory's Morte D'Arthur, Merlin represents temptation. In Boorman's treatment he comes to stand for little more than sublimated sexuality. The most hopeful feature of Boorman's Merlin (Nicol Williamson) is the twinkle in his eye. Boorman makes Merlin sadly, and ironically ponderous, jealous, and essentially misogynist, when he should be light, and quixotic, and ever full of mischief in the powers of darkness he is capable of unleashing. Alas, Boorman's Merlin is an imp who is never allowed to be impish.

In Malory's tale, Merlin's attraction to the lady Vivian caused him to reveal to her his secrets, which she used against him to seal him up in a tree forever. In Boorman's film, Merlin's strange attachment to Morgana
(Arthur's half-sister) gives his narrative the chance to continue the sexual nature of the violence, with which the film began. In the scene in which Merlin has enticed Morgana to his caverns of alchemy beneath Camelot, we see the strangeness of Boorman's vision. In Boorman's film, Merlin leads Morgana to his enclave to kill her, as she has betrayed her power. This descent is however, a descent into sublimated sexuality. Early in the film, Boorman has Merlin give Uther the chance to seduce Igraine. The begotten child Arthur would be Merlin's to raise. Merlin is by extension, a surrogate lover. Boorman shows the peering Morgana, Lancelot and Arthur's queen Guinevere, making love. Boorman's depiction of Merlin as being both attracted and repulsed by Morgana is revealing. Her "meddling acts" does, as in the Grail myth, bring the world to the edge of ruin. Yet Merlin is affected by Morgana enough to allow for his sorcery to bring about an illicit affair that will result in the birth of Arthur.

Through Morgana, and her treacherous ways, Boorman reveals man's basic fear of women. Morgana in the film encapsulates Merlin in a tree-like stalagmite. The rescuer, Arthur, arrives upon the scene to see Lancelot and Guinevere making love in the forest. He uses Excalibur not to slay them, but to serve as a warning of his renewed power. In driving Excalibur into the stone between the lovers, Arthur is able to act against the woman as enchantress. He is not however able to stop the evil Morgana, or her incestuous son Mordred.

Mordred's birth in the film signifies a breach in nature; it represents the degree of inturning that the kingdom has undergone. The source of the Grail, has changed. Boorman places it within Morgana. Female temptation
and possession becomes the focus of what was initially man's lust. Boorman makes Morgana the embodiment of evil. Her son Mordred must slay the father. When Arthur plants Excalibur between his sleeping wife and his former ally, he reveals the knowledge that the sword, like Merlin, must be used only for good. Yet in the film, Boorman has Perceval realize the sword must only be used for good. Retrieving it from the lake, Perceval uses it to wage other battles against the enchantress. Boorman continues to cast women as the root of evil to the end of the film. Upon her death-bed, as in the seminal legend, Arthur and Guinevere forgive each other. Mordred turns against his mother, and kills her as she ages before his eyes. Arthur in turn uses Excalibur one last time to kill Mordred. In that act Merlin's power is gone forever, and man is authentic and free.

There is however, a disturbing element to the inturning of Boorman's treatment of women in the film. In Malory's tale, women are not cast as evil doers directly. They are also extensions of the agape that defines the Round Table. Guinevere may seduce Lancelot, she also inspires him. Malory in fact sent Guinevere to a monastery for years after her adulterous affair with Lancelot. In "Excalibur" Boorman receives the scopophilic gaze. Women know they receive man's gaze, and use it. At the beginning Igraine is as much a part of Uther's temptation as his own lust. She dances for him as much as he wants her. This scopophilia runs throughout the film. Merlin watches Igraine; Arthur watches Lancelot and Guinevere; we watch Morgana and Merlin. Moreover, when we cannot watch further, the offending female is killed. Boorman's matricide is vastly different to the matricide in Malory's tale. It is akin to the kind of death Zed makes
of May in "Zardoz." Women become controllers, and hence they must be killed. What is left finally is a world of male camaraderie ("Deliverance"); of love between males, ("Hell in the Pacific"); or ultimately of self-love ("Point Blank"). The result is a quest that backfires upon itself.

