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# FILM FORUM

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## BEWARE OF A HOLY WHORE

Written and Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Photographed by Michael Ballhaus. With Lou Castel (as Jeff), Werner Schroeter, Eddie Constantine, Hanna Schygulla, Margarethe Von Trotta, Ulli Lommel, Marquard Bohm, Hannes Fuchs, and R.W. Fassbinder. 1970. 103 minutes. West Germany. English Subtitles. A New Yorker Films Release.

Thursday - Sunday, November 11-14 and 18-21, 1976 at 7:30 p.m.

"Fassbinder's a mixture of enfant terrible, burgher, and pimp, whose 24 features (since 1967) are mainly sprung out of a camp sensibility. All of his appetites (for the outlandish, vulgar, and banal in matters of taste, the use of old movie conventions, a no-sweat approach to making movies, moving easily from one media to another, the element of face-tiousness and play in terms of style) are those of camp and/or Warhol. The point - to dethrone the serious, to make artifice and theatricality an ideal - is evident in an amazing vivacity, re-introducing Fable into a Hollywood genre, while suggesting a tough facile guy manipulating a deck of cards." - Manny Farber & Patricia Patterson, Film Comment

BEWARE OF A HOLY WHORE is probably Fassbinder's most Warholian feature at the same time as it develops more traditional autobiographical themes (a la Fellini's 8½ and Truffaut's DAY FOR NIGHT) as well as it explores areas of the psyche and of group dynamics (redefining sexual identities, power relationships, and the interrelationship of the two) peculiar to his body of work. In a luxury hotel by the sea a group of actors and their crew kill time waiting to make a film. Languid, decadent, morbid and tough they engage in histrionics and storytelling, back-biting and seduction as they dance to Elvis and Leonard Cohen on the jukebox and down endless cuba libres. As in CHELSEA GIRLS, nothing happens. Warhol's unseen presence unites his clan. Fassbinder's alter ego, the leather-jacketed director, Jeff, unites this troupe. Warhol's superstars play themselves. BEWARE..., filled with Fassbinder's repertory players, is based on their first attempt at cooperative filmmaking.

Once the action has been established, Jeff arrives out of the sky (shades of TRIUMPH OF THE WILL). He serves as a sexual/financial/emotional resource for a cast who, individually or in groups, fall into intimate embraces with him upon the slightest provocation. He is the alienated hero: sensitive, tortured, powerful, yet vulnerable as well as a father/god figure to his children/supplicants. "Society has killed something in him," says the beautiful Hanna Schygulla. But in typical Fassbinder fashion the relationship quickly reverses. Jeff becomes as dependent, hysterical, and destructive as his admirers and progeny.

Money, class-consciousness, and Germany nationalism compete with Jeff as the binding pre-occupations of his followers. Here is the affluent, mobile new generation of post World War II Germans who smash their glasses as casually as servants sweep up after them, who listen impassively while an outsider comments, "You're all from Munich... You're the supermen because you're together."

Fassbinder lists his favorite painters as "naive painters, the Viennese surrealists, and Bosch." In BEWARE OF A HOLY WHORE he paints a rich tableau of Boschian proportions, touched with the naive's hard-edged colors and the surrealist's singular imagination.

- K.C.

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