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Author(s)	Jack Hamilton
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WHAT'S WORRYING AMERICA?

Author
Fletcher Knebel
rediscovers his
hung-up country...

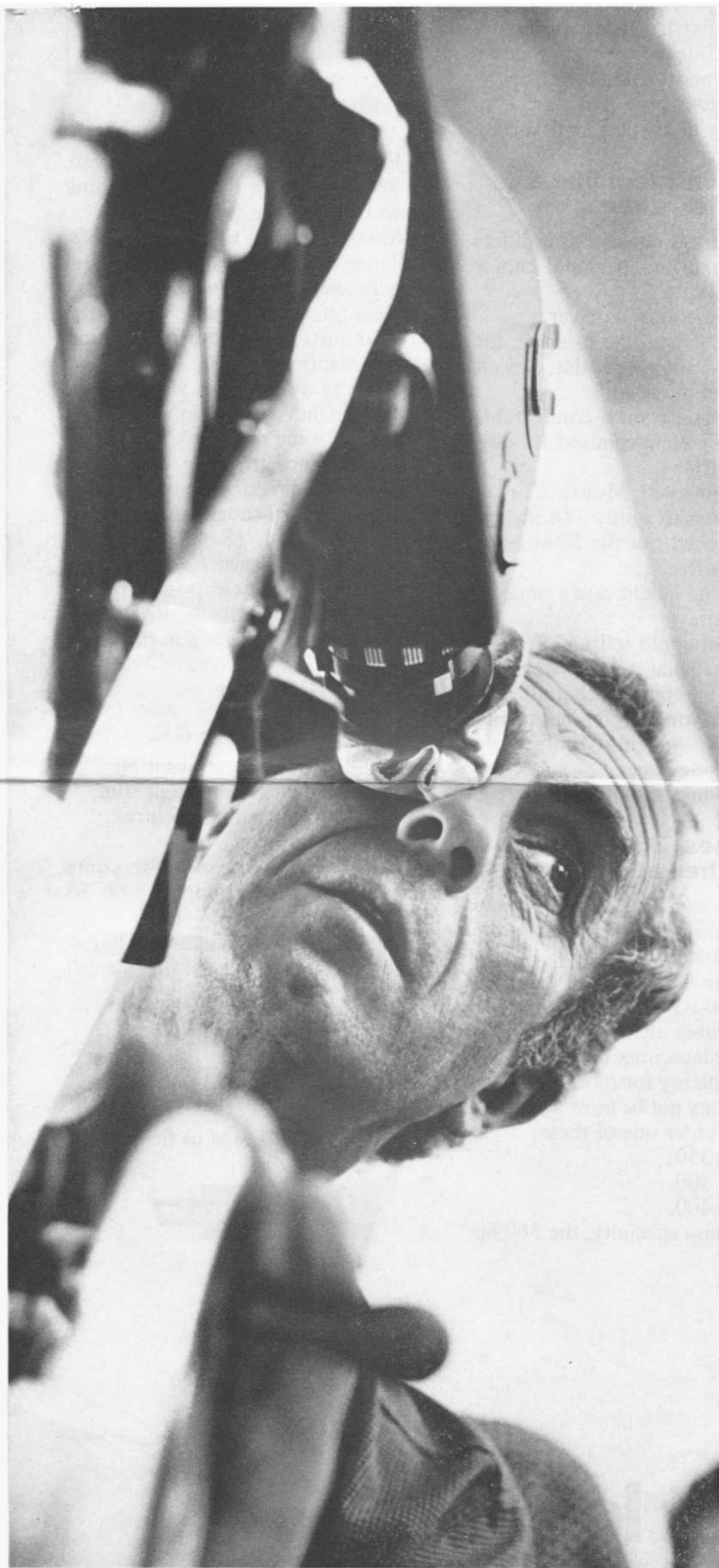
BLOW-UP's director
films his bizarre
vision of our youth

Most hated
winner in
FOOTBALL
Oakland's Al Davis

DEBBIE REYNOLDS
Will she make it as
TV's new Lucy?

NOTRE DAME'S HESBURGH
hits Nixon
on civil rights

ANTONIONI'S
NEW STARS
DARIA HALPRIN
MARK FREGHETTE



FILMING *Zabriskie Point*, his first movie in America, Michelangelo Antonioni (left), the mild, shy, remote, egocentric Italian intellectual and visionary poet of the cinema, managed to stir up the angry suspicions of, among others, park rangers at Death Valley National Monument, several discharged MGM crew members, a Federal grand jury at Sacramento, the Department of Justice and California campus militants. Had he violated the Mann Act when he staged a nude love-in in a national park? Does the film show an "anti-American" bias? As a member of the movie Establishment, is he distorting the aims of the young people's "revolution"? The irony of this hubbub of conflicting interests—it erupted before the film was completed—is that Antonioni is an elusive artist who works in symbols, enigmas, fantasies, never hard facts (*L'Avventura*, *Blow-Up*). He never commits himself to direct answers: "I am too shy. What is a question or an answer? I am not presumptuous to give answers about America. Anything one might say—good or bad, nasty or nice—could be true."

