

# TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

SATURDAY  
SEPTEMBER 29, 2018  
7:00PM • WHITNEY  
HUMANITIES CENTER

AND THE **DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA** FILM SERIES PRESENT



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320 YORK HUMANITIES

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT  
FROM PAUL L. JOSKOW  
'70 M. PHIL., '72 PH.D.

Nº 2  
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Haskell Wexler described *MEDIUM COOL* as being about “a cameraman and his conscience.” Wexler (1922-2015) was a lifelong liberal born into a family of wealthy Chicago industrialists. While working at his father’s electronics company after returning from World War II, he organized a strike by its factory workers, and was soon thereafter given the funding to leave the family business and start his own small production studio where he learned filmmaking by shooting industrial films. He developed into one of America’s most celebrated cinematographers, winning Academy Awards for *WHO’S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?* and *BOUND FOR GLORY*, as well as shooting such films as *AMERICA AMERICA*, *THE LOVED ONE*, *IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT*, *THE THOMAS CROWN AFFAIR*, *AMERICAN GRAFFITI*, *COMING HOME*, and *MATEWAN*. He also continued to direct low-budget, socially-conscious documentaries throughout his career, notably *THE BUS* about the 1963 March on Washington.

His desire to start directing feature films coincided with a shake-up in the film industry, with studios increasing their collaborations with independent producers, and Robert Evans becoming Head of Production at Paramount in 1967. Peter Bart, who had been brought to Paramount by Evans, approached Wexler about adapting *The Concrete Wilderness*, a novel by Jack Couffer (Oscar-nominated cinematographer of *JONATHAN LIVINGSTON SEAGULL*) about a young boy who befriends pigeons and other animals in Manhattan. Wexler accepted a “negative pickup” deal for the project, meaning Paramount would buy and distribute his film, but he’d have to provide the upfront financing, which he did in large part through the aid of his family (his real estate mogul brother Jerrold shares the producer’s credit). “To put it in classic Hollywood talk,” Bart said, “we gave him a development deal, and, being an anarchist by nature, he derailed it and came up with a better idea.”

Wexler radically rewrote the story and relocated it from New York to Chicago’s Uptown, which was then a neighborhood of Appalachian immigrants. He hired a small number of professional actors for the film, notably Robert Forster and Peter Bonerz as local TV newsmen and Verna Bloom as a recently-arrived West Virginian. (Watch for Peter Boyle earning his first screen credit as the gun clinic manager.) He also cast Uptown locals in key roles, and met many of them through his friendships with author/broadcaster Studs Terkel and sociologist/SDS leader Todd Gitlin. These non-professional actors included Harold Blankenship as the young boy Harold, and Uptown activist Charles Geary as his father. Blankenship, who eventually returned to West Virginia, named his son Haskell in tribute to Wexler.

The film was produced for about \$800,000 using the low-budget techniques Wexler learned from shooting industrials and docs. His small crew was able to surreptitiously shoot at the Democratic National Convention by using Warren Beatty’s credentials, and shot the protest scenes using three camera operators (including himself) and two audio engineers. The script was rewritten on the fly during production, which allowed Wexler to incorporate references to contemporaneous events such as the assassination of RFK. The film received what Wexler described as “a political X” rating from the MPAA, and Paramount was reluctant to release it, presenting obstacles such as demands for release forms from every Chicago protester. Nonetheless, it received strong reviews, with Vincent Canby describing it as “a film of tremendous visual impact, a kind of cinematic *Guernica*, a picture of America in the process of exploding into fragmented bits of hostility, suspicion, fear, and violence.” *MEDIUM COOL* went on to be selected for the Library of Congress’s National Film Registry, along with five additional films for which Wexler served as cinematographer.

DIRECTED AND WRITTEN BY  
**HASKELL WEXLER**

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **HASKELL WEXLER**  
A PRODUCTION OF **PARAMOUNT PICTURES**  
(1969) 111 MINS.

STARRING **ROBERT FORSTER, VERNA BLOOM, PETER BONERZ, MARIANNA HILL, HAROLD BLANKENSHIP, CHARLES GEARY, AND SID McGOY**

**DID YOU KNOW:** THE FILM’S MOST FAMOUS LINE—“LOOK OUT, HASKELL, IT’S REAL!”—WASN’T REAL. THOUGH THE FOOTAGE OF WEXLER BEING TEAR-GASSED ON THE STREETS OF CHICAGO IS AUTHENTIC, NO AUDIO WAS BEING RECORDED AT THAT MOMENT, SO WEXLER HAD LINE PRODUCER JONATHAN HAZE DELIVER THE LINE LATER. HE EXPLAINED THAT THE LINE WENT THROUGH HIS MIND WHEN THE INCIDENT OCCURRED, AS THE GAS REMINDED HIM HE WASN’T JUST WATCHING A MOVIE THROUGH HIS CAMERA LENS.

**NEXT UP:** FIRST, JOIN THE FILM STUDY CENTER FOR THE SECOND EVENING OF **THROUGH BERGMAN’S LENS: INGMAR BERGMAN CENTENNIAL SERIES**. THIS EVENING WILL SHOWCASE NEW 35MM PRINTS OF **THE SEVENTH SEAL** AND **THE MAGICIAN**, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY PROFESSOR OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND OF HUMANITIES MARTIN HÄGGLUND. **THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11 AT 7PM.**

**THEN, ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21 AT 2PM,** TREASURES PRESENTS DIRECTOR SOFIA COPPOLA’S **MARIE ANTOINETTE**, A FILM CALLED BY *THE LOS ANGELES TIMES* “A STARTLINGLY ORIGINAL AND BEAUTIFUL POP REVERIE THAT COMES VERY CLOSE TO BEING TRANSCENDENT.” PROF. PIERRE SAINT-AMAND WILL INTRODUCE THE SCREENING OF A 35MM PRINT FROM YALE’S COLLECTION.