

FILM REVIEWS

George Kaczender's Agency

In his books, *Subliminal Seduction* and *Media Sexploitation*, journalism professor and media watchdog Wilson Bryan Key has postulated the theory that the mass media, and especially advertising, uses subliminal messages — those which are received only at the subconscious level — in a manner which poses a serious social threat. Obviously, there is ample material in this concept for a solid thriller of a movie. *Agency*, unfortunately, is not that movie.

Like *Suzanne*, this Robert Lantos Stephen Roth production, directed by George Kaczender (*In Praise of Older Women*), is plagued by an inability to follow up a strong beginning. The theme of subliminal seduction is introduced in the very first shot of the film, in which a standard pan up the outside of an office building is intercut by momentary shots of a demonic figure. Then there is a cut to a frenetic, dimly lit disco number (the only time when Lewis Furey's sardonic music is properly used), in which the demonic also figures. The dance number turns out to be a deodorant commercial, that is, being watched by the head of the advertising agency of Quinn, Porter and Stripe. The final segment of this sequence shows the firm's enigmatic boss, Ted Quinn (Robert Mitchum), pronouncing the garish, incomprehensible ad, "perfect."

But after this display of derring-do, and a flashy animated title sequence, *Agency* begins to plod its predictable way. We meet Phillip Morgan (Lee Majors), and his doctor girlfriend Brenda Wilcox (Valerie Perrine), by way of an irrelevant scene of him jogging through the streets of a wintry New York that looks suspiciously like Montreal. Morgan is upset that Quinn, who has recently become a power in the advertising business in spite of his lack of experience in the field, has been replacing staff. He has also been instituting new campaigns, without consulting Morgan — who is, after all, Q.P. & S.'s creative department head.

Morgan's suspicions of Quinn grow, when his friend, Sam Goldstein, who has been pestering him with tales of sinister goings-on at the agency, is found dead in his refrigerator. Then, an incriminating tape of Goldstein's, which Morgan has left in girlfriend Brenda's safekeeping, is stolen from her at knifepoint by a pair of thugs. After the thugs make an attempt on Morgan's life, he uncovers Quinn's plan.



It's double trouble for Brenda (Valerie Perrine), as hitmen Jones (Gary Reineke, left) and Peters (Michael Kirby) threaten to kill her, if...

Quinn has subverted a local election in Arizona, by using subliminal messages under the deodorant ad, as a prelude to the rigging of the presidential contest.

This should be exciting stuff, but George Kaczender and Noel Hynd, who adapted Paul Gottlieb's novel, conspire to make it otherwise. The plot is let slip more than once, so that the director can linger on the kitschy details of the agency and its operation. Expository scenes, like the one in which Morgan explains subliminals to Brenda, using Key's classic images-in-the-ice cubes example, make the film drag, and seem longer than its 86 minutes.

Agency

d. George Kaczender **p.** Robert S. Lantos **exec.p.** Stephen J. Roth **assoc.p.** Robert Baylis **a.d.** Charles Braive, Daniel Hausman, Pedro Gandol **sc.** Noel Hynd, from the novel by Paul Gottlieb **cont.** France Boudreau, Linda Browne **d.o.p.** Miklos Lente **cam.op.** Al Smith **focus puller** Yves Drapeau **clapper/loader** Michel Girard **stills** Attila Dory, Emilio Lari **ed.** George Kaczender, Peter Wintonick **sd.op.** Richard Lightstone **boom** Jim Thompson **sd.ed.** Ken Heeley-Ray, Monika Dorfman **re-rec.** Joseph Grimaldi **mus.** Lewis Furey **p.design** Bill Brodie **asst.art.d.** Alicia Grunsky, Alfred Benson **animation** Ryan Larkin, Ida Eva Zielinska, Jeanne Sanderson (co-ord.) **choreog.** Jo Jo Smith **cost.** Olga Dmitrov, William Jobe (for Valerie Perrine) **make-up** Michel Dion, Chantal Ethier, Jim Kali (for Lee Majors) **gaf.** Claude Simard **best boy** Charles Hughes **elec.** Gerald Proulx **key grip** Jean Daoust **grips** Normand

Matters such as characterization go by the board very early; only Saul Rubinek — as the frenetic Goldstein — really tries to achieve anything beyond the barest caricature. Lee Majors seems to have been cast in the lead for his name — how fast time flies — for the part requires someone who can appear thoughtful and reflective, hardly Majors' strong suits as an actor. Valerie Perrine has demonstrated, in *The Magician of Lublin* and *Can't Stop The Music*, that she can rise above some pretty low material; but even she has no chance to make anything of her part. For all that she is required to do, Alexandra Stewart, who plays Quinn's

