

## John Boscovich's notes on *North*

"North" notes....

Gary Indiana reads excerpts from Louis-Ferdinand Celine's *North* (1960) part of a trilogy of his novels that includes *Castle to Castle* (1957), and *Rigadoon* (1969) depicting events that occurred during and after the liberation of France by the Allied Forces. These works chronicle Celine's life who, fearing he would be charged with collaboration, fled France, along with his wife and cat, to Baden Baden, Germany and later to Denmark. *North*, one of Gary's favorite novels, was selected by Gary to read for this piece.

Both Gary and myself excerpted the novel. This excerpt describes everyday life at the Simplon Hotel in Baden Baden and how the Axis elite spent the cruelest months of the war.

The trilogy, championed by the Left in France in the 60's, helped revive interest in Celine's work and to pardon, to some extent, his involvement with the Vichy Regime and his notorious pamphleteering. Celine's situation in France somewhat parallels that of Pound in the United States. His work, particularly, *Death on the Installment Plan* (1936) and *Journey to the End of Night* (1934) influenced World Literature as evident in writers such as Burroughs.

All visuals other than Gary are taken from Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot Le Fou* (1965). *Pierrot Le Fou* echoes some of the action in *North*. The film also represents, among many things, the French Intelligentsia's reinvigorated interest in Celine.

It is not coincidental that Godard named Jean-Paul Belmondo's character Ferdinand, as the central character and narrator in *North* is also named Ferdinand. In *Pierrot Le Fou* there is a moment where Anna Karina hands Belmondo a book which he then begins to narrate. This book is Celine's *Guignol's Band* (1944).

All images appropriated from *Pierrot Le Fou* are decontextualized and used as a kind of ideological veneer, although I prefer the term "Marxianna."

The opening title sequence emulates Godard's. The title song is Anna Karina singing to Belmondo. Additional music is Liszt's piano transcription of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* from the first movement. The end credit music is Liszt's *Liebestraume* (number 10) mixed with party samples from *Pierrot Le Fou*.

*North* was shot on Super 16mm specifically to the letterbox ratio of the plasma screen. By choosing this monitor, I attempt to give the viewer a filmic experience with the scale and flatness of a painting. Rear screen projection was used to move away from the ubiquitous blue screen composite to a more traditional film making method

J.B.

*"I am fascinated by the film – and find it, like the rest of your work, extremely intelligent, beautiful, enigmatic – What I'm interested in is the particular choice of this politically compromised figure and the politically compromised scene that he describes – you are once again hitting the right buttons in an age when notions of collaboration, resistance and critique are all highly COMPROMISED ideas, despite the best intentions of our peers to work with purity. Céline's contempt for his contemporaries self-righteousness is something I have always admired – and his insistence upon his contempt is ethical. All of this has to do with the way in which those of us who came of age in the eighties (you and me, etc.) have had a jaundiced view of the abuse and abandonment of the notion of the political in the art world...I think that the notions of the collaboration and compromise are important to this work."*

*-Catherine Lui – on North 7/29/01*

My first film *Without You I'm Nothing* (1990) remained my singular film credit for almost eleven years until *North* (2001). Before *WYIN* and since I had done a considerable body of work in other media such as installation, photo and text, painting, sculpture, design and writing. All my work in other media relates in some way to my film work either formally or thematically. *North* I consider as a kind of code, which attempts to bring unity to many aspects of my inter-genre career.

While making *North* I kept in mind the idea of making a film portrait of novelist Gary Indiana. After reading Gary's work and seeing him read from his true crime novels *Resentment* and *Three Month Fever*, I am convinced as many

others are that he is one of the most important American novelist to emerge in sometime. He recalls Capote during his oeuvre only more political.

Gary chose to read excerpts from Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *North* (1960) rather than from his own work. Céline's novel depicts events that occurred during and after the liberation of France by the Allied Forces. The novel chronicles Céline's life that, fearing he would be charged with collaboration, fled France to Baden Baden, Germany. The passages describe everyday life at the Simplon Hotel in Baden Baden and how the Axis elite really spent the cruelest months of WWII; "the wars raging on seven fronts and all the oceans don't interfere with their caviar." *North* is part of a trilogy of novels that includes *Castle to Castle* (1957), and *Rigadoon* (1969). Céline's earlier work particularly his thirties work, *Death on the Installment Plan* (1936) and *Journey to the End of Night* (1934) influenced World Literature as evident in writers such as William Burroughs and Günter Grass.

*North* is one of Gary's favorite books. When I asked Gary, "why *North*?"....He said you have to see *Pierrot Le Fou* to understand"... It was Goddard's *PLF* (1965) with its many references to Céline, that introduced Gary this work. The two works, Céline's novel and Goddard's film, are interrelated in many ways; *PLF's* many references to Céline represent the reinvigorated interest in his work by the Left in France, which particularly, admired the later trilogy. Also these works to some extent function to pardon Céline (who died in abjection in '61) for his notorious involvement in the Vichy Regime. *North* begins, to some extent, the discourse which culminates in Ophul's *The Sorrow and The Pity*, that collapses the popular notion held after the war and through much of the sixties, that the French were a nation of resisters of opposed to collaborators during *WWII*.

However the film *North* is not about obsolete politics, the language and political ideas in *North* are painfully current and have an uncanny timelessness as the film seems to anticipate and describe recent world events although finished within 2001 but prior to Sept. 11, it references it metaphorically. People were commenting on this at *North's* screening at the Silver Lake Film Festival on September 23 a little more than a week after the eleventh. Recently, Gary commented on how John Walker, "the American Taliban" can be related to Céline and to the notion of choosing the losing side

The inter-cutting and rear screen projections throughout the *North* are entirely taken from *PLF*. *North* is designed to orient the viewer to the movie screen as one would to a canvas of a painting. Therefore when conceiving *North* I envisioned two alternative ways of projection. One mode is standard, being a conventional movie theater, the other which would constitute an installation, would be to project *North* in a large, flat, empty room via rear screen to exclude shadow incursion thus allowing the viewer to approach the film as one would a painting. The alternative installation would be best suited for a museum or gallery setting and some film festivals are equipped to handle film installation such as this.

At the Silver Lake FF after *North* was screened Gary read from *Depraved Indifference* his newly published novel by HarperCollins on the mother and son grift and murder team, Sante and Kenneth Kimes. This work completes his trilogy of true crime novels. *North* was shown in the BFI's London GLFF and in the Milan/Bologna GLFF this year.

*North* is entirely an independent project even though RSA, NYC is listed in the end credits as "Produced By". During the strike, RSA like everyone else wasn't particularly busy so they helped bring me through principal photography but did not fund the project in anyway. Producer and editor, David Dodson organized postproduction. Director of Photography John Pirozzi shot *North* in super 16 mm in one day in a sound stage in Brooklyn. Primary colors were to reference early 60's Parisian design. The titles emulate Goddard's in *Pierrot Le Fou* but were done on a laptop. It was later blown up to 35mm using a new process developed by FotoKem to eliminate video artifact.

The title song is Anna Karina's rendition of Antoine Duhamel's "Jamais je ne t'ai dit que je t'aimerai toujours" to Belmondo from *PLF*. Additional music is Lizst's piano transcription of Berloiz's Symphonie Fantastique from the second movement. The end credit music is David Grubbs' piano arrangement for *North* of Antoine Duhamel's "Jamais je ne t'ai dit que je t'aimerai toujours".  
director's revised notes 1-11-02

J.B.