

In the Year of the Pig



Figure 26. The famous "Make war not love" helmet from *In the Year of the Pig*.

PAULINE KAEI

Blood and Snow (1969)

"We don't want films the color of roses," the New American Cinema Group's manifesto declared in 1961. "We want them the color of blood." More than any other signatory, perhaps, de Antonio got his wish when the nation's most influential critic appraised In the Year of the Pig under the heading "Blood." ("Snow" referred to another film under review.) This commendation of Year of the Pig in the New Yorker magazine secured de Antonio's critical reputation as a filmmaker of importance. He had a considerable correspondence with Kael, dating back to her days as a San Francisco film programmer and his as an enterprising art film distributor peddling prints of Josef von Sternberg's The Blue Angel.

In the Year of the Pig is an assemblage of news footage and interviews that presents an overview of the Vietnam War; Ho Chi Minh is the hero, and the theme is not, as might be expected, the tragic destruction of Vietnam but the triumph of Vietnam over the American colossus. The movie is not a piece of reporting: Emile de Antonio, who gathered the material, has never been to Vietnam; his footage comes from a variety of sources, not specified on the screen but elsewhere acknowledged to include East Germany, Hanoi, the National Liberation Front offices in Prague, Britain, and some American companies (ABC, Paramount News, UPI, Pathé News, Fox Movietone News), and there is a Russian-staged reenactment of the battle of Dien Bien Phu. But, taking this footage from all over, he has made a strong film that does what American television has failed to do. It provides a historical background and puts the events of the last few years into an intelligible framework. Though the television coverage has often been covertly antiwar, and though watching the Americans behave like the bad guys in Hollywood war movies has undoubtedly helped turn the country against the war, the general effect of years of this has been a numbing one—constant horror but

no clear idea of how each day's events fitted in, and growing uncertainty about the meaning of victories and defeats beyond the day's events. We now feel helpless to understand the war; we want to end it, and the fact that we can't demoralizes us. We seem to be powerless. Because this film makes sense out of what's been going on, even if this sense isn't the only sense to be made of it, de Antonio's historical interpretation becomes remarkably persuasive.

The movie does not claim to be "objective" (except in the way that every documentary implicitly claims to be, because it uses photographic records and, despite talk of media sophistication, "seeing is believing"). One could certainly argue that *In the Year of the Pig* (the title, I assume, does not refer only to the Chinese calendar) is merely restoring the balance by showing "the other side"—that if it attempted to be "objective" it would turn into another of those essays in confusion, like the network specials, that balance everything out until they get a collection of the disparate facts and platitudes that are considered "responsible" journalism. However, while the commentators' face-saving gestures and revelations have made us aware of the tacit commitment in that kind of coverage, we may be less conscious of the games being played with this footage. Some of them are obvious, loaded little tricks, like the film's crude beginning (a body in flames, still moving, followed by satiric glimpses of Hubert H. Humphrey, John Foster Dulles, President Johnson), and there are pranks (the insertion of a close-up of a toothy photo of Joseph P. Kennedy, and one of Arthur Schlesinger Jr., looking like a lewd Dracula). This is schoolboy stuff: de Antonio's judgment is erratic. But in the main line of the narrative he plays a highly sophisticated game, using the pick of the archives and recent interviews, expertly (and often very sensitively) edited, and with unusually good sound-editing.

What de Antonio has done is to present the issues of the war and American policy and the American leaders as Hanoi might see them, and he has done it out of our own mouths. He has gone to what must have been enormous effort to put the film together so that the words of men like Dulles, Dean Rusk, Joe McCarthy, and Wayne Morse and of experts and journalists like Roger Hilsman, Paul Mus, Harrison Salisbury, Jean Lacouture, and David Halberstam tell the story. They provide his polemic, without any additional narration. This makes it more credible—and more of a feat. De Antonio calls the film "political theater," and the counterpoint of words and actions involves so many heavy ironies it becomes too much of a feat. He's almost too clever, and his cleverness debases the subject; the method is a little obscene. But one tends to accept the line of argu-

ment, not just because it's a coherent historical view but because emotionally it feeds our current self-hatred.

The Americans make it so easy for de Antonio to build his case. When you listen to Mark Clark and Curtis LeMay, the war really sounds like a racist war. They're war boosters out of the political cartoons of an earlier era; their dialogue would make us laugh at how old-fashioned the satire was if we read it in a Sinclair Lewis novel. When one hears LeMay's vindictive tone as he talks about how every work of man in North Vietnam should be destroyed if that is what it takes to win, and when one hears Mark Clark say of the Vietnamese, "They're willing to die readily, like all Orientals are," it's hard to believe that the war they're engaged in is the same war that's still going on.

I saw this film on the afternoon of Monday, November 3rd, and after sitting there and thinking how far away much of it seemed—Eisenhower with President Diem, the dragon lady Mme Nhu, Dulles and the domino theory, the American leaders explaining how we were going to help the Vietnamese help themselves—I came home to hear President Nixon's speech, which seemed to belong to the same past as the speeches in the movie, though the new rhetoric is smoother and more refined. The continuity of the war that evoked the earlier crude justifications with the war that's still going on, even though hardly anybody believes in the justifications anymore, makes one susceptible to de Antonio's argument. In the context of the movie, even the casual stupidities of American soldiers sound meaningfully racist. When some American soldiers relaxing on a beach say that they miss girls, they're asked what's the matter with the Vietnamese girls, and a silly, grinning boy replies, "They're gooks. You know, slant-eyes. They're no good," and we're revved up to think, "The pig! And our leaders are trying to tell us he's there to keep the Vietnamese free!" In another context, we might simply think that this silly, lonely soldier was trying to find acceptable male slang for not being interested in girls he can't talk to. It might even mean that he wanted *more* than sex.