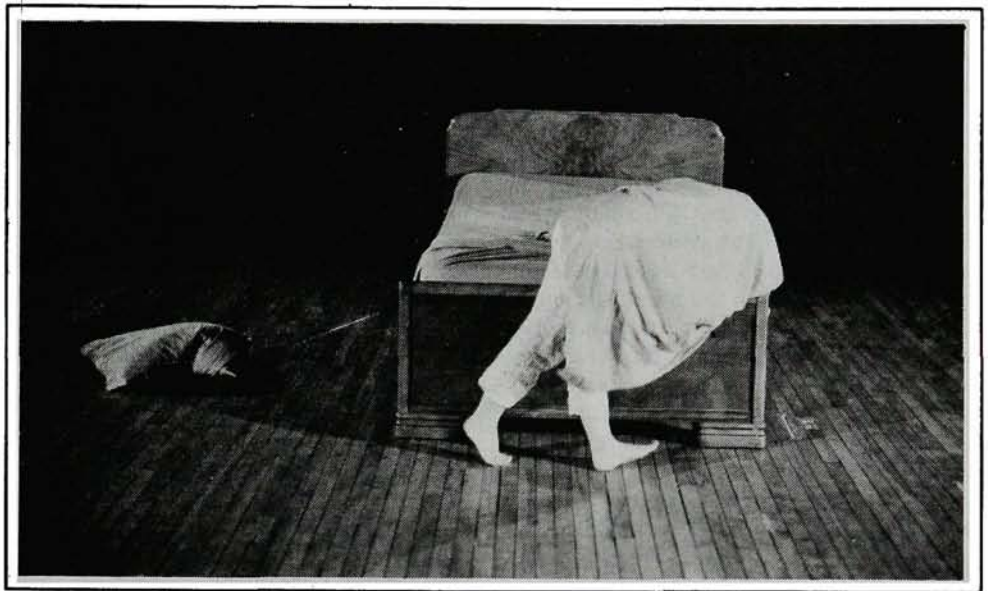
Simpson, Pierre Charpentier **hair** David Beckett, Constant Natale **props** David Phillips, Peter Bowker (asst.) **animal trainer** Michael Klingbell **stunt co-ord.** Eric Cord **p.superv.** Wendy Grean **unit p.man.** Danny Rossner **acc't.** Carole Legault **bookkeepers** Suzanne Benoit, Leona Abrams **pub.** David Novek, Lana Iny, Joy Berger **cast.** Canadian Casting Associates **l.p.** Robert Mitchum, Lee Majors, Valerie Perrine, Alexandra Stewart, Saul Rubinek, Colonel Pierre Sevigny, P.C., George Touliatos, Franz Russell, Hayward Morse, Gary Reineke, Michael Kirby, Anthony Parr, Jonathan Welsh, Hugh Webster, Donald Davis, Walter Massey, Marilyn Gardner, Eric Donkin, Jean-Louis Boutin, Elizabeth Muddy, David Thompson, George Zeeman, Lee Murray, Catherine Veneri, Margo Dionne, Martin Kevin, Malcolm Nelthorpe, Annette Terri, Roberta Boulduc, Shawna Sexsmith, Michael Klingbell, "Maria" **p.c.** Movie corp III-RSL Films (1979) **col.** Eastmancolor, 35mm **running time** 86 min. **dist.** Ambassador Films, Vivafilms (Quebec)

chief lieutenant, might as well have mailed in her performance. Perhaps she did.

Except for Michael Kingbell's cat Maria, and former Canadian cabinet minister Pierre Seigny, who plays Quinn's anonymous Air Force bigwig boss (neither have any lines), the only actor in **Agency** to emerge with any dignity is Robert Mitchum. His heavy-lidded casual style has enabled him to survive his fair share of turkeys — like the 1978 version of **The Big Sleep**. Here, that style works in his favour amidst the sound and the fury signifying nothing. Mitchum is enough of a professional to hide the contempt he probably felt for the project. Still, nothing he can do explains why such a sharp operator as Quinn would hire as his hitmen the two coke-snorting morons (Quinn's own description) played with Grade A ham by Gary Reineke, looking jaundiced, and Michael Kirby, looking ill.

What condemns **Agency** to its low-calibre fate as a film (its Canadian identity is not even an issue), is that the producers and director overlooked, in their cynicism, one crucial matter. In order for a story of conspiracy and paranoia to work, there must be some kind of ethical structure inherent in the organization under scrutiny. And the nominal hero has to be sympathetically portrayed — good examples being **The Hospital**, **Three Days of The Condor**, **All The President's Men**, **Network**, **Coma** and **...And Justice For All** to varying degrees. Although it is possible to make a thriller without such ethics, or a sympathetic hero — as in Francis Coppola's **The Conversation** — there is no indication that the makers of **Agency** believe enough in what they are saying to succeed. Nor do they possess the necessary wit and energy to convincingly fake it.

Paul Costabile



Tackling the demons of insomnia in **One of Those Nights**

One of Those Nights

Witty, fast-paced and unpretentious, **One of Those Nights** is a breath of fresh air from the genre of films about dance.

Much of the credit for this little gem should go to Gina Lori Reily, who choreographed and performed the dance, entitled "Sleeper," that is the subject of this film. Performed to quick-tempo '30's and '40's jazz, this most unusual dance uses a bed as a dance floor. Reily dances under the covers, on top of the bed, beside the bed and, of course, ends up by falling asleep, as the sun peeks up over the horizon, on the floor beside the bed.

The filmmakers, John Brooke and John Fremes, should be commended for the style with which they have presented this solo dance performance: a solo human performance requires a very delicate treatment on film, or else the strength of

the film medium will overpower it. The filmmakers utilized an imaginative array of camera angles, covering the action from directly overhead to camera-on-the-floor and everything in between — but, primarily, with well-designed static frames. The style of shooting, coupled with the clean, crisp editing has allowed the movement and humour of the performance to translate onto the screen.

One of Those Nights is proof of what can be done when a small budget is combined with a thoughtful approach and a little imagination. Hopefully, this film will open a few doors for these young filmmakers, so we can see more of their ideas on the screen.

Edward Farrar

p./d./ed. John Brooke, John Fremes choreog. & perf. Gina Lori Riley ph. Robert Holmes set design Diane Balsky p.a. Sydney Levitt p.c. JFB Films, with Sunrise Films Ltd. (1980) running time 7 min. col. 16 mm.

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