

Jack Smith and His Secret Flix

Program Notes by J. Hoberman



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American Museum of the Moving Image

JACK SMITH AND HIS SECRET FLIX *

November 29-December 14, 1997

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** In "The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez," Jack Smith evokes "the whole gaudy array of secret-flix"—the Hollywood genre films of his youth—"any flic we enjoyed." These were "valid only when done by one who is its master . . . valid only when done with flair, corniness, and enjoyment." Such "masterpieces [would] be remembered because of their peculiar haunting quality . . . The secret flic is also a guilty flic."*

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Cover photo: Sheila Bick in *Flaming Creatures*.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

By David Schwartz,
Chief Curator of Film & Video,
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Were it not for the tremendous job of research and restoration that Jim Hoberman and Jerry Tartaglia have undertaken for the past seven years, Jack Smith's films might not be available today. In addition to his prodigious research and writing, Jim has skillfully supervised the creation of the Plaster Foundation, which has the sole mission of protecting and preserving Smith's important legacy. Jerry Tartaglia has accomplished the seemingly impossible task of physically restoring the films, allowing contemporary audiences to see them in as close to their original form as possible. Jerry's article "Restoration and Slavery" (pp. 68-70) describes how he managed this daunting task.

Jim Hoberman first suggested a Jack Smith retrospective at the American Museum of the Moving Image nearly five years ago. It was his idea to program a series that combined Jack's own movies with films that captured his performances on camera, with Hollywood and avant garde films that Smith admired, and with movies that show Smith's influence on other filmmakers.

The AMMI series was planned to coincide with *Jack Smith: Flaming Creature*, the exhibition of Jack's photographs, visual art, costumes, and other material objects which is on view at our neighbor institution, the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center. The original champion and guiding light of the P.S.1 show was Anthony Vasconcellos, managing director of P.S.1 until his untimely death in 1995. Since then, project manager Lisa Bateman and curator Ed Leffingwell at P.S.1, have been generous with their support of the film series.

The National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts gave vital support to the restoration of *No President*, one of the major discoveries in the series. The Estate Project for Artists for AIDS assisted greatly in producing the *Secret of Rented Island* slide sequence. Special thanks to John Zorn and Hip's Road for generously facilitating the touring package.

Although it has been said that Jack Smith might have been opposed to the idea of a museum retrospective of his work, we hope that the vitality and beauty of his films is justification enough for this show.

Saturday, November 29, 2:00 p.m.

SCOTCH TAPE

Jack Smith, 1959-62, 3 mins. Color.

With Jerry Sims, Ken Jacobs, and Reese Haire (uncredited).

Music (uncredited): "Carinhoso" (Peter Duchin). Recording: Tony Conrad (uncredited).

PAPERDOLLS

Richard Preston, 1962, 4 1/2 mins. Color.

Stills by Jack Smith and Girlie Mags.

Music: Dick Andrews (Japanese flute).

A Master sense of spiritual nothingness . . . the most recent explosion of a major creative force in cinema has in this film filled a New Jersey [sic] junkyard with life and movement and spiritual weightlessness.

—Description of *Scotch Tape*

Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue No. 4 (1967)

Scotch Tape, Jack Smith's first released movie, is an apparently unedited 100-foot roll of 16mm Kodachrome film shot in 1959, using Ken Jacobs' Bell & Howell camera at one of Jacobs' *Star Spangled To Death* locations—the rubble-strewn site of the future Lincoln Center on Manhattan's West Side.¹

That day, Jacobs had assembled his cast in a destroyed building. Rusted cables in great tangles and broken slabs of concrete were all about. Smith borrowed the camera and filmed a dance of people exuberantly hopping around and under the cables. The area of wreckage was so extensive that he could film his dancers either from a few feet away or from hundreds of feet above them. Only by the size of the human figure is the scale of the shot perceptible . . .²

Despite its brevity, *Scotch Tape* anticipates the epic quality of Smith's subsequent films and theater pieces. The alternation of long shots and close-ups suggest considerable elapsed time between each set-up.

¹ Ken Jacobs, unpublished letter to *The Village Voice* (November 21, 1991); Jacobs, unpublished interview with the J.H. (March 11, 1996). Following *Scotch Tape*'s uncredited blurb in the Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue, Sheldon Renan's *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* mistakenly places the *Scotch Tape* location in New Jersey, as does John Fles' note in *Film Culture* #34 (Fall 1964). In addition to *Scotch Tape*, Smith made a number of color *tableaux vivant* (or, as he called them, *plastiques*) on the Lincoln Center site.

² P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) second edition, p.339.

In the longest shots [Smith] framed his group of actors in a corner of the cluttered image; then he positioned them under a covering slab of concrete so that in the brief duration of the shot the viewer must seek out the dancers in the visual field. In the closer shots he makes use of a green artificial flower under which they dance or which some of them hold in their teeth while jumping about. Once, the flower rests statically in focus while the blurred bodies vibrate in the background.³

To judge from the hyperactive quality of these “cavortings,” which Stefan Brecht describes as “partly the lady-like posturing gestures of inverts, partly jungle gym gamboling in some game of Tarzan,” Smith may have effectively undercranked Jacobs’ spring-wound camera.⁴

Jacobs, who appears in the film, frantically dancing and mugging along with another *Star Spangled To Death* performer Jerry Sims, proposed that Smith call his film *Reveling In The Dumps*, and even drew titles. Instead, Smith chose to name his movie after the dirty piece of tape that had wedged itself inside the camera gate and was consequently printed throughout in the upper right corner of the frame.⁵

For a three-minute film, *Scotch Tape* carries considerable conceptual weight. The title anticipates Warhol’s go-with-the-flow acceptance of cinematic “mistakes,” even as it draws the viewer’s attention to the perceptual tension between the film’s actual surface and its represented depth. That Smith’s edited-in-camera montage juxtaposes long shots with extreme close-ups and involves radical shifts in focal length only serves to emphasize the tape’s presence. “Its fixed position,” as Sitney observes, “offers a formal counterbalance to the play of scales upon which the shot changes are based.”⁶

Scotch Tape’s audio accompaniment was created three years later by Tony Conrad who, acting on Smith’s instructions, cut Peter Duchin’s rumba “Carinhoso” to match the footage. Watching the resultant sync event, Conrad later recalled, had a decisive effect on his own life, even inspiring him to become a filmmaker:

All of a sudden, a commitment emerged, a kind of special pleasure that reached out and grabbed the whole scene in a way that was inhabited by a very very special comic presence. It was on the way to ecstasy; in fact it was ecstasy. And at that point, I was won over to be a filmmaker; it

³ *ibid.* pp.339-40.

⁴ *Queer Theatre* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978). Brecht believes that the shot of the “blatantly de-functionalised flower” indicates that *Scotch Tape* was, in fact, edited. This seems unlikely although the truth cannot be readily ascertained as the camera original has been lost.

⁵ Jacobs interview *op.cit.* Sitney reports that “since Jacobs seldom had enough money to develop his rushes from *Star Spangled To Death*, he had shot several rolls of film before he realized the tape had gotten caught in the camera” *op.cit.* 340.

⁶ *ibid.*

was such an extraordinary thing to see, what happened to sound in the presence of a moving image.⁷

Conrad places this screening at the Charles Theater which would date it to the summer of 1962.⁸

On February 11, 1963, *Scotch Tape* was programmed by Jonas Mekas, along with Jacobs' *Little Stabs At Happiness*, the Jacobs-Fleischner Smith portrait *Blonde Cobra*, Ron Rice's *Senseless* and films by Bhub Stewart and Ray Wisniewski, at the Bleecker Street Cinema under the rubric "Newest Absurd and Zen Poetry." Smith's records indicate a check for the composite *Scotch Tape* print, provided by Mekas and dated, a week before the *Flaming Creatures* premiere, April 22, 1963. John Fles' brief appreciation, published in *Film Culture* No.34, is based on seeing *Scotch Tape* in Los Angeles during the summer of 1963.

Flaming Creatures aside, *Scotch Tape* would be Smith's only completed film—it was placed in distribution with the Film-Makers' Cooperative in 1962 and subsequently included in Anthology Film Archives' Essential Cinema.

An experiment with the hand-held photograph and a little animation . . .
Based on the Thomas Dekkar stanza: 'Beauty is but a flower/which
wrinkles will devour/death fall from the air/dust hath closed Helen's eye/I
am sick, I must die/Lord have mercy on us.'

—Description of *Paperdolls* by Richard Preston
Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue No.4 (1967).

Best known for his satirical cut-and-paste collage-animations, the Australian filmmaker-photographer Richard Preston was an active participant in the New York underground from the late 1950s through the late 1960s.

Preston's early films incorporated printed material ranging from Jules Feiffer cartoons and pulp magazine illustrations to ads for the Hedy Lamarr movie *Ecstasy*. Sometime after Smith "used and wrecked" Preston's Brooklyn darkroom during the spring of 1961, Preston printed a number of Smith's black-and-white negatives—many of them culled from the 1961-62 shooting sessions that produced *The Beautiful Book*. These were filmed, as interspersed with photographs of nude pin-ups cut out from men's magazines.⁹

In the context of 1962, Smith's photographs were shocking—the young Tony Conrad, for one, experienced them as pornographic. Nevertheless (and whether intentional

⁷ Tony Conrad in Reisman, David, "In the Grip of the Lobster: Jack Smith Remembered," *Millennium Film Journal* (Winter 1990-91) No.23/24 pp.64-65; unpublished Tony Conrad interview with J.H. (May 10, 1996).

⁸ For an account of the Charles Theater and its importance as a venue for underground films, see Hoberman, J. and Rosenbaum, Jonathan, *Midnight Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983) pp.40-46. For Smith's recollections of the Charles, see "Taboo of Jingola," *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool: The Writings of Jack Smith* ed. J. Hoberman and Edward Leffingwell (London: Serpent's Tail/High Risk Books) pp.102-5.

⁹ Richard Preston, unpublished interview with J.H. (April 30, 1996).

on Preston's part or not), the tension between Smith's posings and the mildly prurient T&A erotica of the day is considerable—and almost interesting.¹⁰

¹⁰ Tony Conrad unpublished interview *op.cit.*

Saturday, November 29, 2:00 p.m.
Sunday, November 30, 4:00 p.m.

FLAMING CREATURES

Jack Smith, 1963, 42 mins. Black-and-white.

Francis Francine (Himself), Delicious Dolores (Sheila Bick), Our Lady of the Docks (Joel Markman), The Spanish Girl (Dolores Flores), Arnold (Arnold), The Fascinating Woman (Judith Malina), and Maria Zazeela (Marian Zazeela). Photography: Jack Smith.

*Assistant Director: Marc Schleifer. Sound Recording: Tony Conrad. Special Assistant: Dick Preston. Facilities: The Windsor Theater.*¹

Music (uncredited): "Amapola," "China Nights (Yoshiko Yamiguchi)," "Concerto for Solo Violin" (Bela Bartok) "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels" (Kitty Wells), "Siboney," "Be-Bop-a-Lula" (The Everly Brothers).

Restoration: Francisco Gonzalez, Anthology Film Archives/The Plaster Foundation, 1991.

A burst of thrilling, pseudo-Oriental pageant music and a mysterious silvery screen: *Flaming Creatures* begins with an oblique evocation of Jack Smith's muse, the actress Maria Montez. The film's leisurely credit sequence is set to a three-and-a-half minute chunk of soundtrack lifted from the 1944 Montez vehicle *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, replete with sonorous gongs and portentous drum rolls, and the hissed promise that "Today . . . Ali Baba comes today!"

Ali Baba comes today! As in the Montez movie, as in all movies perhaps, there is a sense of anticipatory tumult in the harem that, like all harems, implies the possibility of unlimited erotic pleasures—a feminine (or at least un-masculine) polysexual, polymorphous perversity.²

¹ Dolores Flores, born Rene Rivera, is better known as Mario Montez. Arnold is Arnold Rockwood. According to Marian Zazeela, who created the credits, Malina declined Smith's offer to reconfigure her name as "Judith Medina."

Flaming Creature's numerous uncredited participants include Tony Conrad; David Gurin; Piero and Kate Helicz; Ray Johnson; Angus MacLise; Ed Marshall; Henry Proach; Jerry Raphael; Irving Rosenthal; Mark Schleifer; Ronald Tavel; John Weiners; LaMonte Young; the granddaughter of the owner of the neighborhood kosher Chinese restaurant, Bernstein-on-Essex; and a sailor who—according to Zazeela—Smith had "plucked off the street."

Assistant director Schleifer, Marian Zazeela's amicably estranged husband, had as his major role (per one participant) "roaming around town trying to get a coffin." As a recent contributor to *Film Culture*, Schleifer also helped Smith get "The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez" in shape for publication.

² The harem, as Malek Alloula notes:

is an erotic universe in which there are no men. This lack of the phallus is eloquently symbolized by the two figures of the High Lord, who can neither enjoy all the women in his seraglio nor satisfy them, and of the eunuchs, who are the absolute negation of the male principle.

Amid light-struck close-ups of puckered mouths, wagging tongues, and—without any warning—a fondled penis, a variety of creatures rear up before the ornately lettered titles, rendering these titles even more difficult to read. Performers dart back and forth. A masked man, burly and barechested, enfolds a woman in his cloak and ducks out of camera range in reference to a similar move in Sternberg's *The Shanghai Gesture* to reveal the barely decipherable cast names for the third time.

False starts are one of *Flaming Creatures*' recurring formal devices. Having playfully delayed the action through the extension of the credits, Smith cuts to a middle shot of his star Frances Francine in brocaded turban and matching white gown rapturously sniffing a lily. A somewhat longer shot introduces Sheila Bick as Delicious Dolores, a dark and *zofitig* young woman in a clingy black slip and floppy hat. She leans back, hand on her head, in front of the movie's single backdrop—a Whistleresque painting of an oversized white vase containing a generous sprig of what could be almond blossoms.

A 78 rpm recording of a soprano trilling the popular 1930s rhumba "Amapola (Pretty Little Poppy)" provides accompaniment for Dolores' slow shimmy, her exposed back and ample backside turned to the camera. Francine waves and enters the frame. Suddenly lady-like, the pair flutter their fans, air-kiss and insincerely pinch each other's cheeks, turning away and back in synchronized disdain: which of the two is the "dainty little flower" celebrated by the song?

The record's end signals what Smith's journals term the Smirching Sequence. Overhead shots showcase various creatures—including Francine, Dolores, and one of several manifestations of skinny, angular Joel Markman, here wearing a false nose and a ragged negligee—as they apply lipstick, sometimes in close-up, to the accompaniment of a convincing mock radio advertisement, complete with corny music, for a "new heart-shaped lipstick [that] shapes your lips as you color them." The illusion of an actual commercial is, however, shattered when Smith himself interrupts the genteel pitch-artist (Francis Francine) to wonder, "Is there a lipstick that doesn't come off when you suck cocks?"

This question (and Francine's prim answer, "indelible lipstick") precipitates a festive montage of hairy legs, waving penises, and rolling eyes. The background music continues, punctuated by the sound of amplified lip-smacks. All manner of unshaven mugs (photographed on a variety of film stocks) are seen, heads thrown back, studiously painting their smirched lips. Markman is concentrating with such intensity that he doesn't seem to

The Colonial Harem, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) p.96.

While few commentators on *Flaming Creatures* have failed to note the absence of male tumescence, Parker Tyler pushed the analysis of what actually happens on screen:

The drag act of presumably homosexual males is a strangely static and narcissistic routine as well as a sort of atavistic *homage* to the female. Instead of the homosexual orgy we find in [Luchino Visconti's] *The Damned* and [Kenneth Anger's] *Scorpio Rising*—both of these oriented to male militarism, both finally excluding women altogether—Smith's peculiar transvestite cosmetic concerns flirtation between males in drag that turns into flirtation with a real woman and finally her rape by cunnilingus.

Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972) p.237. No participant in *Flaming Creatures* has verified Tyler's parenthetical assertion that the film includes a drag cameo by Smith himself.

notice the cock that coyly peeks over his shoulder. A brief tableau of half-naked bodies is followed by a somewhat longer shot of creatures collapsing in slow motion. After a static composition carefully framed to present the sole of someone's dirty foot, Francine is reintroduced in close-up, glaring at the camera as the high-pitched Japanese ballad "China Nights" wells up on the track.³

In a paroxysm of jealousy or lust, Francine begins chasing Dolores. The cartoon quality of this under-cranked (hence fast and blurry) pursuit is accentuated for its being staged and cut to suggest several impossible vectors as the rival stars pass back and forth before the great vase. At last, Francine seizes Dolores from behind and hurls her to the ground. Dolores cries out or, perhaps, she only pretends to. Faintly dubbed screams are heard as her breast, rendered even more generous by the camera's proximity, bounces out of her gown. As a kind of visual joke, Smith here inserts a close-up in which Dolores more decorously undoes her strap, then cuts back as she is ravished by a horde of creatures.

As "China Nights" disappears mid-phrase, the cacophonous shrieks grow louder and mix with an ominous thunder roll. The glass-paneled black lantern, another touch of Japanoiserie that dresses the otherwise austere set, begins to sway as if in the first tremors of an earthquake. Dolores struggles. She beats her fan on the gang of creatures now pinning her down, jiggling her breasts, poking their noses into her armpit, and otherwise exploring her person. She may even be screaming in earnest as her gown hikes up and the masked man of the credits (Arnold Rockwood) slithers forward on his stomach to work his head between her thighs.

Orgy time! At this point, approximately halfway through the movie, the overhead camera begins to take part, flailing over a tangle of writhing bodies. A second creature—a skinny male, with a black wig and tatty slip—is held down beside Dolores and, feigning a

³ "China Night," taken from a 78 record supplied by the ex-merchant marine Arnold Rockwood, is the title song from the 1940 Japanese movie—one of several "Chinese continental friendship films" starring Yoshiko Yamaguchi a/k/a Li Xianglang, an actress born to a Japanese family in Manchuria, and thus perfectly bilingual. In *China Night*, she typically plays a poor Chinese girl who hates the Japanese who killed her family but nevertheless falls in love with Japanese sailor.

The words to the song may be translated as follows:

China night, O China night:
Lights of the harbor, violet night,
The sound of strings on the ship of dreams.
I can't forget China night, night of dreams.

China night, O China night:
The lanterns swaying in the willows by the window.
A Chinese girl with a red bird cage.
Inconsolable love song: China night, night of dreams.

Like *Flaming Creatures*, *China Night* also includes the bolero "Siboney." Very likely, they are the only films in the history of cinema to contain both.

The movie and the song were hits in both Japan and occupied Shanghai. Brought to trial after the war, Yamaguchi survived to continue her career in Japan. She appeared in Samuel Fuller's 1956 *House of Bamboo* as Shirley Yamaguchi and has for many years been a member of the Japanese Diet.

campy panic, similarly ravished. The camera shakes; the earth moves; the lantern sways precipitously. Plaster dust cascades over the entwined creatures.

Any single frame of the sequence is a dense arrangement of eyes, legs, hands, and genitalia. By way of a climax, Smith contrives a hyper-kinetic closeup of one creature's furtive attempt to lick another's toe. The debris seems real enough although, as David Packman has observed, the persistent disembodied screams suggest the "grisly effect" of a Coney Island spook house.⁴

Abruptly, there is silence. The orgy is spent. Dolores staggers dramatically to her feet, accompanied by Bartok's "Concerto for Solo Violin," and promptly swoons backwards into the solicitous arms of the lithe and smiling Fascinating Woman (Judith Malina) who wears pearls around her neck and has a flower clenched between her teeth. Petals rain upon the women as they kiss. A veil drifts idly in the breeze. For several minutes, the camera considers the empty space and a fly crawling on the wall.

Presently, as if in response to country singer Kitty Wells' plaintive declaration that "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels," a wooden coffin is seen to open and Our Lady of the Docks (Joel Markman), a bewigged transvestite vampire clutching a lily in each hand, awakes and emerges. Picking her way through the wreckage—which includes the fallen lantern—and prowling among the comatose creatures, Our Lady kneels over Francis Francine's neck to feast. She attacks her victim, rolling her eyes back in sated delight. Church bells toll. Eyes open in extreme close-up. Then, Our Lady lifts her dress and idly plays with her penis.⁵

This resurgence of carnal interest, accompanied by the genteel strains of the Cuban bolero "Siboney," another 1930s standard, has a restorative effect. The creatures rise. The seraglio stages a carnival. Our Lady fox trots with Francine—charmingly, neither seems certain which one of them should lead. This sequence, which, at seven minutes, is the movie's longest, is extensively edited and certainly combines several shooting sessions. As the camera whirls overhead, Our Lady can be seen dancing with at least two other people—one, the poet Ed Marshall, the other, an actual woman. Both are wearing Francine's distinctive turban and matching dress. The costume, as Smith often said, was the character. The actor only brings it to life.

Like a Busby Berkeley musical, *Flaming Creatures* ends with an extended series of ensemble and solo dance numbers. Here, as throughout, the participants are cropped by Smith's hand-held camera in unexpected ways. A sailor, apparently picked up that day and brought to the set, looks on bemused as a creature in a flat-brimmed hat and blackface (Piero Heliczer) skips from side to side in a sort of capering hornpipe. Our Lady is transfixed by a lily. The camera, similarly fascinated, investigates an armpit. Then, with a blast of bullfight music from the opening scene of Sternberg's *The Devil Is A Woman*, and after one false start, the regal, giggling Spanish Girl (Mario Montez) twirls across the set.

⁴ "Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*: With the Tweak of an Eyebrow," *Film Culture* No.63-64 (1977), pp.51-56.

⁵ Both Ken Kelman and P. Adams Sitney refer to Our Lady as "Marilyn Monroe." The allusion is appropriate in that Monroe was found dead on August 5, 1962, soon after Smith began shooting *Flaming Creatures*. In his notes, however, Smith links this figure to the fallen 1940s star Veronica Lake: "A coffin on the set—Veronica Lake comes out—petals on lid disappear. She sucks Frankie Dry & they get up & two step together which turns into a production number."

