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ARTHUR PENN, AMERICAN AUTEUR

FEBRUARY 1 – FEBRUARY 4

Harvard Film Archive, Jan/Feb 08

PP 12-13

Arthur Penn (1922–) is a true legend of the American cinema. From the 1950s through the 1970s Penn forged a unique place for himself within Hollywood through a series of intense and brilliant films that helped revitalize studio filmmaking and reconnect with lost audiences. Penn's discovery of a new artistic freedom within the commercial industry effectively paved the way for the auteurist cinema defined in the 1970s by Coppola, Friedkin, Scorsese, et al. While retaining a deep concern for quintessentially American themes, Penn also explored a mode of vividly stylized cinema in works such as *Mickey One* and *The Chase* that engaged in a crucial dialogue with the French New Wave. Balanced with Penn's frequent use of overt, almost overripe symbols is his keen sensitivity to the violence endemic throughout American history and society. Penn's boldest masterpieces such as *The Chase*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Night Moves* and *Little Big Man* were not only critically and, at times, commercially successful films but also landmark cultural events – films that gave an unwavering voice to the zeitgeist of a traumatized nation and the rise and fall of the counter-cultural movement.

A preternaturally talented and intelligent director, Penn has also proven himself on the stage and in television, fields where he remains an acknowledged master, especially for his ability to elicit pitch-perfect yet always surprising performances. One-time advisor to John F. Kennedy for his crucial television debate with Richard Nixon and later head of the Actor's Studio, Penn's uncanny ability with actors is proven by the electric and career-defining performances from Marlon Brando, Robert Redford, Warren Beatty, Anne Bancroft, Paul Newman and Gene Hackman that run throughout Penn's cinema.

Like so many of our greatest directors, Penn's profound and lasting contribution to the American cinema has not been fully acknowledged by critics or historians. This retrospective is a rare opportunity to view Penn's master works and reconsider his important legacy as one of America's most gifted and influential filmmakers. The Harvard Film Archive is deeply honored that Arthur Penn has generously accepted our invitation to present his work and join us for a rare dialogue about his films and career.



ARTHUR PENN *BONNIE AND CLYDE* 1967

DIRECTOR ARTHUR PENN IN PERSON
SPECIAL EVENT TICKETS \$10

THE CHASE

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 1 AT 7PM

Penn's first great masterpiece is also one of his darkest works, a portrait of small town America as a festering backwater stagnant with avarice, envy and racism. Marlon Brando is magnificent as the weary sheriff appointed by a small town's corrupt patriarch and reluctantly assigned to capture a misunderstood fugitive, played by Robert Redford. As night descends, debauched house parties boil over into a frenzied carnival of raw violence that tears apart the flimsy façade of cracker barrel hospitality erected by the town elders. With an impressive line-up that includes Angie Dickinson, Jane Fonda, James Fox, Bruce Cabot and Miriam Hopkins, *The Chase* boasts an ensemble cast that draws from both Old and New Hollywood.

Directed by Arthur Penn. With Marlon Brando, Jane Fonda, Robert Redford
US 1966, 35mm, color, 135 min.

SCREENING WITH

THE TEARS OF MY SISTER

In 1953, Penn directed two live television dramas from scripts by Horton Foote, *The Death of the Old Man* and *The Tears of My Sister*. The broadcasts mark the beginning of Penn's work for live television, which would culminate in *The Miracle Worker* and launch Penn's film career, as well as the beginning of a partnership with Foote that would be renewed with *The Chase* (based on Foote's play and subsequent novel). *The Tears of My Sister* is narrated by a young girl, whose voice we hear but whom we do not see, played by Kim Stanley, as she watches her older sister struggle with the pressure to marry a man she does not love.

Directed by Arthur Penn. With Kim Stanley, Katherine Squire, Frank Overton
US 1953, video, b/w, 30 min.

LITTLE BIG MAN

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 2 AT 3PM

A remarkable adaptation of the Thomas Berger novel, Penn's epic recasting of American history blends dark

satire with ribald comedy to crack open the myths of the "taming" of the Western frontier. Dustin Hoffman's hilarious and heart-wrenching portrait of the stumbling anti-hero, Jack Crabb, brings a poignant vulnerability to Berger's story of the "little man" swept along by the forces of history. Often cited as one of the finest of the revisionist Westerns, *Little Big Man's* potent outrage over the cruel massacre of Native Americans echoed loudly during the Vietnam War.

Directed by Arthur Penn. With Dustin Hoffman, Faye Dunaway, Martin Balsam
US 1970, 35mm, color, 150 min.

