

Director's Notes and Synopsis

"I am fascinated by the film -- and find it, like the rest of your work, extremely intelligent, beautiful, enigmatic -- what I'm interested in is the particular choice of this politically compromised figure and the politically compromised scene that he describes -- you are once again hitting the right buttons in an age when notions of collaboration, resistance and critique are all highly COMPROMISED ideas, despite the best intentions of our peers to work with purity. Céline's contempt for his contemporaries' self-righteousness is something I have always admired -- and his insistence upon his contempt is ethical. All of this has to do with the way in which those of us who came of age in the eighties (you and me, etc.) have had a jaundiced view of the abuse and abandonment of the notion of the political in the art world...I think that the notions of collaboration and compromise are important to this work."

-- Catherine Liu on *North*, 7/29/01

My first film *Without You I'm Nothing* (1990) remained my singular film credit for almost eleven years until *North* (2001). Before *Without You I'm Nothing* and since I had done a considerable body of work in other media such as installation, photo and text, painting, sculpture, design and writing. My work in other media relates in some way to my film work either formally or thematically. *North* I consider as a kind of code, which attempts to bring unity to many aspects of my inter-genre career.

While making *North* I kept in mind the idea of making a film portrait of novelist Gary Indiana. After reading Gary's work and seeing him read from his true crime novels *Resentment* and *Three Month Fever*, I am convinced as many others are that he is one of the most important American novelists to emerge in sometime. His oeuvre recalls Capote, only more politically.

Gary chose to read excerpts from Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *North* (1960) rather than from his own work. Céline's novel depicts events that occurred during and after the liberation of France by the Allied Forces. The novel chronicles Céline's life. Fearing that he would be charged with collaboration, he fled France to Baden Baden, Germany. The passages describe everyday life at the Simplon Hotel in Baden Baden and how the Axis elite really spent the cruelest months of the WWII: "the wars raging on seven fronts and all the oceans don't interfere with their caviar." *North* is part of a trilogy of novels that includes *Castle to Castle* (1957) and *Rigadoon* (1969). Céline's earlier work, particularly his thirties work, *Death on the Installment Plan* (1936) and *Journey to the End of Night* (1934), influenced World Literature as evident in writers such as William Burroughs and Günter Grass.

North is one of Gary's favorite books. When I asked Gary, "Why *North*?"...He said you have to see *Pierrot Le Fou* to understand"... It was Godard's *Pierrot Le Fou* (1965) with its many references to Celine, that introduced Gary this work. The two works, Celine's novel and Godard's film, are interrelated in many ways; *Pierrot Le Fou*'s many references to Céline represent the revitalized interest in his work by the Left in France, who particularly, admired the later trilogy. To some extent these works also function to excuse Céline (who died in abjection in '61) for his notorious involvement in the Vichy Regime. *North* begins, to some extent, with the discourse that culminates in Marcel Ophul's *The Sorrow and The Pity* (1972), a film that collapses the popular notion held after the war and through much of the sixties that the French were a nation of resisters as opposed to collaborators during WWII.

However, the film *North* is not about obsolete politics; the language and political ideas in *North* are painfully current and have an uncanny timeliness as the film seems to anticipate and describe recent world events. Although finished in 2001 prior to September 11, it nevertheless references September 11 metaphorically. People were commenting on this at *North*'s screening at the Silver Lake Film Festival on September 23, a little more than a week after the eleventh. Recently, Gary commented on how John Walker, "the American Taliban," can be related to Céline and to the notion of choosing the losing side.

The inter-cutting and rear screen projections throughout *North* are entirely taken from *Pierrot Le Fou* --- it's iconographic imagery attempts to recreate for the viewer the moment of reception of Celine's novel: Paris, early to mid sixties. This appropriated material offers a kind of ideological veneer.

North is designed to orient the viewer to the movie screen as one would to a canvas of a painting. Therefore, when conceiving *North*, I envisioned two alternative ways of projection. One mode is standard, being a conventional movie theater. The other, which would constitute an installation, would be to project *North* in a large, flat, empty room via rear screen to exclude shadow incursion thus allowing the viewer to approach the film as one would a painting. The alternative installation would be best suited for a museum or gallery setting. Some film festivals are equipped to handle film installation such as this.

After *North* was screened at the Silver Lake Film Festival, Gary read from *Depraved Indifference* his newly published novel on Kenneth and Sante Kimes. This work completes his trilogy of true crime novels. *North* was shown in the British Film Institute's London Gay & Lesbian Film Festival (GLFF) and in the Milan/ Bologna GLFF this year.

North is an entirely independent project even though RSA, NYC is listed in the end credits as "Produced By". During the strike, RSA, like everyone else, weren't particularly busy so they graciously brought me through principal photography but did not fund the project in anyway. Producer and editor David Dodson organized postproduction. Director of Photography John Pirozzi shot *North* in super 16 mm in one day on a sound stage in Brooklyn. Primary colors reference early 60's Parisian design. The titles emulate Godard's titles in *Pierrot Le Fou*, but were done on a laptop. It was later blown up to 35mm using a new process developed by FotoKem to eliminate video artifacts.