He himself doesn't know what shades his discovery of "your

THE ITALIAN DIRECTOR'S FIRST FILM ON AMERICA HAS ALREADY STIRRED UP OFFICIAL SUSPICIONS AND WILD EXPECTATIONS

ANTONIONI'S AMERICA

staggering American landscape" may finally take. He shot 60 miles of film, "with two viewpoints for each scene," that alone will take him 54 hours to screen. But it's known that *Zabriskie Point* (named for an area of Death Valley, which has, symbolically, the highest, lowest and hottest places in the country) is a love story enmeshed in the political-social vibrations of American youth. Antonioni, 57, is obsessed with the young people. "I like everything they do—even their mistakes, their doubts." As to the squall he unwittingly stirred, he shrugs. "Your country never stops astonishing me. I hope all this is not politically inspired."

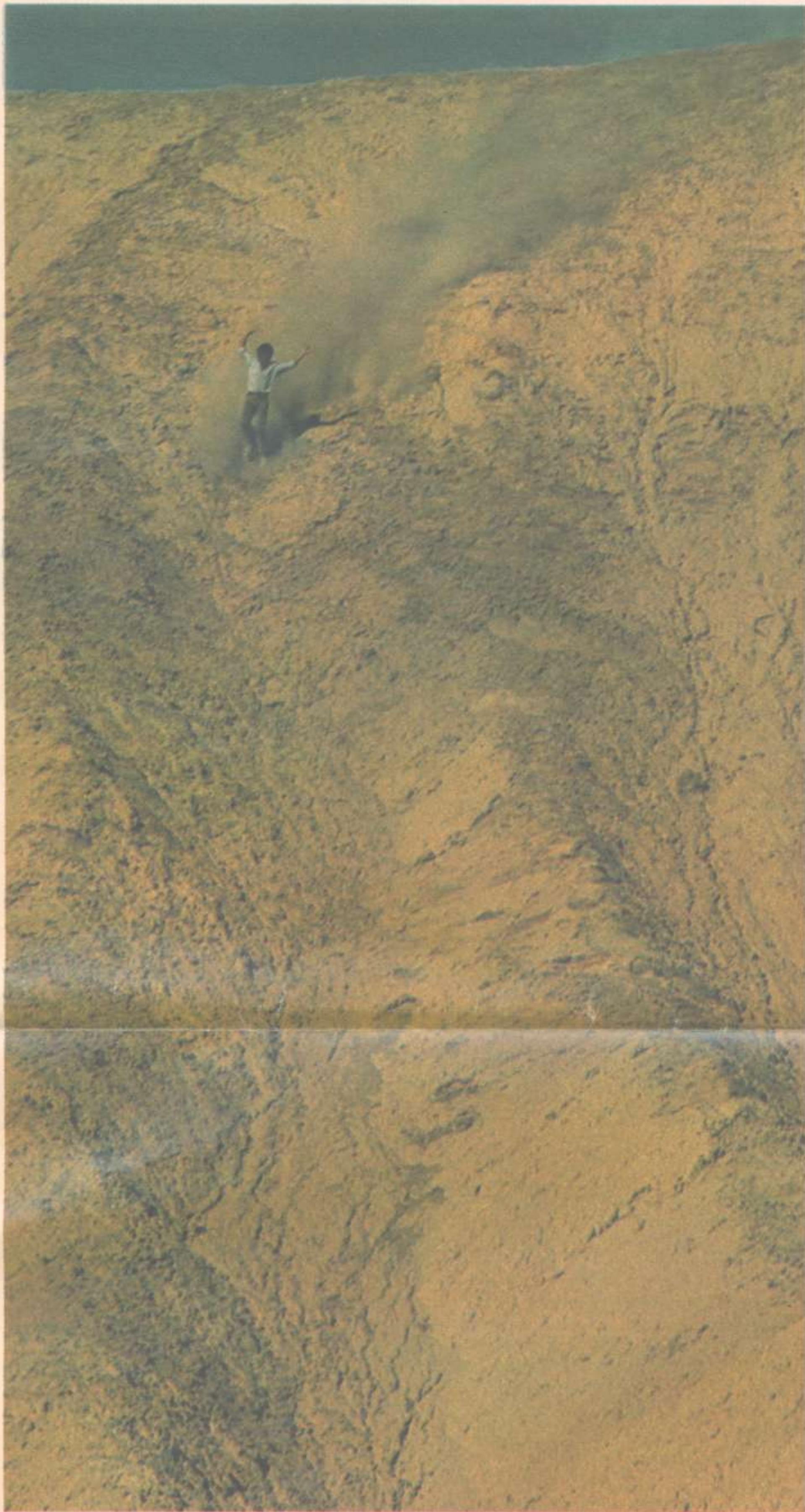
TEXT BY JACK HAMILTON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
BRUCE DAVIDSON

The girl watches her employer's desert house explode, as if in atomic mushroom flames. Is this her wishful illusion or an actual event? Just as in the rest of the story, Antonioni isn't telling.