In this context, America is represented by clips of our leaders at their most repellent, of an American soldier who stands by smiling as a helpless, bound prisoner is kicked in the groin, of Mark Clark and Curtis LeMay, and of young George S. Patton III saying of his buddies, "They're a bloody good bunch of killers" (also a line that would sound very different in the context of, say, a Second World War movie). De Antonio finds a soldier who likes defoliation work, because it seems a step toward ending the war; Morley Safer, it may be remembered, interviewed a GI who said that he didn't like "riding the people's gardens down." No doubt there are both kinds, and certainly they're both destructive, whether they like the work or

not. But by selecting Americans who do like it, by selecting Curtis LeMay and the others, de Antonio obviously means to suggest a basic rottenness in Americans, and in America that is antilife. After one watches the movie for a while, the Americans in it begin to look monstrously callow, like clumsy, oversized puppets.

De Antonio has not merely made a protest film documenting the “downward spiral” (as the North Vietnamese Pham Van Dong described it) of American policy, though that is the film’s most valuable aspect. He has attempted to foreshadow the fall of the West—and not just in Vietnam—by presenting the Vietnamese as a people solidly behind Ho Chi Minh, who represents their goals and ideals, and as a people who have been ennobled by war and who must win. In his own way, de Antonio seems to support Mark Clark’s view of Orientals; the movie suggests that the Vietnamese are willing to die because they are united in a common purpose, and that if they die, their dying still somehow stands for life, while we are dying though we live. The tone of the latter part of the film is almost mystical; the ability of the tiny country to go on fighting against a great power is not presented in practical terms of how much more difficult it is for a super-nation to fight in a divided, decentralized country than to incapacitate a modern, powerful, centralized state but, rather, in terms of our inability to defeat the mystical spirit, the will (and perhaps the destiny?) of Ho Chi Minh’s people. It is, in other words, as patriotic and jingoistic and, in its way, as pro-war as American wartime movies used to be about *our* mission and destiny and in this reversal it is the Americans who have become dehumanized.

ALAN ASNEN

De Antonio in Hell (1968)

As a longtime denizen of the East Village, the dissident filmmaker was an apt subject for the Village's alternative press, including the Village Voice, the Free Press, the East Village Eye, and, in this interview, the East Village Other. This excerpt focuses on the release of In the Year of the Pig, though it was published on the fifth anniversary of the Kennedy assassination.

You're releasing a movie, In the Year of the Pig, which is a historical documentary about the trouble in Vietnam. Since this issue has been churned over for years now, what is your feeling about the time delay?

It would be very difficult to make a film about the war in Vietnam ten years ago, or two years ago, because the war is not simply about American soldiers and Vietnamese soldiers in combat. It's about something that goes all the way back, as my film tries to show. The roots are in the Cold War, and when did the Cold War begin? The roots are in French colonial policy; then our attempt was to buttress the French in Vietnam in return for their joining NATO in Europe.

I don't say all this in film, obviously, but it's implied. For this reason the film also deals with John Foster Dulles and the Eisenhower administration in 1954. There are things I learned in making the film that are simply not "filmic" and were impossible to put in the film. Now, I don't think anybody knows what I'm about to tell you. In making the film I interviewed a Marine Corps colonel who was also a CIA man. He told me that there were fourteen American officers with the French at Dien Bien Phu as advisers in 1954. This was before there were any Americans there, in any capacity. There were fourteen American officers, field rank and above, who were with the French forces during the siege upon Dien Bien Phu. This is why I have Secretary of Defense [Charles] Wilson in the film, talking about giving the French help in 1954. I mean, all of this is part of a picture whose sense

is evoked only by telling a substantial piece of it in time. And, if the war should end next month, which I myself consider quite unlikely, the picture would still be valid because it would still reflect that aspect of American political life in practice, there would still be something to learn about it, and it still is a kind of theater. To me the picture is a kind of black comedy and it has no audience yet because I haven't shown it anywhere. Well, actually the only audience was at Dartmouth College, where the students laughed in all of what I would consider the right places. But if the work has any validity, it has a validity outside of the moment, whether the bombing pause goes on, or whether the war goes on. I mean, these are simply extensions of a great many years of history and a great many sorts of commitments that this country has made and that other countries have made. The film assumes that most of those commitments are immoral.

I noticed in the film that the interviews were mostly with what one would call "doves," and the film clips were of people you could consider hawks. Was there any trouble getting interviews with the so-called hawks?

Well, hawks don't speak to people like me, so we've got them on film. One of the things I enjoyed most about making the films was the long contretemps I had with the United States Department of Defense. Senator Jacob Javits wrote to them for me asking them to cooperate, and I got back letters which I have here, containing such gobbledygook—two pages from a Commander Rohder asking me what it was that I was really doing and explaining that it wasn't the government's policy to give film away, when in fact the government gives and sells this film to many distributors. I can take a walk down this street and buy some of it. But the film I was looking for, of course, wasn't for sale and I don't suppose the average person gets to see it. This is part of my gripe against the government and the media. Who is it that the government takes this film for? I don't expect the government to help me in any work that I do. If they did, I suppose the work wouldn't be any good.

There's been a lot of talk rehashed again now that they're going to step up the Paris peace talks and the bombing has "ended." Many people think, optimistically that the war will be over soon, but a while ago you said that you don't believe it will even be over in a month. Why do you feel this way?

