

## Document Citation

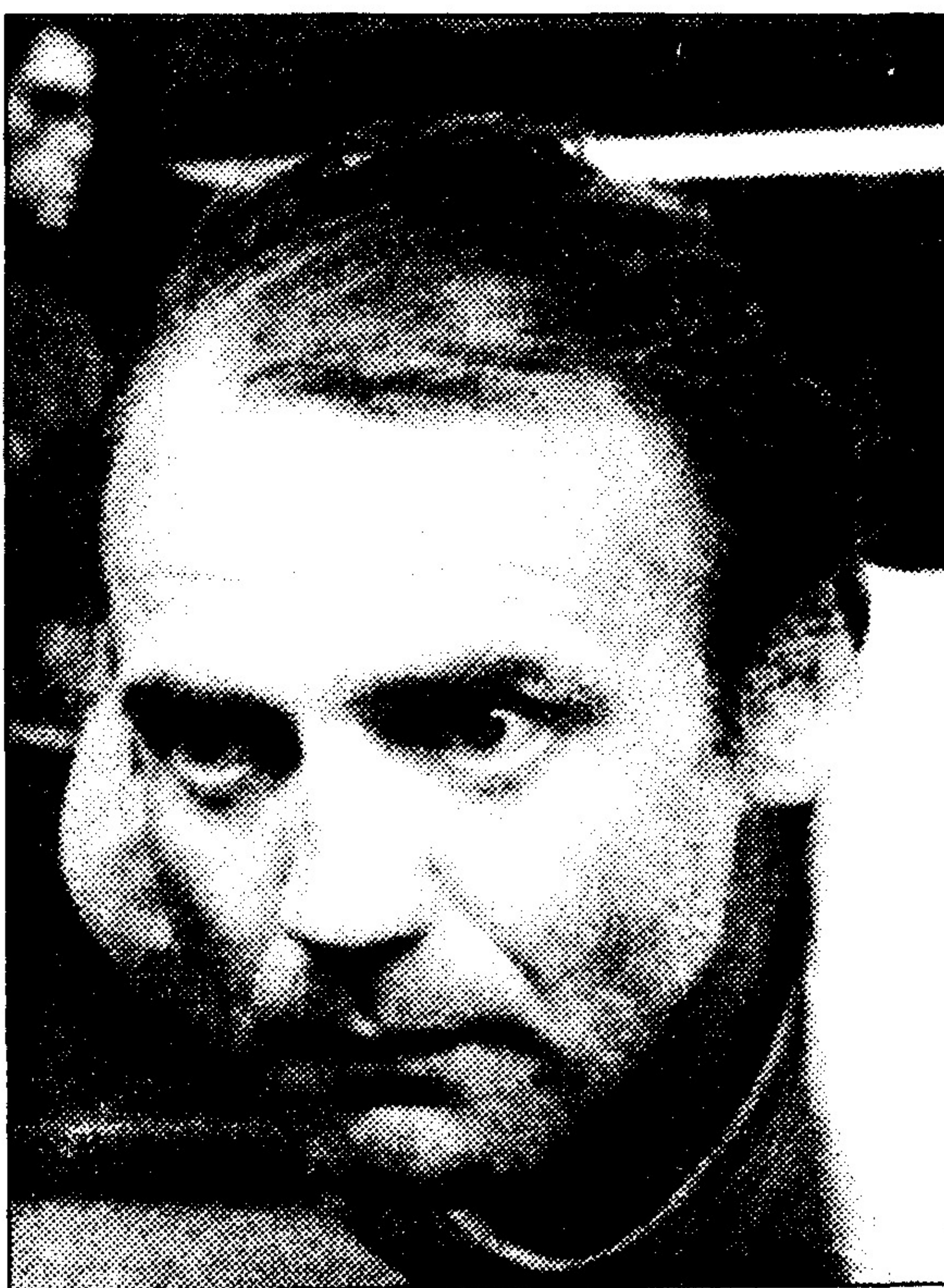
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# Now, *Voyager*

**IN THE WHITE CITY.** Written and directed by Alain Tanner. Released by Gray City, Inc. Opens August 24, at the Cinema Studio.

While not up to *Messidor*, Alain Tanner's *In the White City* (opening Friday at the Cinema Studio) is a strong rebound from the failure of *Light Years Away*—a haunting, immaculately realized account of a Swiss nautical engineer (Bruno Ganz) who jumps ship in Lisbon and briefly vacations in the unknown or, at least, the unfamiliar.

Like Tanner's other recent films, *In the White City* is an attempt both to reimagine Europe—the dialogue is in four languages—and, like *Messidor* in particular, to escape its gilded cage. Like *Messidor* as well, it's far more visual than narrative, more an experience than a catharsis, a game (as one of the earlier film's heroines puts it) in "time and empty space." Ganz has a dream of dazzling light, of a new, wonderfully haphazard life in a city of enchanted whiteness. He moves into a waterfront hotel, abandons his responsibilities, abolishes all schedules, wandering the streets, genially brawling in sailors' bars, and sleeping through the afternoon. His adventures are at once ordinary and charged. As the days progress, Ganz falls in love with the hotel barmaid, gets mugged, pawns his gold watch, lands in the hospital, loses his girl, starts home. Loose-limbed



## Ganz going under

and half-crazy, unafraid to make a total ass of himself, Ganz gives his best performance in several seasons; his innamorata (more like a college girl than a barmaid, actually) is played by a terrific Portuguese actress named Teresa Madruga, whose lean, strong-featured face is a theater of emotions to rival Ganz's own.

With its documentary emphasis on colors and sounds (marred at times by an overreliance on Jean-Luc Barbier's moody saxophone), serendipitous frames animated by billowing curtains and an air of sweet improvisation (toughened and belied by the austere precision of the camerawork), *In the White City* succeeds in evoking the foreign as a succession of unnaturally vivid everyday impressions. The inspi-

ration for *Messidor*, Tanner told one interviewer, came from an experimental film he made by mounting a super-8 camera on his car and shooting three-minute cartridges of the trip between Geneva and Berne. ("Absolutely empty pictures which are at the same time absolutely crammed with information about emptiness, duration, time, the road, the lorries, etc.") *In the White City* is marbled with the grainy super-8 movies—at once banal and exotic—which Ganz takes and mails to his uncomprehending wife back in Switzerland. (In the end, when he's come seriously unmoored, he sends her a virtual avant-garde travelogue of onrushing water and cobblestones, punctuated by overexposed flashframes and footage shot from the trolley.)

It's appropriate that *In the White City* is being distributed here by a company associated with Wim Wenders, for the film continues Tanner's dialogue with the younger German director. Part of Wenders's originality lies in the way he has reworked the distinctive narrative-travelogue of Antonioni's *L'avventura* in terms of a posthippie male protagonist, with culture shock taking the place of alienation. If *Messidor* seems in some ways an answer to *Kings of the Road*, this latest Tanner suggests an adult version of *Alice in the Cities*, as well as Jim Jarmusch's upcoming, Wender-derived *Stranger Than Paradise*. In fact, Tanner could almost have borrowed the title of Jarmusch's first feature and ironically used it here: *In the White City* is the free-fall into "permanent vacation."

—J.H.