DIRECTOR ARTHUR PENN IN PERSON
SPECIAL EVENT TICKETS \$10

NIGHT MOVES

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 2 AT 7PM

One of the strongest of the film noir revivals popular during the 1970s, *Night Moves* pushes the genre to a bleak point of no return. Gene Hackman is wonderfully cast as a disillusioned Los Angeles detective hired to track down

a washed out movie star's daughter while also trying to understand the mystery of his own rapidly disintegrating marriage. *Night Move's* sinister tale of conspiracy and intrigue powerfully evokes the Watergate era and stands as one of the quintessential American films of the 1970s.

Directed by Arthur Penn. With Gene Hackman, Jennifer Warren, Susan Clark
US 1975, 35mm, color, 100 min.

FOLLOWED BY

MICKEY ONE

Strangely underrated, Penn's wonderfully offbeat and inventive film is an extraordinary tour de force and one of his most stylish and satisfying works. Warren Beatty gives a brilliant turn as Mickey, a stand-up comedian on the lam who descends, like Orpheus, into a strange back alley underworld that just might be of his own invention. At turns haunting and comic, *Mickey One* offers a mysterious allegory of fear and redemption that features gorgeous photography by Robert Bresson's favorite cinematographer, Ghislain Cloquet, and an improvised soundtrack by jazz great Stan Getz.

Directed by Arthur Penn. With Warren Beatty, Alexandra Stewart, Hurd Hatfield
US 1965, 35mm, b/w, 93 min.

AND

THE HIGHEST FROM VISIONS OF EIGHT

In Penn's cinema the human body is frequently explored as expressive medium, with gesture, posture and movement taking on a new level of meaning and subtlety – often more expressive than even dialogue. Penn's contribution to the eight-part omnibus film of the 1972 Tokyo Olympics is a wonderful study of the body in motion that follows the thrilling trials of the pole vaulting competition.

Directed by Arthur Penn.
US/West Germany 1973, 35mm, color, 15 min.

ALICE'S RESTAURANT

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 3 AT 3PM

Loosely based on Arlo Guthrie's spoken ballad, *Alice's Restaurant* is Penn's first and only credit as a screenwriter. A lament to the end of the countercultural "revolution," Penn's film vividly evokes the hopes and dreams burnished by the hippie generation. Guthrie himself stars as a wandering soul perplexed by the strange contradictions of Vietnam era America and ultimately engaged in a peaceful one-man battle against the bureaucratic war machine. Effused with a melancholy spirit, *Alice's Restaurant* is one of Penn's gentlest and most poignant films.

Directed by Arthur Penn. With Arlo Guthrie, Pat Quinn, James Broderick
US 1969, 35mm, color, 111 min.

BONNIE AND CLYDE

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 3 AT 7PM

One of the pivotal films of the 1960s, *Bonnie and Clyde* is also a wonderful portrait of amour fou, with Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway as the eponymous heroes whose pursuit of love and larceny scars a dark arrow across the heart of America. Penn's brilliant evocation of the Depression era and America's most notorious bandits caused a scandal for its unusual counterbalance of comedy with a new level of graphic violence hitherto

unseen in American cinema.

Directed by Arthur Penn. With Warren Beatty, Faye Dunaway, Gene Hackman
US 1967, 35mm, b/w, 111 min.

THE LEFT HANDED GUN

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 3 AT 9:15PM

Totally ignored by American critics when it was first released, *The Left Handed Gun* was recognized as a major first film by the French, who noted the film's sensitive portrait of troubled youth and its disturbing vision of violent America. Originally conceived as a vehicle for James Dean, Penn's debut explores the first in a line of social outcasts that recur throughout Penn's cinema, reinventing the legendary figure of Billy the Kid as a sympathetic misfit unable to integrate into a society deliberately cruel to those who are different. Paul Newman subtly captures Billy's fragile, troubled life in a nuanced performance that frequently replaces words with resonant and unexpected gestures.

Directed by Arthur Penn. With Paul Newman, Lita Milan, John Dehner
US 1958, 35mm, b/w, 105 min.

THE MIRACLE WORKER

MONDAY FEBRUARY 4 AT 7PM

Penn's first real recognition as a director came from his screen adaptation of the beloved play which he had successfully directed twice on Broadway. For the screen,

Penn beautifully captured the tenderness and terror that united Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan, played with great sensitivity and power by Patty Duke and Anne Bancroft, respectively. *The Miracle Worker* is a key work in Penn's oeuvre, the film that perhaps makes clearest the concern for non-verbal communication and expressive gestures that runs throughout his films.