I believe that at this point peace is in the best interest of the people of Vietnam and the people of the United States. North Vietnam has taken a tremendous shellacking, yet they have beaten us on the ground. It's a very complicated confusing setup and logically it would seem highly desirable if the war would end. It would seem to serve the better interest of the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. But history does not work

logically and I suspect what will happen is that the present corrupt South Vietnamese government will be used as an excuse to get out of any meaningful negotiations and that the war will continue. I do not think that Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong and the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam can give away what it gave before in March of 1946 when they made their first peace with the French, or what it gave away in 1954 at the Geneva Conference and Treaty. In both cases, it was the so-called Communist Power that was willing to concede and be conciliatory, and in both cases they were betrayed. I don't think that Ho Chi Minh can afford to risk this kind of betrayal. But he's in a very rough spot, because, if we simply do what General LeMay is talking about, which is to bomb the dikes, Haiphong, and Hanoi, we have then stepped the level of the war up to a position where it may become intolerable for them. Harrison Salisbury told me that there would be as many as five million casualties if the dikes were bombed properly with really heavy bombs and at the right time of the year, in the spring, when there's a flood tide anyway, you would just inundate millions of acres, destroy the food-producing capacity as well as drown millions of people.

You say that the Saigon government will be used to halt the peace talks. Recently, with the United States' new policy on the Paris peace talks, wanting to admit the NLF, the Saigon government has been opposed to it and has said that they won't participate. Do you think that this is a sort of under-the-table maneuver on the part of the United States forcing the South Vietnamese to say this?

No, I don't think that conspiracy works that way. When there's no need for a conspiracy there simply isn't one. It's simply Thieu's neck and Ky's neck and the necks of the corrupt government of South Vietnam that are at stake here. They cannot in any way agree to a treaty or to a meaningful meeting with the NLF and with Hanoi, because the first condition of any such meet would be that they would be thrown out. So as long as we humor them or cater to them in any way, we ourselves have already built impediments to meaningful peace talks, namely, Thieu and Ky. The complicating factor in this, though, is that only a few weeks ago General Minh was brought back into the country. Minh is known as "Big Minh" and was one of the leaders of the coup d'état against Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, and was the man who probably would have won the election in 1967—the United States government-sponsored elections—if he'd been allowed into the country. But he'd been forced out of South Vietnam. Now, this is no democrat, it's just that he's simply a different article than Thieu or Ky. And the fact that he's been brought back now leads one to suspect that perhaps

we might be getting ready to dump Thieu and Ky and put in Minh. Minh might be acceptable at the moment for Ho. Thieu and Ky are absolutely not acceptable, because they really are traitors to their country. When Ho Chi Minh was leading the Viet Minh in their struggle for independence from the French, Ky was in the French army bombing the Algerians with the French air force. General Ky is a traitor to the whole concept of the Afro-Asian revolution, and Ho will never accept Ky or Thieu as spokesmen for any part of Vietnam. Don't forget that it was President Eisenhower himself in 1956 who said that if the elections had been held as they were supposed to according to the Geneva Conference, Ho would have carried 80 percent of the vote in *South* Vietnam. I asked Than Van Dinh, the former South Vietnamese ambassador to Washington, what he thought Ho Chi Minh's percentage would be today in South Vietnam and he said 99 percent.

Do you think that it's possible that maybe one of these days the United States will come to the realization that they are never going to win over the people of South Vietnam?

Again, this is part of a bigger picture. The real hawks in our military aren't all that worried about Vietnam. They are convinced that they can beat Vietnam any time they want to step up the game. But in their curious, distorted, mysterious, mistaken, and imbecilic minds, they have equated the NLF in Vietnam with China, and China is the enemy. This is why in the film, as well as in their writings, the people like LeMay and General Clark are always talking about China. Now, China has shown remarkable restraint and has never entered into this war. Nor has Ho ever asked the Chinese to commit themselves. But what we are talking about here is more than just the war in Vietnam. What we are talking about is the position of the United States in all of Southeast Asia. We're talking about our stake in world empire, we're talking about the really big game of which Vietnam is a major part, but still just a part. And it depends on who you talk to. General LeMay is talking now and has been talking for five years about preventive war. In four or five years the Chinese are going to have the ability to deliver thermonuclear weapons, and this is a different game. This is why they want a war. I'm sure this is why people in the Pentagon would like to incite China to cross the border into Vietnam, so that we could then bomb them and their nuclear installations. This would leave only the Soviet Union and the United States to do whatever they want to do.

Sidetracking a little, it's ironic that while the Westerner thinks of the Oriental as always trying to save face, the whole United States position in Vietnam has been one of saving face. Can you see anything in this?

Well, part of the operation is called Save Faces, but the other part is Keep Power. In fact, the nature of our commitment is such that face-saving may not even seem remotely accurate. And in the true sense of "Face-Saving," the most face-saving thing we could do would be just get the hell out. This would show that at some point we learned something about what the nature of the war is. But killing people to save face is first of all stupid, and second of all, we are really involved in an exercise of our power and not just in face-saving.

The movie was made after you formed the Monday Film Corporation and the corporation made a formal statement which I'll quote: "Those who originally formed the partnership, the Monday Film Production Company, share the following convictions: that the United States intervention in Vietnam is immoral, unjust, impractical and debasing. History and the facts speak out against it." Will this be a continual policy in all your movies or was this corporation formed solely for the production of Pig?

It's fairly difficult to make radical films, so each time you make one you start a separate corporation, you have a new set of investors, and backers. The lines you just read were said to every one of the investors in this film. The investors are interesting people. They include three Rockefellers, Paul Newman, Robert Ryan, Steve Allen, Leonard Bernstein, Mitch Miller, a good many people who I think don't ordinarily invest in films. My next project will probably be a fiction film. Everything I do has something to do with the life of the country in which I live. I suspect that even though it's fiction, it will be political.

In conclusion, throughout your three movies, as you mention, you always deal with the state the country is in at the moment. Have you ever considered having a more international theme, dealing more with mankind in general?

