

Document Citation

Title	Pulp fictions: the films of Samuel Fuller
Author(s)	James Quandt
Source	<i>Cinematheque Ontario/a division of Toronto International Film Festival Group</i>
Date	1998
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	8
Subjects	Fuller, Samuel (1911-1997), Worcester, MA, United States
Film Subjects	I shot Jesse James, Fuller, Samuel, 1948 Street of no return, Fuller, Samuel, 1989 The Baron of Arizona, Fuller, Samuel, 1950 Les voleurs de la nuit (Thieves after dark), Fuller, Samuel, 1984 Tote taube in der Beethoven-Strasse (Dead pigeon on Beethoven Street), Fuller, Samuel, 1972 Run of the arrow, Fuller, Samuel, 1957 China gate, Fuller, Samuel, 1957 The naked kiss, Fuller, Samuel, 1963 Pickup on South Street, Fuller, Samuel, 1953 Fuller frame by frame (Fuller at the Moviola), Labarthe, André, 1987

The typewriter, the rifle and the movie camera, Simon, Adam, 1996
The crimson kimono, Fuller, Samuel, 1959
The big red one, Fuller, Samuel, 1980
Shock corridor, Fuller, Samuel, 1963
Merrill's marauders, Fuller, Samuel, 1961
White dog, Fuller, Samuel, 1982
Underworld U.S.A., Fuller, Samuel, 1960
Verboten!, Fuller, Samuel, 1958
Forty guns, Fuller, Samuel, 1957
House of bamboo, Fuller, Samuel, 1955
Hell and high water, Fuller, Samuel, 1953
Park Row, Fuller, Samuel, 1952
Fixed bayonets, Fuller, Samuel, 1951
The steel helmet, Fuller, Samuel, 1950

PULP FICTIONS:

THE FILMS OF Samuel FULLER

"Sam Fuller's films were among the most intense, the most daring and the most morally direct ever made by anyone anywhere. Their influence on my own

as well as those of many other directors has been immeasurable, and their power is the power of film itself: if you respond to Sam's movies, you understand cinema."
- Martin Scorsese

"A great and unique filmmaker . . . the writer-director of twenty-three of the most original, eccentric, and explosive movies ever made" - Lee Server

"Hollywood's greatest abstract sensationalist"
- J. Hoberman,
The Village Voice



Samuel Fuller (1912-1997) is one of the two or three most influential American filmmakers of the postwar period. Fuller's tabloid expressionism seems too singular to imitate, but it exerted a profound influence on countless directors. He was revered by Godard, who dedicated *MADE IN USA* to "Nick [Ray] and Samuel, who taught me respect for image and sound" and who featured Fuller in a legendary cameo in *PIERROT LE FOU* (see below); deified by Wenders, who deployed Fuller's iconic cigar-chomping mug as "The American" in *THE AMERICAN FRIEND* and used his aged debility as thematic notation in his most recent film, *THE END OF VIOLENCE*; and worshipped by directors as disparate as Warhol and Tarantino, Fassbinder and Spielberg, Jarmusch and Scorsese. Ironically, Fuller saw his reputation soar just

as his career stalled after the one-two knockouts of *SHOCK CORRIDOR* (1963) and *THE NAKED KISS* (1964). After a prolonged Hollywood hiatus, during which he worked in television, and stung by his experience on two films—one commissioned then unreleased (*WHITE DOG* [1982]), the other his dream project, cut by more than two hours for commercial viability (*THE BIG RED ONE* [1980])—Fuller exiled himself to Europe. Long lionized in France and England—*Cahiers du cinéma* pronounced him one of the three greatest postwar American directors (with Welles and Kazan) and the British academic journals exalted his work with endless exegesis—Fuller lived in Paris for many of his last years, and made three films, one each in Germany, France and Portugal. The distracted or denatured quality of these final films confirms that America remained Fuller's passion and abiding theme—from his eccentric debut *I SHOT JESSE JAMES* through the Cold War masterpieces of the Fifties and the crazed social critiques of *KISS* and *CORRIDOR*.

This retrospective, long in preparation and unfortunately posthumous, brings together many new, rare, studio and archival prints of Fuller's films, all but one imported especially for their screenings here. We cannot emphasize too strongly that you will never get another opportunity to encounter Fuller's prodigious cinema as it demands to be seen: in 35mm prints, on the big screen. As Andrew Sarris asserted about Fuller's films, they "have to be seen to be understood. Seen, not heard or synopsized."



SHOCK CORRIDOR

"Film is like a battleground . . . Love, Hate, Action, Violence, Death. In one word: Emotion!" Fuller's now legendary simile, bellowed at a party in Godard's *PIERROT LE FOU*, captures his pulpy hyperbole. The military metaphor, the burst of tin-type monosyllables and rapid accretion of cliché before the final pseudo-poetic flourish approximate his cinematic style. One of the most widely quoted mottoes in film lore, it has both the pith of aphorism and a coarse, forceful vigour. A garrulous street prole who began making films in his mid-thirties, Fuller combined the experiences of two previous careers—as a crime reporter and "photo compositor" (or faker) for the notorious yellow tabloid *New York Graphic*, and as a much decorated dog-soldier in World War II—in his role as writer, producer and director. Fuller came to Los Angeles as a New York pulp novelist and became Hollywood's most iconoclastic artist. Soon famous for shooting a gun instead of yelling "Action!" and finishing a take with a snarled "Forget it!," and for pressing his actors and technicians to their physical limits to achieve extraordinary effects, Fuller was dubbed the great primitive of American cinema, a designation which, as we shall see, is both appropriate and misleading.

One might say that Fuller never left the *Graphic* or the gutter: his characters, with names like Griff, Buff, Candy and Moe, are mostly outcasts, misfits or low-lives, curdled by hate or exiled from life. His exposés of America's rotten, racist soul and its violent attempts at redemption have the lurid, perfervid quality of tabloid journalism (which makes the films no less beautiful). All of his themes—race; war; patriotism; identity; orphans, abused children and corrupt adults; infiltration, duplicity and their opposite, loyalty; the fraudulence of propriety and the sham of heroism—are subsumed by his obsession with America. (Motifs such as characters called Griff, coarse mother figures, and a fixation on legs and feet are marginal.) Emerging as a director in the McCarthy era, which he exploited in such films as *PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET* and *CHINA GATE*, Fuller has been called a cold warrior, fascist, red-baiter and even "barbarian" for his seemingly jingoistic politics. But, as with everything about Fuller, the case is far more complex than it appears. As crude and stentorian as his pro-America sympathies sometimes are, they are often shaded or contradicted by his equivocal delivery. (He landed in hot water with J. Edgar Hoover and the State Department.) Indeed, his films can be read as liberal critiques of America, particularly when it comes to the issue of race. As Jonathan

Rosenbaum has written: "Fuller films as diverse as *THE STEEL HELMET*, *RUN OF THE ARROW*, *CHINA GATE*, *THE CRIMSON KIMONO*, *SHOCK CORRIDOR*, and *WHITE DOG* are arguably the most trenchant—and in some cases the most prescient—treatments of racism in the American cinema."