"Excalibur" is then an adolescent fantasy. Its reduction to sexual voyeurism that is linked to violence is an expression of a most conservative doctrine. In "Excalibur," women have become powerful, and men resent it. The evolution of human consciousness has a long way to come. Perhaps "Excalibur" fails because Boorman has done what needed to be done, in previous work. He utilized the surreal in "Point Blank," the religious in "Deliverance," the mythic in "Exorcist II," and the humourous in "Leo the Last." Unfortunately, Boorman's straight version of "Excalibur" was doomed to little more than a spectacle at the outset. Boorman's attempt to inject the film with all its grandiose effects resulted sadly in a spectacle that did not prove worthy of the original.

In conclusion, it must be noted however, that Boorman has attempted to do with all the pyrotechnics of the modern cinema, that which others would not touch. His honest attempt to recreate the seminal legend without the parody as in Monty Python, or the opera of Syerberg's "Parsifal," or the contemporary intimacy of Rohmer, demanded a head-on approach to the violent spirit of an age gone by. Boorman's "Excalibur" is a spectacle, and although it is too spectacular for its own narrative, it reveals a film maker who is not satisfied with the generally accepted notions of the cinematic. He has taken chances, and failed where others have succeeded in more distant interpretations. If Monty Python's "The Holy
Grail" is true to the spirit of the Grail quest, "Excalibur" is true to events of the Arthurian romances. The echoes of myth in Boorman's "Excalibur" show him to believe in a world that is still the private domain of males. Man is violent because of, and for, women. It is an ominous and frightening commentary, but one Boorman shows us that has been apart of our culture for almost a thousand years. That interaction, strong enough to shape the Grail myth, Boorman believes shapes us still.
At the outset of this study, it was stated that Boorman's feature films contained narrative elements and character types that were also found in the Grail legend. The result of such similitudes was a body of work that seemed to echo the major themes of the Arthurian romance. It was also noted that the faith that drove the medieval questors, and ultimately led them to a new epiphanic vision did not occur among Boorman's twentieth-century protagonists. The insight and integrity gained, if only, by Boorman's contemporary questors was an insight that revealed the heart of man to be dark with violence and self-interest. This knowledge of man's limited stature in the face of a universe conditioned to enmity makes Boorman neither a Christian or a strict existentialist. His vision of man as evident from those feature films in which he had a large measure of production and script control, lies halfway between the Christian vision inspired by the Arthurian myths, and man's chaotic absurdity as expressed by the secular existentialist. Simply, Boorman's protagonists reveal him to be an Immanentist.

The Christian Romance

The Grail hero of the Arthurian romance was the reincarnation of Christ on earth. Drawing on pagan themes and motifs of Celtic mythology, the Arthurian romances celebrate the virtues of Christian chivalry. Leaving little room for the orthodox Church, the hero of the romances
Perceval, wins the Grail because he is found to be heir to the Fisher King, becomes a Christian, is personally resolute, and is strong of character. In the romances the Fisher King is stricken with disease, and Arthur and the Round Table have lapsed into sloth. The land is plunged into war and ruin. Perceval storming the Grail castle retrieves the Grail and rules benevolently, and humanely for ten years. When he dies, the Grail disappears forever. Ostensibly it goes to heaven with him.

The Grail hero then manifests the spirit of Christ. He learns civility as opposed to savagery, and becomes an authentic human being as opposed to a brute. The Grail hero is the symbol of ideal man. Like Christ, he is perfected humanity. The Christ-figure Perceval, comes to man to destroy his incarnate error. The stress upon chastity of the Grail seeker is due largely to the hero's resemblance to Christ, but is also due to the sex-fearing strain of medieval Christianity that looms throughout the Arthurian romances. At the last, faith through the example of Christ motivates the Grail hero's drive not to get somewhere, but to be something. The lure of transcendence implicit in the Grail myth overcomes the restlessness that lies at the core of human history.