The title song is Anna Karina's rendition of Antoine Duhamel's "Jamais je ne t'ai dit que je t'aimerai toujours," as sung to Belmondo in *Pierrot Le Fou*. Additional music is from the second movement of Lizst's piano transcription of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. The end credit music is David Grubbs' piano arrangement for *North* of Antoine Duhamel's "Jamais je ne t'ai dit que je t'aimerai toujours".

-- J.B.

Film Dialogue

GARY INDIANA: You don't need to vote to have an opinion...it's the privilege of old age... a time comes when you stop reading the articles...just the ads...they tell you the whole story...and the death notices.. you know what people want and you know that they're dead...God knows the guests of the Simplon in Baden-Baden were Gaulists, out-and-out anti-Hitlerites...ripe for the Allies!...with the Cross of Lorraine in their hearts, in their eyes, on their tongues...and none of your smalltime flops, none of your demented down-at-heel shopkeepers...the Simplon only took people for the very best families, former reigning princes or Ruhr magnates...owners of steel mills with a hundred...or two hundred thousand workers...still I'm speaking of July '44...very well supplied with food, and very punctually...butter, eggs, caviar, marmalade, salmon, cognac, Mumm's extra...airborne shipments, dropped by parachute on Vienna, Austria...direct from Rostov, Tunis, Epernay, London...the wars raging on seven fronts and all oceans don't interfere with their caviar...the super-squashery...Z-bomb, sling, fly-swatter...will always respect the delicatessen of the high and mighty...You won't see Krouzof eating monkey meat in this world! Or Nixon feeding on noodles...the tables of the high and mighty are a "Reason of State"...That's how it was at the Simplon...everything they needed!...on every floor assassins dressed like waiters carrying compote with maraschino...For those people, I don't have to tell you, money was no problem...guests and flunkys thought nothing of putting ten, fifteen million on a single card at the "Mark Exchange"...and Christ, were they in a hurry to unload that stage money!...to buy something with it, anything...but where did the stuff come from? from right next door, from Switzerland...and the prices!...whole wheelbarrows full of marks!...okay...okay...but what about the layout?...A whole floor of the Simplon was fixed up...genuine merchants!...curled, pomaded, swarthy...and slippery!...with the charm of a jaguar, fanged smiles, cousins of Nassar, Lavel Mendes, Youssef..."Come right in, dear patrons!"...and those magnates, you should have seen the barrels full of foreign currency!...the Simplon bazaar open for business...the real thing! a Bukhara rug: ten pounds of "Schlacht Bank" weighed out!...swept in!...tomorrow you'll see the same people in the bazaars of the Kremlin, Russia, or the White House, U.S.A., in the middle of another war!...ten, twenty Hiroshimas a day, boom, boom, sound and fury, that's all...those hideous clashes, love taps, nothing at all...who cares as long as Mercury gets his own!...that's what counts!...in the Russian labor camps, in Buchenwald, in the darkest dungeons, or under the atomic ashes, Mercury is right there! Find his little temple...and you'll be all right...life goes on...So does Nassar and his canal!...and marmalade!...and genuine Rostov sturgeon!...and if you please, don't let the last remaining parachute get any ideas about dropping anything but a good big case of Chianti, plus glasses and beveled mirrors, "pure Venice", better than best! nylon underthings "Valenciennes style"!... for the "Kommissar" ladies!...ah, those perfumed idols, surfeited with tortures, yawning at the gallows...last parachute, remember those are "ratafia-nylon" blouses!... don't make me say it again!...forget about those boring contraptions for pulverizing five provinces! so packed with neutrons that you'll never find Saint-Lazare Station again!

Take it from me...at the Simplon Hotel in Baden-Baden there was everything you needed to get along very nicely...Not just the people from the Ruhr Konzerns and the Central-Europe-Balkan banks, there were slightly wounded generals from every front, believe me, those folks wanted for nothing...choice food not to mention plots, conspiracies, and timetables...you'll say I'm making it up...not at all!...of course you had to be there...the circumstances, not everybody's luck...the end of the meals, flushed with roasts, heavy secrets, burgundy...irresistible menus!...delicacies from start to finish, from the hors d'oeuvres to the strawberries and whipped cream...melba?...syrup?...more?...less?...lemon peel?...and all those waiters, so attentive, listening and taking note, ...a lot of them had waited on Petain, on Goering at the Ritz in Paris...and not just Hermann! all the high Nazi dignitaries and the Baroness de Rothschild...Let the ragged, crackbrained, down-at-heel racists!...no matter where, no matter how, the elite is always the elite...have the meetings, the shit! the motions, the shouting, the raised fists, the lowered fists, the thumbs down! That stuff is for the rank-and-file! Let the scum get down on their knees, down on their faces! To the shithouse!... A waiter at the White House, the Kremlin, Vichy, or the Simplon has a way of passing the hors d'oeuvres...unmistakable...red cabbage or cauliflower, "borsh" or pot-au-feu, your "rank and file gangsters" will always fart the same way, it's dismal...even on Beaujolais or vodka!...their whole digestion is different: Windsor, Kremlin, Elysee!...what does the "intelligentsia" of the wretched earth, want?...its fervent dream?...to fart like Kroutchev or Picasso!... to be wretched like them!...Not so easy!

