

Document Citation

Title	The silent cry
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Source	<i>Pacific Film Archive</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	The silent cry, Dwoskin, Stephen, 1977

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Berkeley
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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8

New German Cinema - The Films
of Hellmuth Costard -
Presented in association
with the San Francisco
Goethe Institute

A tribute to Das Kleine Fernsehspiel/ZDF:
Alternative Filmmaking in Television
(Co-Sponsored by the Goethe Institute
and ZDF in association with KQED-TV)

"The Oppression Of Woman is
Primarily Evident In The
Behavior Of Women Themselves"
and short films (7:00)

"The Silent Cry" (9:00)

Director: Hellmuth Costard
(in person)

Director: Stephen Dwoskin
(in person)

Notes on Hellmuth Costard: Hellmuth Costard was studying psychology when he began filmmaking as a member of the University of Hamburg Film and Television Work Group. He made his first film, "Tom Ist Doof", in 1965, and achieved instant notoriety in 1968 when his film "Besonders Wertvoll" ("Of Special Merit") was excluded from the Oberhausen Short Film Festival on the grounds of obscenity. The ten-minute film consisted of a penis-head reciting the newly enacted 1967 Film Law (morality clause) while being stroked to climax by a female hand, and the subsequent uproar (16 of the 32 invited filmmakers withdrew their films in protest of Costard's censorship) variously provoked the press to identify him as "der kleine Godard" (the little Godard) and "enfant terrible" of the New German Cinema. Since then his work has included production of a children's book and collaboration on a children's television series as well as development of innovative super 8 camera systems. His most recent feature-length film, "Der Kleine Godard", which he shot on his own super 8 system, received the German Film Critics' Prize for Best German Film of 1978.

In "The Oppression Of Woman...", Costard poses a simultaneous challenge to some formal conventions of both film and society. The motions, routines and gestures which make up an unremarkable day in the life of an unremarkable housewife, recorded in minute and oppressively tedious detail, become a catalytic 'object' through the single and simple device of having the woman played by a man: the long-haired and slightly androgynous-looking Christop Hemmerling. For one of the most unnerving things about Hemmerling's performance is that, gestuarly, he offers a brilliantly accurate female impersonation without ever actually looking like a woman...which makes the everyday chores and mannerisms of the 'average housewife' appear at once surreal and crushingly familiar."

"The Silent Cry" - "Steve Dwoskin's film is a kind of impressionistic 'diary' of a girl whose silent cry for help/ understanding/love/identity is the underlying theme of the narrative. The girl, an artist, married to a set designer, is shown in the routine of her daily life constantly being told what to do (or what she has done wrong) by her husband or father while her own ideas about herself emerge only in negative action or in fantasy projections. Not everything is seen from her viewpoint but everything is felt as she feels it. What Dwoskin calls an 'under-narrative' develops and interweaves through the film giving a composite of dreams, distortions, diaries, memories and feelings. Though some of these scenes are difficult to explain separately, they soon become part of an overall visual tapestry that gives a sense of her dilemma. Dwoskin has likened the film to a kind of contemporary 'Alice In Wonderland', 'a world which we can feel more and more as the filmic tapestry is woven.' It is also, one should emphasize, beautifully photographed with not only highly effective extreme close-ups but also many finely-patterned almost abstract shots." --Ken Wlaschin, in the catalogue to the 1977 London International Film Festival