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Mark, the fugitive hero (above and at left), has his mysterious adventure in the primitive desert stillness.

says, "I made no attempt to change her." The right boy was hard to locate. Advertisements in youth papers called for a being of "angular features... Politically Aware." But an Antonioni scout found Mark having a fight at a Boston bus stop. When up for his screen test, Mark said he'd never heard of Antonioni and that his own experience consisted only of "draft-resistance work and carpentry." In Boston's Fort Hill ghetto, Mark is the resident carpenter of a six-house commune with 50 members living by the ethics of Christ, Thoreau and Emerson. Mark sold their magazine, *Avatar* (God Returning), on Boston street corners. "What America is going through now," Mark believes, "is birth pains, a final beginning and understanding of democracy." Antonioni thinks Mark has "the elegance of an aristocrat, though from a poor family. There is something mystical about him." After Mark finally saw his director's *Blow-Up*, he said of him, across the generation gap, "His mind could be less vague. He doesn't want to communicate or show his feelings. He feels at one with today's struggle, but he's never resolved it in his own life. But the amount of opposition he's aroused now, even the Justice Department on his back, must mean he's giving it a good try." When the movie was completed, Daria left Berkeley to join Mark and all the others at Fort Hill.

ANTONIONI FOUND A DANCER FOR HIS GIRL AND A CARPENTER FOR HIS BOY

THE YOUNG people's search for a happier way of life is a reproach to my generation," says Antonioni. To embody his ideal of American youth, he selected two unknowns—Daria Halprin, 20, and Mark Frechette, 21. He first saw Daria in a San Francisco experimental movie, *Revolution*. A Berkeley freshman, she was a member of her avant-garde mother's Dancers' Workshop that performed nude on a New York stage two years before *Oh! Calcutta!* Drawn to her bratty, free, earth-child quality, Antonioni





Against Death Valley's lonely
lunar landscape, the girl and
boy meet, talk and make love.
Daria Halprin and Mark
Frechette, from opposite poles
of the United States (San
Francisco and Boston; rich
and poor families) are the lovers.

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Antonioni sadly eyes the rifles on sale at a gun shop he photographed in California.

When *Blow-Up* became a money-maker in the U.S., Antonioni had a prompt invitation from MGM to do a film here. Partly because of Antonioni's temperamental reputation, MGM officials kept their distance. He went to the Chicago convention (where he was Maced), SDS meetings and the Free Church at Berkeley, arousing suspicions in some vigilant quarters that he might be going to emphasize the trouble spots of America. MGM still claims it doesn't know what *Zabriskie Point*, an expensive production, is all about.

Antonioni worked on his script with two young American writers, Sam Shepard and Fred Gardner. No one was permitted to discuss the ever-changing plot ("political events go by too fast for the cinema to keep up"). His company never knew where they would work the following day. Press agents and crew members, unused to his impromptu methods, were fired.

"Our relationship was purely platonic," Mark Frechette says of the director, because Antonioni (politely embarrassed by Mark's ardor for a "spiritual revolution") never discussed with him the character he was playing, although he spent hours with Daria. Rangers at Death Valley National Monument clashed with hippie members of the Open Theatre during filming of a love-in. College militants didn't trust Antonioni and suspected he was exploiting them.

So it went. No matter what he did, Antonioni provoked resentment. His maverick methods hark back to the times of I-am-the-boss directors D. W. Griffith and Josef von Sternberg. He is an artist who creates his mystic and original work in absolute control of what he wants, and to hell with busybodies and gossips who don't understand. Long before this point in his career, he had been bruised by censorship of church and state in Europe. A tense man with a nervous facial tic, Antonioni has become superstitious, suspi-

cious and easily hurt.

Within the shell of his absorption in his work, he is genuinely surprised that some people don't "like" him. He "likes" Americans and is amused at himself for thinking them a much happier people than he expected. At his return to Rome, he announced that his fellow Italians were unbelievably provincial compared to Americans and were still vainly arguing problems that Americans had resolved 50 years ago.

"America has changed me," he says. "I am now a much less private person, more open, prepared to say more. I have even changed my view of sexual love. In my other films, I looked upon sex as a disease of love. I learned here that sex is only a part of love; to be open and understanding of each other, as the girls and boys of today are, is the important part. But it is not fair to ask questions of me before I put my picture together. The responsibility is mine. It is me in front of the camera saying what I feel about my America."

END

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