I prefer to work with what I know best. I've also done films in addition to the three we've talked about and they too are similar to these. When you say international, I believe that most of my work will deal with America and Americans because this is the world that interests me the most, and of which I'm a part. I think the Vietnam film and *Point of Order* both have something to say about mankind. Words like *mankind* are sometimes fairly difficult to use, they're so big. I think if you tell it right, where it is, where you are, you say something about the nature of how it is everywhere. In my fiction film, although it won't be a message fiction film, I can't see how it won't carry a message. To me, all art is political, finally. I think this is why American painting is coming to an end, because American painting is in itself a political expression simply because it avoids everything this world

has to do with, its ultimate statements are statements which are simply decoration. And these are statements, I might add, that are very, very congenial to U.S. government and big business, both of which endow and support painting. When film, like mine, is endowed and supported by big business and government, then we will know that the films are no good. The first time I get a government grant, I'll know that I've copped out. The state of our world right now is such that the voices we need are voices that question, voices that express doubt about what it is we're doing; because what we are doing is ugly, without life, and without direction. We are like some kind of giant engulfing animal that seems to be gobbling and gobbling everything in the world. *The Year of the Pig* does not refer to the police in Chicago. It was a title I had before Chicago happened. It is a metaphor which only in part describes what the French did in Vietnam or what we did there. It has to do with the kind of thing which underlies our lives now, and which I find revolting. Like most people who have a strong feeling about this country, which I do—a strong positive feeling—I'm a pessimist. I think we need a revolutionary change, but we won't get it.

LIL PICARD

Inter/view with Emile de Antonio (1969)

The first of three conversations with de Antonio published by Andy Warhol's Interview magazine, this idiosyncratic profile was done by a French art critic.

I'm writing about a movie I saw November 13th, one day before Moratorium Day. I saw a documentary, *In the Year of the Pig*, directed and produced by Emile de Antonio. Up on 88th Street and Broadway in the New York theater I sat in the afternoon between about fifty other people watching and listening to the images and voices of modern warfare.

Since I am miraculously still living after having had my experiences with fascism in Europe before WWII, I make it today my task to help to end violence and war and to bring about a change. The film of Mr. De is doing that too and so I asked him for an interview, which he agreed to give me.

We had planned it for a special day. But it happened that the film got repressed in Philadelphia and Emile de Antonio had to cancel the interview for that day to go to Philadelphia to talk on TV. We finally met November 19th at [the] Movielaab [building], 619 West 64th Street, Room 64, where Mr. De has his headquarters.

I had never been in a movie lab and every new experience in "journalistic discovery" is for me an exciting adventure. I went to Hitler's speech before the German industry in the Berlin Funkhalle in 1933 and now I am still kicking to fight for seeing and viewing reality and truth at the source whenever life gives me a chance. I was very excited to talk to a man who—what a rare gift in our time of "fin de sixties"—is filming truth and reality. I had been kind of apprehensive to meet Mr. De, the famous moviemaker, and as security measure had taken along the magazine *New Yorker*, in which his movie had been reviewed.

Mr. De charmed me the moment he shook my hand.

Mr. De: "Let's go down to the coffee shop, where we can talk and have a cup of coffee."

He took my tape recorder and as a gallant gentleman of the old school carried it for me. He looks European to my European eyes. Tall, on the heavy side, easygoing and his eyes are the eyes of the artist, the painter-reporter. The movie *In the Year of the Pig* is in my opinion the work of a literary, schooled, extremely knowledgeable artistic painter-reporter-documentary filmmaker.

Here we get all the noises of the coffee shop.

The noise is very good. That's reality and my voice carries very well and you will surely understand it. I run this as a test. Shall I speak?

Yes.

November 15, 1969, the *New Yorker*, price 50 cents, a dreary middle-class magazine, which gave a not uninteresting review of my film with some fairly mad points in it. I think that's enough to run a test.

You told me you had to go to Philadelphia, where your film had been suppressed?

In Philadelphia the film had had the unusual experience of opening a new cinema there and the police came and said the fire exit is no good. Close down the cinema, and then one of the police said, it's because of one of those Vietnamese pictures you are playing; then the police gave 'em a license and then they closed it down again, with an audience there and they forced them to return the money and the patrons in the theater left and now they hold the theater closed for two more weeks.

And your film will not be shown now?

No, my film plays now in another theater. I was on television on Monday and we discussed this all in great detail.

What did you say on TV?

If you make radical films, you don't expect the same treatment as people who make films that they play in Radio City Music Hall. I mean, I expect my films to be censored. I don't expect conventional films to be censored, but I expect my films to be. My films are against the government.

Your film on McCarthy, Point of Order. Did that film also have difficulties with the police?

No. The only difficulty with the McCarthy film was in the making of it. CBS, because it had a monopoly position, charged me \$50,000 for this material and finally, they had and still have 50 percent interest in the film. 50 percent what happens—they get. So it's not censorship, but it's a kind

of censorship. They could have prevented me from having the material, but once they decided to give me the material they charged an exorbitant extortionate rate. And these are the same people who complain that Vice President Agnew attacks them.

Mr. De, what interests me, you said you are glad I do this interview for Andy Warhol's inter/View film magazine because you know Andy a long time. Do you think A. W. has a hidden political interest?

No, I think Andy's politics are on the surface. I mean Andy pretends he has no politics.

But I think he has.

Andy denies it. But he does have politics. I think it's very hard to be a son of Czech immigrants, when your father was a manual worker, living in Pittsburgh, not to develop some political ideas. But because in Andy's case they're other ideas that enter into the context, I think working in fashion as long as he did tended to diminish his political ideas. You know, I was a friend of Andy when he first began to paint. Andy used to show me his paintings and ask me what do you think of this, what do you think of that?

Was that in 1957?

