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MY UNCLE FROM AMERICA

(NEW WORLD PICTURES) Color French/English Subtitles 125Mins.
Cast: Gerard Depardieu, Nicole Garcia, Roger-Pierre, Marie Dubois, Nelly Borgeaud, Pierre Arditi, Gerard Darrieu, Philippe Laudenbach, with the participation of Professor Henri Laborit.

Credits: Produced by Philippe Dussart, in co-production with Andrea Films and T.F.I. Directed by Alain Resnais. Screenplay by Jean Gruault. Based on the works of Henri Laborit. Cinematography by Sacha Vierny. Edited by Albert Jurgenson. Music by Arle Dzierlatka.

An intelligent and funny study of everyday life that presents social theory painlessly, but not without sadness. This unusual film, the most recent and most accessible offering from renowned French director Alain Resnais, should find solid support in the art house market. 80-147

My Uncle from America focuses on the lives and struggles of two men and a woman, making their separate ways through the modern world. Three different lives, families, careers, occasionally intersecting at different points, but mostly pursuing the questions and demons of success, self-image, family.

We follow Jean (Roger-Pierre), a teacher turned writer turned bureaucrat, juggling politics, family, and lover, while dreaming of the comfortable provincial life of his youth. Janine (Nicole Garcia), his lover, is a young woman of radical working class stock, who dreams of recognition as an actress. Best of all, there's Rene (Gerard Depardieu), a big boy, Catholic and eager, who rejects life on the family farm to find success in the city.

The film is the most recent effort of director Alain Resnais (*Last Year At Marienbad*, *Providence*) and screenwriter Jean Gruault (*Jules and Jim*, *The Story of Adele H.*), and is unusual in every respect. Based on the work of Dr. Henri Laborit, a biologist and natural philosopher who has studied the effects of conflict and aggression on living organisms, the film is "theoretical" and complex. But, far from being a dry documentary, the film weaves Dr. Laborit's theory with the stories of the three very likable, very human characters, and manages to offer many insights into the way we live today.

Mon Oncle d'Amerique views the early lives and career struggles of the talented and emotional Janine; the intelligent and sometimes arrogant Jean, comfortable in his role as a cultural bureaucrat for French National Radio; and the unfortunate Rene, who works so hard and eagerly as a middle-manager for a textile firm, until it's bought by a multinational and his world is shaken. Using a complex editing technique that reflects a very original and creative view of cinema, Resnais intersperses scenes of the three characters in extremely pressured moments (romances forming and ending, competing with other employees, political backstabbing), with the cool and detached comments of Dr. Laborit detailing the ways in which conflict and aggression are used in society. Sometimes the characters' lives touch, as when Janine is rejected by her lover, Jean, and meets Rene at a business meeting (where Janine is now employed as a designer), and proceeds to use his weaker ego as a punching bag.

The film uses many free associations: fragmented, not linear, storytelling; montages which try to move the viewer beyond the accustomed logic of everyday life, to see why we behave and feel as we do. Whether the ideas presented are accurate is immaterial (and there is reason to wonder about their own icy logic, as presented by the God-like Dr. Laborit, calmly spouting theory while the characters struggle, puff, and sweat). Nevertheless, the film is a funny and absorbing meditation, wonderfully acted, which, for all its flaws, expands the possibilities of cinema. Tony Napoli

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