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DON'T LOOK NOW

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By STUART FREEMAN

Used to be that you had some guy mistaken for some other guy and somebody who wanted to kill that second guy went out after this first guy instead. Sometimes they went up to Mount Rushmore. Other times, they just stayed home and chased each other around the block. It was a simple game of flight and pursuit, the odds being with the villain and the stakes being always high enough to stimulate viewer concern. This here was once called a "thriller," and, by gum, they just don't make those things anymore! The way it is now, you have that fall-guy opening the movie with a line like "Nothing is what it seems." Yep . . . that's what he says, alright, and, in case you happened to miss the point, you have the fall-guy's wife reading a book called "The Fragile Geometry of Space." How d'ya like *them* apples, mystery-fans? Sort'a clues you in, don't it? Well, what the heck . . . after an opening like that, who needs to see the rest of the movie?

Thrillers aren't what they used to be, that's for sure, and if you're not getting them from Alfred Hitchcock, you're just not getting them from anybody. Indeed, the latest thing (for those more sophisticated, "youth-oriented" audiences) is the psychological thriller; the movie that dazzles you with flashy camerawork, stuns you with unexpected ellipses, and has your date staring up at you and asking that most profound of all earthly questions, "Wha-a-a . . .?" (to which you look down at her and mutter something like, "Er . . . according to Kier-

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Thrillers Thrill's Unthrilling

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kegaard . . .").

These damn things are supposed to constitute "movie art," yet, even as they proceed to break down those conventional time-space continuums that were good enough for a great director like Hitchcock, they manage to erect so many levels of hollow meaning that one can honestly refer to them as *toothpick movies*. Last year at about this time, we had the usually gifted Robert Altman giving us his version of a psychic suspense film, an unmitigated disaster called *Images*. This time out, it's the rather less gifted Nicolas Roeg (*Performance*, *Walkabout*) giving it a try, and he brings forth as pretentious and thoroughly catatonic a movie as any I've seen this year.

Don't Look Now is, in fact, about 10 minutes' worth of accessible storyline surrounded by an endless amount of curious detail; of enigmatic priests and blind women, of accidental deaths and grisly murders, of characters wandering around a wintry Venice and cruising down the famous canals. None of this is really provocative, however, and even when director Roeg

hypes it all up with his camera and editing effects, the footage still fails to take on the quality of mythos. There's just no sense to this; no sense of *any* kind, and one is left with the two main characters, plodding along aimlessly in search of a scenario.

Regrettably, even as the comings and goings and ambiguous pieces of business never coalesce into any semblance of a narrative, so too do the people lack sufficient life and conviction. With their non-personalities and consistently dreary small-talk, they come to represent (and, indeed, almost to satirize) the whole idea of "British bland." They're from the upper class, you know, and—if you care to dig deeply enough (as I don't)—you may attempt to understand the movie as some sort of ghastly joke, re the complacent lifestyle of the bourgeoisie. For my part, however, it's a ghastly joke on the *audience*, an exercise in photographed stasis that contains not a single realized idea and manages the considerable feat of turning Julie Christie into a mannequin. In short, it's like spending New Year's Eve with your insurance salesman.