I haven't told you about the Casino!...those gaming rooms..."Translavian baroque"...Florid colonels, liverish councilors, ailing old bags with heart trouble...pale...pale...without a sou left to their names...or the strength to get up and go...wartime, no orchestra...no sound but the unchanging *rrrrr* of the wheel...and that melodious voice, briskly..."*jeux sont faits!*"...The nobility from the Simplon came in to take a look...genteel, contemptuous...but the collabo "refugees," especially the ladies, clung three...or four...to a chair...panting in expectation...

The Casino pastry shop was always jam-packed with Boche war widows...convalescing from emotional shock...bring on the *babas au rhum!*...and the cream puffs and brioches this big!...the blueberry tarts and the platters of eclairs...I've got to admit that we indulged just a little...the hard times came later...don't let it bug you...I'm telling you all this every which way...the end before the beginning!...what does it matter? the truth alone matters!...It's so hard to visualize those convalescent war widows taking the "cure", packing away cakes, petits fours, strawberry tarts...pitchers of creamy chocolate...all those mouths full, dripping...the hard part was getting out! the revolving doors!...the waiters had to push them...all those somnolent ladies...they'd land somewhere...belching...dreamy...and linger for hours, digesting...

The croupiers...something else again...they had no fun at all...no time for petit fours!..."place your bets!...five!"...in addition they had their pupils to train, one a piece...a specially selected war cripple, a basket case in uniform...and they'd better learn quick...to toss the ball...to rake in the stakes...five! three! four! "les jeux sont fait!" the dexterity of luck!...harmonious unbroken movements, chips...flawless delivery!...the tradition of the Baden Casino doesn't date from yesterday!...Berlioz played there and Liszt...and all the Romanov princes...the Naritzkins and Savoy...the Bourbons and Bragances...we, of course, seemed like intruders, we, unwanted on all the shores of Europe...well, anyway it was an opera, the comic kind...you spectators have nothing to worry about...History passes by, plays on, and there you are...I'll tell you all about it...

Exactly the same croupiers in Monte Carlo...so-called deportees...pomaded hair, the same...hooked nose, the same...dinner jackets, sewn pockets...same as in Ostend, Zoppot, Enghien...voices like velvet guillotines...the Great Reich thought of everything...people find fault with it now! Sure!...think of stories they tell nowadays about the Gauls, Louis XIV, even Felix Faure!...the defeated are always scum!...I know it...I know it well...

-- Louis-Ferdinand Céline, from *North* (1960)

Translated by Ralph Manheim, from the Dalkey Archive Press edition

Edited by Gary Indiana and John Boskovich

Technical Notes

North was photographed by award-winning cinematographer John Pirozzi with an Arriflex 16SR3 camera in the Super16 format on Kodak film. Photography was made at 25 frames per second to accommodate the use of on-set projections of Jean Luc Godard's *Pierrot Le Fou*. After developing, the original negative was transferred to PAL DigiBeta in a modified anamorphic ratio. This preserved the 1.77:1 aspect ratio while anticipating the eventual printing to 35mm film for release. *North* was edited on an Avid non-linear editing system. It was then onlined on an Avid Symphony, maintaining a full, non-compressed, 1:1 digital, PAL-format image. This finished PAL DigiBeta tape was then given to Ed Armstrong, Director of Tape to Film for FotoKem Laboratories in Los Angeles for printing to 35mm. Using a new, proprietary process, FotoKem transferred the PAL DigiBeta online master tape to 35mm negative. After color timing, the film was printed to standard 35mm Kodak Premiere release stock.

When projected in 35mm film, the final look and feel of *North* is unlike anything previously seen. In the past, tape to film transfer has been marred by the video artifacts commonly seen in standard laser-scanned output. However, FotoKem's unique process eliminates these artifacts, creating an image free of the video look. Unlike Von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* or Thomas Vinterberg's *Celebration*, *North* was originally photographed on film, not digital video. As a result, while *North* was transferred to film from PAL DigiBeta tape, the final 35mm release prints are completely devoid of any video artifacts. This system even benefited excerpts from Godard's *Pierrot Le Fou*, which were taken directly from a PAL-format DVD, transferred to PAL DigiBeta, and cut into *North*. As before, no video artifacts are visible in the tape to film process.

-- David Dodson, *Editor*