As the bullfight music mixes with "Siboney" and an Italian aria, the screen is packed with all manner of dancing creatures, dappled by moving shadows and cascading streamers to suggest the Mardi Gras revelers in Sternberg's campiest Dietrich vehicle, *The Devil Is A Woman*. This cavorting is intercut with a mock Delacroix tableau displaying an impassive odalesque (Marian Zazeela), her arm languidly resting on her head and one breast exposed. She is surrounded and cushioned by a cluster of mock Arabs (Irving Rosenthal, Angus MacLise, LaMonte Young), one of whom solemnly points to her nipple.

Ending as leisurely as it began, *Flaming Creatures* offers several minutes of curtain calls. In poignant silence, the Spanish Girl spins like a dervish and Our Lady extravagantly smokes a cigarette. Then, one final surprise: an incongruous burst of the Everly Brothers' version of the teen-anthem "Be-Bop-a-Lula" as a flurry of last-minute kisses and swoons gives way to a shot of a leg dangling a high-heeled pump, the image of Our Lady being groped, an inverted flower, the end title, and a final closeup of a jiggling breast.

In an undated draft of a letter to *The Village Voice*, Smith explained that he "used transvestites in *Creatures* because of the visual comedy."

The film was as complete as possible a collection of the funniest and hopefully hilarious things I knew at that time . . . I should have added tapes of the first few audiences. I had read that Mack Sennet [sic] and others of that time designed their films to see if they could produce a continuous belly laugh . . .⁶

⁶ *Flaming Creatures*' gender confusion was further compounded by early commentators. Smith told Ken Kelman that the movie's female star Sheila Bick was, in fact, a hermaphrodite. Kelman duly reported this in his review of *Flaming Creatures* ("Smith Myth," *Film Culture* No.29) and it has been repeated elsewhere. Similarly, Judith Malina, who wears a masculine blond wig from the Living Theater production of William Carlos Williams' *Many Loves*, was mistakenly described by P. Adams Sitney as a transvestite.

Making *Flaming Creatures*: Up on the Roof

By J. Hoberman

Flaming Creatures was initially conceived as a vehicle for Marian Zazeela. However, Zazeela's meeting and subsequent involvement with the composer LaMonte Young precluded her participation: "I had to spend night and day with LaMonte," she later explained.¹

Thus, "La gran estrella Maria [sic] Zazeela," as she is known in Smith's journal, was replaced by another Lower East Side ingenue, Sheila Bick, the wife of Zazeela's high school boyfriend. The musician and future filmmaker Tony Conrad, a disciple of Young's who had just graduated from Harvard, was invited to stay at Zazeela's now-vacated East 9th Street studio. There, in the early summer of 1962, he discovered Smith installed and in the process of assembling *The Beautiful Book*, a collection of photographs which Conrad deemed "some kind of bizarre, contemptible New York art pornography."²

By his own account, Conrad initially regarded his eccentric roommate with benign contempt:

I found Jack one day working on a gigantic grey painting of a vase of flowers, maybe nine feet square. How marvelous, thought I, ironically, a vase of flowers. "Oh, uh, Jack, what is this?" Jack said, "It's the set for my new movie."³

Although "still at this point quite unimpressed," Conrad, nevertheless, offered to help Smith transport the painting to his movie's location, schlepping it a dozen or more blocks to the leaky, tar-paper roof of the Windsor Theater at 412 Grand Street, where *Flaming Creatures* was staged and shot over the course of eight or so weekend afternoons throughout the late summer and early fall.

Having established the Charles Theater as an ongoing concern, owner Walter Langsford had acquired the venerable Windsor (said to be the city's oldest movie house) with an eye to expanding his Lower East Side exhibition empire. Photographer-filmmaker Richard Preston, who produced some animated collage trailers for the Charles, took the unfinished loft above the theater as his studio. This space, which overlooked and opened onto the Windsor's roof, served as *Flaming Creature*'s dressing room and prop department, as well as providing a physical support for the painted backdrop Conrad helped carry to the set.⁴

¹ Marian Zazeela, unpublished interview with Edward Leffingwell (February 1996). Introduced to Smith by writer Irving Rosenthal, in late fall 1961, Zazeela, then a young painter, became the most important female model in the series of photography sessions Smith staged weekends from late 1961 through June 1962 at his Lower East Side apartment—tableaux that featured many subsequent participants in *Flaming Creatures* including Francis Francine, Mario Montez, Joel Markman, Ronald Tavel, and David Gurin.

² Tony Conrad in Reisman *op.cit.* p.63.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Preston, unpublished *op.cit.*

On his first visit to the Windsor roof, Conrad discovered that:

there were lots of weird substances being consumed and strange people arriving on the scene. And boy, was I surprised when it turned out that people took three hours to put on their makeup; I was very more surprised when people took several more hours to put on their costumes.⁵

(Conrad's ultimate surprise came when, after assigning him a dress to wear, Smith "ripped it down the back to expose my ass and turned my back to the camera.")

When, in "The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez," Smith wrote that film is "a place where it is possible to clown, to pose, to act out fantasies, to not be seen while one gives (Movie sets are sheltered, exclusive places where nobody who doesn't belong can go)," he was, in a sense, describing the making of *Flaming Creatures*. The two-story Windsor was flanked by higher buildings which, as old-law tenements, had no side windows. Thus, the lengthy preparations and riotous goings on involved in the production of the movie would only have been visible from an adjacent roof, several stories up. Preston remembers sporadic complaints, but no actual disturbances.⁶

Norman Solomon's production photographs reveal *Flaming Creatures*' sheltered, if not shaded, open-air set to be a secluded and surprisingly small space—marked by a painter's drop cloth estimated by one participant as 10x14 feet—not unlike the courtyard used by Ken Jacobs for *Star Spangled To Death*. A ladder, supported at a slight angle by a seven-foot stepladder and the roof of Preston's loft, provided a hook for the glass lantern and served as a rickety catwalk for overhead shooting. Smith not only directed *Flaming Creatures* but, using available light (if not a light meter), filmed the action himself. His sole credit is "Photographer" and he can be seen, in one of the photos, holding a 16mm Bolex camera with three lenses.⁷

Flaming Creatures was shot on a variety of black-and-white reversal film stocks, including such exotic brands as Agfa-Ferrania and Dupont, stolen from the out-dated film bin at Camera Barn. (According to Conrad, Smith made particular use of Perutz Tropical film—a specialized German-made film designed for shooting at high temperatures—because, thanks to its counter location, it was the easiest to shoplift.) Preston notes that the late-afternoon lack of direct sunlight, contributed to the ethereal, distinctively low-contrast quality of imagery.⁸

Conrad's recollections suggest that *Flaming Creatures*' lengthy Mardi Gras sequence was, in fact, the first section of the film to be shot although, by all accounts, Smith took great care in preparing for each shooting session. Preston, an observing non-

⁵ Conrad in Reisman *op.cit.* p.64. Conrad, unpublished *op.cit.*

⁶ Preston *op.cit.*

⁷ Conrad unpublished *op.cit.* Preston *op.cit.* The two rolls of 35mm film (color and black-and-white) shot by Norman Solomon on the *Flaming Creatures* set give some indication of the space. To judge from the personnel, Solomon was present on the day of the Smirching Sequence (see below).

⁸ Conrad unpublished *op.cit.* Preston *op.cit.*

participant, was surprised at how “orderly” and “businesslike” the production actually was. Although he could not imagine a finished film emerging from such primitive conditions, he remembers being struck by the actors’ “reverence” for Smith.⁹

Ronald Tavel, who crouched on the catwalk pouring plaster dust down on the actors while Smith filmed the Rape-Earthquake-Orgy, cites the solemnity with which one of the women was filmed partially nude. Other participants remember an altogether more delirious environment. By Joan Adler’s account, the Rape-Earthquake-Orgy was shot “in broiling sunlight.”

With the set falling all over [the performers] high as kites, Jack pouring ceiling plaster all over them (a large chunk bruised Frankie, who got mad telling about those sufferings too) and careening dangerously above on some swinging, homemade contraption.¹⁰

⁹ Preston *op.cit.* Various participants assumed Smith’s direction was improvised and spontaneous. In fact, his journal notes are fairly detailed. *Flaming Creatures* was intended to open with a “Smirching Sequence: Marion [sic] & Francine applying lipstick.” The scenario continues:

Marion and Francine pose about envying each other’s lips . . . F.F. grabs at M. The chase Marion strikes with purse. The clinch. F.F. pulls out her tit. (E.Q. [earthquake] builds up) . . . C.U. of F.F. bouncing M’s tit. Marion screaming & struggling. Final shot of many people holding M. down as F. bobbles her tit. F’s erection under his dress.

With the exception of the final fillip and the substitution of Sheila Bick for Marian Zazeela, the final film plays much as written. The screams are written into the script as are the tolling bells which accompany “Marion’s recovery.” There is, however, an unfilmed twist: “Mary [the part taken by Judith Malina in the movie] puts Marion on a camel and they ride off across the desert—Mary’s burnoose flowing (chorus of religious music swells).”

¹⁰ Ronald Tavel, unpublished interview with J.H. and Callie Angell (August 24, 1994). “On Location” in Dwoskin, Stephen, *Film Is: The International Free Cinema* (Woodstock NY: The Overlook Press, 1975) pp.12. No participant in *Flaming Creatures* to whom I spoke supports Adler’s suggestion that Jerry Joffen shot portions of the film. For all its visual tumult, the orgy sequence may have involved as few as five or six performers.

The source of this falling plaster may be deduced from an anecdote related by Walter Langsford during the course of a memorial held for Smith at P.S.122 on October 16, 1989. Langsford recalled that *Flaming Creatures* was in production while he and a crew were renovating the Windsor below:

Smith went up on the roof with what equipment he had and what friends he had. And we went on about our business. Half an hour or so later we heard this tremendous crashing noise from the roof, and I ran up and Jack had a sledgehammer, and he was banging away at one of the main support beams.

(Transcript courtesy Edward Leffingwell).

In a journal entry dated August 11, Smith refers to “the incident on the Windsor Roof” and expresses an unfounded concern that Langsford may prevent subsequent filming. In September, Langsford and Stein announced plans to reopen Windsor as a sister theater to the Charles; both movie houses went dark the end of the year.

While it would surely be an exaggeration to describe *Flaming Creatures* as having been created in a state of stoned ecstasy, the participants were scarcely innocent of New York's still-underground drug culture. Marijuana, cocaine, and methamphetamine were at various times used on the set; indeed, Sheila Bick's husband (a chemist) was busted for cocaine manufacture at the time of the filming.¹¹

According to Tavel, *Flaming Creatures* was originally to be called *Pasty Thighs and Moldy Midriffs*. (Alternate titles gleaned from Smith's journal include *Flaking Moldy Almond Petals*, *Moldy Rapture*, and *Horora Femina*.) By summer's end, the title was definitely *Flaming Creatures*. Zazeela, who painted the film's spidery credits, consented to pose for one sequence. In late September, after the Mardi Gras and Rape-Earthquake-Orgy scenes had been filmed, she arrived at the Windsor accompanied by LaMonte Young and Irving Rosenthal.¹²

The *Flaming Creatures* shoot extended well into October. Judith Malina, the co-founder of the Living Theater, remembers filming her scene with Sheila Bick on the afternoon of Yom Kippur. Malina, fasting in observance of the Jewish holy day, maintains that Smith positioned the two actresses on "a heap of flower petals and garbage" with "absolutely no preparation." ("Jack shouted 'Pull out her boobie. Push her tit in!' I pushed in her nipple as if it were a doorbell," is how Malina recalled Smith's direction although their encounter seems hardly so violent.)¹³

Smith's letter to his friend David Gurin, suggests that, a week or so later, *Flaming Creatures* was still in production:

Instead of finishing the movie according to the script I shot some pure psychotic footage of Sheila SINGING . . . singing mind you—I was reeling I was so zonked that morning behind that c . . . Now I spend my days wondering where to insert that footage.

Smith further notes that "the movie's expenses are mounting" and there was difficulty getting the footage processed: "We have to send it to Colorado to Stanley Brakhage."¹⁴

¹¹ Conrad unpublished *op.cit.* Marian Zazeela and LaMonte Young, unpublished interview with J.H., July 1996.

¹² Tavel *op.cit.* Zazeela unpublished *op.cit.* Smith's correspondence suggests some mild tension on the roof that afternoon:

Irving became overstimulated Sunday and said certain semi-tactless cracks in an attempt at ironic levity but they went over like lead balloon and caused Joel to walk off the set of *Flaming Creatures* and later when they were taking off their gowns there was an exchange of homo-waspishness between them.

¹³ Judith Malina, unpublished interview with J.H. (May 10, 1996).

¹⁴ The first portion of Smith's letter—written over two days but dated "who knows"—is published in *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* *op.cit.* p.164.

Brakhage, who was experienced in processing problematic footage, had a close working relationship with Western Cine-Lab in Denver. In a letter dated Halloween 1962, Smith wrote Gurin that,

The fact that only fifteen minutes of *Flaming Creatures* out-takes are known to remain suggests a frugal shooting ratio, all the more impressive in that Smith evidently filmed many crucial scenes without benefit of seeing his earlier rushes. Gregory Markopoulos would write that Smith needed only a week to cut *Flaming Creatures*. Given the density of the montage (and the other events of the fall, which included Smith's arrest for shoplifting), this seems unlikely. In any case, several months were required for the closely synchronized sound accompaniment that Conrad assembled on ¼" magnetic tape in the winter of 1962-63.¹⁵

Smith screened the unfinished *Flaming Creatures* for friends and associates throughout the winter, with one publicized benefit organized by the Piero Heliczer's dead language press at painter Jerry Jofen's cavernous West 20th Street loft, which, among other things, had a reputation as a shooting gallery.¹⁶

News of the movie broke into print in mid-April when Jonas Mekas wrote in his *Village Voice* column that Smith had just completed "a great movie." *Flaming Creatures*, Mekas maintained:

is so beautiful that I feel ashamed even to sit through the current Hollywood and European movies. I saw it privately and there is little hope that Smith's movie will ever reach the movie theater screens. But I tell you, it is a most luxurious outpouring of imagination, of imagery, of poetry, of movie artistry, comparable only to the work of the greatest, like von Sternberg.¹⁷

although *Flaming Creatures* was completely shot, "I've been waiting 3 weeks now for it to be sent to Colorado to be developed. Due to Dick Preston's farting around."

Flaming Creature's total budget, Jonas Mekas would later report in *The Village Voice* (March 13, 1963) was \$300. While this unverifiable figure was likely devoted to film processing, some was devoted to props. Smith's October 6 letter to Gurin complains of being "doublecrossed by the funeral home turds" who charged him a "\$10 rental for Joel's coffin."

¹⁵ Conrad unpublished *op.cit.*

¹⁶ A sometime visitor *chez* Jofen, P. Adams Sitney provided a vivid memoir in the May-June 1997 issue of the Anthology Film Archives calendar:

A cluttered, wildly messy series of large rooms one flight up from the street . . . It delivered the shock of another world. The railroad corridor led to an immense studio, heaped with monumental canvases, thick with overpainting and collage . . . [The sleeping quarters were] always filled with people, more women than men. Most of them seemed dangerous or desperate in my nineteen-year-old eyes. I came to imagine it alternately as a harem or shooting gallery . . . (n.p.)

Joan Adler describes the scene in similar terms, "On Location" *op.cit.* p.16.

¹⁷ Mekas, Jonas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema* (New York: Collier Books, 1972) p.83.

Not two weeks later and accompanied by a second version of Tony Conrad's taped soundtrack, a further revised *Flaming Creatures* received its theatrical premiere, midnight, April 29, at the Bleecker Street Cinema on a bill with *Blonde Cobra*.¹⁸

Flaming Creatures' definitive version may be dated to midsummer. In early August, Mekas and Jacobs attended the Flaherty Film Seminar, an international documentary event held in Brattleboro, Vermont, toting prints of *Blonde Cobra* and *Flaming Creatures*. It was late before Mekas was able to put the movies on the projector. "Midnight screenings in Vermont!" Mekas exclaimed to his readers. "My God, we felt like underground even at Flaherty's." (This expedition is documented in the last reel of Mekas' epic diary film *Lost, Lost, Lost*.)¹⁹

Flaming Creatures was distributed by the Filmmaker's Cooperative from 1963 through 1968. By the end of 1965, Smith had withdrawn the negatives for both *Flaming Creatures* and *Overstimulated* from the Coop's safekeeping. (It is unclear whether *Overstimulated* was actually in circulation.) At some point in the late 1960s, perhaps anticipating a licensing agreement with Grove Press, he produced a new high contrast print of *Flaming Creatures*. The edited camera original was subsequently lost until discovered in 1978 by filmmaker Jerry Tartaglia among a mass of lab-discarded 16mm footage.

¹⁸ Conrad unpublished *op.cit.*

¹⁹ Mekas *op.cit.* p.95.

Saturday, November 29, 4:00 p.m.

THE DEVIL IS A WOMAN

Paramount, 1935, 83 mins.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Screenplay by John Dos Passos and Sam Winston based on the novel The Woman and the Puppet by Pierre Louys. Music by Rimski-Korsakov, Ralph Rainger, and Andrea Setaro. Photographed by von Sternberg and Lucien Ballard. Sets by Hans Dreier. Costumes by Travis Banton. With Marlene Dietrich (Concha Perez), Lionel Atwill (Don Pasqual), Cesar Romero (Antonio Galvan), Edward Everett Horton (Don Paquito).

New York opening: Paramount, May 3, 1935.

ARABIAN NIGHTS

Universal, 1942, 86 mins.

Directed by John Rawlins. Screenplay by Michael Hogan. Produced by Walter Wanger. Music by Frank Skinner. Photographed by Milton Krasner (Technicolor). Sets by Jack Otterson and Alexander Golitzen. Costumes by Vera West. With Maria Montez (Sherazade), Jon Hall (Haroun-Al-Raschid), Sabu (Ali ben Ali), Shemp Howard (Sinbad), Turhan Bey (Captain).

New York opening: Rivoli, December 24, 1942.

Shortly before he began shooting *Flaming Creatures*, Jack Smith purchased the ledger that would serve as his journal from mid-1962 through mid-1963, inscribing the opening page "THIS IS A JOURNAL WITH ENDLESS PAGES." En face (beneath the rubric "A MILLION TONS OF SHIT") is a list of things to do and people to contact. These include the notes "Call von Sternberg" and "Eulogy to M. Montez. Why does no one remember her pix."

Consequently explicating *Flaming Creatures* even as he produced it, Smith articulated his film aesthetic in two early essays, "The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez" and "Belated Appreciation of V.S."—the first, his impassioned celebration of the much ridiculed 1940s movie star Maria Montez; the second, an appreciation of the visual poetry and unconscious transvestism in the movies Josef von Sternberg made with Marlene Dietrich. Both were originally published in *Film Culture*.¹

Smith's championing of Sternberg and Montez might be considered manifestations of the sensibility that would soon be called camp, were Smith's notions not so serious. As P. Adams Sitney would be the first to observe, *Flaming Creatures* made manifest what Smith found "implicated in Maria Montez and von Sternberg's films, and without the interference of a plot. What he brings to the fore is what has been latent in those films—visual texture, androgynous sexual presence, exotic locations."²

¹ The two essays are reprinted in *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* op.cit.

² Sitney op.cit. p.353.

Montez vehicles and Sternberg/Dietrich collaborations further suggested a particular mode of being. The title *Blonde Cobra*, invented by Smith as a name for the diva he might play himself, combines Dietrich's "Blonde Venus" with Montez's "Cobra Woman." Dietrich, Smith wrote, was "V.S. himself . . . his visual projection—a brilliant transvestite in a world of delirious unreal adventures." Smith would tell Marian Zazeela, his most important model during the 1961-62 making of *The Beautiful Book*, that he considered himself the Sternberg to her Dietrich.³

But, if Dietrich was Sternberg's projection, Maria Montez had, even more miraculously, managed to project her own world: Montezland. "The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez" begins with the declaration that "at least in America a Maria Montez could believe she was the Cobra woman, the Siren of Atlantis, Scheherazade, etc. She believed and thereby made the people who went to her movies believe." According to Ronald Tavel, the other leading Montez theorist of the early 1960s Lower East Side, Smith not only considered Montez "the most perfect object" for a movie camera to consider but thought that the star's imagination exerted itself on the entire crew.⁴

The Devil Is A Woman was Sternberg's last movie with Dietrich—and arguably the most mannered with the director serving as his own cinematographer. Opening in May 1935, it was withdrawn from circulation following a protest by the Spanish government and for a quarter century thereafter shown only at the Museum of Modern Art.

As the credit sequence of *Flaming Creatures* quotes a moment from *The Shanghai Gesture*, so its Mardi Gras evokes what von Sternberg called *The Devil Is A Woman's* "riotous carnival." Writing on this "transfigured tinsel tradition" in his 1966 Museum of Modern Art monograph, Andrew Sarris noted with amazement "how little space Sternberg requires to evoke an empire, and how little time to evoke an era. The sheer economy of the

³ Rinder, Lawrence, "Anywhere Out of the World: The Photography of Jack Smith," *Jack Smith: Flaming Creature—His Amazing Life and Times*, ed. Edward Leffingwell (London: Serpent's Tail/PS 1 Museum, 1997) p.144.

⁴ Tavel unpublished *op.cit.* Tavel has several times written on Smith and Montez. See his "Maria Montez: Anima of an Antediluvian World," *Jack Smith: Flaming Creature op.cit.*, as well as his dossier on the Theater of the Ridiculous, *Tri-Quarterly* 6 (1967) pp.93-109.

Smith's sense of Montez was born out by Robert Siodmak who told John Russell Taylor in an interview published in *Sight and Sound* (Summer-Autumn 1959):

While [Montez] couldn't act from here to there, she was a great personality and believed completely in her roles. If she was to play a princess you had to treat her like one all through lunch, but if she was a slave-girl you could kick her around anyhow and she wouldn't object—method acting before its time, you might say.