No, 1960. I think I gave him his first critique of the "Coke Bottle." I lived near to him and one day he asked me to come to his house. I went to his house all the time and he asked me what I think of two paintings of Coke bottles. One was a pure painting of a Coke bottle and the other one was a painting of a Coke bottle with many harsh slash marks that looked like an abstract expressionist drawing and he asked me what do you think of it? I said, one is interesting and one is terrible. The simple Coke bottle, like pop art, is interesting and the one with the marks is boring, because it's a combination of de Kooning and many other people.

When I listen to you now—how much you care about art! As you know, I write on art also, for European publications, so it's very interesting to listen to your ideas on art.

Last night I had dinner with Rauschenberg, Castelli, and Frank Stella, who is a very old friend of mine. I own eight or nine of his works. I know all these artists from way back, before they had galleries.

Does your friendship with all these artists influence you in your filmmaking?

No, not at all.

So why do you have painter friends? Is it a human need or is it interest in art?

At one time my interest was commercial. I made deals. Before I became involved in filmmaking I was a kind of agent without representing anybody.

I made deals with these people and we were also friends. We shared somewhat similar views of the world—I wasn't always as political as I am now. But I became political and each year as the U.S. becomes worse, I become more radicalized. And now, I have this film *In the Year of the Pig* playing around the country.

Was that the title from the beginning?

The title has nothing to do with Chicago and the police there. I don't choose the title first. First I make the film. Then the title emerges. Because *In the Year of the Pig*—this title relates it to the Confucian philosophy, Vietnam like China is a Confucian country and the Year of the Pig is like the Year of the Frog, the Year of the Rat, that makes it clear, that is, Vietnam and Pig represents for me also the idea of French colonialism and the American war. We are the Pigs, the French were the Pigs.

You are an American?

Certainly, I was born here and served in the United States Army. I'm a political person.

Is your film objective or did you approach the subject with a preconceived idea?

I don't believe that any filmmaker is objective. I think that objectivity is impossible unless you do abstract work. If you deal with the human image in your work, you cannot be objective. Whenever you point a camera, you make a statement. Whenever you cut a piece of film, you make a statement. I'm not interested in objectivity, I am a man who believes. I'm a man of political belief. I was absolutely convinced before I made the film that the U.S. was wrong. That the government of South Vietnam was a government of puppets created by us. I was asked this question (of objectivity) many times and I'm tired of it. It sounds flippant, but it's nonetheless correct: only God is objective and he doesn't make films. I'm not interested in God. I'm interested in films and I'm not objective and I hope I even never think of being objective. The most that a documentary filmmaker can hope for is that he is honest. For example, when my film *In the Year of the Pig* was shown in Harvard before the meeting of the biggest American society of Asian scholars, who all are concerned with the history of Vietnam, these scholars could not detect in my film a lie, they could not find out that I was a crook in my work, nobody could see anything untruthful, even those who defend the U.S. position could not say you doctored the evidence. Because I invented a kind of film which is like political theater like plays, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, for example; those plays which are all taken from *Point of Order*, because as

you know, today the film comes first, the theater follows. The theater is boring, hopeless, nothing happens there. If you want the real difference, the way it happens, you look at my film *Point of Order* and then you look at the play.

Does the film Point of Order still play in the U.S.?

It plays in New York several times a year in the movie theaters and also all around the country. I'm very lucky as a documentary filmmaker. I may be the only one whose pictures play in theaters. *Point of Order* played in four hundred theaters the year it was out, and I'm not including colleges and television.

Do you think that we have today a similar situation as at the time of McCarthy?

Worse. Much worse. I don't think that there is anybody in American life today who is as dangerous as McCarthy was in 1954, but I think the American government today is so much more dangerous than the American government in 1954. I think we are living in a kind of police state now. It's a different kind of police state than the Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, but it's a police state. We have a Federal Police now that is, you know, like the Geheime Staatspolizei was, and the FBI is exactly that, only it's much more clever, it's not as brutal, it has electronic eavesdropping, it has the advantage of all the recent advances of science. We now have two laws for the U.S., one law for the police and one law for people. And that is part of a police state. You see all these people out there and their cars with the slogans—"Support Your Local Police"—and those flags and stickers—"Honor America"—on buses, police cars, trucks—this is the beginning of fascism. It's an American form. It will not look like Mussolini nor like Hitler. But I mean Nixon and Agnew are not mistakes, they represent what the American right wing believes.

Did you ever think to do a film about the Negroes?

Well, to begin with I use the word the Blacks.

I do too. So did you think of making a film about the Blacks?

I really think a Black must do such a film.

Would you work together with a Black on such a film?

Certainly. In fact I spent a day recently with a Black man who came from Africa and he wanted me to come to Africa to work on a film. But I feel I'm incompetent to do that. I know nothing about Africa. That's one reason. And another is that I have work I'm committed to do that takes me through April.

Have your films been shown in Germany?

Oh, yes. *Rush to Judgment*, *Point of Order*, and *In the Year of the Pig* were all shown in the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR) and *In the Year of the Pig* won the main prize in Leipzig in 1968. In West Germany *In the Year of the Pig* was shown and it will be shown on West German television.

When?

I don't know, we are just signing the contract. In 1967, *Rush to Judgment* was shown in the Mannheim festival. I refused that *Point of Order* be shown on West German television because they wanted to dub it. It seemed absolute insanity to dub the voices of McCarthy and Roy Cohn, it's so intrinsically American. It showed lack in sensitivity on their part. They offered a lot of money, but I refused.

When you did your Vietnam movie you never went to Vietnam. Why?