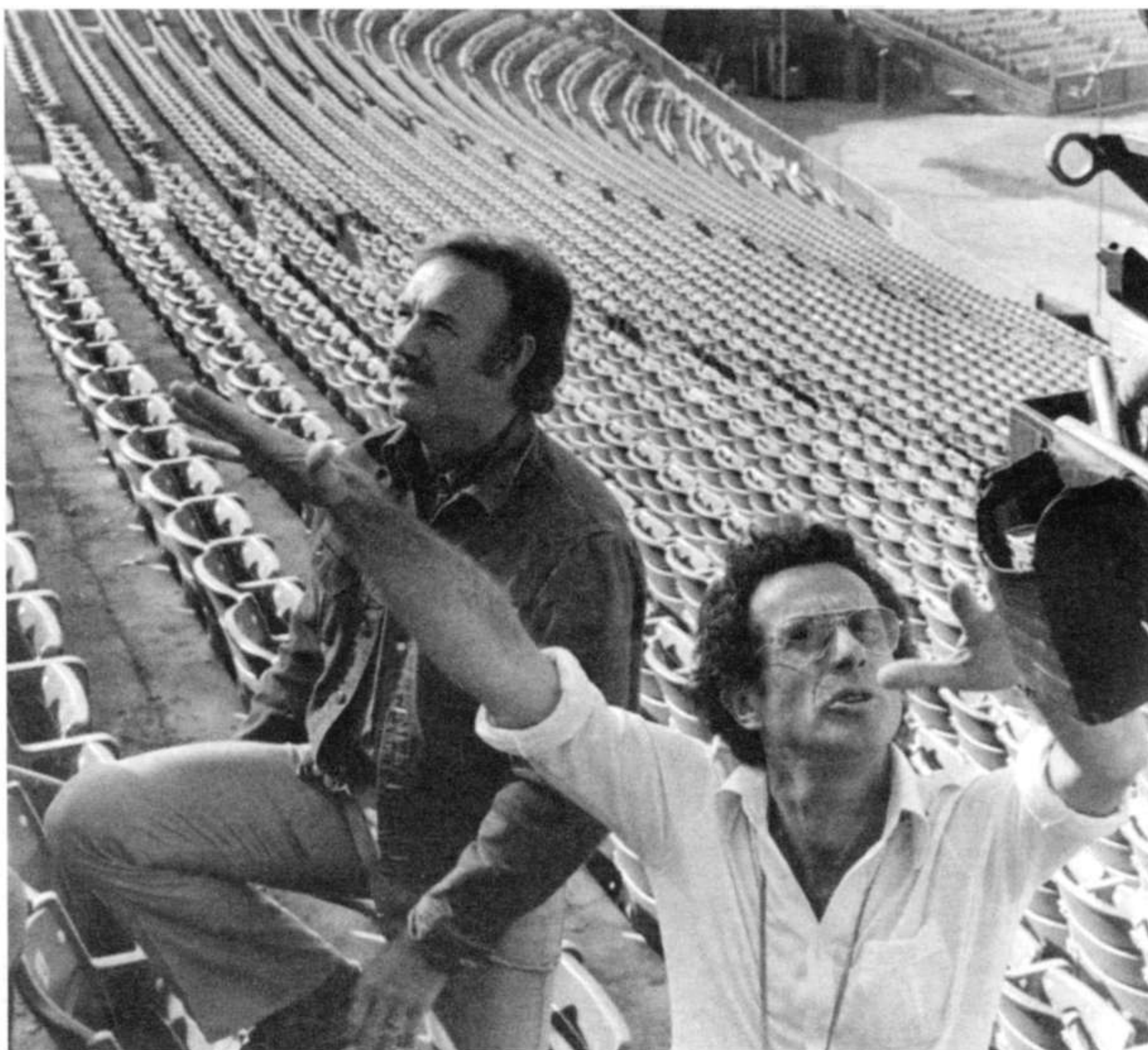
Directed by Arthur Penn. With Anne Bancroft, Patty Duke, Victor Jory
US 1962, 35mm, b/w, 106 min.

THE MISSOURI BREAKS

MONDAY FEBRUARY 4 AT 9PM

Featuring the incredible pairing of Jack Nicholson as a feckless cattle thief and Marlon Brando as the Irish "regulator" hired to hunt him down, *The Missouri Breaks* is a rollicking and highly unusual Western that, in typical Penn fashion, strains the boundaries of the genre. Penn's empowerment of performers is taken to a wonderful furthest extreme by the subversive presence of Brando's cross-dressing and unpredictable assassin, who effectively turns codes of masculinity and narrative continuity upon their heads. Once dismissed as an "oddity" in Penn's career, *The Missouri Breaks* has been reevaluated as one of the more ambitious and original Westerns of its time, placing it in the company of Peter Fonda's *The Hired Hand* and Monte Hellman's *The Shooting*.

Directed by Arthur Penn. With Marlon Brando, Jack Nicholson, Randy Quaid
US 1976, 35mm, color, 126 min.



GENE HACKMAN AND ARTHUR PENN ON THE SET OF NIGHT MOVES