If Fuller's thematics seem more complex than primitive, so too does his celebrated style. His directorial debut, *I SHOT JESSE JAMES* (1949), though more conventional than the films that followed, announced his individual approach with its eccentric formalism, its rejection of genre, its peculiar psychology and narrative absurdities. The forceful, insistent use of close-ups (which Andrew Sarris has compared to Dreyer's in *THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC*), the blunt, disorienting ellipses in the narrative, and the focus on the psychosexual relationship between Jesse James and his best friend and murderer, made for a western that broke rules it seems not to have known even existed. As several critics have noted, though Fuller's films seem to adhere to common genre taxonomy—western, war film, crime or gangster film—they in fact ignore or reject the edicts of genre. (Some, like Phil Hardy and Tony Rayns, claim that the films are all, at heart, war films.) So it is with *THE BARON OF ARIZONA* (1950), Fuller's second film, which despite its western trappings, turns Gothic before it heads into Buñuel territory with its tale of a decadent fraud and his adolescent bride. The baroque "western" *FORTY GUNS* (1957) all but demolishes genre expectations, eroticizing its whips and weaponry as it accumulates one deranged set-piece after another with little regard to such narrative niceties as consistency of tone (unless it is hysteria), clarity of motivation, or logical construction. (It at least, unlike *JESSE JAMES*, has horses.) Jonathan Rosenbaum has gone so far as to call *GUNS* "avant-garde," and Martin Scorsese expressed amazement at its mad daring: "It's not even really a Western—I don't know what it is—*FORTY GUNS* doesn't care."

Fuller's impatience with genre conventions was perhaps a function of his virtuoso approach to visual style; genre is a constraint on extravagance, and Fuller's cinema is nothing if not extravagant. (Fuller seemed to take his last name as aesthetic imperative.) A stranger to subtlety and self-effacement, weened on the Weegee world of New York tabloids, Fuller rejected the "invisible" methods of classic Hollywood technique in favour of stylistic extremism. For a writer drunk on

words—his characters are almost as loquacious as he, carny barkers and brazen bards all—Fuller was even more intoxicated by the visual possibilities of cinema. Working in the pre-widescreen format of the early Fifties, he packed the square frame until it seemed ready to buckle, cut to sharp, sudden close-ups, and made the camera move in improbable ways, with ostentatious cranes and dollies and travelling shots that were less decorative than delirious. Hired by Darryl Zanuck to prove that the CinemaScope camera could move (in HELL AND HIGH WATER), Fuller characteristically set an impossible task for himself by using the newly extended frame to shoot in the constricted setting of a submarine. The Scope frame became Fuller's chosen format for a period, its sprawl suited to his exaggerated approach. Later he introduced what one critic has called "shock dissolves" (in UNDERWORLD USA), interpolated distorted colour home-movie sequences into the black-and-white world of SHOCK CORRIDOR, choreographed elaborate montages (the best of which was cut from UNDERWORLD USA) which earned him the nickname "Kino-fist," and strapped the camera to its operator and to an actor to capture the vertiginous violence of a street brawl (PARK ROW) or a bald hooker beating her pimp senseless with her handbag (THE NAKED KISS).

Exhilarated by the danger of filmmaking, Fuller pushed the limits of film form, nowhere more so than in his use of the long take. His two favourite extended shots, among the most audacious in American cinema, are in PARK ROW and FORTY GUNS. In the famous climax of the former, an insanely long take traverses three sets, its hurtling, prolonged physicality defying traditional filmic space and duration. (It influenced the Sonny's Bamboo Lounge sequence in Scorsese's GOODFELLAS.) Nicholas Garnham claims this shot "puts Fuller technically in the same league as Welles, Ophuls, and Mizoguchi and other masters of the moving camera." While many critics have interpreted Fuller's penchant for the long take in purely pragmatic terms, citing Fuller's love of perilous spectacle, others discern a more complex rationale. Myron Meisel has compared Fuller's approach to that of a director who seems his opposite—neorealist, transcendentalist and historian Roberto Rossellini: "Like Rossellini, with whom he shares a kindred historical esthetic, Fuller favours long-takes with a moving camera to contain and describe his spectacle," Meisel asserts. Garnham also makes the Fuller-Rossellini connection, citing not only the long take, but also both directors' didacticism and use of documentary, their determination that cinema is a way of propagating truth. (Ever the journalist, Fuller believed film was a form of reportage, which perhaps explains the percussive, boldface tenor of his titles, some of which are even milder than their original forms: FORTY GUNS he wanted to call WOMAN WITH A WHIP, and SHOCK CORRIDOR was first known as LUNATIC.)

The comparison to Rossellini might raise some eyebrows, and some hackles. The garrulous Jewish American Poverty Row "primitive" and the serenely intellectual Italian Catholic seem worlds apart in tradition, vision, and method (though the sloganeering Communist newspaper editor in Rossellini's EUROPA 51 would not be out of place in Fuller's cinema, nor would Fuller's battle-scarred soldiers be alien to Rossellini's PAISAN). But as dissimilar as they are, both are Brechtians, both are moralists, and both were formative influences on Jean-Luc Godard. In paving the way for Godard, Fuller's primitivism became a form of proto-modernism. Godard responded to the formal innovations, the genre subversions and narrative disjunctures of Fuller's B-movie method, and, as much as he admired Fuller's American nativism, discerned in his work a poetry that he compared to Murnau (whose films Fuller adored) and even Bresson. As with Rossellini, the comparisons are surprising, even jarring: Murnau, the German homosexual poet of mortality, and Bresson the French Jansenist minimalist, again both seem the antitheses of the gruff Fuller and his rough aesthetic of excess.

These parallels, as dubious as they initially seem, not so much tame or refine Fuller by placing him in a "civilized tradition," as remind one of his love for European culture. It is one of the central contradictions of Fuller's work that, though he rarely departed from his great theme—America and American identity—even when his settings were in Asia (in at least half a dozen films), he was enraptured by European art. He esteemed French culture, planned films on Balzac and Rimbaud and wrote one based on Baudelaire's "Les Fleurs du Mal." He deified Beethoven—"I love Beethoven. I'd squeeze him in any place"—and hoped to make his life story. Phil Hardy

claims that to Fuller "Europe represents culture—with the exception of Mark Twain (a journalist?), all Fuller's artistic references are to Europe: Dickens, Shakespeare, Byron, Goethe, Nijinsky, Mozart, Baudelaire, and, of course, Beethoven. America is seen as the place of material wealth, but nothing more." Before one turns Fuller into an unlikely Jamesian figure, one must argue with Hardy's schemata by suggesting that Fuller sometimes connects European culture with corruption and perversion, initially in THE BARON OF ARIZONA, and most markedly in THE NAKED KISS, where his beloved Beethoven (the "Moonlight Sonata") and Venice—one of the great repositories and signifiers of European culture—are insistently associated with one of the creepiest, most corrupt characters in all Fuller. (Conversely, the straight-arrow cop Griff knows nothing and cares less about Beethoven.)