While reviewer Bosley Crowther complained that Montez played "the beauteous dancer with the hauteur of a tired night-club showgirl" (*New York Times*, December 25, 1942), other critics seem to have understood *Arabian Nights* as something like camp. Noting that this material "used to be played straight in Doug Fairbank's day," *PM's* John T. McManus called it "the gaudiest and most cynical transformation of a classic since the Ritz Brothers played *The Three Musketeers*." Alton Cooke noted in *The New York World-Telegram* the whistling, hooting, wisecracking spectators. "It was just about the wildest audience since the time a gang of youngsters was hired to turn hoodlum and stage a riot for Benny Goodman around the Paramount." (*Arabian Nights* clippings, New York Public Library, Library of the Performing Arts.)

director's mise-en-scene has seldom been appreciated . . . " Sternberg's decor, Sarris wrote, was "not the meaningless background of the drama, but its very subject, peering through nets, veils, screens, shutters, bars, cages, mists, flowers, and fabrics to tantalize the male with fantasies of the female."⁵

Smith goes even further, citing *The Devil Is A Woman* in his von Sternberg appreciation: "The script says Count so and so (in *Devil is a Woman*) is a weak character. The plot piles up situation after situation—but needlessly—Sternberg graphically illustrates this by using a tired actor [Lionel Atwill] giving a bad performance." The notion of a bad, and hence triumphantly revealing, performance is crucial to Smith's appreciation of Maria Montez.⁶

The brainchild of producer Walter Wanger, albeit inspired by the success of Michael Powell's 1940 *Thief of Baghdad*, *Arabian Nights* was Universal's first all-color feature as well as the first of the six exotic vehicles Maria Montez made for the studio, mostly with Jon Hall and Sabu. In addition to its plenitude of harem beauties, it contains the world's largest bathtub, which is rimmed with goatskins. Even before *Arabian Nights* broke opening day records, Maria Montez signed to star in *White Savage* and *Cobra Woman*. Earning nearly two million dollars, *Arabian Nights* proved to be Wanger's most financially successful film thus far. By 1944, Wanger ranked just below Louis B. Mayer as the second highest paid man in Hollywood.

A mixture of low comic hijinks (abetted by the presence of a future Stooge, Shemp Howard, as Sinbad, as well as a script doctored by an Abbott and Costello writer) and total production design, *Arabian Nights* is an exemplary showcase for Montez's total conviction, regarding her destiny to be the Queen of Bagdad. Moreover, framed as a tale told in a harem (located behind the Taj Mahal!), the movie includes a number of favorite Smith tropes including the image that would provide the title for—as well as a chunk of narrative (the switching of poisoned cups) in—his unfinished first film (*Buzzards Over Bagdad*) and the slave market in *No President*. In addition to the scum of Bagdad audience shouting for the dancing girl Sherazade, *Arabian Nights* offers a vision of exotic politics,

⁵ *The Films of Josef von Sternberg* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966) pp.41-42. "Belated Appreciation of V.S.," *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* op.cit. p.42.

In his journal, Smith maintains that, for *The Devil Is A Woman*:

Von Sternberg got Dos Passos to write the worst dialogue of 1936. He constructed ludicrous, exaggerated Hollywood Nutty Spanish sets, made a wonderful moldy-corny melodramatic atmosphere in which Dietrich could wax deliriously hammy. He turned melodrama upon itself and came up with a true personal fantasy. This was no Spain, even of the inept Hollywood imitation style—this was layer over layer of clutter, extras in rented costumes, light and shadow as it never existed in nature or even art up to this point, costumes that Dietrich must have had difficulty standing up in—in short a perfect artistic Spain.

⁶ For a discussion of Smith's view of Montez in the context of surrealist film aesthetics see my "Bad Movies," *Vulgar Modernism: Writing on Movies and Other Media* (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1991) and "Jack Smith: Bagdada and Lobsterrealism," *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* op.cit.

the flaming ending in which the villain falls to the bottom of the pool, even a ridiculous drag routine.⁷

In his 1962-63 *Journal*, Smith made a few notes for a "Maria Montez Flic":

⁷ As Matthew Bernstein notes in his study of Walter Wanger, *Arabian Nights* "fantastic conception of oriental despotism [not only plays] upon the intimate connections between political and erotic power" but, in its battle between good and bad brothers suggests "a displaced expression of the fear and loathing felt towards the leaders of the Axis powers." (*Walter Wanger, Hollywood Independent* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994] pp.188). This is even more so of *Cobra Woman* which, as directed by German refugee Robert Siodmak, all but restages *Triumph of the Will* in the form of the sacred Cobra Dance. The influence on Smith's 1965 theater piece, *Rehearsal for the Destruction of Atlantis*, as well as *No President*, is evident.

Wanger's "orientalist fantasy," Bernstein points out, is derived from Diaghalev and the Ballets Russe: Frank Skinner's score is a pastiche of Rimski-Korsakov; the production design draws on Bakst; certain motifs suggests Nijinsky's golden slave (*ibid.* p.189). Thus, the 1910 "Scheherazade Party" that Michael Moon persuasively argues as a precursor to *Flaming Creatures* ("Flaming Closets," *October* 51, Winter 1989, pp.19-54) was absorbed by Smith as mediated by Universal Studios.

It is worth noting that a number of Smith's associates from the early 1960s had a more serious interest in the Muslim Orient. Irving Rosenthal and Ronald Tavel both lived in Tangiers for extended periods, Mark Schliefer ultimately converted to Islam and moved to Egypt. Smith, as Tavel would disapprovingly observe (unpublished interview *op.cit.*) had no interest in the actual Bagdad; his obsession was with Hollywood's version.

The Plaster Movie Studio broods in a deep shadow, obscured by scaffolding . . . Director prays to Miss Montez. They use a corpse as leading lady. Record them fluffing their lines, Freudian slips—complaining—asking director for pins, being retouched by makeup woman, staring—lost into mirrors.

This scenario was eventually realized not as a movie but as the written piece *The Memoirs of Maria Montez*.⁸

⁸*Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* op.cit. pp.37-39. Montez was only the most important of Smith's stars. He collected images of George Chakiris and, according to Tavel (unpublished interview *op.cit.*), was fascinated by Gale Sondergaard. Smith's interest had nothing to do with Sondergaard's political history—like her husband, Herbert Biberman, she was blacklisted—and everything to do with her portrayal of the villainous Spider Woman in two Sherlock Holmes mysteries. Tavel recalls that, excited to learn that Sondergaard would be appearing in a one-woman off-Broadway show during the autumn of 1965, Smith went backstage on opening night to invite the actress to appear in one of his movies. She declined.

Sunday, November 30, 2:00 p.m.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON BLOOD SACRIFICE

Ken Jacobs, 1957, 4 mins. With Bob Flieschner and Jack Smith. Black-and-white.

LITTLE COBRA DANCE

Ken Jacobs, 1957, 2 mins. With Jack Smith. Black-and-white. Silent.

Excerpts from STAR SPANGLED TO DEATH

Ken Jacobs, 1958-60, 20 mins. With Jack Smith and Jerry Sims. Color and B&W. Silent.

THE DEATH OF P'TOWN: A Fragment of a Movie That Never Was

Ken Jacobs, 1961, 7 mins. With Jack Smith as the Fairy Vampire. Color. Silent.

LITTLE STABS AT HAPPINESS

K.M. Rosenthal (Ken Jacobs), 1959-62, 15 mins. With Jack Smith and Jerry Sims. Color.

BLONDE COBRA

Ken Jacobs and Bob Fleischner, 1959-63, 33 mins. With Jack Smith. B&W and Color.

Auditing a film production class at City College in 1956, Jack Smith met the future filmmaker Bob Fleischner and through Fleischner, his most important aesthetic collaborator, Ken Jacobs.

An aspiring Abstract Expressionist painter, Jacobs prized the immediate and gestural. Like the contemporary forms of Assemblage and Happenings, his early 16mm films extended the aesthetic of Action Painting into other realms, manifesting a similar involvement with found objects and the urban picturesque. Performing in Jacobs' films, Smith animated derelict landscapes with his manic acting-out and spontaneous clowning—a capacity for what Parker Tyler would describe as the “sloughing off civilized dignity and indulging amoral naked impulses in the sight of all.”¹

Saturday Afternoon Blood Sacrifice and *Little Cobra Dance* were shot on consecutive days during the summer of 1957 with Smith filmed cavorting (and at one point, attracting the attention of the police) in the deserted streets of lower Manhattan's no-longer extant Washington Market. Thereafter, throughout 1958 and 1959, Smith was cast as the primary figure in Jacobs' epic *Star Spangled To Death*—a vast, not-yet-completed symphony of social disgust which interpolated all manner of found footage (soft-core porn films, home movies, political advertisements) into scenes of Smith's bizarre clowning (scenes which also appear in

¹ *Underground Film: A Critical History* (New York: Da Capo, 1995) p.20.

its edited-in-camera spinoff, *Little Stabs At Happiness*.) Both films were shot on the roof and in the courtyard of the West 75th Street apartment building where Jacobs was employed as superintendent—as well as in various New York junkyards and construction sites.

Parker Tyler, one of the few critics to take note of *Star-Spangled to Death*, recognized its anticipation of the Oldenburg Happenings of the early 1960s (while tracing its “use of the trash pile as a source of costume and decor” and “infantile-neurotic” mode of acting back to the European avantgarde of Kurt Schwitters):

Star-Spangled to Death is a grimly poetic camp phrase expressing the anti-patriotic radical socialism which, Jacobs believes, was the true impetus of the emergent Underground as distinct from the elder avant-garde. The film shows two beat characters, Jack Smith and a male crony [Jerry Sims], struggling with a life style; Smith represents an ambiguous joie-de-vivre with manic-depressive roots: wild clowning (en travesti) amid slum surroundings; his friend shows the utterly dour side, withdrawn and “speechless,” lacking any of the grotesque theater which makes Smith an “acting personality.”

An avatar of the new Underground in Tyler’s opinion, *Star-Spangled to Death* was less interested in shocking the bourgeoisie than providing “a documentary showcase for the underdog’s spontaneous, uncontrolled fantasy.”²

Jacobs and Smith made their last film together, *The Death of P'Town*, in Provincetown during the summer of 1961. It was that summer, during which Jacobs met his future wife Florence Karpf, that Smith came out—to Jacobs, at least—as a homosexual.³

Habitué of the Charles screenings, Jacobs and Smith were both “discovered” there during the spring of 1962. *Little Stabs At Happiness*, which was shown anonymously to the accompaniment of several ancient 78 rpm records at the Charles on June 6, attracted Jonas Mekas’ attention—as did Smith’s *Scotch Tape*. *Little Stabs At Happiness* existed only as camera original. When Mekas offered to help Jacobs with his lab bills, the filmmaker alerted him to the existence of another, unfinished Smith project.

In early 1959, Smith had collaborated with Fleischner on a “comic horror film.” The movie was abandoned after a falling out and the footage turned over to Jacobs who, without concern for the original intentions, edited it the following winter into the portrait of Smith that would be known as *Blonde Cobra*. In the late spring or early summer of 1962, Jacobs and Smith “struck a truce” (per Jacobs). Jacobs recorded Smith, then assembled a soundtrack that

² *ibid.* pp.79-80. The period of Jacobs’ and Smith’s collaboration coincides with a number of parallel artistic endeavors. It was during the summer of 1957 that John Cassavetes began working on *Shadows*; November 1959 when the revised *Shadows* was shown with the World Premiere of the Robert Frank, Alfred Leslie, Jack Kerouac collaboration *Pull My Daisy* at Cinema 16. Early 1960 brought “Four Happenings” at the Reuben Gallery and “Ray Gun Spex” at Judson. That same spring, the Bleecker Street Cinema and the New Yorker revival houses opened. Jonas Mekas began shooting *Guns of the Trees* during the summer of 1960 at a time when Shirley Clarke was working on a film version of *The Connection*. The New American Filmmaker’s Group established the Filmmaker’s Cooperative in late 1960.

³ Ken Jacobs, unpublished letter *op.cit.*.

juxtaposed snatches of a Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers movie, a German tango, a children's record, and live "talk radio" with Smith's hysterical singsong confessions.⁴

Shown with *Flaming Creatures* at its premiere on April 29, 1963, and frequently paired with it thereafter, *Blonde Cobra* established Smith as an underground star on par with Taylor Mead. (In fact, Ron Rice had already written him into *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*.) The same week in *The Village Voice*, Jonas Mekas announced the arrival of a "new cinema of disengagement and freedom":

The movies I have in mind are Ron Rice's *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*; Jack Smith's *The Flaming Creatures* [sic]; Ken Jacobs' *Little Stabs At Happiness*; Bob Fleischner's *Blonde Cobra*—four works that make up the real revolution in cinema today. These movies are illuminating and opening up sensibilities and experiences never before recorded in the American arts; a content which Baudelaire, the Marquis de Sade, and Rimbaud gave to world literature a century ago . . .

Blonde Cobra, Mekas wrote, was "the masterpiece of the Baudelairean cinema . . . a work hardly surpassable in perversity, in richness, in beauty, in sadness, in tragedy."⁵

Film descriptions by Ken Jacobs from Filmmakers Cooperative Catalogue:

LITTLE STABS AT HAPPINESS

Unedited except for addition of titles. Lavish color, unrelated improvisations, the good and the bad. Strictly light summer fare. Very easy and fun to do. Superior in a way to a spite-choked feature I've been grinding out for years. A true breather.

BLONDE COBRA

Blonde Cobra is an erratic narrative—no, not really a narrative, it's only stretched out in time for convenience of delivery. It's a look in on an exploding life, on a man of imagination suffering pre-fashionable Lower East Side deprivation and consumed with American 1950s,

⁴ For a detailed account, see Ken Jacobs' "The Great *Blonde Cobra* Collaboration," *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* op.cit. pp.162-63. Although Jacobs puts the *Blonde Cobra* premiere on April 29, it was shown previously at the Bleecker, on the night of February 11, as part of Mekas' "Newest Absurd and Zen Poetry" program. At that time, the film was credited solely to Bob Fleischner. Jacobs' finished soundtrack to *Little Stabs At Happiness* (which dates itself February 27, 1963) refers to the February 11 program.

⁵Mekas op.cit. pp.85-86.

'40s, '30s disgust. Silly, self-pitying, guilt-stricken and yet triumphing—on one level—over the situation with style, because he's unapologetically gifted, has a genius for courage, knows that a state of indignity can serve to show his character in sharpest relief. He carries on, states his presence for what it is. Does all he can to draw out our condemnation, testing our love for limits, enticing us into an absurd moral posture the better to dismiss us with a regal 'screw-off.'

Sunday, November 30, 4:00 p.m.

ROSE HOBART

Joseph Cornell, 1936, 20 mins.

THE FLOWER THIEF

Ron Rice, 1960, 70 mins. With Taylor Mead.

Lent to his ever-potential studio assistant Ken Jacobs in 1960, Joseph Cornell's then-unknown masterpiece proved to be a valuable film, in quite different ways, for both Jacobs and Jack Smith.

To make *Rose Hobart*, Cornell had distilled and reshuffled footage from one of his secret-flix, the exotic adventure *East of Borneo* (Columbia, 1931), titling this new and non-linear film after *East of Borneo*'s female star. Jacobs borrowed *Rose Hobart*'s spliced original as well as the "Holiday in Brazil" record album Cornell used as musical accompaniment, holding onto the film (which had not been publicly screened since its December 1936 premiere at Julien Levy's gallery) for over a year while he and Smith subjected it to careful study:

We looked at it in every possible way: on the ceiling, in mirrors, bouncing it all over the room, in corners, in focus, out of focus, with a blue filter that Cornell had given me, without it, backwards. It was just like an eruption of energy . . . ¹

The impression the film made on Smith may be deduced from the copy of *The Beautiful Book* he annotated for Marian Zazeela, making reference to "the previously greatest movie on earth, Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* film."

As film critic and historian P. Adams Sitney was the first to point out, *Flaming Creatures* can be seen as a version of *Rose Hobart*, in which Hollywood secret-flix fantasies are restaged rather than reedited. *Rose Hobart* subsequently evinced itself as an influence on Jacobs' oeuvre with his re-filmed 1905 short, *Tom Tom The Piper's Son* (1969) as well as in his numerous projection pieces.²

Ron Rice's no-budget first feature, the talk of the Lower East Side during the summer of 1962, provided Smith with another sort of non-Hollywood precedent for *Flaming Creatures*. The beatnik film *par excellence*, *The Flower Thief* featured coffeehouse poet (and former stockbroker) Taylor Mead as a kind of Zen village idiot, dragging an outsized teddy bear in a child's red wagon as he wandered through the fleshpots of San Francisco's North Beach. Affect alternating between the wistfully infantile and dementedly fey, Mead clowns around sites ranging from jazz bars and downtown street corners to the old Playland amusement park and a vast derelict loft.

¹ Sitney *op.cit.* p.349.

² *ibid.*

The Flower Thief was shot on outdated, army surplus 16mm film stock with a hand-held camera. The soundtrack was cobbled together out of jazz, Mozart, blues guitar, and children's records, along with some severely sub-Kerouac poetic ravings. Unscripted and genuinely haphazard, filled with goofy non-sequiturs and ultimately less talented than persistent, it was praised by Jonas Mekas in *The Village Voice* as exhibiting "the utmost disrespect for the professional camera, plots, character conventions." In addition to the numerous positive drug references ("holy holy holy methedrine"), *The Flower Thief* is enlivened by several instances of visual blasphemy including Mead mooning the camera or wearing the American flag, a nude couple in the shower, and a group of scruffy beatniks resting the Iwo Jima tableaux.

Shown at the Charles as part of the June 1962 Filmmakers Festival (which named Rice "most promising filmmaker"), *The Flower Thief* began playing a continuous engagement at the Charles along with another Taylor Mead vehicle, Vernon Zimmerman's *To L.A. with Lust*. Unexpectedly, Rice's feature received something close to a rave from *The New York Times* critic Eugene Archer and, despite the Charles' lack of air-conditioning, played to full houses for three weeks.

Thanks to this success, Mead (subsequently described by Brendan Gill in *The New Yorker* as "a cross between a zombie and a kewpie [who] speaks as if his mind and mouth were full of marshmallow") became the first underground movie star, while Smith would later maintain that *Flaming Creatures* was made specifically for the Charles.³

³ Robert Downey uses the Gill quote to describe his *Babo '73* in the *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue No.4*. Smith discusses the Charles in his "Taboo of Jingola," *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool op.cit.* p. 104.

In an interview with Jack Sargent, Taylor Mead explained his absence from *Flaming Creatures*:

I was supposed to be in *Flaming Creatures*, but I already had my Flower Thief image so I thought . . . and I heard there was nudity in *Flaming Creatures*, so I thought "well, I have this image." I was like a young actor "I have this image I must maintain," you know. So I goofed on being in *Flaming Creatures*, which was such a great film, but Jack did once have me playing the violin in front of the screen until the audience began objecting.

Naked Lens: Beat Cinema (London: Creation Books, 1997) p.84.

Saturday, December 6, 2:00 and 6:00 p.m.

NORMAL LOVE

1963, 105 mins. Color.

Mario Montez (Mermaid); Diana Bachus (The Girl); David Sachs (Mongolian Child); Angus MacLise (The Green Mummy); Beverly Grant (Cobra Woman); Naomi Levine (Black Spider); Francis Francine (Pink Fairy; The Cake Girl); Tony Conrad (The Mummy); Tiny Tim (Gilded Hag); Sheila Bick (Cobra Lady); Eliot Cukor (Werewolf); John Vaccaro (White Bat); Joan Adler (Chorus Cutie); Diane Di Prima (Pregnant Cutie); Arnold Rockwood (Uncle Pasty); Teddy Howard (Watermelon Man); Johnny Foster (Pool Creature).¹

Restoration: Jerry Tartaglia/The Plaster Foundation, 1997

THE YELLOW SEQUENCE (Normal Love addendum)

1963, 20 mins. Color.

With Francis Francine, Tiny Tim, and David Sachs.

Restoration: Jerry Tartaglia/The Plaster Foundation, 1993

The whole of Western culture exhudes the distinct aroma of slowing frying mermaid fileted.

—Jack Smith to Jonas Mekas, summer 1963.

Complaining, even before the *Flaming Creatures* bust of March 1964, about the “sickeningly pasty reception” his film had received, Jack Smith wrote in his journal that he “was not likely to make another movie that the people of [his] own city could not see.” The statement proved prophetic. Smith would never complete another film—at least in conventional terms.²

First, however, as backed by Jonas Mekas (himself funded by filmmaker-philanthropist Jerome Hill), Smith embarked on a “commercial” follow-up to *Flaming Creatures*: “I spent my summer out in the country shooting a lovely, pastel pink and green color movie that is going to be the definitive pasty expression. All the characters wear pink evening gowns and smirk and stare into the camera.”³

¹ Uncredited participants include Stanley Alboum, Joel Markman, Alan Marlowe, Pat Oldenburg, and Andy Warhol. *Normal Love*’s opening titles also include credits for a never-assembled musical track by Tony Conrad, Angus MacLise, and Robert Adler.

² “The Astrology of a Movie Scorpio,” *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* op.cit. p.55.

³ *ibid.* In an undated interview with Jonas Mekas, most likely made in mid August 1963, Smith elaborated on his technique:

The Great Pasty Triumph, known briefly as *The Pink and Green Horrors* and eventually retitled *Normal Love*, was very much a film of its season. With the exception of several scenes staged around the Moon Pool, a candle-lit, incense-shrouded, mirror-strewn altar to Maria Montez, which Smith had assembled in the midst of an East Village apartment, it was strictly back to nature—shot variously in rural New Jersey, on Fire Island, and at Old Lyme, Connecticut. Smith uses leaves, branches, smoke, sparklers, confetti, and all manner of gauze to clutter up the foreground and create compositions where performers blend into the decor. The dominant colors are pink and green—fittingly, one scene is a ceremonial watermelon feast.

