

Document Citation

Title	'Illusions': more than meets the I
Author(s)	Bart Mills
Source	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Date	1979 Jun 10
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	Calendar, p.49
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Bad timing, Roeg, Nicolas, 1980

'ILLUSIONS': MORE THAN MEETS THE I

BY BART MILLS

VIENNA—"Well, that's 11.23% of the film finished," said Art Garfunkel after another day of hanging around spooky Viennese settings, standing in for Nicolas Roeg's obsessions.

Garfunkel, whose least-known accomplishment is his MA in mathematics, was making his return to films in Roeg's "Illusions," a love story which director Roeg promises will be "high drama—no middle ground whatever."

Roeg and Garfunkel are intense men who are unafraid to say how wrapped up they are in concern about love.

"In my personal life," Garfunkel said, "what I'm most involved with is the mystery of how men and women go together. I deal with the question we all deal with: how to make love last."

"When you're in love," Roeg said, "you don't count the cost. When you tell her, 'We can't afford it, darling'—that's when she knows."

Roeg located "Illusions" in Vienna because his protagonist is a psychoanalyst. One scene in the film will show Garfunkel and costar Theresa Russell embracing on a couch in Sigmund Freud's office.

"Illusions" is a perfect title for a Roeg film, since he always makes pictures that contain more than meets the eye. Gleefully, he pointed out the familiar *trompe l'oeil* poster on the wall of the Freud museum, the one that seems to show a profile of Freud, but on closer inspection actually shows Freud's forehead to be in the shape of a naked woman.

Roeg, 50, started making films late in life, and he's made very few. "Illusions" is his first outing since "The Man Who Fell to Earth" three years ago. His other films are "Performance" in 1968, "Walkabout" in 1970 and "Don't Look Now" in 1973.

As "Illusions" producer Jeremy Thomas said, "Roeg won't compromise, which is why he doesn't make a lot of pictures. The characters in this film aren't Americans just because that might make it play in Peoria. And it's Art Garfunkel, not a major box office name like Richard Dreyfuss."

Harvey Keitel is the best known name in the supporting cast. Theresa Russell was generally unknown until her role as Maureen Dean in CBS-TV's recent "Blind Ambition."

Roeg does things his way or not at all. Last year he walked away from the biggest budget being offered any film maker at the time, Dino De Laurentiis' \$25 million for a remake of "Flash Gordon."

"Dino and I had a trial run. I had a year to say what I wanted. At the end of it he said that my plan wasn't the picture he wanted to make. It was the traditional artist-patron relationship. He was happy for me to stay, if I made his picture—but he'd have lost respect for me if I had." De Laurentiis hired Mike Hodges to direct and the film is going ahead in London.

At first, it appeared as though "Illusions" would fall by the wayside, too. Few directors film every project they'd like to, but for Roeg the disappointment is greater than usual because he generally spends a



Art Garfunkel and Theresa Russell, above, in "Illusions," by director Nicolas Roeg, right photo. The film, about a psychoanalyst, is set in Vienna.

year or so collaborating with a writer on the script. His co-writer on "Illusions" is playwright Yale Udoff.

"Maybe it's a failing of mine," said Roeg, knowing it's not, "but I like to work on a script until it's close to the film I'm going to make, not just something to be read" and rewritten. Only Roeg rewrites Roeg.

The problem with "Illusions," from a financier's point of view, is that Roeg refuses to tell stories the way "Laverne and Shirley" does. Because there's more in his films than meets the eye, the brain has to be applied. As producer Thomas said, "All Roeg's films haven't been gigantically successful."

Roeg began "Illusions" as an artist in the employ of another Italian patron, Carlo Ponti. "Ponti gave me a story and 'Illusions' came out of that story, which was set in Italy. The story touched a major chord in my emotions and I took it to myself."

However, Ponti was unable to attract financing to the script. Even Roger Corman (for whose "The Masque of the Red Death" Roeg had been cinematographer in 1963) was unable to find backers. By mid-1977 the project had "fallen into abeyance." The Roeg-Udoff script had become "just something to be read."

One of the readers was 28-year-old Jeremy Thomas, son of Ralph Thomas. The elder Thomas has directed dozens of films for the Rank Organisation. The younger Thomas had produced "The Shout" for Rank, with Alan Bates, and it won the grand prize at Cannes last year.

Thomas, knowing that working with Roeg would be "another step up the ladder for me," asked Roeg if he would commit himself to make "Illusions" if Thomas could find a backer.

"I am committed," Roeg replied. "No one can make the picture without me."

Thomas bought out Ponti and convinced



Rank to part with \$4 million, in the hope that "Illusions" would "blow people's minds—I mean, blow a lot more people's minds than previous Roeg pictures."

Roeg was gleeful when he talked about Rank's gamble on him. After all, his previous film was the last made by British Lion before it went out of business.

Rank is well cushioned, however. The studio can afford its recent aggressive move into financing films for international audiences, like "The Lady Vanishes," because it owns Britain's largest theater chain and holds the Xerox concession for Britain. It's the one major British studio that isn't headed by one of the Winogradsky brothers (Lord Grade at ATV and Lord Delfont at EMI). "I love Ed Chilton (head of Rank's film division)," Roeg said. "I've never met him, and I love him."

Roeg always had the support of Art Garfunkel, from the time in 1976 when Roeg flew to Muscle Shoals, Ala., where Garfunkel was recording his "Watermark" album. "I love stories that are really about something," Garfunkel said. "I like to be involved with projects where the other people are the A people."

Garfunkel, 36 now, took this long to re-

turn to films after appearing in Mike Nichols' "Catch-22" in 1969 and "Carnal Knowledge" in 1971 "not because I rejected all offers, but because I was otherwise engaged."

"There was a period when I told my agent not to send me scripts because I knew I'd only be teasing myself if I saw one that was interesting. There was always an album I wanted to make, a tour I wanted to take or a rest I wanted to have."

"I'm not in this world to get bigger. Now, obviously, no one gets into the business of becoming famous by accident. It would be wrong to say I didn't have a drive since childhood to become successful. But now the ambition has evolved into something else, with more emphasis on good, creative projects."

Garfunkel's albums take 12 to 14 months to record and are marked by the obvious care taken with every moment of music—though he says his new CBS album, "Fate for Breakfast," is "a departure . . . It's got more bite, more punch. More percussive, less legato. Not so much me as the producer and me."

Garfunkel was cast for type, at least insofar as he says, "My character in 'Illusions' is a very careful man." He continued, "Some psychoanalysts treat the mystery of life as if it were nonexistent, believing everything can be dealt with, contained. My character meets an experience—jealousy—which he can't fit into the conventional explanations. He'd never come to grips personally with this problem. He'd never been put to the test."

Roeg maintains a very light hearted set, like a painter whistling while he works. But he knows by now what can happen to his films if he doesn't watch out. The version of "The Man Who Fell to Earth" released in America was cut by 23 minutes.

That pain has healed to the extent that Roeg can say now, "It's like a tailor-made coat. The customer takes it out of the shop and decides to rip one arm of the coat off. He walks around and no one says what an ———the tailor is." □