Detractors could dismiss the European references as kitsch pretension and the thematic complexities as signs of confusion, part of the brute incongruity they find everywhere in Fuller. But for every criticism of, say, Fuller's crude sense of narrative construction, one can counter with an example of his finesse, in this case the symmetrical, often circular structures he employs; even the loopy DEAD PIGEON ON BEETHOVEN STREET circles back at the end to explain its opening flurry of enigmatic images. And as Lee Server correctly observes, Fuller's "filmography is a unique paradox: work born for the most part in the lower depths of the 'B' movie mills, yet shot through with elements seldom seen outside the rarefied worlds of the avant-garde and 'art' film: autobiography, thematic obsessions and technical experimentation." Little wonder that critics, faced with these contradictions and paradoxes, often resort to oxymoron to describe Fuller. As J. Hoberman noted in his Fuller obituary: "Sam ate contradictions for breakfast—he was our skid-row Eisenstein, our 42nd Street Brecht." In other words, our most sophisticated primitive.

✦ **James Quandt**

Our gratitude to the following people and organizations who made this retrospective possible: Dennis Bartok, American Cinematheque, Los Angeles; Roger Bell, Head of Library Services, Twentieth Century Fox, Los Angeles; Kelley Bradley, Warner Brothers Classics, Burbank; Dianne Schwalm, Vice-President of Marketing and Publicity, Warner Brothers, Toronto; Michael Schlesinger, Columbia Repertory, Los Angeles; John Kirk, MGM/UA Worldwide Distribution Services, Los Angeles; Tim Hunter, Los Angeles; Gabriel Desdoits, Gades Films, New York; Anne Morra, Film Archives, Museum of Modern Art, New York; Bruce Goldstein, Film Forum, New York; Bill Banning and Rick Norris, Roxie Releasing, San Francisco; Robert O'Connor, Paramount Pictures Repertory, Los Angeles; Joan Behan/Independent Film Channel; Adam Simon; Doug Lemza, Criterion Pictures (USA); Suzanne Hitchens, Criterion Pictures (Canada); Adrian Weiss, Los Angeles; Jon Davison, Los Angeles.

PASSPORT TO FULLER!

Available to Cinematheque Ontario members only; to receive reduced ticket prices purchase our "Passport to Fuller:" 10 separate tickets (4 from The Pantheon; 3 from The War Films; 2 from The Westerns; and 1 from The Late Crime Films) for \$40.00 including GST. For complete details and restrictions consult the Fuller Passport Order Form or call (416) 968-FILM. Members may purchase passports only from Cinematheque Ontario's Advance Ticket Box Office located at 2 Carlton Street, Suite 1600, Toronto, until March 20, 1998.

The Pantheon (choose 4)

- MERRILL'S MARAUDERS
- WHITE DOG
- HOUSE OF BAMBOO
- FORTY GUNS
- THE NAKED KISS
- SHOCK CORRIDOR
- PARK ROW
- PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET
- THE CRIMSON KIMONO
- UNDERWORLD USA

The Westerns (choose 2)

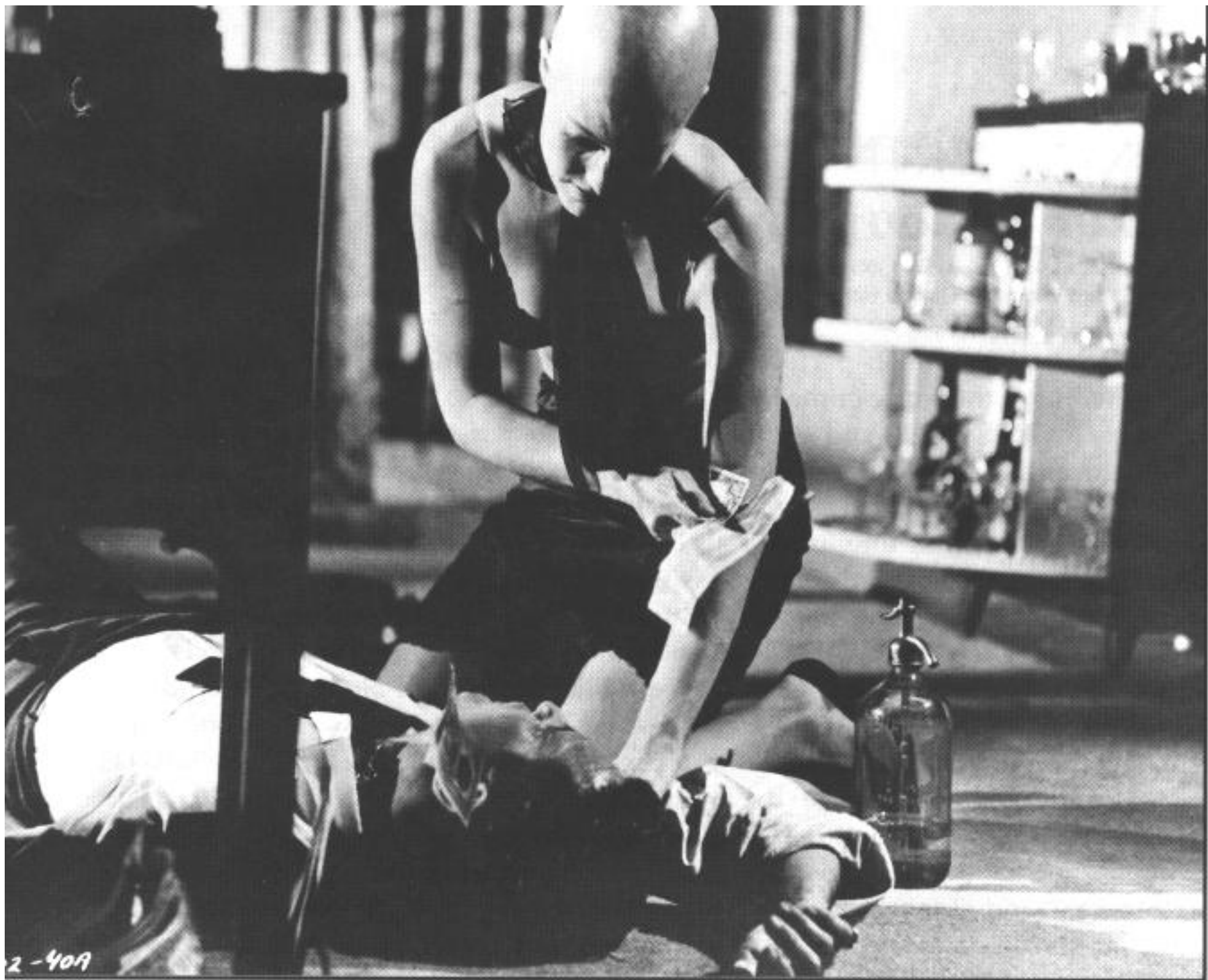
- I SHOT JESSE JAMES
- THE BARON OF ARIZONA
- RUN OF THE ARROW

The War Films (choose 3)

- FIXED BAYONETS
- CHINA GATE
- VERBOTEN
- THE STEEL HELMET
- HELL AND HIGH WATER
- THE BIG RED ONE

The Late Crime Films (choose 1)

- DEAD PIGEON ON
BEETHOVEN STREET
- THIEVES AFTER DARK
- STREET OF NO RETURN



THE NAKED KISS

NEW 35MM PRINT!