The notes that Smith prepared for Tony Conrad's never-completed soundtrack refer to six distinct sequences. The opening Red Scene, an interior with the Mermaid and the Black Spider, precedes the title and credits. These are followed by the Watteau-like Swing Scene in which The Girl is pursued through a leafy glade, then pushed in a swing by the Watermelon Man. The lighting of sparklers creates a strategic fade to the Swamp Sequence. Here, The Girl squints in the sun as she's stalked through a verdant marsh by Uncle Pasty, the beefy, cunnilingual rapist from *Flaming Creatures*. (In addition to the mask worn in the earlier film, Pasty sports a set of trick-store fangs that come loose when The Girl deflects his attentions with a custard-pie in the kisser.)⁴

Normal Love doesn't have *Flaming Creatures*' stone-age quality. Despite the Swamp Scene's regressive trajectory—it ends with a handsome, if slime-covered, druggy-looking Werewolf rising from the primeval muck to assault the Mermaid, the equally dazed camera spinning overhead, and offer her a Coke—it's less an orgy than a reverie. That the action is punctuated with shots of the Mermaid's milk bath reinforces the suggestion in Smith's papers that much of the movie might be taking place in her "inner psychotic world."

The Swamp Sequence is followed by the Blue Scene (in which comatose creatures in pink gowns cover a deserted West Side pier), the dark and verdant Green Scene (the Mummy, the Cobra Woman with her boa constrictor), the bucolic Party Scene (shot in a cow pasture and thus extending the theme of milk from the Mermaid's bath to the colored drinks the creatures quaff), and the famous Cake Scene.

Over the August 11-12 weekend, while *Flaming Creatures* and *Scotch Tape* played the Gramercy, Smith took his *Normal Love* cast on location at the Connecticut estate of

Mother Cinema is a jealous mistress. Often I realize half-way through a take that I've forgotten to direct a creature, or the creatures, in the shot. At the beginning of the shot they think they know what the shot is about, what we're doing, but then after a while they sort of exhaust some little cutie-pie thing that they'd thought of and then realize that the take is in the middle; so they look towards the camera usually, puzzled, sort of a chipmunk concentration, sort of looking, shrugging in a way that will be so much against the atmosphere of what's happening about them that only I, only the director, looking through the viewfinder will know, will catch this, and tell them what to do.

The most extensive and atmospheric account of the *Normal Love* shoot is Joan Adler's "On Location," published as the first chapter in Dwoskin *op.cit.* pp.11-22.

⁴ A selection of Smith's *Normal Love* journal notes appear in *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* *op.cit.* pp.45-50. (The piece titled *Normal Love*, however, shares only its title with the movie.)

Stable gallery-owner Eleanor Ward. Out in the meadow, Smith topped a giant pink-and-white layer cake (constructed from Claes Oldenburg's macquette) with a score of writhing, half-naked male and female "chorus cuties," including a barely discernible Andy Warhol dancing behind a very pregnant Diane di Prima. "We were shimmying like crazy all over that cake," di Prima recalled, "We did about 80,000 takes [and] each time we did a take I fell off the cake."⁵

This open-air tribute to Busby Berkeley shifts gears only slightly when the Pink Fairy (Francis Francine) emerges from the cake and the emerald-green Mummy (Tony Conrad, sewn into his costume) lurches out to abduct one cutie before being himself mowed down by the skinny, demented-looking, machine-gun toting Mongolian Child.⁶

It is at this point that Smith's chronology ends although *Normal Love* includes one further scene, referred to in Smith's notes as the Yellow Sequence. Here, Francis Francine mimes dying in a field of golden-rod as Tiny Tim—then just another Village weirdo, trilling 1920s love songs in MacDougal Street coffeehouses—is filmed perched on an abandoned car, plucking his plastic ukelele.

Normal Love is sumptuous but static—in part because Smith never completed it. To judge from surviving financial records, the first *Normal Love* work print was generated in August although the shoot continued into October and, in the case of the Moon Pool sequence, through December—despite evidence of an edge-numbered work print which, in any case, was lost and replaced in late January 1964.⁷

Smith exhibited *Normal Love* rushes and rough cuts through 1965, and thereafter showed excerpts in various combinations with different sorts of exotic musical accompaniment as a projection-performance piece. Thus, like Sergei Eisenstein's unfinished *Que Viva Mexico!* and various Orson Welles projects, *Normal Love*'s extant 125 minutes can only exist as a presentation of footage.⁸

⁵ Diane di Prima, unpublished interview with J.H. (April 30, 1996).

⁶ An uncredited photograph of Smith preparing to film the Cake Scene graces the cover of *Film Culture*'s summer 1963 issue. Andy Warhol shot a one-roll 16mm "newsreel" of the sequence, confiscated by the New York City Police Department in March 1964 and presumably lost.

⁷ At the same time that Mekas was writing checks for the production's raw stock and lab work he covered the cost of printing *Overstimulated* in a check dated August 7, 1963.

⁸ Jerry Tartaglia's restoration is an assemblage of already-edited sequences, with a chronology based on notes made by Smith and Tony Conrad in 1963-64. As the chronology does not include the Yellow Sequence (discovered on a separate reel), it is presented as an addendum. Smith's sometime projection of the material, shot at 24 frames per second, at the slower silent speed (16 frames per second), as well as his penchant for lengthy reel changes and other projection breakdowns—not to mention the subjective, perhaps pharmaceutically-enhanced state of the audience—likely accounts for descriptions of the movie as a four-hour epic.

One can only speculate on Smith's plans for the *Normal Love* soundtrack. His notes specify both "African drums" and "classical elation" for the Swing Scene, a "Sol's piano music" as well as "violin and drumming delirium" for the Blue Scene, and a number of specific rural sound effects (frogs and crickets) for the Swamp and Party Scenes. A small item in *The Village Voice* (October 24, 1963) announces a grand competition for the *Normal Love* soundtrack:

If you are able to reasonably duplicate the voice of Maria Montez, you are invited to submit a tape recording of the following quote: "Every time I look into the mirror I could scream because I am so beautiful."

The restored version makes use of selections from Smith's record collection—many of them used during his various "live" presentations of the footage.

Saturday, December 6, 4:30 p.m.

FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN

Universal, 1943, 74 mins.

Directed by Roy William Neill. Script by Curtis Siodmak. Produced by George Waggner. Music by Hans J. Salter. Photographed by George Robinson. Sets by Russell A. Gausman. Costumes by Vera West. With Bela Lugosi (The Monster), Lon Chaney, Jr. (Lawrence Talbot, the Wolf Man), Ilona Massey (Baroness Elsa Frankenstein), Lionel Atwill (The Mayor), Maria Ouspenskaya (Maleva). New York opening: The Rialto Theatre, March 5, 1943.

"Rubens. Arabian Nights. Chinese Masters. Monet . . . It is a dream that Jack must have carried in himself since his childhood, this pink-yellow Chinese-Arabic dream," Jonas Mekas rhapsodized after seeing the first rushes of the movie that would eventually be known as *Normal Love*.¹

In fact, *Normal Love* suggests a pastoral, pastel-colored conflation of *White Savage*, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, *The Lady and the Monster*, *I Walked with a Zombie*, *The Mummy's Hand*, and *The Spider Woman*. Even more than *Flaming Creatures*, its successor drew upon the "secret-flix" of Smith's boyhood—specifically those Universal wartime horror-movies whose stars (Bela Lugosi and Gale Sondergaard) he particularly admired and whose characters he would re-imagine in drag and color.²

Anticipating *Normal Love* by conjoining two well-developed horror mythos, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* is a movie as blatantly atmospheric as it is boldly irrational. The action, David J. Skal observes, unfolds "in a monster-haunted Germanic never-never land called Visaria, which a resurrected Lawrence Talbot and his wizened gypsy sidekick are somehow able to reach from Wales in a horse-drawn wagon." (As Smith would note: "Corniness is the other side of marvelousness.")³

¹ "The Great Pasty Triumph," *Film Culture* No.29 (Summer 1963) p.6. Mekas titled his brief appreciation after *Normal Love*'s working title—one Smith would several times recycle. "The Great Pasty Triumph" is also his last one-person photography show, at the Erewhon Gallery on East First Street in 1965. The exhibition included a number of pre-1962 color images (many of which anticipate *Normal Love* in posing elaborately costumed creatures in natural settings) affixed to three-inch white wooden cubes.

² In his essay "Maria Montez: Anima of an Antediluvian World," Ronald Tavel calls *Normal Love* "a work that draws its look, its feel, its colors, images, and backyard fairy tale quality directly from *White Savage*." Jack Smith, *Flaming Creature* op.cit. p.96.

Smith's account of his secret-flix may be found in "The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez," *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* op.cit. pp.25-35. Smith's evaluation of then-current trash movies anticipates our own situation: "Fantasies now feature weight lifters who think now how lucky and clever they were to get into the movies & the fabulous pay" (p. 28).

³ *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994) p.217. Skal offers a pithy analysis of *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman* and the Wolf Man cycle in the context of World War II (211-18). Smith "Perfect Filmic Appositeness" op.cit. p.31.

The credits that emerge from smoking test tubes, the opening mausoleum robbery, the orgiastic Festival of the New Wine, and the figure of the Wolf Man are images that would find their place in the Smith oeuvre. (One of his alter egos was "Rodney Werewolf.") The sequence wherein the Monster carries the comatose Baroness only to be attacked himself by the Wolf Man is recapitulated after a fashion at the climax of the Cake Scene in *Normal Love*.⁴

Although *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* is not among the secret-flix Smith cites in his 1962 essay "The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez," he did list it in a syllabus for a proposed film course titled "Copyright in Atlantis."

This undated syllabus also includes the Thomas Alva Edison company's prehistoric *The Kiss* (1896) and two silent features *Destiny* (Fritz Lang, 1921) and *The Black Pirate* (Albert Parker, 1926) with Douglas Fairbanks. Many of the films, which are typically identified by star rather than director, date, like *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, from the period of Smith's youth: *Hollywood Hotel* (Busby Berkeley, 1937); *The Blue Bird* (Walter Lang, 1940); *Aloma of the South Seas* (Alfred Santell, 1941) with Dorothy Lamour; *South of Tahiti* (George Waggner, 1941) with Maria Montez; *I Married a Witch* (Rene Clair, 1942) with Veronica Lake; *Chatterbox* (Joseph Santley, 1943) with Judy Canova; *The Lady and the Monster* (George Sherman, 1944) with Vera Ralston; and *Dark Passage* (Delmer Daves, 1947).

The Veils of Bagdad (George Sherman, 1953) with Victor Mature, seems a late addition; the list, which has no particular order, departs Hollywood in the 1950s with the Yugoslav folk tale *The Magic Sword* (Vojislav Nanovic); *The Gold of Naples* (Vittorio De Sica, 1954); *Yambao* (Alfredo B. Crevenna, 1956), a Mexican vehicle for Ninon Sevilla; and *Flaming Creatures* (1963). Smith's course is thus bracketed, at least chronologically, by two shocking, censor-inflaming movies—Edison's and his own.⁵

⁴ Just as Smith's Mummy was played by two actors, so the role of the Monster in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* was performed by both Lugosi and, uncredited, the stuntman Eddie Parker.

⁵ Smith's titles are far from exact. I assume that by "The Kissing Bandit [with] Judy Garland [and] Gene Kelly," he most likely refers to another MGM musical, one included among his secret-flix, *The Pirate* (Vincente Minnelli, 1948); that the Italian film he calls *The Iron Cross* is probably the fantastic *Crown of Iron* (Alessandro Blasetti, 1941); and that the Erich von Stroheim vehicle *Mask of Korea* is almost certainly *The Mask of Dijon* (Lewis Landers, 1946).

I have not been able to identify *Antony and Cleopatra*, dated to the 1920s and starring [Louis?] Jouvet as Marc Antony, or an Italian film, *Green Fire*, with the French actress Mireille Balin.

Sunday, December 7 at 2:00 p.m.

CHUMLUM

Ron Rice, 1964, 26 mins. Color.

With Jack Smith, Beverly Grant, Mario Montez, Joel Markman, Francis Francine, Guy Henson, Barry Titus, Zelda Nelson, Gerard Malanga, Barbara Rubin, and Frances Stillman. Music: Angus MacLise. Recording: Tony Conrad. Special assistance: Stanley Alboum.

CAMP

Andy Warhol, 1965, 70 mins. Black-and-white.

With Jack Smith, Baby Jane Holzer, Paul Swan, Mario Montez, Mar-Mar, Jody Babb, Tally Brown, Fufu Smith, Donyle, Tosh Carillo, and Gerard Malanga.

Shown successfully at the Charles during the summer of 1962, Ron Rice's *The Flower Thief* provided Smith with inspiration for *Flaming Creatures*. A year later, Rice returned the complement. According to P. Adams Sitney, "Rice often accompanied Smith as he was shooting *Normal Love*. They tended to return to [Rice's Lispenard Street] loft with most of the cast, still in their costumes, after the day's filming. At first Rice made some casual film studies of the actors swinging on the hammocks in his loft. Later he expanded them into the production of *Chumlum*."¹

An altogether more languid harem movie than *Flaming Creatures*, *Chumlum*—which would be Rice's first and only color film—makes elaborate use of multiple superimpositions, all produced in the camera, and an equally layered soundtrack. Exterior locations include the wrecked car and field of goldenrods that served as the location for *Normal Love*'s Yellow Sequence as well as a cabin in the woods. Sitney writes:

If there is a development or progress in the film, it is from indoors to outdoors, from swinging, crawling, and dancing in the harem to dancing in the sky over Coney Island (through superimposition)—an image would recall the end of *The Flower Thief* where Taylor Mead dissolves into the sea.

Sitney suggests that *Chumlum* is meant to be "a reverie in which time is stretched or folded over itself" belonging to Smith, who appears in Arabian garb midway through and can be seen sliding around crushing Beverly Grant in a hammock.²

¹ Sitney *op.cit.* pp.358-59.

² *ibid.* p.359. According to Joan Adler's memoir:

Chumlum was shot "towards the end of the summer, when the non-stop effort was over and the shooting of *Normal Love* had become sporadic. Ron's set was ready for *Chumlum*. Jack's creatures set free, Joel, Beverly, Frankie, Rene, Jack himself. There were three-day shooting sessions which led to

Such featured roles were commonplace in the underground movies of the mid-1960s. Smith subsequently appeared to extravagant effect opposite Mead in Rice's unfinished epic *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man* (1963); was included in Andy Warhol's *50 Fantastics and 50 Personalities* (1963-64); played Vincent Van Gogh in Dov Lederberg's *Eargogh* (1964-65), Orpheus in Gregory Markopolous' *Illiac Passion* (1964-66), Jack the Ripper in Bill Vehr's *Brothel* (1966), and either Batman or Dracula in an unfinished film begun by Warhol during the summer of 1964.³

Warhol's interest in Smith's movies has been well documented—not least by Warhol himself in his memoir *POPism*. Present for the filming of *Normal Love*'s cake sequence at Eleanor Ward's estate in Old Lyme Connecticut, Warhol studied Smith's technique:

I picked something up from him for my own movies—the way he used anyone who happened to be around that day, and also how he just kept shooting until the actors got bored . . . The preparations for every shooting were like a party—hours and hours of people putting makeup on and getting into costume and building sets.

Warhol further notes that his second 16mm film was “a little newsreel of the people out there filming for Jack.” This three-minute camera roll, *Jack Smith Shooting Normal Love*, was showing with *Flaming Creatures* at the New Bowery when NYPD detectives busted the theater on March 3, 1964. It was confiscated by the New York Police Department and is presumably lost.⁴

despair on the creatures' part, two days of waiting for Ron to start shooting, left totally to their own character-building and action devices, drained of energy until they slowly emerged into slow, curving dancers in sequence shot over sequence, intermeshing blacks and reds and yellows, curving fabric lines, swaying arms, hair, bodies. Jack started everyone off into make-up and costumes, then started his own. It took three days to finish that, too, as everyone explored the heaps around. Beverly in the hammock.

“On Location,” in Dwoskin *op.cit.* p.13.

³ Smith's other performances of the period include Carl Linder's *Skin* (1964) and *The Devil is Dead* (1964), Naomi Levine's *Jeremelu* (1964), George Kuchar's *Lovers of Eternity* (1964), Piero Heliczer's *Satisfaction* (1966) and various untitled films by Jerry Jofen.

⁴ Warhol, Andy and Hackett, Pat; *POPism: The Warhol '60s* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1980), pp.31-32 Warhol is considerably more effusive in an interview with David Ehrenstein published in *Film Culture* No.40 (Spring 1966):

DE: Who in the New American Cinema do you admire?

AW: Jaaaacck Smiiiiittth.

DE: You really like Jack Smith?

AW: When I was little, I always . . . thought he was my best director . . . I mean, just the only person I would ever copy, and just . . . so terrific and now, since I'm grown up, I just think that he makes the best movies.

DE: What in particular do you like about his movies?

AW: He's the only one I know who uses color . . . backwards.

The underground nearly went under during the spring of 1964. There were no more public screenings, as Jonas Mekas devoted his energies to a series of court battles. Smith was unable to complete *Normal Love*, although he continued to show it as rushes. Rice took off for Mexico, where he died of pneumonia in December 1964. Under the circumstances, the major force in underground movies became Warhol—the one figure who was able to subsidize his own studio.

On October 28, 1965, *Normal Love* was screened at the Filmmakers Cinematheque on a bill with Warhol's *Temptations*—soon to be retitled *My Hustler*. Two days after the premiere of what would be Warhol's first real popular success, Smith—the subject of some fifteen Factory "screen tests" as well as a collaborator on at least one unfinished feature—appeared in Warhol's *Camp*.

Basically a filmed variety program, *Camp* had its premiere at the Filmmakers' Cinematheque on November 18 as part of the two-week New Cinema Festival of shadow plays, slide pieces, psychedelic light shows, and multi-media performances (many quite aggressive in their sensory bombardment) that also included Smith's *Rehearsal for the Destruction of Atlantis*. Warhol, who would unveil his own multimedia extravaganza "Andy Warhol, Uptight" two months later at the annual dinner of the New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry, was here a step behind. For the ad blurb he wrote, "Everyone is being so creative for this festival that I thought I would just show a bad movie. The camera work is so bad, the lighting is awful. The technical work is terrible—but the people are so fantastic."⁵

Although *Camp* is barely acknowledged in the literature on Warhol's movies, filmmaker Thom Andersen gave it an unusually full description in the June 1966 issue of *Artforum*. Andersen wrote:

Camp is essentially one unedited shot, interrupted one by one reel change. As the film begins, the performers are grouped in Warhol's studio as are the figures in Courbet's painting of 1855, *L'Atelier* . . . There is no simple order to the arrangement: people are seated on a couch, on hard-backed wooden chairs, and on stools; they are standing against a wall in the background. The whole scene is lit with a garish melodrama created not only by stationary lights, but also by portable Sun-Guns carried about by T-shirted technicians who wander into the frame occasionally to light a certain spot or move a microphone. The performers are listed in the program "in order of appearance" as "Baby Jane Holzer, Paul Swan, Mario Montez, Mar-Mar, Jody Babb, Tally Brown, Jack Smith, Fufu Smith, Donyle, Tosh Carillo, and your host, Gerard Malanga." As this program note suggests, the format is that of a variety show. People are introduced and they perform and act for a set period of time.

Several of Smith's creatures, most notably Mario Montez, became Warhol superstars. In fact, the coinage "superstar" is Smith's. A selection of his photographs, "Superstars of Cinemaroc," was published in the first issue of *Gnaoua* (Spring 1964).

⁵ Hoberman and Rosenbaum *op.cit.* p.69.

Paul Swan in an abbreviated gladiator costume which seems to be a series of oversized diapers does a death scene to the accompaniment of Wagner. He is asked to repeat it and does so. Baby Jane Holzer, wearing a poor boy sweater and wide-wale corduroy trousers, comes forward and dances with him, then disappears . . .

Mario Montez appears as a female impersonator dressed demurely in a long flowery dress. He sings "If I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate" and dances. As he dances, the cameraman zooms in and out. Never has the zoom been so gratuitously abused . . .

Mar-Mar, a chubby middle-aged man, dresses as a clown and deports himself as one. He wears two ties; a bow tie and a straight long tie. A teddy bear hangs on a chain from his belt like a codpiece. He delivers a parodistic political oration for William Buckley and performs a series of yo-yo tricks . . .

Jody Babb has been sitting on a stool swinging her leg in studied nervousness. Now the microphone is brought over to her. She announces she is going to sing a song although she only knows part of it. She detaches the microphone from its stand and walks around singing "Let Me Entertain You" in a halting, untrained voice . . .

At the opening of the second reel—some time has passed, but the camera has not moved—the M.C., Gerard Malanga, introduces himself and reads a poem entitled *Camp*, a short parody of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. It ends with the line, "Who would ever guess I was a boy?" Tally Brown, a very fat woman in a low-cut dress, just talks. None of us are really camping, she says, we're all playing ourselves, an observation as true as it is tautological.

Jack Smith refuses to perform . . . ⁶

Indeed, Smith, nattily dressed in a suit, has so far shown remarkable restraint—refusing to clap for the other performers, although he smirks as Tally Brown advances to the microphone. Introduced by her as "the inimitable Jack Smith," he makes a delayed entrance and, as the viewer wonders what it is he might do, stalls for time by placing a doll's head on the microphone and dancing to a bit of Ramsey Lewis' instrumental version "The In Crowd," which has been playing somewhere off camera since the beginning of the second reel.