Boorman's heroes deny God: Father Lamont in "Exorcist II" turns his back on his Catholic orthodoxy and rejects his faith. Walker in "Point Blank" has no faith. The killer-instinct motivates Lewis in "Deliverance," and Zed in "Zardoz." It prevents the protagonists in "Hell in the Pacific" from penetrating beyond militarism. Leo sees absurdity in "Leo the Last," and Nan, Guy, and Steve, in "Having a Wild Weekend" have nothing to replace their restlessness. Boorman's protagonists are driven,
but they are not driven by a Christian faith.

The Existential Dance

In opposition to the faith-filled chivalric view of the Grail myth lies secular existentialism. Born of nineteenth-century rationalism and twentieth-century destruction, the existentialist degraded Christian dogma and reduced it to a means of slavery. The existentialist refused to accept the notion of the transcendent. For the existentialist, man's unadorned, unattached free will made him construct a mental interpretation of the world. For the existentialist, one mental construction was as insignificant and as arbitrary as any other. History in this context could have no lesson. Man for the existentialist was a meaningless, free, passion-filled being. Life was absurd.

Though Boorman's protagonists witness chaos, they are not creatures like Godot, or Krapp, who twist and squirm, naked before the nothingness of man's condition.² Beckett's play Waiting for Godot sets out the challenge for modern man. For Beckett not terribly much divides the religious and irreligious in man. The religious man sees his waiting in terms of Godot's coming. The irreligious man cannot believe that Godot will ever come, or that he ever even existed. Both accept life seriously; both see human existence beginning and ending in pathos.

To the existentialist existence is futile. Yet this futility is profoundly religious in that it offers modern man no hopes, illusions, or cathartic reconciliation. The existentialist determines to look directly
at life's bleakness in complete awareness of his total, and individual freedom. For the existentialist, man's life cannot be tragic, because that implies a falling short of an ideal. Meaninglessness doesn't call for super-human effort, or indeed suicide. It simply calls for man to carry-on. In carrying-on, and in being simply a human being, existence takes on its own particular, and peculiar meaning.

Boorman as Immanentist

By and large Boorman's characters strive to find meaning. More often than not, that search is grounded in a misperception. It is only after Walker's penetration of the syndicate in "Point Blank" that he discovers his ethic of retribution is hollow. It is only after Steve's flight from media exploitation in "Having a Wild Weekend," that he discovers the ideal of freedom is impossible. Ed's knowledge of the murder he committed in "Deliverance" will haunt him forever. Zed in "Zardoz" sets out to free the primitive, only to discover that he himself chooses to remain a primitive at the end. The meaning each of Boorman's protagonists find is unique, though it is not cathartic.

The passion that drives Boorman's heroes does not stem from an outer religious faith. Nor is it an expression of existential awareness. It is simply part of their human nature. Something makes Boorman's heroes search for transcendence. His heroes are continually running a gauntlet, be it rivers ("Deliverance"), highways ("Having a Wild Weekend"), religious orthodoxy ("Exorcist II"), technocracy ("Zardoz"), racial and social inequality ("Leo the Last"), or militarism ("Hell in the Pacific"). The
blindness to the futility of their often impassioned quest make Boorman's heroes the antithesis of being free.

Boorman sees man as being infused with a great spiritual power. It is a force not present in history, as say the god-figure in the Arthurian romances; it is instead inherent in, and at work within, human history itself. This force that is so much a part of Eastern religion as evident in the films of Kurosawa, could be called Immanentism.