It's unnecessary. Because not only art, but also facts are in the mind. Just think of all the millions of reporters who go to Vietnam who are idiots, who see nothing. Immanuel Kant lived in Königsberg and he wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason* and he never left his small town. The housewives could set their clocks after his walks, because every morning he took a walk from his house to the church and back, and in his mind was, you know . . . and now, I am a very thorough worker. When I did the *Year of the Pig* I read everything I could find in French and in English before I even did anything. I spent over three months reading ten hours a day. I read every book that exists in English and French on Vietnam. I have 250 books at home in my library on the subject of Vietnam. I read these books how people dig a ditch with the same unending drive and as I read I took notes, I created a chronology, I took quotations, I wrote down things to look for, things that were said by President Johnson, things said by John Foster Dulles, and all the others who appear in the film, and I began a very methodical research in all the film libraries everywhere. It's the biggest collection of films which I got together that exists anywhere. It includes all the works of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, all the works of the National Liberation Front, and it also includes the work of ABC (American Broadcasting Company) and the great old material of Paramount News, Fox, UPI. I have literally hundreds of thousands of feet of 16mm films, which I'm now donating—giving them to somebody. It takes me a long time to make my movies.

How long did it take you to make the film In the Year of the Pig?

Fifteen months. Fifteen months without stopping, seven days a week.

When I saw the film, I scribbled down all along during the screening in the dark some notations, for instance, the one with which the film begins. What is it?

Yes, you mean: "AS SOON AS I HEARD OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE MY HEART WAS ENLISTED IN ITS CAUSE"—that's by Marquis de Lafayette, who fought in the American Revolution. To me the war in Vietnam is a revolution for freedom on the part of Ho Chi Minh, there is a statue on Union Square, right where Andy's factory is, and on that statue are those words which I filmed.

The next note I made when seeing the film is about the noise. What kind of noise do you use in the film?

It's helicopter noise. The music of America today is the helicopter in Vietnam. That's "music concrete." You know that Bob Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and I produced the biggest concert of John Cage's music [in] 1958 at Town Hall. The music, the noise you hear in the film is really a helicopter concerto, it's written by a young man, who studied with John Cage, his name is: Steve Addis. Columbia Records produces his records.

Then I have a note about the coffeehouse with white uniformed officers, sitting at small sidewalk coffee tables and being deposited by rickshaw drivers there.

This coffeehouse is mentioned in many European countries as the essence of colonialism. They are sitting there, brought to the coffeehouse with the bodies of the Vietnamese in rickshaws and by the rickshaw driver, and the captain in the café snaps his fingers and sends the boys away. This is what it's all about. The white man sits and drinks his apéritif and the other man pulls him and waits on him. That's why we have the revolution to bring to the world.

I have made a note of a very important sequence of the film that struck me as especially well seen and photographed, village life in Vietnam. The peaceful landscape and in strong contrast to it the war machine with helicopter noise, the hardware, and then again the picture of Professor Mus talking in a quiet room surrounded by works of art.

That's Professor Mus, professor of Buddhism, he died this summer. He represented General de Gaulle. He spoke Vietnamese, he was born in Vietnam, came from the ruling classes of France who were in Vietnam in 1945. He had parachuted into Vietnam and negotiated with Ho Chi Minh on behalf of General de Gaulle. He is the man who said: "When the history of the twentieth century is written, Ho Chi Minh will be known as its greatest patriot." I use conservative people. Paul Mus is a conservative French scholar. It's too easy to use a communist or somebody who shares my own point

of view. My method is always to find somebody like that, because it's more interesting that Paul Mus says it than the leader of the SDS, because the leader of the SDS is totally predictable, nobody is interested in him, everybody knows exactly what he is going to say. Paul Mus was professor of Buddhism at Yale and the Collège de France.

I find here a quote, starting with the words, a thumb-square of rice . . .

Paul Mus was saying that in 1945, September 2, when Ho Chi Minh began the Republic of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh said to the people: what they must do is work, because "a thumb-square of planting rice is more valuable than a thumb-square of gold," and in that he meant that the people have to work and plant rice. It showed that Ho Chi Minh thought like a peasant. First he was a socialist and second a communist.

Ho Chi Minh is called in your film the George Washington of Vietnam.

That was said by a conservative Republican senator, Thruston B. Morton from Kentucky. I can give you a lot more material on all these details. The French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* brought out recently also an interview on me.

What does the passage in the film mean when Ho Chi Minh uses the comparison of the circle and the square in a talk with Professor Mus?

Oh, that is very beautiful and very rare. Nobody has seen this on film before. Not in Europe nor anywhere, except on my film. It's from a film from Hanoi and it shows Ho Chi Minh explaining the parable the circle and the square. In Confucian philosophy the circle means the imaginary, the dream, and the square represents the real, the tangible, the earth. What Ho Chi Minh wanted to say to Paul Mus when he was doing the circle with his hand in the air was: tell me about this treaty you were talking about, is it real or is it just a dream?

I have here as a reminding note the word hatred. To which passage in the film does that belong?

In 1945 Ho Chi Minh is saying: "I have no army, I have no director of public affairs, I have no finance minister, I have only my hatred," and he means his hatred for the French as his colonial oppressors.

Am I right with my observation that you had a very definite idea from the point of art making opposites? Nature in contrast to the hardware war machine?

That's very well observed.

The landscape looked to me like the one on old Chinese paintings.

That's meant to be so. That's exactly what I wanted it to be.

The pictures you showed look to me like those beautiful landscapes in fog with the grey skies with reeds, grass, trees, clouds, boats.

I hope you will write that. You are the first person who saw that, that's very good. I mean, I spent weeks looking for that material.

The sailboat and the piece of nature.

Like pre-Sung paintings.

The human being is very, very small and nature is overwhelmingly grandiose.

I remember in my film how big the mountains are and the people so very small.

Changing then to the hardware, the aircraft, the guns, it came on like a phalanx, a monster, with the terrific noise of the helicopters and the bullets.

That's it.

Yes, this absolutely terrifying frame, all black, just streaks and streaks of bullets and the sizzling agonizing whirling noise . . .

The imposition of an artificial environment.

And here I have another note of some part of the film that impressed me.

"An island in a red sea" . . .