THE NAKED KISS

Director: Samuel Fuller
 USA 1964 93 minutes
 Cast: Constance Towers, Anthony Eisley

Fuller as shock commando: THE NAKED KISS opens with a lurid spasm of violence, as a ferocious prostitute (Constance Towers, and does she ever) beats a drunken pimp to the ground with her handbag. (The shot is subjective, so she seems to be beating us.) Suddenly, her hair falls off, and we're faced with the most primal sight in all of Fuller: a bald Towers in black bra and skirt assaulting the whimpering procurer within an inch of his life. (This is the first of three symmetrically placed attacks by her on three corrupt characters.) Two years later, hair grown into a golden fall, Kelly turns up in the small town of Grantville, where she resists taking a job at Candy's à la Carte, the cat house across the river, and instead makes a new life for herself as a nurse in a pediatric hospital, and is soon betrothed to the town's rich benefactor, a hero of the Korean War. When Kelly kisses him, she feels the "naked" embrace of a pervert. Masterfully shot by Stanley Cortez, THE NAKED KISS is part aberrant saint's story, part Sirkian attack on bourgeois blindness and hypocrisy, and all appalling masterpiece.

Friday, March 13 6:30 p.m.
 Sunday, March 15 1:00 p.m.

NEW 35MM PRINT!

SHOCK CORRIDOR

Director: Samuel Fuller
 USA 1963 101 minutes
 Cast: Peter Breck, Constance Towers

Buñuel requested a private screening. Andy Warhol called it one of his two favourite films (the other being THE NAKED KISS). The first of the twin masterworks Fuller made with Constance Towers—she plays Cathy, an exotic dancer who fakes incest with her boyfriend—SHOCK CORRIDOR is as powerful and deranged as some of the inmates who inhabit the mental institution that gives the film its name. Peter Breck plays an ambitious journalist who, determined to win the Pulitzer Prize, has himself committed to an asylum so he can solve a murder. The plan, of course, goes awry, and the writer soon finds himself undergoing shock treatments. The madhouse is Fuller's blunt metaphor for modern America, and in sequences breathtaking for their courage, prescience and innovation, the director takes on racism, psychiatry, fanaticism, and the effect of the atom bomb. (The hallucinatory sequences, including the rainstorm in a hallway, show Fuller at his experimental best.) For every excursion into Fuller weirdness—the writer is trapped in a ward of nymphomaniacs—there is a moment of brute, blinding truth about how America damages or destroys people but cannot seem to heal them. "One of the five best films of 1965" (Jean-Luc Godard). "One of the most outrageous, passionate, and controversial films ever made" (Brian Baxter, *The Guardian*).

Friday, March 13 8:45 p.m.
 Saturday, March 14 6:30 p.m.

NEW 35MM SCOPE PRINT!

FORTY GUNS

Director: Samuel Fuller
 USA 1957 80 minutes
 Cast: Barbara Stanwyck, Barry Sullivan

Few films have elicited as much fevered praise, bewildered paeans, and hyperbolic claims as FORTY GUNS. Godard pronounced it "along with HOUSE OF BAMBOO, Fuller's best film . . . It is full of innovations and inventive direction," and quoted one of its most audacious shots in BREATHLESS. Truffaut lifted its ending in THE BRIDE WORE BLACK. Scorsese loves FORTY GUNS, but doesn't quite know what to make of it: "It's not even really a Western—I don't know what it is—FORTY GUNS doesn't care." It has been called "avant-garde" (Jonathan Rosenbaum), "a wild and reckless western that separates the cultish from the sheepish" (Andrew Sarris), and "still the most subversively entertaining Western ever made" (Dennis Bartok). Barbara Stanwyck is even more berserk than Mercedes McCambridge in JOHNNY GUITAR as Jessica, a leather-clad cattle baroness who runs a chunk of Cochise County with her punk brother. Brandishing her leather whip and her might against Griff Bonnell, a "legal killer" with a sense of justice, Jessica proves her claim to have been "bitten by a rattler when I was fifteen." Fuller fills the frame with phallic references, Jessica's sexual frenzy translated into naked gun-lust in images and verbal exchanges that make the connection between dick and Derringer more than explicit. ("May I touch it?". "It may go off in your face.") "This is the Fuller movie about which it is hardest to write because more than any other it is pure experience, pure movie" (Nicholas Garnham).

Tuesday, March 17 6:30 p.m.

NEW 35MM SCOPE PRINT!

HELL AND HIGH WATER

Director: Samuel Fuller
 USA 1954 103 minutes
 Cast: Richard Widmark, Bella Darvi

"The whole film was shot in 21 days in a studio. A tour de force. The rest doesn't matter" (Fuller). Fox head Darryl Zanuck asked Fuller to prove that the CinemaScope camera could move and to provide a showcase for his latest "find," a bad actress called Bella Darvi, and Fuller obliged with this nuclear paranoia adventure thriller. (Steven Spielberg loved HELL AND HIGH WATER so much he reportedly carried a print in the trunk of his car for years.) Bracketed by shots of a nuclear mushroom cloud, HELL concerns a group sent to investigate suspicious Chinese activities off the coast of Alaska. Surveying the area by submarine, they discover the Chinese are planning to drop the A-bomb on Korea and make it look like an American act of war. A suspenseful cat-and-mouse submarine chase ensues, and Fuller uses every opportunity to make that Scope camera do things no one had managed before. (Only Fuller could turn the enclosed space of a submarine into an opportunity for lateral tracking shots that exploit the widescreen format.)

Tuesday, March 17 8:45 p.m.



35MM PRINT!

PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET

Director: Samuel Fuller USA 1953 80 minutes
Cast: Richard Widmark, Thelma Ritter

"Perhaps Fuller's most perfectly realized film and one of the undeniable masterworks of the entire crime movie and noir traditions" (Lee Server). (Its original title was PICKPOCKET, and one need look only at the virtuoso opening sequence to see the affinities with Bresson's later film of that name.) Richard Widmark plays a petty thief who, picking pockets in the New York subway, reaches into a prostitute's purse and unwittingly steals some top secret microfilm. Both Federal and Communist agents are soon on his trail; Fuller's central theme of betrayal and duplicity receives one of its bleakest treatments. Widmark is coiled and iconic as a criminal who quite literally lives outside the realm of common people. Thelma Ritter was nominated for an Oscar as Moe Williams, the hard-bitten police informant intent on not ending up in Potter's Field. (Her leave-taking soliloquy is one of the greatest moments in Fuller's cinema.) Fassbinder so loved PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET despite its McCarthyist politics, that he paid tribute to it in THE AMERICAN SOLDIER by basing the character of a porn dealer on Moe Williams and calling her Magdalena Fuller. "A superb thriller . . . The film remains a desperate kind of masterpiece" (*Time Out*). Ironically, PICKUP was awarded the top prize at the Venice Film Festival by a predominantly leftist jury, headed by Communist Luchino Visconti.

preceded by:

TORONTO PREMIERE!

FULLER AT THE MOVIOLA (FULLER FRAME BY FRAME)

Director: André Labarthe France 1987 20 minutes

A rare treat for Fullerites. Sam sits at the moviola and offers a frame-by-frame analysis of the celebrated opening sequence of PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET.

Sunday, March 22 4:30 p.m.



35MM ARCHIVAL PRINT!

I SHOT JESSE JAMES

Director: Samuel Fuller USA 1949 81 minutes Cast: John Ireland, Preston Foster

Andrew Sarris has claimed that this, Fuller's first film, was "constructed almost entirely in closeups of an oppressive intensity the cinema had not experienced before." Dreyer's THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC." Like all important directorial debuts, I SHOT JESSE JAMES introduced many of the central themes and stylistic motifs of its maker. A pioneering work of the psychological western sub-genre (or, at least, western, as some critics have claimed), the film offers a very strange portrait of John Ford, the man who shot his best friend Jesse James (whom Fuller described in an interview as "a half-assed homo who impersonated a girl." A bathtub scene with two men prefigures that in HOUSE OF BAMBOO: "You see, my film is about the story of the guy who killed the man he loved" [Fuller].) Its claustrophobic use of close-ups, sense of emotional masochism and delirium, and its eccentric editing prove that Fuller's style was fully Fuller from the outset. (Scorsese remembers seeing the film as one of the vivid experiences of his childhood movie-going.) The unsympathetic hero, his psychological dislocation, the themes of betrayal, jealousy, and love begetting violence—staples of Fuller's world in the years ahead—are all crammed into this strange, morbid movie. . . . [It] convey[s] an atmosphere not dissimilar to one of Luis Buñuel's dream-states" (Lee Server).

Tuesday, March 24 8:45 p.m.

35MM PRINT!

UNDERWORLD USA

Director: Samuel Fuller USA 1961 99 minutes Cast: Cliff Robertson, Beatrice Kay

Imperative. A film so tough, cynical and relentless that critic V. K. Perkins has devised a term for one of Fuller's aggressive formal devices: "shock dissolve" ("Every shot is a smack in the eye," Perkins says. Little wonder Godard loved the film and that Tarantino quotes it.) Tolly Devlin, who as a twelve-year-old witnessed his father being beaten to death in an alley and grows up to wreak revenge on everyone involved with the death (and some who aren't), is perhaps Fuller's most bitter anti-hero: "UNDERWORLD USA goes further than any other Fuller movie in depicting the hero as psychopath: his heroism is a product of his sickness" (Perkins). Even Tolly's yearning girlfriend Cuddles is chilled by his hatred: "I die inside when you kiss me," she murmurs. "UNDERWORLD USA is an important, pivotal work in the gangster genre. It is the last great work in the classic tradition" (Lee Server).

Wednesday, March 25 6:30 p.m.

35MM SCOPE PRINT!

HOUSE OF BAMBOO

Director: Samuel Fuller
USA 1955 102 minutes
Cast: Robert Ryan, Robert Stack

Godard considered this Fuller's best film (with FORTY GUNS); and Fuller authority Lee Server calls it "one of the most unusual and most elegantly pictorial gangster movies ever made." The first Hollywood film shot in Japan, it is certainly one of Fuller's most beautiful works: "HOUSE OF BAMBOO is above all an aesthetic pleasure. . . . Fuller unleashes the potential [of CinemaScope] with lightning fast tracking shots, disorienting setups, bizarre compositions and dazzling panoramas" (Server). Tough guy Robert Ryan is a crime boss building an empire in U.S.-occupied postwar Tokyo. Robert Stack is the undercover cop assigned to infiltrate Ryan's gang. The widening vortex of betrayal takes in Mariko, the Japanese widow of a man killed by Ryan. Full of celebrated sequences—the shooting in a bath tub, the final chase in an amusement park—HOUSE OF BAMBOO is charged with homosexual tension between boss and spy: Stack and Ryan in flinty love and mortal combat behind screens and scrims, in the back rooms of pachinko parlours and on a Ferris wheel high over Tokyo.

Wednesday, March 18 6:30 p.m.

35MM PRINT!

THE CRIMSON KIMONO

Director: Samuel Fuller USA 1959 82 minutes Cast: James Shigeta, Victoria Shaw

L. A. Confidential, Fuller style, a lurid (and occasionally lunatic) noir set in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo. Japanese-American cop Joe Kojaku is assigned to investigate the murder of blonde stripper "Sugar Torch." (Fuller described the opening sequence in which she runs through the streets in bra and pants, and is gunned down in traffic as the "most dangerous scene I've ever shot.") Plunged into the worlds of Skid Row and Little Tokyo, Kojaku is forced to confront his own racial paranoia as he encounters a world in which the lines between Caucasian and Asian have become blurred. (Sugar Torch is just one example: a karate specialist, she had her portrait painted wearing the eponymous crimson kimono.) Fuller unleashes his trademark pyrotechnics in a kendo match that ranks among his finest sequences. THE CRIMSON KIMONO exerted an immense influence on Godard; its visual style was absorbed into his own, particularly in films such as MADE IN USA.

Wednesday, March 25 8:45 p.m.

FIXED BAYONETS

Director: Samuel Fuller USA 1951 92 minutes Cast: Richard Basehart, Gene Evans

After the great success of THE STEEL HELMET, Darryl Zanuck hired Fuller to make pictures for Twentieth Century-Fox. Returning to the arena of the Korean War with a larger budget, Fuller narrowed his focus in this intensely controlled portrait of a platoon in a snowbound cave, surrounded by enemy soldiers and landmines, and led by conflicting commanders: the obdurate Sergeant Rock and the diffident Corporal Denno who becomes a hero despite himself. (Watch for the bizarre Athlete's Foot sequence, in which the fate of the two contrasting leaders is announced as the soldiers massage each other's bare feet.) With the bigger budget, Fuller achieved visual flourishes he had only dreamed of, including elaborate crane shots, long takes, and circular pans. And the often grotesque humour with which he depicts the claustrophobic setting established the tone for his subsequent films. (The on-set stories regarding FIXED BAYONETS are among the best in Fulleriana, high among them the accidental hiring of dozens of gay dancers from a musical to play exhausted soldiers.)