Boorman's Immanentism is not unlike Hegel's notion of the dialectic, or Jung's sense of the collective unconscious. It is a softer view of man that denies the radical scepticisms of the secular existentialist. As an immanentist, Boorman can embrace failure; hence his questing heroes belong surely to the twentieth century. The achievements of Boorman's protagonists often end in failure at the worst. At best, their actions are deficient or inadequate. Father Lamont ("Exorcist II"), and Walker ("Point Blank"), each die without reconciliation. Steve ("Having a Wild Weekend"), loses a lover, and Marvin ("Hell in the Pacific"), a friend. Ed ("Deliverance"), is stricken by the knowledge of his evil heart. Zed ("Zardoz") rejects this knowledge; and Leo ("Leo the Last"), doesn't realize that in righting injustice, he himself has become violent. Yet, in each of Boorman's films there is hope. Despite the violence, Leo's catatonic life has become impassioned. Lamont has grown from an orthodox Catholic to a more caring humanist. Steve will fall in love again, and expect less. Perhaps Marvin's American son will not be a soldier, and perhaps one of Zed's children will grow to be interested once again in the computer. Ed will never, ever sleep the sleep of a child again; but
The significant factor in Boorman's films is the limited and guarded hope his protagonists express. Revelation is beyond the Immanetist worldview. Boorman's Immanentism is marked by narratives that end with an implied sense of hope. No matter how limited or deficiently his characters have run, whatever gauntlet is placed before them, the desire, the passion, that divine element in man, has had a part in its expression. As such though every human potential for the completely ephipanic act is thwarted, one gets the feeling in Boorman's characters that they would not make the same mistakes again. This sense of the limited, but inevitable sense of progress that is man's history is the operative understanding of Immanentism. Until the dialectic process completes itself, single human activity accounts for little. Immanentism holds that little by little, over expanses of time man's full creative expression is manifest. There is something in store for man in Boorman's films and that is man himself. Immanentism dulls the Christian notion that man is able to achieve perfection; it denies too the existential negativism that would turn mankind's achievements to ashes. Since the divine element, in man has had a hand in whatever he has constructed, there are in all Boorman's feature films, those characters who do perceive some small final truth.

Boorman's characters are limited, yet they are also divine. In creating characters who are easily possessed yet wholly inadequate, Boorman does not have to make his heroes totally responsible. Hence the violence in Boorman's films ("Deliverance," "Point Blank," "Hell in the Pacific," "Zardoz") can have a meaningful context. Immanentism holds
that the Nazi Holocaust was not simply a hideous event as it appears from our partial viewpoint, it has a justifiable place in the greater scheme of meaning that will eventually be a more human history. We can expect that war will continue in "Hell in the Pacific." Other mountain-men will continue to avenge the loss of the Cahulawassee by murdering new intruders in "Deliverance." Syndicates will continue to doublecross members in American cities, and the media will find even more manipulative ways to exploit. For Boorman, violence is a part of human nature, because save for a small few, man has not yet evolved to the way of peace.

There is no account for the death of God in Boorman's films. Father Lamont doesn't give up his faith in "Exorcist II," he seeks a better expression of it. Zed is not ready to accept the expansiveness of the new world-view manifest in the Tabernacle Computer in "Zardoz." For the moment, he retreats to outer displays of machismo, and a docile woman's love. Ed's nightmare of the hand that rises from the Cahulawassee Lake is a symbol of the violence he committed. His unspoken hope in the film is that through it, he might live more fully in future. Walker's consciousness of a wasted life, played back in the moment of his death in "Point Blank," is a too-late acknowledgement of a life devoid of love. God does not die in Boorman's protagonists. He is at work at war, in ruinous technological change, and even in the closedness of a strict religious orthodoxy. God cannot be absent in Boorman's films; he is ever-present in the heart of man. However, the blackness of man's heart is always present in Boorman's films. His characters, he reveals are victims of an incomplete history.
In utilizing narrative elements, characters, and themes that are echoes of those of the Arthurian romances, Boorman has been able to render archtypal figures in a modern context. Boorman's preoccupation with such mythic themes as man's inate restlessness, his relationships and roles with women, contingency (or magic), and violence, shows us that these fears and preconceptions still persist. In a century without God, Boorman is unable to offer a solution to man's human dilemma. Man for Boorman is violent, sexist, compulsive, ego-driven, and afraid. In spite of these failings, Boorman's characters long for more. Echoes of Arthur persist.
Preface: Notes on a Critical Method


Chapter One: Dying Gods and Transformations


3 Though fed by the climate of twentieth-century violence, existentialism is not strictly a twentieth-century philosophy. Soren Kierkegaard's believed by the mid-nineteenth-century that Christianity interfered with man acting as a free agent. For Kierkegaard the worship of a God in the image of man was ridiculous, because it made little different to anything, and hindered the arduous task of living freely with maximum intensity. For Kierkegaard, this traditional notion of God was dead.

