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FATA MORGANA: written, produced, and directed by Werner Herzog; Color, 35 and 16 m/m, 78 minutes.

FATA MORGANA

FATA MORGANA (THE MIRAGE). The Gobi Desert becomes a metaphor for man's existence and his relationship with nature. Herzog manipulates natural and man-made images as symbols of cosmic importance. A new visual language of film, reaching beyond traditional syntax of sound and picture. At the 1971 N.Y. Film Festival FATA MORGANA'S revolutionary avant-garde vision created a strong controversy. New York Film Festival; Los Angeles Film Festival; Chicago Film Festival; Cannes Film Festival.

"Some films tell made-up stories, and some tell true stories or teach something. Rarely, films are more like poems or musical composition: they weld sight, sound and occasional sense into a 'surreal' experience that is meant to be appreciated not with the intellect but the senses.

Though it was shot largely in the Sahara Desert or its inhabited environs, and few of its sequences were staged for the camera, Werner Herzog's FATA MORGANA is this surreal kind of film. At 78 minutes, it is almost certainly the longest yet made in this genre, but it may also be the most consistently cohesive, the least boring, the most evocatively beautiful to look upon, and the most pleasing to the ear.

The film is divided into three sections, 'The Creation,' 'Paradise' and 'The Age of Gold.' The first of these is principally made up of gloriously photographed shots (by Jorg Schmidt-Reitwein) of bare desert and sky. The narrated text (in English) is allegedly taken from a Guatemalan myth about the world's beginnings, and the music is typified by Couperin's seraphic 'Third Tenebrae Service for Wednesday of Holy Week.'

Sand and sky are seen throughout, but with the succeeding sections more litter appears on the landscape and more human beings scale down the natural grandeur. The text is drawn from what seem to be surrealist poems, full of tongue-in-cheek paradoxes. And the music, never jarring, includes Johnny Cash and Leonard Cohen.

With its scenes of an Arab boy abusing his pet fox or a monomaniacal naturalist with his carnivorous lizard, and its ultimate vision of a tired pianist and drummer performing into the void, FATA MORGANA is clearly making a point about the relationship between man and nature. But, the N.Y. Film Festival program notes to the contrary, it is neither a 'documentary' nor a 'parable.'

Rather, it is a cinematic abstraction most likely to appeal to that young audience which enjoyed the trip-to-another-dimension sequence in '2001' and didn't worry too much about the 'literary' context. Promoted this way, it might develop a sizable cult."

—Gold, *Variety*