Thursday, March 26 8:45 p.m.



THE BIG RED ONE

Director: Samuel Fuller USA 1980 113 minutes Cast: Lee Marvin, Mark Hamill

A late career triumph for Fuller, THE BIG RED ONE is the culmination of thirty years of filmmaking: "My big love," he called this dream project. Shot on a comparatively small budget, it was hailed as an instant classic. Lee Marvin plays the tough, grizzled leader of four young soldiers, members of "The Big Red One," as the First Infantry Division was known. From their landing in North Africa in 1942 through the last battles in Europe, the film draws on Fuller's experience of the Second World War, but, though blunt, sentimental, lurid, surreal and grotesquely funny in classic Fuller style, it is markedly more mellow and contemplative than earlier films like MERRILL'S MARAUDERS. The battle footage is almost austere, particularly the treatment of the D-Day landing, and is all the more effective for its discipline. Over two hours of what should have been Fuller's magnum opus was cut before the film was released, and a restoration of the full-length version is reportedly being considered as a tribute to the late director. "A constantly arresting and appallingly powerful cinematic dream, laconic and hard-boiled and hideous and memorable, a war movie by way of Raymond Chandler" (Jay Scott).

Friday, March 27 8:45 p.m.



EUROPEAN RELEASE VERSION

WHITE DOG

Director: Samuel Fuller USA 1982 90 minutes Cast: Kristy McNichol, Paul Winfield

The most controversial film of Fuller's career, WHITE DOG became a *cause célèbre* when it was attacked by the NAACP as an incitement to racism, and its release deferred then dropped by the studio (Paramount) that had commissioned it. It was released in Europe to rave reviews, but ended up on pay television in North America. Based on Romain Gary's *roman-à-clef* about his years in Los Angeles with his wife Jean Seberg, the film is a trenchant examination of the racism and bigotry that permeate American society. A young woman hits a dog with her car, nurse back to health and then discovers to her horror that it is a "white dog," raised to kill blacks. Paul Winfield plays the black animal trainer who attempts to "deprogram" the dog. (Both J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum have compared the dog to the donkey in Bresson's AU HASARD BALHAZAR.) A supreme example of Hollywood professionalism, WHITE DOG is lean and direct, its powerful anti-racism message delivered with a visual style that is pure Fuller. (The length of the mass shot in which the dog attacks a rapist is astonishing.) "**** Masterpiece. The best American movie released so far this year, made by the greatest living American filmmaker" (Rosenbaum).

Saturday, March 28 8:45 p.m.

35MM PRINT!
TORONTO PREMIERE!

DEAD PIGEON ON BEETHOVEN STREET

Director: Samuel Fuller Germany 1971 102 minutes Cast: Glenn Corbett, Christa Lang

A true film maudit, DEAD PIGEON ON BEETHOVEN STREET seems to require Godard for his admiration and support for so many years. (One keeps waiting for Eddie Constantine to turn up.) David Sanjek calls it "technically the most audacious production of this most audacious individual. . . . Fuller's most ludicrous, lunatic production." Though the tone is unusually playful, and the goings-on preposterous even by Fuller's standards, DEAD PIGEON still has the hallmarks of Fuller's most serious cinema: an amoral, unsympathetic hero involved in a story of infiltration and betrayal, elaborately stylized sequences of violence, and an outrageous sense of spectacle. (Two examples: the shoot-out in a maternity ward, bullets whizzing over the heads of new-born babies; and the battle between hero and villain, in which swords, spears, and battleaxes rain through the air). Glenn Corbett plays the tough private eye hired to retrieve some incriminating footage from an international blackmail ring. Fuller's wife Christa plays the blonde femme fatale.

preceded by:

THE TYPEWRITER,
THE RIFLE AND THE MOVIE CAMERA

Director: Adam Simon USA 1996 60 minutes

A splendid documentary that serves as primer, portrait and tribute all in one. Executive producer and host Tim Robbins guides us through the three phases of Fuller's career—newspaperman, soldier, and film director, the latter subsuming the former two. The voluble, excitable Fuller holds court, his anecdotes interwoven with clips from his films and homages from three of his greatest admirers: Jarmusch, Tarantino and Scorsese. Tarantino picks through a pile of Fuller's detritus—scrapbooks, abandoned scripts, props—and Scorsese recalls seeing SHOT JESSE JAMES as a child, and illustrates how a fight sequence in RAGING BULL was modelled on one in STEEL HELMET. "A treat, crafted with love" (Robert Horton, *Film Comment*).

Sunday, March 29 3:00 p.m.



PARK ROW

35MM PRINT!

PARK ROW

Director: Samuel Fuller USA 1952 83 minutes Cast: Gene Evans, Mary Welch

Fuller's favourite of his films—"the story of my heart," he called it—is also one of his most influential: Martin Scorsese calls it "a very important movie to me for the use of tracking shots and the staging of action and violence." Climaxing in one of the most celebrated sequences in film history, PARK ROW "gathers all of Fuller's major themes in a burst of dramatic and visual excitement" (Jean-Pierre Coursodon). Set in New York in 1886, the film deals with the struggle between the abrasive, idealistic Phineas Mitchell (Fuller's alter ego) and his upstart paper *The Globe*, and the steel-willed Charity Hackett, whose *New York Star* is the voice of the power elite. In one of Fuller's most quoted and analyzed sequences, an insanely long, hurtling take traverses three sets (with the camera strapped to the operator). Nicholas Garnham claims this shot "puts Fuller technically in the same league as Welles, Ophuls, and Mizoguchi and other masters of the moving camera." "The giddiest celebration of American journalism after CITIZEN KANE . . . PARK ROW continues to stun through its outrageousness, which at inspired moments becomes a worship of pure energy" (Jonathan Rosenbaum). "One of Fuller's best films" (Myron Meisel).

Tuesday, March 31 6:30 p.m.

RARE 35MM PRINT!

MERRILL'S MARAUDERS

Director: Samuel Fuller USA 1962 98 minutes Cast: Jeff Chandler, Claude Akins

An extremely rare print of the greatest of Fuller's war films—Lee Server claims its battle scenes have "a visual splendour and kinetic excitement comparable to the work of Ford, Kurosawa, Eisenstein, Lean—that is, comparable to the greatest battle scenes ever filmed." A harrowing epic about the suicidal campaign of 3,000 American soldiers fighting behind Japanese lines in Burma in 1944, the film was shot in the Philippines, and Fuller makes the most of the hellish terrain. The leader Merrill (jut-jawed Jeff Chandler) is one of Fuller's driven, obsessed heroes: "If you can breathe, you can fight," he tells his exhausted troops. Fuller improvised much of the script based on his own war experience, and the result is an almost traumatic sense of immediacy. "Superb . . . taut, bleak and damning" (*Time Out*).