That's Joseph McCarthy who said in 1954: "And unless we win the war in Indochina we will be an island in a red sea of communism." It was insane in 1954 and it's insane in 1969.

May I to the end of this talk give you one more question, which I jotted down during the screening of the film in the dark auditorium of the New York theater: a new pathological power, police state 1956-1960, economical miracle . . .

Yes, that's a joke, that's an idiot who is still in the Congress, he is the majority leader of the Republican Party in the Congress, Jerry Ford, who said, Diem was an economical mirror. As you raise this question, let me say one thing: My essential method and technique is irony—it is the placing of one image against another, never with any explanation. This is my contribution to documentary film, in *Point of Order* and in this film. *Point of Order* was the first documentary made that had no narration, no explanation. The work explains itself, just like a theatrical work, like a dramatic work, there is no explanation and the perception must be with the eye and the mind and the ear. It's not told to you. This is what you are seeing, *you see it*. And everything in that film is very carefully plotted and there is always an irony between the truth and the lie. There is always irony. The old Soviet filmmakers used to say, "Between two frames is always the third frame which is not there, but people will perceive it."

JONAS MEKAS

Movie Journal (1969)

The leading advocate of New York independent cinema, Jonas Mekas had known de Antonio since their days organizing the New American Cinema Group in 1959. Mekas's own journal, Film Culture, had published the manifesto that had declared de Antonio one of the Group's key instigators. But it was through his weekly "Movie Journal" column in the Village Voice that Mekas chronicled his experiences at underground screenings. After seeing In the Year of the Pig, Mekas visited de Antonio in his Movielaab editing room, where he was already at work on America Is Hard to See.

This week I saw two films on Vietnam. One was Newsreel's *Hanoi Film* [by] Norman Fruchter and Robert Kramer. The film concentrates on the people of North Vietnam, on their resistant spirit. We see them working and fighting. It is an unpretentious, direct film, like a letter from Vietnam. A letter which should be read by everybody.

The second film is Emile de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig*, which opened at the New Yorker. It's a much bigger film. It concentrates on the political folly, on the speeches of the politicians and the generals. In collage form it traces the American involvement in the war. As such it is an important and unique document.

I visited de Antonio in his editing room where he is putting together a film on [Eugene] McCarthy's presidential campaign.

You have become a specialist and authority on a kind of political documentary where the filmmaker is involved with huge amounts of material which he then reduces to presentable length. In all such films usually there is this question of credibility. You have all these bits of film, this 100-minute collage, but every bit is out of the original context. You have edited them according to your own political stand.

I considered this problem, obviously, very seriously. It's really a philosophical problem first: is objectivity possible in the kind of political film that I do? And my answer is that objectivity is impossible. Because I begin with a set of passions and feelings. I don't think you can be objective about the war in Vietnam.

Obviously. It's also obvious that the saying "the camera eye doesn't lie" is just a saying. The camera eye will lie as much as the filmmaker behind the camera will lie. My question was more directed to the ways of presenting already existing footage.

I aim for a kind of collage where, by the way you make it, you achieve an element of reality which is more real than the real material you started with.

Your materials always seemed to me to be perfect materials for my own dream document film. I would use the same footage you did, only I would make neither collage nor montage with it. I would simply string pieces together, very scientifically, with an introductory frame, the way D. W. Griffith used to do, telling the name of the speaker, place, and date. Then we would have a collection of irrefutable bits of historical evidence, almost like notes that could go with textbooks. As it is now, the film can always be dismissed as propaganda.

Yes. But I am more interested to work the way I am working. Vietnam exists in history. All other films on Vietnam leave that out. They may have more passion, more emotion. But I am interested in the political theories, in the mass of facts. I am interested in establishing a line of thought. You can't arrive at the sort of linear, factual explanation in a film that you can in a book. Not even a single book contains it in any intelligible way. But I think that because of certain peaks within the film that point at what happened, you have revelations. The film reveals what really happened.

I liked the materials. Some footage is funny gallows humor. The generals, for instance. I have never seen such a bunch of morons. You see them, in the film, they are there for real, and you know they are there in charge of this war, and you see their faces, you listen to them, and my God they are morons. They are murderers and morons.

Most of the people I interviewed have seen the film and they agree that they have been used in a straight way. The film has been screened for Asian scholars. It played at Harvard and similar places, and nobody objected to its history aspect.

How much footage did you have to begin with?

You can only work by compression with collage technique. In all cases I had so much negative material that I was almost at the point of going insane.

Usually, I make two selections. I saw some material in Prague, some in East Germany, the ABC footage here in New York. I saw everything the National Liberation Front made in film and everything that Hanoi had on film, etc. etc. First, I look at everything they have and while I do that I make the first selection. From the thousands of hours of film I ended up with 100 hours. Then I started shooting interviews and getting other materials. The form starts evolving as I go.

Most of the films on Vietnam have little meaning for me, because I am not interested in refugees and staged battles. We had too much of it, so that we almost became insensitized to it. It doesn't do anything to us.

What I was interested in was the intellectual line of what happened. It tells us more about what happened, I think. I am not interested in demonstrations or anything of that aspect. I am interested in the establishment side, because that's the important side, frankly. That's the side we hope *leads* to demonstrations.

What's the McCarthy film you are working on?

It's not so much a McCarthy film as a study of why the campaign failed. Is it possible to work within the system? The assumption of the film is that Eugene McCarthy was the last best hope of working within the system in a national election.

When you said you were coming here I remembered one of the first times we met—because I don't see you anymore very much. But we were together when the New American Cinema Group was founded ten years ago. We all went in different directions, which is fine. But it was a very curious beginning. I think it was a very important moment in film because nobody was really confronting Hollywood or the big phony European companies, and most of us had never even made a film yet. Shirley [Clarke] was preparing *The Connection* and you were shooting *Guns of the Trees*. It was in reaction to your film that I started *Point of Order*.