Nietzsche (1844-1900) saw Christian dogma making slaves of Western man. For him the search for a divine being who brought order out of chaos was a
pathetic delusion that prevented the expression of human freedom. For Nietzsche it was not just the traditional image of God, but God himself, who was dead. For Sature (1905-1980), who witnessed the depravity of man in the twentieth-century and acted in freedom, the notion of a belief in a merciful God was impossible. For a more complete, brief, overview of the relationship of Christian and existential thought, see John Wilds, ed. Christianity and Existentialism (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), p. 66-148.

4 The etymological root of the word absurd is instructive. It is derived from the Latin, "ab surdo," and means strictly, "out of harmony." hence the existentialist must exist alien and outside of any comforting religious or social dogma.


6 Ibid., p. 41.

7 Ibid., p. 11.

8 Ibid., p. 9.

9 Ibid., p. 130.


11 Cavendish, King Arthur and the Grail, p. 137.

12 Ibid., p. 60.

13 On the other hand, the Grail legends do contain examples of less than chivalric attitudes towards women. In Tristram and Isolde, a knight Gandin who was a violionist is urged to play for Isolde by Mark, King of Cornwall. Gandin is promised anything. Of course Gandin an old admirer, asks for Isolde. Mark bound to honour his word, gives the weeping lady to Gandin. Fortunately she is rescued by Tristram, but not before the whole episode has echoed with sado-masochistic appeal.

In another episode Galahad and Palomides are involved in a duel. The prize for the duel was Palomides girl. In the following tourney the two knights fight so hard that one of Galahad's sword blows was deflected from Palomides helmet, only to behead his horse. Galahad ashamed to have killed the horse told Palomides he could keep the girl. A knight without a woman to win is one thing, but a knight without a horse is quite another!
Chapter Three: Aesthetics - An Overview


Chapter Five: "Point Blank" (1967)


2 Ibid.


Chapter Six: "Hell in the Pacific" (1968)

Chapter Seven: "Leo the Last" (1970)


Chapter Eight: "Deliverance" (1972)


2. Ibid., p. 233.


Chapter Nine: "Zardoz" (1973)


Chapter Ten: "Exorcist II: The Heretic" (1977)


3Ibid., p. 211.


7Ibid.

Chapter Eleven: "Excalibur" (1981)


Conclusion: Boorman as Immanentist


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1962 The Concrete Vision: New Festival Theatre, Chichester
1962 The Island That Sells Itself: A Picture of Portland
1962 Man of Steam
1962 One in a Hundred
1962 The Globe Shrinkers
1962 The Big Stride
1962 Angles and Degrees
1962 The Christmas Machine
1963 Citizen '63
1963 Six "Ays" to Saturday
1963 Film About Salisbury
1963 Honorable Retreat
1963 Granite Man
1963 Clay Man
1963 Fair Game
1963 Art by Design
1963 Paper Roots
1963 The Friendly Dragon
1964 The Quarry (drama; one hour)
1964 The Newcomers (drama series; one hour)
1965 The Great Director: D.W. Griffith (one hour)

B) Feature Films (1965-1981)

"Having a Wild Weekend (1965)
Screenplay by Peter Nichols; directed by John Boorman; produced by David Deutsch; presented by Warner Brother Pictures; running time 91 minutes.