We gratefully acknowledge the exceptional assistance of Warner Brothers in supplying us with this rare print, and we present it as a salute to Warners in their 75th Anniversary year. Thanks to Dianne Schwalm, Vice-President of Marketing and Publicity (Toronto) and Kelley Bradley, Warner Brothers Classics (Burbank).

Tuesday, March 31 8:45 p.m.

35MM ARCHIVAL PRINT!

THE BARON OF ARIZONA

Director: Samuel Fuller
USA 1950 90 minutes
Cast: Vincent Price, Ellen Drew

"I love this film!" (Samuel Fuller). BARON OF ARIZONA tells the true story of James Addison Reavis, a con man and forger who almost succeeded in swindling the U.S. government out of the Territory of Arizona in the nineteenth century. The centre of the film is the bizarre, LOU-like relationship between Addison and the orphaned Mexican girl he fosters, who turns out to be a baroness, then takes him for her bride. This is Buñuel territory, and we have interpreted BARON not as a western it ostensibly appears to be, but as a classic work of Gothic sensibility, tinged with surrealism. (Fuller wanted to explore the more abnormal aspects of the relationship, but was prevented by censorship.) James Wong Howe's atmospheric cinematography is undictably superb, and Vincent Price luxuriates in the role of effete fraud, while Ellen Drew's decadence Fuller associates with European values (as he does Grant in THE NIGHT OF THE KISS). "'True love' finds itself through a morass of deceit, exploitation, and violence, and punishment—Fuller's view of a fine romance" (Lee Server).

Wednesday, April 1 6:30 p.m.

35MM PRINT!

VERBOTEN

Director: Samuel Fuller
USA 1959 94 minutes
Cast: James Best, Susan Cummings

"The great Fuller at his punchy, unbuttoned best . . . riveting and powerful cinema" (*Time Out*). Surely a major influence on Lars von Trier's ZENTROPA (EUROPEAN FILM FESTIVAL) and IMAGES OF A RELIEF, this film is also obviously shaped by Godard's aesthetic: "VERBOTEN's conceptual boldness could be compared only to Godard who, of course, derived much of his style from Fuller films like this" (Lee Server). An American sergeant is wounded while ferreting out the last remnants of German resistance at the end of WWII. A German woman rescues him, and he returns home after the war to marry her. Amid riots and anti-U.S. incidents, the sergeant's American falls under the influence of a German Werewolves, the secret army of German sympathizers working to undermine the occupying forces. The film is composed of extremely long takes, rivalling such as directors as Straub for its sparse number of shots, but the effect is hardly as subtle as Fuller throws Wagner and Beethoven into the soundtrack, introduces Fassbinder's domestic melodrama, narrates a sequel to the Nuremberg trials, and combines a documentary of the Nuremberg trials with a conspicuous back-lot artifice, and keeps all at full boil with some of the most extravagant imagery in his oeuvre. "Christ! Wagner and fire and blonde and horses! Good God, how could you do wrong with that?" (Fuller).

Wednesday, April 1 8:45 p.m.

Samuel FULLER

35MM PRINT!
THE STEEL HELMET

Director: Samuel Fuller
USA 1951 84 minutes
Cast: Gene Evans, Robert Hutton

Fuller's first sensation—"the sleeper of its year" (Lee Server)—and a major commercial hit, THE STEEL HELMET created a furore on both sides of the political divide. Denounced as anti-American because of its critique of racism, it drew the scrutiny of the Pentagon and the ire of J. Edgar Hoover. At the same time, American leftists denounced the film as reactionary, and in Rome, Communists rioted at a screening, breaking windows and throwing seats into the street. (Fuller claimed that the cinema owner sent him a demand for damages.) The first film about the Korean War, HELMET is the ferocious portrait of an Army sergeant who leads a patrol of green recruits to safety. Gene Evans plays the cold, callous sergeant with stony power. "My idea in STEEL HELMET was to show anger, the hate of this man who hates everything and everybody. He hated himself" (Fuller). J. Hoberman recently wrote that HELMET "suggests WAITING FOR GODOT rewritten by Mickey Spillane," and Scorsese acknowledges it as an influence on RAGING BULL. "A remarkable achievement, filled to overflowing with its unique, intense mix of violence, symbolism, offbeat characterization and hardboiled discourse" (Server).

Thursday, April 2 6:30 p.m.

35MM SCOPE PRINT!
CHINA GATE

Director: Samuel Fuller
USA 1957 97 minutes
Cast: Angie Dickinson, Nat King Cole

As Lucky Legs, a Eurasian alcoholic prostitute abandoned by her racist husband during the early years of the Indochina War, Angie Dickinson is as wildly improbable and as moving as everything else in this unforgettable film. Peter Keough recently called CHINA GATE "the first and perhaps best film about Vietnam," but, despite its Cold War celebration of anti-Communist incursions, it is less about the Vietnam conflict than it is about race, family, courage and—perhaps above all—mise-en-scène. Opening with documentary footage of the war that eerily anticipates footage from a decade later, segueing to a Scope appraisal of Dickinson's "lucky legs," then plunging us into the jungle with an international crew of anti-Communist soldiers led by intrepid Angie in sarong and impeccable make-up, CHINA GATE is one of the more bizarre marriages of plaster studio artifice and gritty actuality in all of Fuller's cinema. (If ever a film illustrated that CinemaScope can never translate properly to video, CHINA GATE is it. This is your only chance to see Fuller's exclamation-mark compositions in their Scope complexity.) Nat King Cole sings the title song, and gives an affecting performance as Goldie.

Thursday, April 2 8:45 p.m.

STREET OF NO RETURN

Director: Samuel Fuller
France/Portugal 1989 90 minutes
Cast: Keith Carradine, Valentina Vargas

Never released in North America, STREET OF NO RETURN received both derisive and rave reviews ("one of the most beautiful noirs ever made in colour" - Georgia Brown, *The Village Voice*; "A stunning film noir about love and memory and revenge, full of visual poetry and manic energy"-Lee Server). Keith Carradine plays an arrogant singing star whose career comes to an end when a jealous lover slashes his throat. Years later, an alcoholic derelict living on Skid Row, he is arrested as a cop killer and gets drawn into a conspiracy involving his old flame, Celia. Fuller lavishes his usual visual style on his wild and dubious plot, punching each scene up with swatches of primary colour—a midnight blue street, a yellow mansion, an impossibly red Coke machine. "STREET OF NO RETURN simply recalls David Goodis at his most fatal and triste, and Fuller directing his heart out. . . . As wacky, often ludicrous, as it is, though, the film is haunting and contains at least a dozen sensational moments. Best, it takes you back to Fuller" (Brown). "Fuller invests every frame with his own inflamed passion and outrageous, eccentric personality. . . . Fuller gathers up all the ingredients of a near-lifetime of mean streets storytelling and boils them down to their essence" (Server).