It soon becomes apparent that Smith is going to the interpersonal. "Should I open the closet now, Andy?" he asks the silent presence behind the camera, in an uninflected whine. The question is repeated twice. Having donned shades and declared "let's open the closet now," Smith shuffles to another location in the Factory, calling for lights and

⁶ Andersen, Thom, "Film," *Artforum* (June 1966) p.58.

directing the camera to follow him. Thus, Smith commandeers the movie which, as Andersen notes,

becomes increasingly incoherent. The portable lights and the microphone follow [Smith] only intermittently. Indistinctly, we hear the other performers getting up, moving around. Elsewhere are other voices saying words we can't discern . . . Smith passes by another couch on which two girls are sitting; when the camera passes, one gets up and walks away; the other remains seated, lit in silhouette. Finally the closet [a glass case containing a single *Batman* comic book] is reached.⁷

Shown now in close-up clutching the key, Smith leers, feigns confusion and rolls his eyes—posing, prancing to the music, and otherwise miming controlled hysteria, while continuing to direct the action: “Bring the camera forward—is there a zoom on that?” He ultimately pushes the closet forward until it threatens to topple over and has to be supported by Tally Brown, finally hunkering down with a movie magazine as the next performer, FuFu Smith, begins to set up an arrangement of toy trains.⁸

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Before introducing Smith, Brown makes a reference to her last "Warhol special," namely *Batman*, Smith's major collaboration with Warhol. Known variously as *A Lavender Filter Throughout*, *The Rose Without Thorns*, *Dracula*, *Batman Dracula*, and (by Smith) *Rodney Dracula*, this silent feature—albeit the first Warhol production to use lights—was shot, as a series of 100-foot 16mm camera rolls, in the aftermath of the *Flaming Creatures* trial, during the summer of 1964.

Suggesting a cross between a mad scientist's lab and a discotheque, the Factory scenes feature Rufus Collins, Ivy Nicholson, Gerard Malanga, Billy Name, an unidentified male nude, a raw chicken, and Baby Jane Holzer in a tinfoil bikini. The various entanglements, scarcely more risqué than footkissing, suggest a modified *Flaming Creatures* entanglement. The scene ends as Smith, dressed in black and sporting a pair of Halloween fangs, twists with Beverly Grant atop a mock operating table.

Another series of Factory interiors features Taylor Mead, Tally Brown, Beverly Grant, Baby Jane Holzer, Gerard Malanga. Smith, again in fangs, lurks about—wrapping Ronnie Cutrone's head in aluminum foil and dancing with his mirrored reflection. A third Factory sequence has a bejeweled Smith first dancing and then playing footsie with a half-dressed Sally Kirkland who, abruptly ravished by Beverly Grant, walks off abashed and puts on her skirt.

There are also two series of exterior rolls. One, shot on a Long Island estate, show the caped Smith in long shot, dancing, twirling, running towards camera, and collapsing. Holzer, Nicholson, and Grant are also present—as is Naomi Levine, who is abducted by a naked man. The second has a subdued Smith twirling his cape on the Factory roof in the company of Tally Brown and Beverly Grant—whose picture on the cover of the Summer 1964 *Film Culture* is taken from this sequence. The credit reads "Beverly Grant on the set of the Rompalmhol Production *A Lavender Filter Throughout* (A Concatenation of Jack Smiths) by Andy Warhol in association with Henry Romney and John Palmer, 1964.

Batman Dracula—as the footage has come to be called—was never completed (or even edited), although excerpts were shown at the New Yorker theater on December 7, 1964. Warhol's account of *Dracula*—"the filming went on for months"—may be found in *POPism op.cit.* pp.32, 70-71. Smith made his final appearance for Warhol as a "soothsayer" in *Hedy*, shot in November 1965 from a script by Ronald Tavel. The large cast not only included former Smith superstar Mario Montez in the title role but also *Flaming Creature's* Arnold Rockwood.

Sunday, December 7 at 4:00 p.m.

I WAS A MALE YVONNE DE CARLO

1968-70s, 30 mins. Black-and-white.

Sound on tape (Jerry Tartaglia).

THE SECRET OF RENTED ISLAND

1977/1997, 80 mins. Color. Sound.

Slides sequenced by Edward Leffingwell and Joseph Santarromana.

Produced with the assistance of the Estate Project for Artists for AIDS.

Few recordings exist of the live performances Jack Smith presented from 1968 into the mid-1980s. Indeed, far more people saw Ron Vawter's interpretation of one such performance, the 1981 *What's Underground About Marshmallows?*, which formed the basis for the second act of his Roy Cohn/Jack Smith, than saw all of Smith's performances combined.¹

I was a Male Yvonne De Carlo, which stars Smith himself, takes its title from one such piece—*I was a Male Yvonne De Carlo for the Lucky Landlord Underground*, staged in the early 1980s. Shot mainly during the late '60s and edited a decade or more later, *I Was a Male Yvonne De Carlo* is one of several films and slide-shows that feature the filmmaker as a mock celebrity. It opens with the excerpt from *No President* originally called "Marsh Gas of Flatulandia"—several minutes of black-and-white footage of steam escaping from manholes segues to an interior scene of various creatures emerging from dry ice vapors—then shifts to color to show the filmmaker, clad in a leopard-skin jump suit, attended by a nurse as he sits amidst the detritus of his duplex loft on Grand and Greene Street, resembling nothing so much as a ruined Warhol Factory.

Smith waits under the visible movie lights, drumming his fingers. A fan presents him with a black-and-white glamour shot (Smith in profile, posed with a sinuously curved dagger) to autograph as the Warhol superstar Ondine, dressed entirely in black leather, snaps his picture. Violence erupts as the nurse takes out a whip to discipline the star's fans. When a female creature pulls out the same dagger depicted in the glamour shot, Smith jumps up and shakes the weapon from her hand. The action is post-scripted with footage of a steam-shovel patrolling the rubble where a 14th Street movie palace once stood.²

¹ By the early 1970s, Smith's emphasis shifted to performance and he became, in effect, his own creature. Cinemaroc Nickelodeon productions were supplemented—if not supplanted—by a series of impossible-to-recreate slide shows and so-called live films. "A program of mine" means "extra trouble," he promised one Hamburg venue. "I am experimenting with various records as the film is projected and making other small corrections. This could be turned to advantage as a glamorous selling point. Often, there is repeat business because people can see the film gaining power as corrections are made and that is a new kind of film excitement." "Jack Smith Film Enterprises, Inc," *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* op.cit. p.149.

A transcription of the *What's Underground About Marshmallows?* tape used by Vawter is included in *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* op.cit. pp.137-43.

² In 1945, after Walter Wanger cast her in *Salome, Where She Danced*, the soulless, plastic Yvonne De Carlo replaced Maria Montez as Universal's Queen of Technicolor and reigning babe of mishigas. Unlike "The Wonderful One," as Tavel writes, De Carlo "cherished no secret 'art' ambitions and gave the studio few

The Secret of Rented Island documents Smith's legendary, gloriously eccentric restaging of Ibsen's *Ghosts*. The play was one in which Smith had a long-standing interest although, as he told Gaby Rodgers, "it is timely doing *Ghosts*. There are new strains of VD which will not respond to penicillin, you know."³

Perhaps the most radically pragmatic staging Ibsen has ever received, *The Secret of Rented Island* (a.k.a *Orchid Rot of Rented Lagoon*) was performed at the Collation Center, a loft on Park Place near City Hall. Like all Smith performances, it was in a state of constant flux. At the performance I attended, Regina was played by a large pink plush hippo suspended in a pulley-operated basket, Engstrand and Pastor Manders by a pair of toy monkeys, each placed on a little wagon, while Mrs. Alving had a human interpreter (NYU drama professor Ron Argelander) who sat, swathed in scarves and a thick, black veil, inside a supermarket shopping cart. A prop woman, made up as a hunchback, dressed in a kimono and wearing high, cumbersome wedgies, wheeled the animals and Mrs. Alving on and off stage, positioning them (and also climbing up and down a step ladder to work the lights) as directed by Smith, who played Oswald.

Most of the dialogue was prerecorded on tape by Smith, using voices of different pitches that varied between a garbled hysteria and a ridiculously slow drone. Although the tape appeared to contain the entire play (with interpolations concerning Uncle Pawnshop and the Lucky Landlord Paradise), it was frequently inaudible, having to compete with the phonograph records of ocean sound effects and exotic music. Smith delivered his lines live, reading from a tattered script which eventually littered the stage along with the handfuls of glitter he produced from a pouch inside his pants. In Smith's adaptation, Oswald was transformed from a failed painter into a forgetful actor. Thus, despite the script he held in his hands, Smith would repeatedly ask Mrs. Alving to remind him of his place in the play.

The Secret of Rented Island ran from Halloween 1976 into the new year. Performances began with the burning of an enormous quantity of incense and ended, sometimes five intermissionless hours later, with the playing of Doris Day's recording "(Once I Had A) Secret Love" and the ceremonial parting of Mrs. Alving's veil to reveal what Smith described as "a

headaches. And, if she had no magic, no tangible passion, no legendary superstructure, well, that was the age Hollywood was moving into."

According to Tavel, Smith felt that, by the mid 1970s, the Lower East Side had entered a De Carlo age, second-rate and inauthentic:

...stuck in the gummy cobwebs covering the real thing. I also had the feeling that he said Miss De Carlo as one says 'Gee' rather than Jesus, or 'Gosh' and 'Golly' rather than God. And when I'd confront the neologist with that suspicion, he'd shyly, even humbly agree. I was not wise to tempt the minatory gods with continual familiarity.

In an unpublished interview with Callie Angell and myself (August 24, 1994), Tavel elaborated:

When [Jack] would talk a great deal about Yvonne De Carlo, I'd say, "Well, why do you talk so much about her?" And he'd say, "You can't get the real thing anymore and it's better to deal with removal and displacement."

Tavel believes that, as early as *Arabian Nights* (1942), Wanger had De Carlo in the chorus line as a possible Montez replacement and that this threat was actually made during the shooting of *Sudan* (1945), her last Technicolor film for Universal.

³ "Casting by Candlelight," *Soho Weekly News* (11/4/76) p.29.

hideously grotesque mask of diseased decay." Purists should know that, in sequencing these slides, an hour of taped pre-performance preparation has been condensed into six minutes.⁴

⁴ By the time these slides were shot—most likely in January 1977—Mrs. Alving was being played by two mannequin legs and a pair of shoes. Presumably, Smith was reading her lines as well. Her mask is not apparent.

For a Smith production, *The Secret of Rented Island* has been relatively well-documented. In addition to the slides sequenced for this recording, a single-frame 16mm film was produced simultaneously. The most detailed written account may be found in Stefan Brecht's *Queer Theater* op.cit. pp.157-77. See also J. Hoberman, "The Theatre of Jack Smith," *The Drama Review* (March 1979) pp.8-9; two reviews, Dan Isaac's "The King Queenmaker Meets Ibsen," *Village Voice* (January 31, 1977) pp.67-69 and Gerald Rabkin's "Bizarre Survivor," *Soho Weekly News* (November 11, 1976) p.28; as well as Gaby Rodger's curtain-raiser, op.cit.

Saturday, December 13, 2:00 p.m.

REEFERS OF TECHNICOLOR ISLAND

1967, 15 mins. Color. Sound on Tape.

SONG FOR RENT

1968-69, 5 mins. Color. Sound on Tape.

With Jack Smith as Rose Courtyard.

NO PRESIDENT

1967-70, 50 mins. Black-and-white. Sound on Tape.

With Irving Rosenthal (Wendell Willkie), Doris Desmond (The Love Bandit), Mario Montez, Donna Kerness, Allegra, Gay Martini, Bill Fortenberry, Jerry Sims, Robert Lavigne, John Vaccaro, Nan King, Ruby Zinnia, Tally Brown, Wendell Willkie, White Pussy, Lob Loach, Yusef.¹

Restored with the assistance of the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts.

The last of Jack Smith's 16mm features—austerely black-and-white, more an exercise in sensibility than craft—*No President* evolved out of his 1967 program, *Horror and Fantasy at Midnight*, first shown on November 9th and 14th at the New Cinema Playhouse on West 42 Street (where *Chelsea Girls* had begun its epochal run the year before).

Smith's poster cites a number of individual titles—"film clips from the subterranean chambers of Dr. Madman!"—including *Reefers of Technicolor Island*, *Scrubwoman of Atlantis* (both in "Livid Color!!"), *Ratdroppings of Uranus*, *Marshgas of Flatulandia*, *The Flake of Soot* and *Overstimulated*—shown to the accompaniment of a taped soundtrack by the Cineola Orchestra. Jonas Mekas' review in *The Village Voice* (November 16, 1967) describes a two-hour plus presentation of three untitled films, each approximately 45 minutes long:

The first one starred a most beautiful marijuana plant, a gorgeous blooming white queen with her crown reaching towards the sky. In the second part we saw a gallery of Jack's creatures, and there is no other name for them but to call them Jack Smith's creatures. Although they are enacted by other talented and beautiful people, it's Jack's imagination that crowns them with those fantastic gowns and hats and plumes and colors. The third part is like a continuation of the second, but it's in black-and-white, or more truly, in gray-and-white.

¹ These are the credits advertised for *No President*'s February 2, 1969 Elgin screening. A review in *The East Village Other* (February 9, 1969) cites Charles Henri Ford in the cast. Other uncredited participants, identified by viewers or cited in Smith's production notes, include Tosh Carillo, Francis Francine, John Hawkins, Piero Heliczer, Gerard Malanga, Joel Markman, Jeanne Phillips, and Gaby Rodgers.

The monochromatic footage, Mekas wrote, was no less "glorious and maybe even more so" than the preceding films. To see Smith's new work was "like a national holiday."²

Like Ken Jacobs' *Star Spangled To Death, Horror and Fantasy at Midnight* would mix original material with found footage. By the time James Stoller saw the program, Smith's 1960 *Overstimulated* was intercut with newsreel footage of the 1940 Republican Convention that nominated Wendell Willkie to run for president. The Willkie footage was projected in and out of focus. "I don't know what Wendell Willkie means to Jack Smith, but I was immoderately moved by this strange juxtaposition," Stoller wrote.

The Cineola Orchestra's "haunting" musical accompaniment was now augmented by "some comparably haunting word music, and a gummy Vietnam discourse" which Stoller recalled from Smith's 1965 performance *Rehearsal for the Destruction of Atlantis*. These, he thought, invited the audience "to consider the footage of exotic beings, Christmas snow falling, etc. in a considerably wider context. And it's not difficult to do."³

Joseph Aliaga's account has the program open with *Reefers of Technicolor Island*, the same color footage described by Mekas, accompanied by "tooty flutes" and "the ominous tom-tom of drums." Then came color footage of "boys in drag" accompanied by a Vietnam tape:

Seated and languidly swaying with a big fan in front of his-her face the top chief, called Lobster Man, jerks the exposed penis of a faceless naked man standing off to the side while a narrator appropriately touches, in diplomatic terms, on a corrupt official's jerking off a nation, a people, a power and it's funny.

This was followed by "headlights of cars moving at night through rising steam from the city's streets," the sequence referred to by Smith as *Marshgas of Flatulandia*; black-and-white interiors of various creatures, and finally, the *Overstimulated* Republican Convention described by Stoller. The last shot, Aliaga wrote, was "a brilliant intuitive leap . . . a newsreel clip showing hundreds of civilians lined up on both sides of a street wildly cheering army recruits marching off into World War One."⁴

Advertised in *The Village Voice* (January 18, 1968) as "Jack Smith's first program since *Flaming Creatures*," *Horror and Fantasy* moved downtown for a five-day run at the Tambellini's Black Gate on Second Avenue at 10th Street. Irving Rosenthal "author of the Flamboyante new esoteric novel SHEEPER and 1st actor to appear on the American screen in glitter makeup" was announced as the star. By late March, this program had coalesced into the *Kidnapping and Auctioning of Wendell Wilkie by the Love Bandit*—an all black-and-white presentation starring writer Irving Rosenthal, lipsticked and unshaven,

² Mekas *op.cit.* pp.298-99.

³ "16mm," *Village Voice* (December 7, 1967) p.37. Appearing three weeks after Mekas' review, Stoller's piece was written partially in response to a letter published in the *Voice* that had attacked Mekas as "odious" and "reprehensible" for praising Smith.

⁴ "Jack Smith's Mixed Bag and Then . . . , *Medium 2* (Winter 1967-68) pp.33-35.

as the infant Wendell abducted by a mustachio'd pirate and sold on the block of a slave market.⁵

According to Stoller, who described the presentation in *The Village Voice*, the show began with "the playing of a Willkie address, in the deep booming tones of old radios." Because Smith typically projected his newsreel footage at silent speed, while leaving the exciter lamp on, the voiceover took on a compelling sluggish tone. "The announcer's voice is slowed down at length until it sounds just like Jack Smith's. Then campaign footage of Willkie on the farm, etc. Then without warning, right into Smith's creatures."

The Cineola Orchestra was no longer in evidence. Instead, as Stoller wrote, the images were accompanied by:

hoary, familiar music so dumb sounding that even Don Ameche wouldn't play it. Also throughout, the voice of Jack Smith may be heard booming from the projection booth, complaining about one thing or another. He seemed, I thought, to grow most unhappy whenever something particularly beautiful appeared on the screen as if embarrassed by his own powers.⁶

Kidnapping and Auctioning of Wendell Wilkie by the Love Bandit was playing at the Gate when Lyndon Johnson announced that he would not run for a second term as president. This juxtaposition of Smith's Bagdad and American electoral politics proved prophetic. In the summer of 1968, lame-duck LBJ nominated Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas to replace retiring Earl Warren and, by way of drawing attention to the nominee's liberal position on obscenity, Strom Thurmond organized a "Fortas Film Festival," including *Flaming Creatures*. [See *Crimson Creatures: The Case Against Flaming Creatures*.]

The first Sunday morning in February 1969, less than two weeks after Richard Nixon's inauguration, an hour-long version of *No President* was shown at the Elgin: "Wendell Wilkie . . . More Famous Than Most Presidents—He Had Farms in Indiana, Vegetative Motility, and a Willingness to be President . . ." read the flyer, which also noted "If one knew what one expected of one's president one wouldn't need a president

⁵ Irving Rosenthal's novel *Sheeper* was published by Grove Press in January 1968, with Smith's portrait of a turbaned Rosenthal on the cover. (Smith's passion for Maria Montez is cited, without particular sympathy, on page 204.) As *No President* evolved, Smith used his Rosenthal portrait to advertise the film.

Other personnel listed in the ad for the January 17-21 run include Mona Joy, Robert Lavigne, Doris, Hakim Kahn, Tiffany Zenobia, Suzanne [sic] de Maria, Allegra, Mario Montez, Gerry [sic] Sims, Wendell Wilkie [sic] and the Lobster. The films were evidently accompanied by John Vacarro's narration and Angus MacLise's Cineola Orchestra. When *Kidnapping and Auctioning of Wendell Wilkie by the Love Bandit* was presented at the Gate the following March 28, the announced cast was Irving Rosenthal, Doris Desmond, Mario Montez, Donna Kerness, John Lavigne, John Vaccaro, Nan King, Tally Brown, Ruby Zinnia, Bill Fortenberry, and Jerry Sims.

⁶ "16mm," *Village Voice* (April 4, 1968) p.49.

would one?" People thought they knew what was expected of Jack Smith. Andrew Sarris in the *Voice* and the reviewer for *EVO* both commented on the size of the crowds.⁷

The screening was clearly an event. Sarris, who attributed his presence to "a spirit of morbid, perhaps even masochistic curiosity," and later wrote a two-part review of a film he clearly hated, put the running time at slightly more than an hour. The footage, including that of Wendell Willkie, was shown silently, with sound provided by "a fatuous Lowell Thomas commentary on the Congo and mood music by Tschaikowsky."⁸

Where the Sarris review is near pathological in its ambivalence, Parker Tyler would hail *No President* as "an even more daring exploitation of the themes in *Flaming Creatures* (minus cunnilingual rape and plus political burlesque)" and Mekas reported in the *Voice* (February 13, 1969) that at least one viewer at the Elgin screening found *No President* "a remarkable first public screening of a film made 50 years ago."⁹

No President had a move-over run, beginning Friday, February 7, at Cinema 7, "a private club devoted to films for the male homosexual." The same day, a conference on censorship and pornography held on the Notre Dame campus in South Bend, Illinois never got beyond its opening day. It was disrupted by sheriff's deputies who maced students in breaking up a screening of Andrew Noren's *Kodak Ghost Poems* which, along with *Flaming Creatures* (yanked from the projector after two scandalizing minutes), had been banned by the administration.

On October 30, 1969, *No President* opened for a midnight run at the same Bleecker Street Cinema where *Flaming Creatures* had begun its scarlet career nearly seven years before. The film was shown once more, on October 12, 1970, projected in the back room at Max's Kansas City as part of the first New York Underground Film Festival. The lone mention appears to be Jonas Mekas' praise, later that month, in *The Village Voice*:

I sit through a commercial movie, and it does nothing to me. It is so far away from the main concerns and passions of the art of cinema today, that it does nothing to me. Then I go to Max's Kansas City, and I see Jack Smith's show, his present version of *No President*, and the screen suddenly comes to life. Not only comes to life: It moves with such intense and unique imagination that I sit through a hundred minutes [sic] without once being able to detach myself from it. I think Jack managed to put into this movie fifty, sixty, I don't know how many years of screen's mythology, symbology, everything. He distilled it all to the basic

⁷ "Films in Focus," *Village Voice* (February 6, 1969) p.55; *East Village Other* (February 7, 1969) n.p. The movie's title is sometimes given as *No President?* Other titles found in Smith's notes include *Wendell Wilkie When Will You Remember to Empty Your Artifical Bladder Before Bedwetting Time?* and *Marshmallow President*. (Smith consistently spells Willkie with one "l," as do some—but not all—commentators on the film.)

⁸ "Films in Focus," *Village Voice* (February 6, 1969) p.55; "Films in Focus," *The Voice Voice* (February 13, 1969) p.58.