But some very good works came out of the period, and it's almost time for some theater to come up with a retrospective of the entire period of the New American Cinema, ten or twelve works. The earlier ones, because I think—and you know I am interested in history—I think it's terribly important.

To look back, to survey, to sum up, and then make another step forward— Because when we started there was very little happening and there was very little hope at the time.

You said we all moved in different directions. But on the other hand, we are all connected. We are all trying to deal with certain realities.

I think the connections would become clearer with such a retrospective. Because everything that has been done since then was done outside the existing system, I mean, politically, financially, artistically, every aspect. And there was no underground yet. But now you know that the underground no longer can be contained in that concept. Because some of the underground people are playing now in regular theaters or at universities.

So we are at some point of another beginning now.

EMILE DE ANTONIO
BILL NICHOLS

*"De Antonio: Year of the Pig Marxist
Film" and "Nichols Replies" (1978)*

In April 1978, the film journal Jump Cut ran an article by cinema scholar Bill Nichols, who noted that the radical collective Newsreel distributed its work in ways that bypassed the theatrical and university exhibition circuits that booked de Antonio documentaries. Bristling at the thought of being perceived as a "liberal," the director seized the opportunity to document his left-wing bona fides.

Nichols's sympathetic reply would be followed by one of the most appreciative readings of de Antonio's modernist aesthetics. In "The Voice of Documentary" (Film Quarterly, Spring 1983), Nichols hailed de Antonio's montage technique as an exemplary application of Marxist historical principles. De Antonio sent the article to his Point of Order video distributor, Sander Weiner, with the note: "This is a very good piece by the best person writing on film documentary in English, Prof. Bill Nichols."

►
By de Antonio

I want to reply to two lines in Bill Nichols's "New from California Newsreel."

These films have their greatest value in ongoing political struggles to organize and mobilize the working class and Third World peoples. It is important to bear this in mind as a fundamental quality for it places them in a different context than left-liberal films that circulate predominantly in a middle-class, educational context (colleges, high schools, public libraries), such as *In the Year of the Pig* (Emile de Antonio, 1968).

In the Year of the Pig was/is an organizing weapon, a collage/history of the people's struggle in Vietnam. That collage was made with the help of the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam], the NLF [National Liberation

Front], French Marxists, film and television friends of the Czech Democratic Republic (1967), the German Democratic Republic, U.S. deserters, antiwar veterans, and the antiwar movement itself. It was made when the Movement was young, large, high on struggle and emotion, and without knowledge of what had happened in Vietnam, when it happened and why. No U.S. protests were shown in the film because it was the other addressing itself to us, frequently in our words and images. It was also the way we saw them from the mid-1930s to the Tet Offensive. It was a Marxist, historical line, not free from error.

Its audience was varied, intense, in some places even wide. It played European television but never U.S. Not even now. It played the U.S. and Europe theatrically. Theaters were attacked. Screens were painted over with hammer and sickle (Los Angeles, among others); bomb threats to the theater in Houston; in Paris during a long, successful run, the cinema was systematically stink-bombed. It was used as a tool by the Moratorium; it was a benefit for the Chicago Seven at the opening of their trial; the Australian antiwar movement used it as its primary film weapon; it played GI coffeehouses; it played teach-ins. I still meet people who say, "Your film turned me to antiwar activity." And yes, it still plays colleges.

It was the first U.S. Marxist film to be nominated for an Academy Award. That didn't mean as much to me as the ring a DRV officer solemnly gave me in Leipzig where the film won a prize, a ring made from a plane shot down over the DRV.

If we forget history, we are only a convulsive twitch to today's media output. That output is false, bad, and works to blot out yesterday's reality. The struggle is always the same; the ultimate goal is always the same; but the currents, the cast, the emphases, the disguises change. I am not a left-liberal and neither is the film.

► **"Nichols Replies" (by Bill Nichols)**

The Los Angeles screen I saw was painted "PIG"; our own screen in Kingston, at the National Film Theatre branch here, was severely slashed (in 1977!). De Antonio is right. His film emerged from the heat of the New Left, helped mobilize many, and fully deserves the support it's received. *In the Year of the Pig* was also a little different from Newsreel's films. Newsreel was an ongoing collective making films for circulation primarily within the community-based New Left (antidraft groups, GI coffeehouses, war resistance groups, the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, prisoner support groups. Specific defense efforts like that around Los Siete in San Francisco, the

Chicago Seven, etc.). Until *The Women's Film* in 1971, Newsreel never even attempted theatrical release, seeing that as step toward co-optation within the commodity system of circulation that sucked the political life from leftist films. Films that entered that system were left-liberal to Newsreel. Much debate went into this position, some even arguing that no Newsreel film should ever go out without a Newsreel member to help lead discussion, most agreeing that discussion in some form should occur whenever a Newsreel film was shown. Again, failure to insist upon the necessity of discussion around films when they are shown and to make explicit provisions for it seemed a liberal lapse, trusting aesthetic power to do what only political organizing could actually achieve—an ongoing, self-sustaining struggle to change our political and economic system.

But that was then. Today Newsreel's films circulate in a manner not radically different from de Antonio's films. The label "left-liberal" does not adequately describe the difference now, nor does it do full justice to de Antonio's films in any case. Its use continues a political position that grew up in a climate of confrontation and polarization and sometimes failed to distinguish friends from the myriad enemies. The question of how a film is distributed—by whom, at what rates, to what groups, shown in what context, with what kind of discussion or supporting materials—remains a vital and perhaps somewhat neglected one. It is not a question that should be glossed over; hopefully, all leftists actively engaged in the use of film and its related media, including both Emile de Antonio and Newsreel, will continue to contribute to an understanding of how to make the best possible political use of the context in which films are shown.