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Andy Warhol Film at Cinematheque

Each new Andy Warhol film confirms the observation that what the master of the put-on is really doing is re-inventing the cinema from its crudest origins, discovering its essence in the process.

"The Chelsea Girls," that modern-day Dante's Inferno, was a long way from when he merely pointed a camera at the Empire State Building or a sleeping man and let it grind away for hours. And now "Bike Boy" (at the Hollywood Cinematheque), Warhol's funniest yet saddest film, is far more complex than its recent predecessor, "I, a Man."

By now it's clear that it was essential for Warhol to have experimented with the most banal subjects imaginable in order to learn the simplest, most direct ways of presenting people in their entirety. What Warhol wants is for people to strip their souls (and often their clothes, too) for his camera, so that he may in turn project his unique, darkly apocalyptic vision of mankind.

Weird Types

As in "I, a Man," "Bike Boy" follows a handsome young man through a series of encounters with rather weird types. In the earlier film Tom Baker was merely a likable, self-possessed guy trying to make love with a number of girls in a way that would have meaning and dignity for both.

Since the girls were a cross-section of pretty

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'BIKE BOY'

An Andy Warhol Film. Produced, directed and photographed (in Eastman Color) by Warhol. 103 minutes. With Joe Spencer, Viva, Ingrid Superstar, Bridget Polk, Vera Cruz, Ann Weher, Ed Weiner, George Anne, Bruce Haines.

mixed-up or inhibited types — indeed, one of them was self-proclaimed man-hater Valerie Solanis, who allegedly took a near-fatal shot at Warhol the other day—the effect was to illuminate the anguish that seems the inevitable accompaniment in emotional involvements in our society.

In "Bike Boy" Warhol has developed this theme further with his new hero, husky Joe Spencer, a foot-loose motorcyclist. Since Spencer is more aggressive, voluble—and, yes, ingenuous — than Baker, the contrast between him and the decadent denizens of Warhol's world is more vivid and has more meaning.

In truth, Spencer emerges as a kind of Rousseauesque last natural man. Yet his muscular arms bear those typical tattoos, "Born to Lose," a swastika, and a skull and crossbones with "Death" inscribed under it — all identifying him as a member of a vanishing breed.

Never before has Warhol so specifically, by virtue of Spencer's virile presence,

delineated the sickness of his own people. The film begins with a lingering look at Spencer in the shower, which establishes

the film's voyeuristic tone.

He is thus the object of attraction in subsequent episodes, which include a lengthy session of trying on various bizarre and abbreviated costumes in an effete San Francisco men's shop—that an effeminate type is doing the same thing simultaneously only sets off Spencer's masculinity — and some notable encounters with those upper-class drop-outs, the strangely beautiful Viva and the bulky Bridget Polk.

Whereas Viva, fragile physically and emotionally, appreciates Spencer's innocent strength Miss Polk is clearly threatened by it. The destructive, caustic wit that served her so well in "The Chelsea Girls" cannot dent the integrity of Spencer's innate manliness no matter how hard she tries.

Expertise Revealed

Throughout the film, which is effectively punctuated by those flash frames first utilized by Warhol in "I, a Man" and so aptly described by Gene Youngblood in the Free Press as "strobe" cuts, there is much that is hilarious. But the humor invariably reveals Warhol's experts at the put-on as people desperately trying to defend themselves from the abyss. Warhol, who treats nudity and profanity as casually as ever, once again has moved beyond camp to tragedy.