⁹ Tyler *op.cit.* p.42; "Movie Journal," *Village Voice* (February 13, 1969) p.57.

images of the unconscious, and in the most subtle way possible. Jack's film is one of cinema's glories.¹⁰

Mekas had already written to Smith on October 19, 1970 to inform him that the Selection Committee for the newly established Anthology Film Archives voted to include both *Flaming Creatures* and *No President* in its canon of essential cinema. In his letter, included among Smith's papers, Mekas stipulated the "original version" of *No President* "in the shape you projected it fifteen months ago" as well as the first version of *Flaming Creatures*.

The surviving version of *No President* alternates scenes shot in Smith's Greene Street loft with found footage—including a Lowell Thomas travelogue of Sumatra, a clip of Dinah Shore and an unidentified man singing "A Sunday Kind of Love," a newsreel footage of candidate Willkie addressing the Future Farmers of America.

The narrative is structured around two tableaux. In the first, the future presidential candidate (Irving Rosenthal) is attended by a nurse and then abducted from his midwestern crib by a mustachioed pirate (Doris Desmond) out of a Spanish galleon flick; in the second, which features a professional belly-dancer as well as the singer Tally Brown striking an agitated diva pose, Willkie is auctioned and sold on the block of a slave market modeled on the one in the 1942 Maria Montez vehicle, *Arabian Nights*. Thus, Smith's hothouse childhood fantasies merge with entropic, harshly lit glamour scenes wherein the garishly costumed hobnob with the brazenly nude. As befits a political scenario, *No President* is rife with representations of the phallus—metaphoric and otherwise. Among other things, the movie literalizes the idea of a champagne cocktail.

In an unpublished memoir, Charles Bergengren recalls that *No President* was preceded by the color short subject *Song for Rent*. Here, Smith appeared as his red-wigged, plastic-jawed, alter ego Rose Courtyard, seated in a wheelchair amid detritus of his Greene Street loft. The film was accomplished by two renditions of Kate Smith singing

¹⁰ *Movie Journal op.cit.* p.406.

"God Bless America." Dressed in a red satin gown, clutching a bouquet of dead roses, Rose is finally moved to stand up and salute.¹¹

¹¹ Smith's papers included a monologue written for Rose Courtyard, complete with stage directions: Hello, I'm Rose Courtyard. Deep down inside of me [laff] I'm a very patriotic girl. Last night on the Celebrity Beanbag program I was given the humility award for my [with mongolian pride] NINETEENTH PLANE CRASH!!! You may have noticed my plastic jaw—and as you can see my dancing days are over. Aren't these roses beautiful? Roses have always been identified with me as all my fans know—that is my real fans, not just bloodsuckers. Here's my photo album, my scrapbook right here. Let me tell you about some of my plane crashes. I've had quite a few plane crashes—the last one was *going* to entertain our boys. *Their* LIVES DEPEND ON keeping the war going! Their lives depend on it . . . actually my song was ended by a few bad roles—but [thoughtful, serious] my career was finally undoubtedly ended when a sightseeing bus I was on was smashed into by a helicopter on the New Jersey *TURNPIKE*!

I'm going to sing a song for you . . .

SONG

That bottle. Oh—it fell—Oh let me pick it up—oh SHIT COCK suck—fuck you!! Motherfuck OH SHIT—GOD BLESS CONSTRUCTION WORKERS.

Saturday, December 13, 4:00 p.m.

FELLINI SATYRICON

United Artists, 1969, 129 mins.

Directed by Federico Fellini. Screenplay by Fellini and Bernardino Zapponi based on the book by Petronius Arbiter. Produced by Alberto Grimaldi. Music by Nino Rota.

Photographed by Giuseppe Rotunno. Sets by Danilo Donati and Luigi Scaccianoce.

Costumes by Donati. With Martin Popper (Encolpio), Hiram Keller (Ascilito), Max Born (Gitone), Capucine (Trifena), Salvo Randone (Eumolpo).

New York opening: Little Carnegie, March 14, 1970.

THE DIANE LINKLETTER STORY

John Waters, 1970, 10 mins.

With Divine (Diane).

PINK FLAMINGOS

John Waters, 1972, 92 mins.

With Divine (Babs Johnson), David Lochary (Raymond Marble), Mary Vivian Pearce (Cotton), Mink Stole (Connie Marble), Danny Mills (Crackers), Mama Edie (Edith Massey). Art Director: Vincent Peranio. Costume Designer: Van Smith.

New York opening: Orpheum, February 3, 1973.

Through incomplete episodes, some with no beginning, some with no end and others without a middle, the film is an attempt to peer beyond the borders and see the reality of a vanished world, the life of creatures with incomprehensible customs and habits, the rites and daily living of a continent which has sunk into the galaxy of time.

—Fellini on *Fellini Satyricon*, *Tutto Fellini*

“Two minutes after I met Federico Fellini in Rome,” a flabbergasted Stanley Kauffmann reported in *The New Republic* during the winter of 1964, “he asked me whether I’d seen Jack Smith’s *Flaming Creatures*.”¹

Fellini’s alleged admiration for Smith was a persistent legend throughout the 1960s. Steve Dwoskin writes:

Flaming Creatures’ first screening [sic] took place in a storage loft just off Washington Square Village. Various members of the press managed to get in and it was rumored that Fellini and a few other ‘known’ film people were there as well. The seats were planks of wood stretched across boxes, with a few old lavatories that had been stored there also turned into seats.

¹ Kauffmann, Stanley, *A World on Film* (New York: Delta, 1967) p.424.

Jonas Mekas maintains that he showed both *Flaming Creatures* and *Normal Love* to the Italian director (as well as to Michelangelo Antonioni) when they were in New York. Parker Tyler notes that Fellini "saw and admired [*Flaming Creatures*] before he made the *Satyricon*."²

Freely adapted from Petronius Arbiter's fragmentary first-century burlesque of Roman society, *Fellini Satyricon* is a nearly plotless spectacle—a programmatically non-Christian, carnivalesque freak show in which the men are mainly homosexual and the women in a constant state of erotic arousal. While this quintessentially Felliniesque movie recalls the stone age of the Italian *peplum* genre, its visions and orgies seem even more an attempt to trump the post-Smith underground movie. *Satyricon* "has the quality of a drug-induced hallucination, being without past or future," Vincent Canby wrote in *The New York Times*, while *Time*'s anonymous (and less-enthusiastic) reviewer complained that "Encolpius and his colleagues are too much obviously fashioned after contemporary faggots"—both writers echoing the tenor of Smith's earlier notices.³

Fellini himself suggested that his *Satyricon* was a youth-trip along the lines of Kubrick's *2001* and much was made of his casting a hippie found on the streets of London's Chelsea and a member of the New York cast of *Hair* as his leads.⁴

Jonas Mekas wrote in *The Village Voice*:

Watching [*Satyricon*], I regretted that Jack Smith never completed *Normal Love*. It was almost painful, just to think that *Satyricon* is there and *Normal Love* isn't. It is very possible that *Satyricon* contains some of Fellini's most imaginative film images. And there is a reality in it, in parts of it, the reality of sad, sentimental, lonely, melodramatic Coney Island and 42nd Street creatures, caught with great love. But it's also one aspect of the world and texture and feeling that Jack Smith dealt with in *Normal Love*, and in Jack's hands it all became something else:

² Dwoskin *op.cit.* pp.58-59. Jonas Mekas, unpublished interview with Edward Leffingwell (December 9, 1994). Tyler, *Screening the Sexes* *op.cit.* p.237. Specifically, Tyler suggests that *Flaming Creature*'s "atavistic homage to the female" and "instinctive sort of monosexuality" is reiterated in "the way in which the black Venus of *Fellini Satyricon*, by virtue of sex magic, rescues the homosexual Encolpius from the impotence that overtakes him."

Although Smith spent the summer of 1974 in Rome (where he exhibited slides at Fabio Sargentini's gallery and created the slide-show *I Danced with a Penguin*), there is no evidence he ever met Fellini.

³ *The New York Times* (March 14, 1970) p.48; "Rome, B.C., A.F.," *Time* (March 16, 1970).

⁴ Kael, Pauline, "Fellini's *Mondo Trasho*," *Deeper into Movies* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly/Little, Brown, 1973) p.131. See also Wyke, Maria, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (New York: Routledge, 1997) p.191.

According to his early publicity, Fellini originally conceived *Satyricon* an all-star Hollywood parody featuring such past and present luminaries as Groucho Marx, Jimmy Durante, Terence Stamp, Danny Kaye, and The Beatles. The intention to cast Mae West in major role suggests an avatar of Michael Sarne's *Myra Breckinridge* (1970), another big-budget descendent of *Flaming Creatures*. (Chacellor, Alex, "Fellini Fun With Classic," *Newark Sunday News* [September 1, 1968], E3.)

Satyricon's only known star—and a minor one at that—is the nearly unrecognizable Capuccine. A pity Fellini didn't find a role for Tina Aumont, daughter of Maria Montez, who would appear as one of Donald Sutherland's conquests in *Federico Fellini's Casanova* (1976).

the sadness, the sentimentality, the melodrama, and the abnormality were transcended through Jack's art . . . ⁵

Fellini Satyricon would also remind Pauline Kael of an underground movie, although the one she cites—by title, not author—is John Water's 1969 *Mondo Trasho*.⁶

The girl . . . the tragedy . . . the gap.

—Description of *The Diane Linkletter Story* by John Waters
Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue No. 5

A youthful devotee of the New York underground, Waters acknowledged Andy Warhol, Kenneth Anger, the Kuchar Brothers, and Jack Smith as crucial influences. Indeed, Waters' early features—technically crude, sexually explicit shock comedies featuring a stock company headed by the 300-pound "gender-blur" Divine—imported the underground aesthetic to Baltimore.⁷

The Diane Linkletter Story, shot one afternoon to test a new sync-sound camera, dramatized a recent, actual event—the suicide of TV personality Art Linkletter's teen-age daughter, here played by Divine, while under the influence of LSD. The more ambitious *Pink Flamingos* appeared on the scene during the winter of 1972-73. This was something almost new: Waters compounded "ridiculous" drag-queen humor with sub Paul Morrissey rawness, the raunchy energy of underground comix, a bit of P.T. Barnum, and the first, nameless stirrings of punk. The movie cut across the gay, hippie, and teen-age subcultures to invent its own category, "the filthiest people alive."

In March 1973, the Elgin Theater began running *Pink Flamingos* as a midnight attraction; by mid-April, it was the talk of New York. Smith himself reviewed *Pink Flamingos* in *The Village Voice*, some four months into its run, although his notice served mainly as an opportunity to attack the two *Voice* movie critics, Jonas Mekas and Andrew Sarris.

Clearly, Smith recognized *Pink Flamingos* as akin to *Flaming Creatures*, praising Waters for the "nausea factor [he] seems uncannily to have built into the film, the excesses of which would be too revolting when described [in] the Breeze of Death style of Mekas and the secret media-maid peter patter of Sarris."

⁵ "Movie Journal," *Village Voice* (May 14, 1970).

⁶ Kael *op.cit.*:

If you have ever been at a high-school play in which the children trying to look evil stuck their tongues out, you'll know exactly why there's so little magic in Fellini's apocalyptic extravaganza. It's full of people making faces, the way people do in home movies, and full of people staring at the camera and laughing and prancing around, the way they often do in sixteen-millimeter parodies of sex epics like *Mondo Trasho*. (130)

⁷ For an account of Waters' early career and development in the context of the New York underground, see Brecht *Queer Theatre op.cit.* pp. 137-56, and Hoberman and Rosenbaum *op.cit.* pp. 136-73.

"They can eat shit"—in the words of the dialogue of one of the best scenes in *Pink Flamingos*, the speech in the opening of which is marked by a moronic quality that you know at any moment could erupt into filth. This moment is deliciously held back for a few seconds until the "... you can eat shit..." line spews irresistibly from the lips of one of the film's two spectacular leading ladies. From that moment on the dialogue becomes a gilded torrent of filth, the colors become more and more garish as the story unfolds of a clash, that results in a trailer-burning, between two families, each in the thrall of a superbitch in the family who opposes the other over the issue of which of them is the world's filthiest woman. This issue, hardly resolved by the trailer burning, is at last settled by the one known as Divine, a queen (whose family trailer it was) who sticks her fingers into a fresh pile of her dog's shit on the sidewalk and licks it off in the film's closing moments.

"Queer?" Smith concluded. "I think such antics seem virile and wholesome when compared with the unmanly activities of the publicity dykes of Atlantis seemingly bursting with film chatter who really are only pyorrheal piranhas."⁸

⁸ "Pink Flamingo [sic] formulas in focus," *Village Voice* (July 19, 1973) p.69.

Sunday, December 14, 2:00 p.m.

OVERSTIMULATED

*1959-63, 6 mins. Black-and-white. Silent.
With Jerry Sims and Bob Fleischer.*

RESPECTABLE CREATURES

*1950s-80s, 35 mins. Color. Sound on tape (courtesy of Jerry Leiber).
Also known as Loathsome Kisses of Bagdad and Normal Fantasy.*

HOT AIR SPECIALISTS

1970s, 4 mins. Color. Silent.

WINO

1970s, 20 mins. Black-and-white. Silent.

Jack Smith's "live films" incorporated footage going back to the mid-1950s. The short *Overstimulated* was once part of *No President*, while *Respectable Creatures* combines material from Smith's first movie, *Buzzards Over Bagdad*, with scenes shot over a decade later during carnival in Rio de Janeiro.

The extant footage of the 16mm *Buzzards Over Bagdad*, which Smith may have begun in the early 1950s while living in Los Angeles and was apparently still shooting when he first met Ken Jacobs in 1955, suggests a relatively straightforward gloss on the Maria Montez vehicle *The Arabian Nights*—specifically drawing upon a scene that involves a harem girl and her lover putting poison in the caliph's wine.¹

¹ Smith screened the footage for Ronald Tavel during the 1960s, commissioning Tavel—who believes the material was shot in Los Angeles—to write intertitles which were never used. (Tavel, unpublished interview *op.cit.*)

The title *Buzzards over Bagdad* was recycled in 1966 for the "underground movie flip book" included the December 1966 issue of *Aspen*, a box magazine co-edited by Andy Warhol. Announced as coming from "the forthcoming film *Buzzards over Bagdad*, a Cinemaroc North African Nicolodeon Presentation by Jack Smith," the images appear to be frame enlargements from black-and-white footage that would later be incorporated in *No President*.

It's likely that Ken Jacobs saw *Buzzards over Bagdad* as well. "Once and only once [Jack] showed me the thing he'd been shooting in the loft in the 20s before we met," Ken Jacobs wrote in unpublished letter to *The Village Voice* *op.cit.*:

It was very promising in a crazy way, totally blind, totally sincere. And almost entirely taking place in his head, the screen image no more than stimulant for his head-trip. He'd built a foot-high pool of water in a raw industrial loft, gathered fronds to it and conned/coerced this poor stringy nervous girl into simulating Maria Montez narcissism against the glare of a point-blank floodlight. Attempting, humorlessly, witlessly, Hollywood-straightforwardly but ineptly to achieve *The Beautiful* as he'd become acquainted with it in Wisconsin.

Jacobs regarded Smith's intentions as devoid of irony—although that was certainly not the case a decade or more later when Smith intercut *Buzzards of Bagdad* with flipped bits of *The Yellow Sequence (Normal Love)* and documentary footage taken, in February 1966, of Rio slums and street urchins. Discovered in a film can labeled *Respectable Creatures*, a version of this composition, also incorporating material from *I Was a Male Yvonne De Carlo*, was shown in 1983 at the Millennium in New York under the rubric *Normal Fantasy*.²

Shot in black-and-white in Smith's Lower East Side apartment (the location for *Blonde Cobra*), *Overstimulated* features Bob Fleischner and Jerry Sims—a sometime Smith model, also prominent in Ken Jacobs' *Star Spangled To Death*—wearing long, filmy dresses and jumping up and down in front of a flickering television set. The camera work is scarcely less frantic; made after *Scotch Tape*, the film likely dates from late 1959, before Smith and Fleischner had their falling out.

Another East Village apartment film, shot perhaps 20 years later, *Hot Air Specialists* features Smith in drag reminiscent of his Rose Courtyard outfit. The movie is a narrative: Smith brings home a trick with propulsive results. The black-and-white *Wino*, also from the mid 1970s, is another East Side psychodrama featuring the depressed-seeming Smith as a homeless alcoholic interacting on the street with other pavement dwellers. It is likely that Smith's roles in these films was only that of a performer.

² Smith's trip to Rio was sponsored by songwriter Jerry Leiber and his wife, the actress Gaby Rodgers. In an undated letter written to Leiber from Brazil, Smith explains that his original plans to make a travelogue have "expanded" into a dramatic movie that will use the carnival as its starting point. Smith's papers include a shot list for a film called *Carnaval [sic] in Lobsterland*. That the Brazilian footage was edited early on with material from *Normal Love* is suggested by Smith's entry in *Film-Makers Lecture Bureau Catalogue No. 1* (1969) which describes *Loathsome Kisses of Bagdad* as a two-hour feature with Tiny Tim and the Carnival in Rio. The musical accompaniment is taken from material recorded by Smith in Brazil and later given to Leiber.

Sunday, December 14, 4:00 p.m.

THE LOVERS OF ETERNITY

George Kuchar, 1964, 25 mins. Color. With Jack Smith.

THE TRAP DOOR Excerpt

Beth B and Scott B, 1980, 10 mins. Color. With John Ahearn and Jack Smith.

PUTTING LITTER IN POOL and other Super-8 camera rolls

Jack Smith, 1970s. 12 mins. Color. Silent.

Jack Smith's first movies were made in 8mm. Ken Jacobs recalls seeing:

the charming, all-heart 8mm movie [Jack] shot in his early teens, *The Saracens*, for which his mother had sewn costumes for the neighborhood kids and in which the roofs of neighboring suburban homes loom clearly over the strung cloth penning in his Bagdad.¹

Unfortunately, like contemporary 8mm juvenalia by the filmmakers Kenneth Anger and Gregory Markopoulos, Smith's Kenosha, Wisconsin *peplum* appears to have been lost.

The tragic love of a poet of the Lower East Side and a girl in a blue nightgown. Stolen moments of happiness in a savage indifferent world.

—George Kuchar on *The Lovers of Eternity*

Smith starred in several narrow-gauge productions. In 1965, he appeared, along with several other underground filmmakers and a monstrous cockroach, in George Kuchar's burlesque of bohemian squalor, *The Lovers of Eternity*. Fifteen years later, Smith lent his presence to a subsequent Lower Manhattan avant garde—playing the exotic psychiatrist Dr. Shrinklestein in Beth B and Scott B's Super-8 sound feature *The Trap Door*. (Within two minutes of his appearance, late in the movie, Smith has changed into Arabian Nights drag and taken control, dangling a pasty jewel in front of the hapless hero's nose and drawling, "Have you ev-ver been . . . hyyp-no-tized?")²

¹ Jacobs, unpublished letter *op.cit.*

² Originally called *The Unclean*, *The Lovers of Eternity* was shot in an East 12th Street apartment Smith then shared with Dov Lederberg, also in the movie and "a filmmaker so pretentious and recondite he has even managed to alienate [Jonas] Mekas" per Robert Christgau's piece in the *New York* section of the November 20, 1966, *The New York World Journal Tribune*. *The Lovers of Eternity*, as Kuchar explained it to Christgau, "concerned a poet 'who lacked only one thing—inspiration.'" Christgau noted that the movie was "filled with wildly uncomplimentary shots of Lederberg's refrigerator and his oozing walls."

In the interim between these two satires of art world innocence, Smith himself switched to Super-8 for the making (or not) of an Arabian Nights epic, *Sinbad in the Rented World*, in which he appeared as the former dancing boy and aspiring radio personality, Sinbad Glick. This may or may not be the 20-minute assemblage (not yet preserved) that, labelled *Sinbad of Bagdad*, was shot on the wintry Coney Island beach some time off-season during the late 1970s. A group of well-swaddled creatures, including a mother and baby, line up in formation. Some of their costumes sport papier-mache phalluses. The *mise-en-scène* also includes miniature animals, empty bottles of Bali Hai wine, and an advertisement for Preparation H. These staged scenes are interspersed with verité footage taken of the crowds around Surf Avenue.³

Smith also left a number of Super-8 camera rolls. One of these features a particularly striking appearance by the Lobster in full regalia. Another half dozen rolls, seemingly from the same project, appear to have been shot by Smith himself in the early 1970s amid the detritus of his Greene Street loft. Two later rolls, including *Putting Litter in Pool* (1977), present Smith performing on the Mall in Washington DC at the time of the National Gallery's enormously popular Tutankhamen exhibit.

³ Smith's papers describe *Sinbad* in some detail, e.g. "in the confusion of the climactic roach stampede, the Lobster in his final priestly disguise with the forehead earring of exoticism in his back pocket, is drowned in Plaster Lagoon." See *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool* op.cit. pp.146-47.

