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THE KOUMIKO MYSTERY and ECHOES OF SILENCE

BEAUTY PARTS

Like sportive sea lions, many of the movies selected for showing at the annual New York Film Festival surface for a moment, make their splashes great or small, sink from sight, and emerge a second time only after so long an interval that one had begun to suppose that they had vanished forever. These are movies, the question of their artistic merits aside, that are plainly of little box-office value, and it is neither surprising nor deplorable that local distributors fail to commit business suicide by purchasing them. Luckily, Dan Talbot, the proprietor of the New Yorker Theater, feels an eleemosynary fondness for sea lions, and last week he put on display an interestingly compatible double feature that consisted of two Festival movies, *The Koumiko Mystery*, by a French practitioner of *cinéma vérité*, Chris Marker, and *Echoes of Silence*, by the young American producer-director-writer-groaner Peter Goldman. The pictures have in common a documentary technique, urban settings that carry an often crushing weight of symbolic meaning (Oh, the loneliness of the big heartless city! Oh, how unlike some comfy, motherly bosom is all this cold steel and glass and flickering neon light!), and protagonists who are indefatigable pedestrians. They walk and they walk and they walk and they *walk*, with a persistence that put me in mind of the lovers' exhausting nightlong peregrinations in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*.

Despite its provocative title, Mr. Marker's movie boasts no Agatha Christie-like mystification; on the contrary, it is a simple and wistfully inconclusive dialogue between Mr. Marker and a slender, intelligent Japanese girl named Koumiko Muraoka, whom Mr. Marker encountered in the course of shooting some footage at the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 1964. The camera picks up Koumiko at the stadium, where a relay race is under way, and follows her patiently about the streets and shops of Tokyo while, on the sound track, we hear Mr. Marker's sympathetic voice in-

quiring into her life and Koumiko softly answering, sometimes with delightful speculative evasions that reveal more about her than any conventionally responsive answers could. We learn how she feels about being Japanese, about her country's infatuation with Western styles and customs, about the attractiveness of Caucasian babies compared to that of Oriental babies. (To her, Caucasian babies look like veritable angels, and she is enchanted to think of a race in which it is possible to possess blue eyes.) Much of our pleasure in *The Koumiko Mystery* is our pleasure in Koumiko herself. As she tells us, she has an archaic face, intensely Japanese and not in the least à la mode; it is beautiful, and the delicacy of her imagination is beautiful, and these beauties suffice.

Echoes of Silence is a pretentious title, marking no advance in its self-confident vulgarity over *The Thunders of Silence*, which, I dimly recall, was the title of a story written many decades ago by Irvin S. Cobb. Mr. Goldman's movie sweeps up a dustpanful of young Village sad sacks and patronizes them by finding in their chosen squalor, their chosen impotence, their chosen failure to connect, an assertion of worth. It would be painful enough if the message they were made to convey was, "Love us, because we are such awful slob," but the message is even more intolerable; it is "Respect us, because we are such awful slob." Mr. Goldman has made matters worse by assembling a cast remarkable only for its disheveled uncomeliness. There are plenty of good-looking young people in the Village, but it is a part of Mr. Goldman's sentimentality to imply that there are none—that sheer physical ugliness somehow approaches the real thing, as beauty does not. *Echoes of Silence* lasts seventy-five minutes, and seventy-five minutes of ugliness is a long time.

—BRENDAN GILL