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Elaine May's **MIKEY AND NICKY** (1976), from her screenplay, with Peter Falk, John Cassavetes, and Ned Beatty, is a powerful maverick film of the mid-'70s. May won a titanic battle with Paramount to cut the movie to her specifications and get it released, but in the war seemingly lost her visible career as a filmmaker. Very oddly, *Mikey and Nicky* is a superior example of what has to be described as a Cassavetes exercise, with John himself and his friend Peter Falk indulging in long, mostly lugubrious Actors Studio moments. May, fortunately, puts her own stamp on the material, a fine sense of dramatic form in weaving a love-hate symbiotic bond between the two men during one fatal night of fear in the lower depths of Philadelphia. She squeezes evocative dialogue, vicious insights, and privileged moments from Falk's Mikey and Cassavetes's Nicky. She molds improvised observations to her own high standards of gritty realism and satisfyingly resolves the tale in a searing climax. **Museum of Modern Art, Theatre 1: 6 p.m.** ■