Crimson Creatures: The Case Against *Flaming Creatures*

By J. Hoberman

Reviled, banned, rioted over, *Flaming Creatures* is the only American avant-garde film whose reception equals that of *L'Age d'Or* or *Zero de Conduite*. It seems unfair that so light and playful a movie should bear so heavy a burden of notoriety—certainly Smith himself felt burned, bitterly complaining that his film, “designed as a comedy,” was transformed into “a sex issue of the Cocktail World.” Yet, the tumult that *Flaming Creatures* occasioned is nearly as illuminating in its way as the movie itself.¹

Flaming Creatures had its theatrical premiere at midnight, April 29, 1963, at the Bleecker Street Cinema and there its vicissitudes—and those of the underground—began. For starters, all Underground Midnights at the Bleecker were canceled. According to Mekas, the theater managers, Marshall Lewis and Rudy Franchi, complained that the “low quality of the underground” was ruining the Bleeckers’ reputation.²

Responding in *The Village Voice*, Mekas issued a manifesto on the “Baudelairean Cinema,” citing *Flaming Creatures*, *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*, *Blonde Cobra*, and *Little Stabs At Happiness* as the four movies making up “the real revolution in cinema today.” These movies, he declared:

... are illuminating and opening up sensibilities and experiences never before recorded in the American arts; a content which Baudelaire, the Marquis de Sade, and Rimbaud gave to world literature a century ago and which [William] Burroughs gave to American literature three years ago. It is a world of flowers of evil, of illuminations, of torn and tortured flesh; a poetry which is at once beautiful and terrible, good and evil, delicate and dirty. A thing that may scare an average viewer is that this cinema is treading on the very edge of perversity. These artists are without inhibitions, sexual or any other kind . . . There is now a cinema for the few, too terrible and too “decadent” for an “average” man in any organized culture.³

As if in confirmation, Mekas subsequently noted in *The Village Voice* that no film laboratory would print *Flaming Creatures*; the next issue of *Film World and AV News Magazine* elaborated his complaint that New York City labs were routinely destroying footage found to have images of nudes.⁴

That summer, Mekas relocated his underground screenings to the Gramercy Arts, a small theater in the East 20s, off Lexington Avenue. *Flaming Creatures*’ first reviews appeared in the autumn. Arthur Knight, *Playboy*’s resident expert on “sex and the cinema,”

¹ “Pink Flamingo formulas in focus” *op.cit.* p.69.

² Hoberman and Rosenbaum *op.cit.* p.51.

³ Mekas, Jonas, *op.cit.* p.85-86.

⁴ Mekas. “Experimental Film Producers Protest Arbitrary Action of New York Labs,” *Film World and AV News Magazine* (September 1963).

caught *Flaming Creatures* in Los Angeles on a bill with Brakhage's *Dog Star Man* and, describing it for the readers of the *Saturday Review*, was suitably appalled: "A faggoty stag-reel, it comes as close to hard core pornography as anything ever presented in a theater . . . Everything is shown in sickening detail, defiling at once both sex and cinema."⁵

Everything? As the filmmaker Gregory Markopoulos suggests in his impassioned account of the *Flaming Creatures* premiere (delivered at New York University in June 1964, a time when the movie itself was the subject of a criminal trial only a few subway stops away), *Flaming Creatures*' original viewers were "projected into a state of cosmic or filmic shock":

Those images, scenes, and sequences that they had envisioned and had wished would appear in the commercial film that they attended were unexpectedly offered before their eyes. The audience burst forth and roared while the walls of censorship began to crack.⁶

Such walls were real. At the Gramercy Arts, where *Flaming Creatures* was shown twice in August to packed crowds ("At last! An evening of Baudelairean cinema" proclaimed the *Voice* ad), police harassment had become a regular feature of the show. Because the films exhibited were not submitted to the New York State Board of Regents for licensing, it was deemed illegal to charge admission for their exhibition. Mekas' counterstrategy was to present the films free and solicit contributions for the Love and Kisses to Censors Film Society. When *Flaming Creatures* was shown it was advertised merely as "a film praised by Allen Ginsberg, Andy Warhol, Jean-Luc Godard, Diane Di Prima, Peter Beard, John Fles, Walter Guttman, Gregory Corso, Ron Rice, Storm De Hirsch, and everybody else."⁷

Drawing ever more attention to *Flaming Creatures*, Mekas rented the midtown Tivoli Theater, a seedy venue known for sex exploitation films, to present Smith with *Film Culture*'s annual Independent Filmmaker Award.

Flaming Creatures has graced the anarchic liberation of new American cinema. Jack Smith has attained for the first time in motion pictures a high level of art which is absolutely lacking in decorum; and a treatment of sex which makes us aware of the restraint of all previous film-makers.⁸

⁵ Knight, Arthur, *Saturday Review* (November 2, 1963).

⁶ "Innocent Revels," *Film Culture* #33 (Summer 1964), p.41. Ken Kelman's account of the reception is quite different:

When the first show was over, a clique, a clique of six or so, back on the west side applauded, amid the numb and blind. Amid the tame, I halted, oppressed by their inertia, paused, vacillated, considered for two beats of silence or three, before I clapped solo and thus no doubt branded myself a clappy pervert, crap happy degenerate, slobbering sadist, or, even, perhaps Jack Smith.

"Smith Myth," *Film Culture* #29 (Summer 1963), p.5.

⁷ Hoberman and Rosenbaum *op.cit.* p.59.

⁸ "Fifth Independent Film Award," *Film Culture* #29, (Summer 1963), p.1.

On December 7, moments before the ceremonial midnight screening was to begin, the theater management buckled under the pressure from the city's Bureau of Licenses and canceled the show. Outraged, Mekas gave Smith his award outside, using the roofs of the cars parked along Eighth Avenue as his stage. Then, a few hundred New American Cinema partisans led by Barbara Rubin, one of the young firebrands of the Film-makers' Cooperative, occupied the Tivoli until evacuated by the police. In a boxed statement printed in the next issue of *The Village Voice*, *Film Culture* spoke for all filmmakers: "We'll find places to show our work. We'll screen our movies in public places, on the highway billboards and in the streets, if necessary."⁹

Less than a month later, the *Flaming Creatures* crusade went international. Mekas had been invited to judge an experimental film festival in Knokke-le-Zout, Belgium. When *Flaming Creatures* was refused a screening, he resigned from the jury, threatened to withdraw the entries of other American filmmakers (including Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, Robert Breer, and Gregory Markopoulos), and organized special showings in his hotel room. Among those present, perched on the bathtub or bed, were Jean-Luc Godard, Agnes Varda, and Roman Polanski. The word-of-mouth was sensational.¹⁰

With the irrepressible Barbara Rubin as his confederate, Mekas chose New Year's Eve to commandeer the projection booth of the festival theater. Pretending to tie up the projectionist, filmmaker Jean-Marie Bouchet, and planting a print between the reels of Warhol's six-hour *Sleep*, Mekas provoked a disturbance that was widely reported in Europe. A small riot broke out, and as the Belgian Minister of Justice (and honorary head of the festival) arrived to quell it, Mekas projected the film on the minister's face until all power was cut off. Ultimately, the jury awarded *Flaming Creatures* a special "damned" film prize. According to Mekas, most of the jurors thought it was a documentary. "A wild image of America we left in Knokke-le-Zout, I tell you," he reported in *The Village Voice*. "No wonder a State Department man was sitting next to our table wherever we went."¹¹

Flaming Creatures made *Variety*'s front page and not for the last time. But if, as the show biz bible reported on January 15, "Belgians Balk N.Y. 'Creatures,'" New York itself was cleaning up for the 1964 World's Fair. Village coffee houses and off-off Broadway theaters were shuttered; Times Square tango palaces and taxi dance halls were closed; Lenny Bruce was arrested for obscenity at the Cafe A-Go-Go. Unlicensed screenings of underground movies were hounded from venue to venue. On February 3, *Flaming Creatures* was shown with *Normal Love* rushes at the Gramercy Arts. Two weeks later, the theater was shut down.

The next screenings were at the New Bowery Theater at 4 St. Marks Place where, on February 20, Smith had projected *Normal Love* production slides to the accompaniment of a taped radio speech by Antonin Artaud. *Flaming Creatures* was shown, together with Warhol's newsreel *Jack Smith Filming Normal Love*, on Monday, March 2, with an undercover policeman in the audience. The following night, two NYPD detectives broke

⁹ "A Statement on *Flaming Creatures*," *Village Voice* (December 12, 1963).

¹⁰ Trumbull, Leslie, "Movie Journal," *Village Voice* (January 9, 1964) p.13; *Sight and Sound* (Spring 1964) p.89; "Knokke-le-Zout," *Film Quarterly* (Spring 1964) p.14.

¹¹ Mekas *op.cit.* pp.111-15.

up a near-capacity showing attended by some ninety spectators." It was hot enough to burn up the screen," one cop would tell the press.¹²

The police impounded both films, the projector, and the screen, arresting the theater manager, Jacobs, and ticket-taker Florence Karpf. Jacobs recalled:

The most articulate porn audience ever assembled were dressing down the cops. Poet Diane di Prima ducked out to phone Jonas. He rushed over and leaped in swinging the First Amendment. He insisted that if we were to be arrested, he be arrested as well, and forced information on them of his connection to the screening . . . At the station house, Jonas was just as fiery . . . [It] was a bad scene, with movie-imitating killer cops, and I feared Jonas was going to bring it down on us. We were 'fags' and 'weirdos' (intellectuals) and 'commies' . . .¹³

The campaign against fags, weirdos, and commies was not restricted to New York. Saturday evening, March 7, Los Angeles police raided the Cinema theater and confiscated the print of Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*—"a purely homosexual thing," one member of the vice squad termed it. Theater manager Mike Getz was soon after arraigned for "exhibiting an obscene film." On the very same night in New York, Mekas was arrested once more—this time for showing Jean Genet's 1950 short, *Un Chant d'Amour*, a poetic evocation of homosexual fantasy set in a French prison.¹⁴

The *Chant d'Amour* screening, at the Writers Stage Theatre on East 4th Street, was advertised as a benefit for the *Flaming Creatures* defense fund. The idea was to link the suppression of *Flaming Creatures* to the suppression of a film—also suggesting graphic sexual acts and featuring male nudity—by a famous European artist ("push the prestigious Genet in their faces, pull in Sartre," Jacobs recalled). But, as Mekas reported from jail in *The Village Voice*:

The detectives who seized [*Un Chant d'Amour*] did not know who Genet was. When I told them that Genet was an internationally known artist, I was told it was my fantasy . . .

I was [also] told that they will make a statue of me in Washington Square; that they will make "a mashed potato" of me by the time they are through; that I was "dirtying America"; that I was fighting windmills. One of the detectives who arrested me told me, at the theater, that he did not know why they were taking me to the station: I should be shot right there in front of the screen.¹⁵

¹² Meskil, Paul, "Police Chill 'Flaming' Movie," *New York World Telegram* (March 4, 1964).

¹³ Jacobs, unpublished *op.cit.*; Mekas *op.cit.* pp.129-30.

¹⁴ Hoberman, J. "License for License," *Banned in the U.S.A.: America and Film Censorship* (Berkeley: Pacific Film Archives, 1993) p.16.

¹⁵ Jacobs, unpublished *op.cit.*; Mekas *op.cit.* pp.129-30.

Flaming Creatures and *Scorpio Rising* were busted once more at the New Bowery—on March 17—before the theater, which had been screening the movies free of charge, was padlocked. There were no more public showings as Mekas devoted his energies to the upcoming trial, his defense funded by Jerome Hill and abetted by a handful of academics, an assortment of beat poets, and the newly-formed New York City League for Sexual Freedom (which demonstrated outside the district attorney's office).

The case *People of the State of New York vs. Kenneth Jacobs, Florence Karpf and Jonas Mekas* was taken by the prominent civil rights lawyer Emile Zola Berman who, according to newspaper accounts, at times thought he was representing the exhibitors of a film entitled *Crimson Creatures*. Nevertheless, according to Judge David Trager, then a young lawyer working on the case, Berman (whose most notorious subsequent client was Sirhan Sirhan, the assassin of Robert Kennedy) believed that *New York vs. Jacobs* had the potential to go to the United States Supreme Court.¹⁶

Defending *Flaming Creatures* in the April 13 issue of *The Nation*, Susan Sontag scored "the indifference, the squeamishness, the downright hostility to the film evinced by almost everyone in the mature intellectual and artistic community." Although this squeamishness extended to *The Nation* (Sontag recalls that the editor who assigned her the piece was fired as a result) and beyond (on April 7, the Modern Museum in Stockholm canceled a New American Cinema series that might have included *Flaming Creatures*), "mature" support may not have mattered. The three-judge Criminal Court panel, which included former New York City mayor Vincent Impellitteri, refused to allow expert testimony, with the single exception of Sontag's, on either *Flaming Creature's* artistic merit or its alleged pornography.¹⁷

Film historian Herman Weinberg, producer Lewis Allen, poet Allen Ginsburg, and filmmakers Shirley Clarke and Willard Van Dyke took the stand in vain; the prosecution case rested entirely on treating the judges to a screening. "Two of them munching cigars, watched impassively as the movie was shown in chambers," one daily reported.¹⁸

¹⁶ David Trager, unpublished interview with J.H. (May 13, 1996).

¹⁷ Harrington, Stephanie Gervis, "Pornography is Undefined at Film-Critic Mekas' Trial," *Village Voice* (June 18, 1964) p.9.

¹⁸ Hoffman, Paul, "A Movie Show—in Criminal Court," *New York Post* (June 3, 1964) p.16. See Ken Jacobs, unpublished letter *op.cit.*, for a personal account of the bust and trial. Smith's recollections of the *Flaming Creature* affair may be found in his 1978 interview with Sylvere Lotringer. *Flaming Creatures* was confiscated, Smith explains, because:

Mekas was into having something in court at that time, very fashionable, a lot of publicity . . . He would give screenings of *Creatures* and make speeches, defying the police to bust the film. Which they did. And then there was the trial . . . I walked into the courtroom and my lawyer said "Go out of the courtroom," and I said "Why?"—"Because the judge is upset by too many men with beards." I was ordered to leave by that marshmallow lawyer that Uncle Mekas had. So I couldn't even see the trial.

"Uncle Fishook and the Sacred Baby Poo-Poo of Art," *Wait for Me for Me at the Bottom of the Pool op.cit.* pp.107-8.

On June 12, Jacobs and Mekas were convicted and sentenced to sixty days in the New York City workhouse. The trial was followed, four days later, and to some extent was upstaged by *People of the State of New York vs. Lenny Bruce*, which ran for months in the same Criminal Courts Building and resulted in Bruce's conviction for giving an "indecent performance." Jacobs' and Mekas' sentences were suspended, as was Karpf's, but the court ruling has never been reversed. (Technically, *Flaming Creatures* remains obscene, at least in the boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx, to this day.)

As *New York vs. Jacobs* worked its way through the courts, *Flaming Creatures* rocked the film societies of the nation's universities. On April 1, 1965 (a week after the first teach-in against the war in Vietnam was held at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor), Albuquerque police broke up an off-campus screening arranged by University of New Mexico students, who claimed that the film's star was a UNM graduate, and confiscated the print.¹⁹

Another screening—organized by the local chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (by then the largest organization of campus radicals in America) a month after the *Flaming Creatures* case reached the United States Supreme Court—was broken up on November 9, 1966, at the University of Texas in Austin. SDS, which recognized a hot issue when it saw one, was also involved in an incident at the University of Michigan, two months later. By then, much to the displeasure of *The New York Times* senior movie critic, the underground had surfaced: Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls* was playing at a midtown Manhattan movie house. On January 5, 1967 the *Times* announced that "Adult Themes Head for Screen."²⁰

The evening of January 18, acting on a professor's complaint, an Ann Arbor police officer halted the screening at the Architecture School auditorium just as the Rape-Earthquake-Orgy sequence commences, fifteen minutes and thirty seconds into the movie. A group of irate students initially blocked the officer's exit from the booth. Later, a hundred or so marched downtown to stage a four-hour sit-in at the station house demanding the film's return. Three student members of the Cinema Guild and their faculty advisor were arraigned on charges of showing an obscene motion picture.²¹

The subsequent hearings, laws suits, and trial preoccupied Ann Arbor for the remainder of the year when, unmoved by history professor Robert Sklar's defense testimony, a municipal judge ruled *Flaming Creatures* "a smutty purveyance of filth [that] borders on the razor's edge of hard-core pornography." By that time, the *Flaming Creatures* appeal had been dismissed as moot by five of the nine justices of the United States Supreme Court. The four dissenting justices were split: Chief Justice Warren and

¹⁹ "Albuquerque Axes Avant-Garde Film About 'Third Sex,'" *Variety* (April 7, 1965) p.1.

²⁰ "Film Showing Canceled After Police Enter 'Y,'" *The Daily Texan* (November 10, 1966) p.1. Crowther, Bosley, "The Underground Overflows," *The New York Times* (December 11, 1966).

²¹ "Underground Film is Seized at U. of Michigan Showing," *The New York Times* (January 20, 1967); "Transvestite *Flaming Creatures* Pic Raided," *Variety* (January 25, 1967).

Justice Brennan voted to affirm the judgment of the lower court while Justices Fortas and Douglas voted to reverse the judgment.²²

This footnote became a football when, in the summer of 1968, lame duck Lyndon Johnson nominated Fortas for chief justice. In the Fortas nomination, Senate conservatives found a way to attack the whole Warren court. Their weapon would be Fortas' liberal rulings on pornography. The print of *Flaming Creatures* confiscated in Ann Arbor was flown to Washington DC, at the behest of Senator Strom Thurmond, the ranking Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee. The senator "already has some experience as a film critic," *Variety* noted. "He recently railed against *The New York Times* for criticizing *The Green Berets*."²³

In late July, Thurmond, organized a "Fortas Film Festival" in Room 2228 of the Senate office building. A fourteen-minute filmed striptease, two other skin flicks, and *Flaming Creatures* were projected on the wood-paneled wall. Members of Congress were invited, as was the press, and Thurmond, who claimed that he had "shocked Washington's hardened press corps," thoughtfully furnished glossy frame-enlargements from the movie.²⁴

The anti-Fortas forces announced plans to send prints of *Flaming Creatures* to women's groups and civic clubs in hopes of triggering further outrage. Before the Fortas nomination collapsed in September, there was talk of showing the film on the Senate floor. Although that last screening never came to pass, *Flaming Creatures* is likely the only American avant garde movie ever described in the *Congressional Record*:

This home made film has gained a notorious reputation for its homosexual content. [It] presents five unrelated, badly filmed sequences, which are studded with sexual symbolisms . . . a mass rape scene involving two females and many males, which lasts for seven minutes, showing the female pubic area, the male penis, males massaging the female vagina and breasts, cunnilingus, masturbation of the male organ, and other sexual symbolisms . . . lesbian activity between two women . . . homosexual acts between a man dressed as a female, who emerges from a casket, and other males, including masturbation of the visible male

²² "Municipal Judge Says *Flaming Creatures* Obscene," *The Ann Arbor News* (September 1, 1967) p.15. Murphy, Bruce Allen, *Fortas: The Rise and Fall of a Supreme Court Judge* (New York: William Morrow, 1988) pp.448.

On January 15, 1968, another *Flaming Creatures* print was impounded by New York District Attorney Robert Morgenthau on its return to the Film-Makers' Cooperative after a booking in Vancouver. At the same time, the movie continued to be screened. Ads clipped from Los Angeles newspapers in late February announce *Flaming Creatures* showing in an "approved edited version" at the Park Theater. In May, the movie was screened openly at Cinematheque, then returned to the Park for a week in mid-July. In the interim, the Warhol Factory previewed their bluntly-titled *Fuck* (which would be busted the following month as *Blue Movie*) and transvestites battled New York cops over the closing of the Stonewall bar in Greenwich Village.

²³ "Try to Put Torch to Fortas Nomination by Showing *Flaming Creatures* in D.C.," *Variety* (July 31, 1968) p.62.

²⁴ Corry, John, "Washington Report: Strom's Dirty Movies," *Harper's* (December 1968) pp.30-40.

organ . . . homosexuals dancing together and other disconnected erotic activity, such as massaging the female breasts and group sexual activity.²⁵

This earnest testimony, as hopeless as it is graphic, was supplied by the founder of Citizens for Decent Literature, Cincinnati lawyer Charles Keating (convicted, twenty-five summers later of seventy-three counts of fraud, racketeering, and conspiracy in defrauding Lincoln Savings and Loan Association and its investors). More suggestive was the account of *Flaming Creatures* an anonymous senator offered a *Newsweek* correspondent: "That movie was so sick," the senator explained, "I couldn't even get aroused." Thus, the movie's failure as pornography was something worse than pornography itself.²⁶

While *Flaming Creatures* was scarcely the only explicit movie produced by the early '60s underground, it triggered a rage that far exceeded the hostility directed at such other candidates for martyrdom as Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving*, Carolee Schneeman's *Fuses*, or Barbara Rubin's *Christmas on Earth*. These movies were "merely" explicit—or, in the case of Jean Genet's venerable *Un Chant d'Amour* and Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (two other movies that were prosecuted, albeit less forcefully), blatantly homoerotic. The behavior in *Flaming Creatures* is something else—extravagantly queer to be sure but even queerer than that. The anonymous senator's response suggests that *Flaming Creature's* failure as pornography was something worse than pornography itself.

Those rudely brandished dicks, neither wholly erect or entirely flaccid, are only penises. As funny as it is poignant, *Flaming Creatures* is guilty of a criminal disrespect more serious than burning the flag. In so casually representing the male organ, it desecrates the underlying symbol of all power structures—including the US Senate.

²⁵ *Congressional Record—House* (September 4, 1968) p.25562.

²⁶ Shaffer, Samuel, *On and Off the Floor: Thirty Years as a Correspondent on Capitol Hill* (New York: Newsweek Books, 1980) p.92. Strom Thurmond aside, the senators known to have screened *Flaming Creatures* in Room 2228 on July 29, 1968, were James O. Eastland (Dem-Miss.), Russell B. Long (Dem-La.), John McClellan (Dem-Ark.), Gale McGee (Dem-Wyo.), and Jack Miller (Rep-Iowa). "Griffin Says 40 Ready to Block Vote on Fortas," *Washington Post* (July 29, 1968) A6.

Carel Rowe noted a similar response when he showed *Flaming Creatures* in spring 1972 as part of the Lurid Film Festival at Northwestern University. The audience laughed raucously for the first third and "then, suddenly, the crowd grew ugly." (*The Baudelairean Cinema: A Trend within the American Avant-Garde* [Ann Arbor: UMI, 1981], p. xi.)