Steve ........ Dave Clark
Guy ........ Robin Bailey
Lenny ....... Lenny Davidson
Mike ........ Mike Smith
Louis ........ David Lodge
Beatnik ..... Ron Lacey

Dinah ........ Barbara Ferris
Nan ........ Yootha Joyce
Rick ........ Rick Huxley
Denis ........ Denis Payton
Zissell ...... David De Keyser
Grey ........ Hugh Walters
"Point Blank" (1966)

Screenplay by Alexander Jacobs and David and Rafe Newhouse. Based on the novel The Hunter by Richard Stark; directed by John Boorman; produced by Judd Bernard and Robert Chartoff; a Judd Bernard-Irwin Winkler production released by M.G.M; running time 92 minutes.

Walker .......... Lee Marvin               Chris .......... Angie Dickenson
Yost .......... Keenan Wynn          Brewster .......... Carroll O'Conner
Frederick Carter . Lloyd Bockner   Stegman .......... Michael Strong
Mal Reese ........ John Vernon        Lynne .......... Sharon Acker

"Leo the Last" (1970)

Screenplay by Bill Stair and John Boorman; directed by John Boorman; director of photography Peter Suschitzky; music by Fred Myrow; produced by Irwin Winkler and Robert Chartoff; released by United Artists; running time 103 minutes.

Leo .............. Marcello Mastroianni        Lazlo .......... Vladek Sheybal
Margaret .......... Billie Whitelaw               Jasper .......... Keefe West
Rosco ............ Calvin Lockhart              Salambo .......... Glenna Forster Jones
Max ............. Graham Crowden               David .......... David De Keyser
Hilda ............ Gwen Davies                Mrs. Kowalski ... Patsy Smart
Kowalski ........ Kenneth J. Warren            Mr. Madi .......... Thomas Buson
Black Preacher .... Ram Holder
Mrs. Madi .......... Tina Solomon

"Deliverance" (1972)

Screenplay by James Dickey; directed by John Boorman; director of photography, Vilmos Zsigmond; editor, Tom Priestley; produced by John Boorman; distributed by Warner Bros; running time 109 minutes.

Ed ................ John Voight               Lewis.......... Burt Reynolds
Bobby ............ Ned Beatty                   Drew .......... Ronny Cox
Mountain Man ...... Billy McKinney             Toothless Man .... Herbert Coward
Sheriff Bullard ... James Dickey               Old Man .......... Ed Ramsey
Lonny ............ Billy Redden

"Zardoz" (1973)

Written, produced and directed by John Boorman; Associate Director, Charles Orme; photographed by Geoffrey Unsworth; edited by John Merritt, released by 20th Century-Fox; running time 103 minutes.
Zed .................. Sean Connery  Consuella ........ Charlotte Rampling
May .................. Sara Kestelman  Avalow ............ Sally Anne Newton
Friend ............... John Alderton  Arthur Frayn ..... Niall Buggy

"Exorcist II: The Heretic" (1977)

Screenplay by William Goodhart; directed by John Boorman; produced by John Boorman and Richard Lederer; director of photography, William Fraker; editor, Tom Priestley; music, Ennio Morricone; distributed by Warner Bros.; running time, 117 minutes.

Regan ............... Linda Blair  Father Lamont .... Richard Burton
Dr. Tuskin .......... Louise Fletcher  Father Merrin .... Max Von Sydow
Ecumenical Edwards  Ned Beatty  Kokumo ............ James Earl Jones

"Excalibur" (1981)

Screenplay by Rospo Pallenberg and John Boorman; produced and directed by John Boorman; adapted from Malory's "Le Morte D'Arthur" by Rospo Pallenberg; director of photography, Alexander Thomson; film editor, John Merritt; music by, Trevor Jones; and Orion Pictures release through Warner Bros.; running time, 140 minutes.

King Arthur......... Nigel Terry  Morgana ............ Helen Mirren
Lancelot ............ Nicholas Clay  Guinevere .......... Cheri Lunghi
Perceval ............ Paul Geoffrey  Merlin ............. Nicol Williamson
Mordred ............. Richard Addie  Uther ............. Gabriel Byrne
Urgens .............. Keith Buckley  Igraine ........... Katrine Boorman
Gawain .............. Liam Neeson