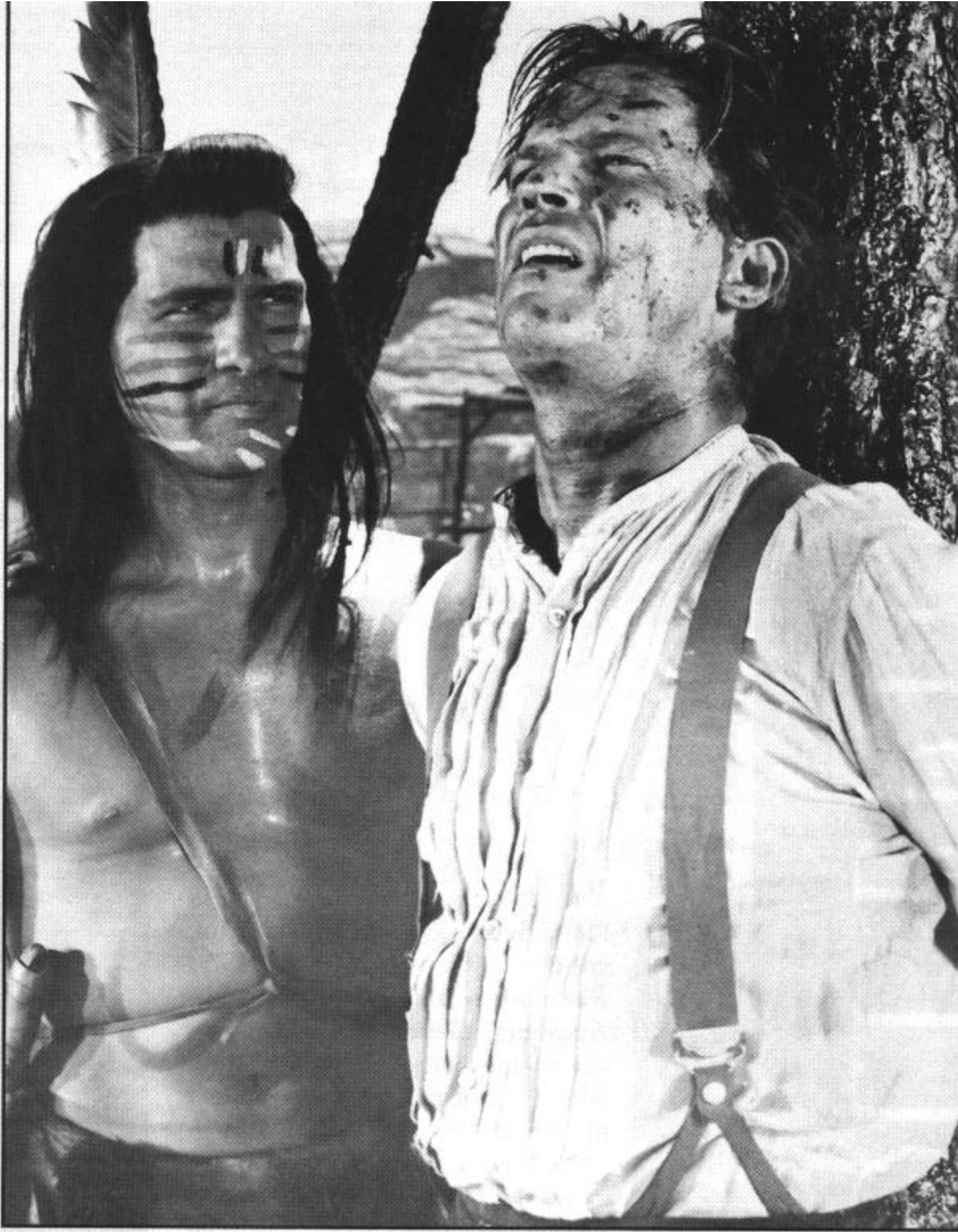
Friday, April 3 8:45 p.m.

THIEVES AFTER DARK

(LES VOLEURS DE LA NUIT)
Director: Samuel Fuller
France 1982 92 minutes
Cast: Véronique Jannot, Bobby Di Cicco
Note: In French only; no English subtitles

Fuller described THIEVES AFTER DARK at its Berlin Film Festival premiere: "Youth, romance, a little error, a big error, and then violence—that's a picture!" Bobby Di Cicco from THE BIG RED ONE and Véronique Jannot play Parisian youths down on their luck. He's a concert cellist, she's an art historian who dreams of becoming a museum curator, but both are unemployed. They fall into petty crime, and, while taking revenge on the government bureaucrats they blame for their hopeless situation, one of their victims (played by Claude Chabrol with *jambon* juiciness) accidentally falls to his death. A manhunt ensues, and the lovers go on the lam to the Alps. This being a Fuller film, the mountains promise not escape or idyll but more violence. Many critics think THIEVES a little decorous, but others find the film's second half full flavour Fuller with "a real sense of frenzy and danger" (*Variety*).

Tuesday, April 7 8:45 p.m.



35MM TECHNICOLOR SCOPE PRINT!

RUN OF THE ARROW

Director: Samuel Fuller USA 1957 86 minutes Cast: Rod Steiger, Brian Keith

Increasingly, critical consensus places this in Fuller's pantheon—*The Guardian* pronounced it "one of Fuller's masterpieces" in his obituary—though it remains very little known. "From start to finish, one of Fuller's richest, most surprising movies" (Dennis Bartok, American Cinematheque), RUN OF THE ARROW features one of Fuller's most complex, embittered heroes: O'Meara, a Confederate soldier, who, at the end of the Civil War, cannot reconcile himself to the humiliation of the South. "There's no cure for what ails you, son," his mother tells him. He joins with the Sioux and their fight against the U.S. Army and must choose between allegiance to their tribe and his allegiance to the traditions of America. Shot in Utah in resplendent colour, RUN OF THE ARROW "is that rare thing in Hollywood, a genuine film of ideas. . . . Fuller's cast is one of the best. . . . a rich and provocative experience" (Lee Server).

Saturday, April 4 8:45 p.m.

The only book in English on legendary Japanese director

SHOHEI IMAMURA

Edited and with an introduction by James Quan

Essays and interviews by noted scholars and critics such as Donald Richie, Max Tessier, and Aubrey Bock, plus a complete Imamura filmography

"The films of Shohei Imamura are among the greatest ever made." Jonathan Demme

A CINEMATHEQUE ONTARIO PUBLICATION

TO ORDER BY MAIL:

Please send cheque or money order for \$13.75* (taxes and shipping incl.) *orders outside Canada please add \$4.00 for additional postage—all in Canadian funds.

TO:

Cinematheque Ontario
2 Carlton Street, Suite 1600
Toronto, ON M5B 1J3

For more information please call (416) 968-3456 or fax (416) 967-9477.