Restoration and Slavery

By Jerry Tartaglia

"At first I thought the creature was sent by Fishhook." Jack would not believe that the camera original material of *Flaming Creatures*, which I had just returned to him, had simply been lost for thirteen years and found by accident. He seemed intent upon spinning a tale in which the film had been stolen by Fishhook, hidden away in the "Safe," and for some unrevealed reason, was now being returned to him, by me, an agent of Roachcrust. By the end of our evening together, spent over a cup of lukewarm-tapwater-instant coffee, he came to accept the bizarre truth that I had simply found the film stuck in a pile of sound fill which had been discarded by a lab. He projected some slides for me, talked to me about being queer, and promoted his theory of voluntary slavery. When I was ready to leave, he said that this story of the finding of *Flaming Creatures* was "very Baghdadian." As I walked out, he quipped, "I guess I owe you one." That was in 1978.

Jack had many voluntary "slaves" over the years. I have heard of people who spent hours painting and re-painting a single corner in his loft, or endlessly rearranging props and materials in seemingly eternal preparation for a film shoot. Though Jack died in 1989, his system of voluntary slavery lives on in the restoration of his work. In choosing to work on the preserving and restoring of the films of one of the great filmmakers of our time, I discovered that the only will to which I can be subjected is that of Jack Smith. The fact that he isn't here to dictate the exact execution of the details requires of me an internalized taskmaster. This discipline requires that traditional filmmaking and restoration practices be set aside. The reason is simple. In the collected body of work by Jack Smith, we are dealing not with a straightforward film auteur, but with a theatrical and cinematic genius who prescribed his own parameters in film and performance. The task of restoration and preservation of this enormous body of work demands that we begin with the utmost respect for the processes which brought him to produce this work.

In his time, Jack was both a filmmaker and what was later to be called a performance artist. In many ways, he was the grand daddy of performance art. His events involved people, objects, projected slide images, film, and lots of time. The film material was projected with music which he selected on the spot from his large and eclectic collection of LP's. Some of the material was work print from his "completed" feature films like *No President* or *Normal Love*, some of it was new material, and some of it was comprised of some of his other short films, inserted in their entirety into the "performance" reels.

To a restorer, this set of circumstances is enough of a challenge. However, Jack added a small twist to his performances. Oftentimes, while the film was screening, he would remove the take-up reel and begin re-splicing the material into a new arrangement. Obviously, this had to be accomplished quickly, before the remaining material had run through the projector. Jack developed an ingenious way of re-editing during a performance. He used tape splices. Sometimes the tape was conventional film splicing tape, most of the time it was cheap masking tape, paper tapes, even duct tape. The bits of tapes were just large enough to hold the film strips together, and small enough to pass through the projector gate. The visual result of this method was astonishing. The splices were visible, of course, but the material was re-woven into a new tapestry of visual excess with each screening. One hour of film material, in this way, could be transformed into a three-hour film experience.

Twenty years later, those same splices turned brittle, leaving a hardened adhesive residue and projection gate dirt at each joint. The restoration of *Normal Love* was particularly encumbered by this problem. Each splice had to be disconnected. The celluloid had to be gently scrubbed free of the residue, and a new hot splice had to be done. In some situations, the bond was too tight and the film too brittle, so the masking tape splice had to be entirely excised. When possible, I left some of those splices intact. I wanted today's viewers of the work to have some inkling of the visual effect which punctuates the film through the surface activity created by masking tape passing through a projector gate. Fortunately, the lab which did the internegative understood the challenges which we faced in this restoration work, and accommodated the peculiar needs of the project.

Since the objective of the restoration is to preserve Jack's work, a new print had to be struck of all the film. Jack had shot all of his work on 16mm reversal film stock. Smith often used outdated stock because he had no money. This frequently produced very beautiful color. At the time of his death in 1989, color reversal film in 16mm was almost completely phased out as a viable medium. Therefore, the work had to be prepared for an internegative from which prints could be struck. It certainly allowed for the preservation of the work in all of its luscious and vibrant color, but it also prompted serious aesthetic questions about the restoration process itself.

If Jack had been only a filmmaker, the restoration would have been rather straightforward. But, since he, himself, had recut *Normal Love* into new versions for performances, the restoration of the original film version could actually destroy the performance reels which themselves were legitimate work. Some filmmakers advised that Jack had cut up his films for these performances, and that this somehow reflected a deterioration of his creative abilities. Others claimed that his high-strung temperament had gone over the edge, and he was "destroying" his own films. Neither of these assertions reflects the truth about Jack Smith's art. My responsibility as restorationist is to preserve the work as Jack created it, and not according to the dictates of the various factions of his many friends and even more former friends, all of whom insist that their particular experience and memory of him and his work reflects the sum total of his oeuvre. Likewise, I bear a responsibility to preserve the performance reels as they constitute a major portion of his lifetime of work in film.

The solution thankfully came in the form of a music cue sheet from Tony Conrad, who had created the soundtrack for *Flaming Creatures*. Jack had asked him to do the same for *Normal Love*, so Tony began by preparing a cue sheet. Apparently, that was as far as he was able to go. Jack's personality intervened and Tony left the project, although Jack left his name in the credits. The cue sheet provided the order for the scenes in *Normal Love*.

My task was to identify and locate those scenes and reassemble the film. I spent a good deal of time looking at the reels of film, over and over again. I had to familiarize myself with Jack. I had to understand what he had done. I did not believe that he was insane, nor that he was a cinematic nihilist who had randomly cut up his movies. Surely, an artist who had created the beauty and humor of *Flaming Creatures* knew what he was doing. I kept watching and reviewing the tens of thousands of feet of film. Some of it I clearly identified and put aside for the *No President* restoration. Some of it I recognized from the verbal accounts given to me by Jack's closer friends, and by people who had seen many of his performances and had taken notes. These performance reels were also put aside, even though some of them contained images from *Normal Love*. But, Jack knew what he was doing, after all. These images were mostly duplications of the images on the reels which he had labeled "Normal Love." Some scenes were clearly part of *Normal Love* but were not listed on the cue sheet, and therefore

were apparently not intended for inclusion in the original version of the film. Those scenes comprise the "Addendum" to *Normal Love*. The only extant material from the film, which is not included in either the restored version nor in the addendum, are some shots which Jack himself put into the performance reels entitled: "Exotic Landlordism" and "Cement Lagoon." I decided to leave them where they were. Those performance reels were edited by Jack Smith, and I did not want to impose my interpretation upon the chronology which he himself created.

These performance reels actually comprise the bulk of the oeuvre. They include a number of completed films, as well as material which appears to be intended only for inclusion in his performances. Many of them include Jack in various roles, or should I say "costumes," since he worked on the assumption that a costume created a role. *I Was A Male Yvonne De Carlo*, *Jungle Jack in Cologne Zoo*, *Bald Mountain*, *Love Thing*, *Abortion Pit Nightmare*, *Wino*, *Cement Lagoon*, and *Hamlet* are some of the performance reels in which Jack appears. These reels have not been as widely screened as the more infamous "completed" films: *Flaming Creatures*, *Normal Love*, *No President*, *Scotch Tape*, and *Overstimulated*. Sometimes, when Jack screened them, he gave the performances themselves different titles. In any case, I leave that jigsaw puzzle to some other preservationist. I do believe, however, that these performance reels will, in time, elucidate the genius of this artist, and clarify his role in influencing a generation of filmmakers, photographers, theater artists, and erstwhile volunteer slaves.

Unpublished Letter to *The Village Voice*, November 1991

By Ken Jacobs

Hoberman's impressive excavation of the social history of *Flaming Creatures* (*Village Voice*, November 12, 1991) could extend into the entire Sixties, hopefully undermining the Seventies and Eighties and making possible some vivid Nineties. It was thrilling to see Valentino on the same page with the arisen vampire Joel Markman, both decked out in blonde wigs, Valentino himself returned from the grave by grace of the Museum of the Moving Image to claim his place in the flaming history. I was inspired to at last claim my own.

World, it's okay for the law to believe my connection to *Flaming Creatures* was only as projectionist at the legendary bust, but you should know better. First, a couple of smudged details: I wasn't the projectionist, Flo wasn't the ticket-taker. The actual (non-union) projectionist, M.G., saw what was happening, slid into the audience and split the Underground scene forever. Jerry Sims was ticket-taker. Jerry blamed me for his arrest, after earlier begging me for the chance to earn some bucks, wouldn't speak to me during the trial and afterwards referred to me only as The Criminal. He got his own lawyer, low-profile Lower East Sider Bernard Hanft, and Hanft quietly got him off completely, with Jerry insisting implausibly that he had no idea what kind of movie was being screened behind him as he tore stubs.

Flo sold tickets, besides painting exquisite posters for the films. She also was often given the job of explaining with her pellucid diction to irate, positively pissed cine-slummers why they should be giving the films more of a chance (and why they couldn't have their money back). I managed, Jonas booked. Our lives were illegal, like loft-living at that time. We'd given up on getting the films licensed (past the censors) for public screening. We were cultural mice keeping it low in the big city but knowing it was only a matter of time before we'd be pounced upon. After Jerry and I were arrested, this fatherly Irish detective approached Flo and banking on her innocence asked, "What do you think of the film?" Of course she rose to the bait, rose to the film's defense. She told him it was beautiful, a work of art. He then showed her his badge, told her she was under arrest, she had confessed to knowledge of the character of the merchandise.

The most articulate porn audience ever assembled were dressing down the cops. Poet Diane DiPrima ducked out to phone Jonas. He rushed over and leaped in swinging the First Amendment. He insisted, if we were to be arrested, he be arrested as well, and forced information on them of his connection to the screening. Dianne offered to get herself arrested, too, so that Flo wouldn't be alone in jail, but Flo thanked her and declined.

At the station-house Jonas would be just as fiery, he was reacting to this suppression from way back in his life. The station-house was a bad scene, with movie-imitating killer cops, and I feared Jonas was going to bring it down on us. We were "fags" and "weirdos" (intellectuals) and "commies" (the same), the last particularly ironic with Jonas the most communism-despising *intelligent* person I've ever known. A long cold scary and hungry night. Flo and I had meant to hit the Orient on the way home. Now she was over among the heart-breaking low-caste female prisoners (who were pleasant to her). Jerry had already clammed up, attempting sleep on a plank under bright lights and complaining when Jonas and I raised voices, Jonas busy in mind with detentions past.

For me, a deeper ignominy was to come. Jonas had thrown himself into this convinced he could be more effective as victim-with-a-public-name. As columnist for *The Village Voice* he

was culture with credentials. And he was effective. The law had meant to squash a few offbeat smut peddlers and here was this prisoner-of-conscience opera building up. Jack as creator of the notorious film became media-hot and so did Jonas as its prime defender. And then there was us, in their shadow, and during all the *Jacobs vs. New York* fracas nobody but nobody inquired did a Jacobs have a thought regarding what was happening. We moved for a time amongst a crowd fevered with the thrill of proximity to a world-class new item, but our names rarely made the news; as in the Hoberman column we were the this and the that, ticket-takers, spear-holders, props. We were the jerks, jerked around months on end from hearing to hearing, never speaking in court, passed up by reporters, even snubbed by our own counsel the self-promoting Emile Zola Berman, who imagined he was immaculate in his threads but only looked embalmed. Only his fine but intimidated assistant David Traeger would speak with us. Berman would actually lead Jonas away from us to confer, the grown-ups, in privacy.

Jack bothered just once to observe a court session. He left without a word but clearly disdainful, as if we were fools for involving ourselves in this, like we had a choice. And one time some of us, defendants and supporters, went off to Mott Street for lunch where whenever I spoke Susan Sontag acted as if the furniture had the effrontery to interrupt her. What can I tell you, World, but if those caught up in wealth-amassing gather to compliment each other on their success, and distance themselves from the poor, a similar thing happens in the consciousness-set as regards attention. Who gets it gets, those who got bask in and are confirmed by each other's glow, and maneuver their backs against those faceless that would forget their places lest the circle of light be ruptured and the glow run out, returning to the plebes from whence it came.

Flo didn't let this get to her but I smarted. Fact is I wasn't a nothing then. That April 29, 1963 Bleecker Street premiere of *Flaming Creatures* was accompanied on the program by the premiere of the completed *Blonde Cobra* portrait of Jack Smith: Bob Fleischer's filming but my composition, ultimately my portrayal of Jack. "Embarrassing" he said, and "You made it heavy." But this was post-friendship and after I'd been demoted from genius. For Jack an opinion was how you seduced or got back at people. Winter of 1959-60 I'd put together *Blonde Cobra* from a bit of my own previous filming and Bob's interrupted and discarded filming of concepts entirely other than those that inform *Blonde Cobra*. Jack had held onto the footage for some time before giving up on it. But I was penniless and Bob too disinterested to put any more money into it and the soundtrack waited until 1962 when Jonas caught a screening of *Little Stabs At Happiness* shown with phonograph record accompaniment. He learned my name, address, and one day out of the blue came this offer of money (Jerome Hill's) to make sound prints of both works. So, just to begin with, if those films were something, I was someone.

Were Flo and I too plain? Too without airs, too haimish, too straight; too without a promise of kinky exoticism to excite interest? Did our manner tend to deny the historical moment its glamour? Would we have to weird up our act to get invited to the party thrown supposedly, at least in part for us?

I had played no part in the filming of *Flaming Creatures*. Jack and I had fallen out for good summer of '61 in Provincetown. There I did my last filming of Jack, as The Fairy Vampire in *Death of P'Town* (the graveyard scene, with which I unsuccessfully tried raising money for the rest of the film which was to include—Jack's idea—a long sequence of tourists' knees). I showed *Little Stabs At Happiness* and *Blonde Cobra* at the Sun Gallery. And Jack and I wrote alternate lines of stories and poems and skits that we read and performed in our *Human Wreckage Review*. I connected with Flo that summer, and Jack came out ("Homosexuality is ludicrous," he had said), literally with a vengeance, complete with paranoid projections of

disapproval. I'd wondered was Jack in his uniqueness asexual, his libido entirely suffused into his art. For the record, there were always women that Jack, if nothing else ("I'm strapped"), would play along. Our human wreckage sank out of sight and after that summer we worked together again only to tape his voice for *Blonde Cobra*, and to shoot a title (*Reveling In The Dumps*) which he chose not to use for his film eventually known as *Scotch Tape*.

His film *Scotch Tape* but the scotch tape that appears photographed along one side of the entire length of the film was caught in the gate of my Bell & Howell. It plays a similar part, wedged at the same angle, in some shots in my four hour *Star Spangled To Death*, 1957-60. We were on my set, the demolished buildings that made way for Lincoln Center, when Jack after some years of concentrating on still photography again felt like filming. His little film (a single, possibly unedited color roll) is very much in the manner of what I'd been doing, and could flow along with the other camera-raw episodes of *Little Stabs At Happiness*. But this frolic doesn't begin to suggest the splendor of style and concept of *Flaming Creatures*—an eruption that will disrupt for all (human) time—and I don't mean to make more of my evident influence on *Scotch Tape* than to have it noted. The fantasy and perfect-pitch feel for the frame of Jack's great opus can be found, prior to its filming, in his many photographs, and devil knows why a museum hasn't presented them since he's no longer here to cut all bridges to them (David Schwartz . . . ?). Not to break minds but I was in on the cropping of many of the early ones and could do some justice to the ones he didn't get around to.

I'm claiming a significant contribution not to the film *Flaming Creatures* but to the artist that made it—and it stinks that I have to do it, have to set myself up for attack by his sycophants, because it's staringly thumpingly screamingly obvious to anyone willing to see what's what and I've let it pass for years on end expecting *someone* to brave the admittance. If only to see was to believe! Then all it would take for me to be believed would be a viewing of *Star Spangled To Death*, and for good measure a look at what Jack had been up to with film before the intervening experience of acting in and seeing my stuff go through its changes, and going mind on mind with me those six crucial years. I learned many things from Jack, that trivia has deep roots, that some movies have to be experienced from within and about their ostensible foolishness; it was he who brought to my attention Da Vinci's remark that truth is to be found in details and it was a revelation for me when he told me that he'd fallen for Francesca when she appeared one day wearing a tan raincoat because that was poetry, he'd put into words something as powerful and mysterious and intangible as the pull of the moon. I learned more than that but I was the one thinking *form*.

(And politics, and economics. Someone relayed to me Jack's statement, "Kenny [beyond age 10 I've only been called Kenny by Jack] taught me to hate America." He had learned to hate landlords before we met, painting a swastika on the window of a landlord because he knew for some reason or other that would get to the guy. But he had no penetrating social criticism, could muster no more than Jean Shepard-style amiable condescension regarding the density of bullshit public and private-sector that made breathing difficult during the Feshtunkiner Fifties. He thought fashion photography was the greatest! He snuck off to Christian Science meetings!!)

Once and only once he showed me the thing he'd been shooting in the loft in the twenties before we met. It was very promising in a crazy way, totally blind, totally sincere. And almost entirely taking place in his head, the screen image no more than stimulant for his head-trip. He'd built a foot-high pool of water in a raw industrial loft, gathered fronds to it and conned/coerced this poor stringy nervous girl into simulating Maria Montez narcissism humorlessly, witlessly, Hollywood-straightforwardly but ineptly, to achieve *The Beautiful as*

he'd become acquainted with it in Wisconsin. It was as idealized and unseen in its specificity as the charming all-heart 8mm movie he'd shot in his early teens, *The Saracens*, for which his mother had sewn costumes for the neighborhood kids and in which the roofs of neighboring suburban homes loom clearly over the strung cloth penning in his Baghdad. But the purposeful and conscious anti-illusionism of *F.C.* (remarked by Hoberman), the comic antic irony of it, its worldly realism and hold on sanity, the self-acknowledged pathos of that space between actuality and impossible aspiration that the film takes place in . . . , that in my view is prompted by me. What I was doing and what I was saying. In this instance that sophistication is prompted by my anti-Hollywood and abstract-painting concerns helping Jack to some artistic objectifying of his obsessions, so that he could *do* something with them.

The garbage-aesthetic of the film is drawn, sucked directly out of *Star Spangled To Death* by Jack, great complainer of art-vampires besetting him. Flo eventually told me about Jack warning her not to get involved with me: "He looks normal but he fills his place with junk from the streets." Then years later we see a performance in his loft on Grand Street and there's my fascination with the worn and discarded and confessional, my shit! that Jack had given me such a hard time over, him with his then *film-noir* home decor, sent up theatrically to monumental heights. It doesn't take a doctorate to spot many elements in *Star Spangled To Death* that will move towards and instill energies into *Flaming Creatures*, as should be expected, we all come from somewhere, we've all been impacted upon. But perhaps now you can understand why I might be sensitive to being fixed in a little mindless-shit historical role as "projectionist," whatever.

But Jack was not an entirely thankless vampire, although I did watch him swallow Jerry Sims whole incorporating him into his richness of personality. Rather, within days or at most a couple of weeks after the 1963 premieres Jack came downtown to hand-deliver a postcard expressing his gratitude for all he'd learned from me and what it had "made possible." It's here somewhere, perhaps in Jack's black leatherette bible, with zipper, awarded him for good behavior or study habits, amongst the junk.

To return to the busts (there was more than one). I was grateful for and admiring of Jonas' fighting stance and organizing abilities. He went on the attack by arranging to get himself arrested a second time. Flo and I, while out on bond, helped set up an advertised screening of Genet's *Un Chant D'Amour* and this time left Jonas entirely alone to take the rap (but prepared for jail with Flo's roast chicken), so as to push prestigious Genet in their faces, pull in Sartre, etc., with the hope of then getting the cases joined. Names, Big Names, were raining down on the scene.

But Jonas did wound me passing up on moving a portion of Hill's largesse towards the wrap-up of *Star Spangled To Death*. And confused me, because he was so out and out delighted with how I'd come through with *Little Stabs At Happiness* and *Blonde Cobra*. He did help me to a fund-raiser for the film—a huge audience gave it shocking canon volleys of applause—but there wasn't all that much money. Instead Jonas opted to bankroll Jack's *Normal Love*, affording Jack himself as scapegoat when, despite some ravishing color rushes, the film floundered, failing to take on a life of its own. Later he'd bet on Barbara Rubin's wretched imitation of Jack, *Christmas on Earth*.

A pity and a loss. I was hot at that time to complete the work. Years later I was so pissed with Jack (he was the only film artist of renown to take the side of the destroyers of the original Millennium, my creation with a lot of help from Flo and friends) and with fellow star Jerry Sims that I no longer wished to present them in so grubby-heroic a light. Also my life changed, my head, and the times. It was no longer the Fifties but the Sixties! Could the shock

assault on its time of *Star Spangled To Death* be appreciated outside of that time? After the emergence of Pop Art and Underground upheaval in film, could the film's relentless originality and invention be recognized? And then, should someone relegate it to "foreshadowing" Smith and Warhol, I'd have to kill. Well, let's figure that Jonas was blown away as we all were by *Flaming Creatures* and that Jack as filmmaker was more important to him than Jack on screen, and after all, World, you were agog and waiting on Jack's next "great pasty triumph." It had to seem practical. Also, Jonas is a believer in The Star, and The Star needs space. Perhaps, too, *Star Spangled To Death* was so monstrously discursive and so anti-packaging that Jonas doubted I could get it together, or he may've preferred it stay in its rawer half-ass state (which is how he's felt about *The Sky Socialist*). But now with Jack and Bob Fleischner gone, and my curls falling from my head, I'm thinking I should do right by myself in my leap-into-space youth and get the thing out where it can enjoy some fresh obscurity in this most thankless and goddamnest of arts.

At the memorial gathering for Jack soon after his death, a parade of people who I'd never seen attending film spoke in the full certitude of ignorance about how Jack had given birth to film, Jack alone, only Jack. Ghastly slides of Jack in dress-up, returned to humorlessness, were projected. I then screened some of my earliest filmings of Jack, the mid-Fifties *Saturday Afternoon Blood Sacrifice* and *Little Cobra Dance*. A whole other Jack broke forth than most of them had known, not languid but splendidly energetic, up for fun! Sans bullshit. I wondered had I made problems for the crowd? Could it be—that Jack, prime mover, had himself come out of somewhere? Conducted by someone? Worse: to an appreciable extent had he been influenced by someone less agreeably remote than fabled von Sternberg? By, of all persons, the merely *sensible*

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