

BREAKING THROUGH SELLING OUT DROPPING DEAD

by David Beard
Proprietor Cinebooks

Breaking Through, Selling Out, Dropping Dead and Other Notes on Film-making.

By William Bayer, Macmillan, New York 1971.

William Bayer is a film-maker, screen writer, and a novelist. His first feature, "Mississippi Summer", is in distribution and his second feature, "Flash and Silk", is now in production. His book is addressed to those who are interested in the big screen. His advice is sound, filled with common sense and the voice of hard-earned experience.

He is a professional and his book is intended as a guide to the men and women who want to enter the cut-throat world of the feature film.

Bayer's book is not bitter. It is not simplistic. It is well written. The prose is alive and carries the reader into total absorption in the subject. Even though Bayer feels that the book will interest only "the young film-maker who is faced with enormous problems of career development . . .", it should be read by students who are taking film courses and teachers of film courses.

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List compiled by David Beard.

It should also attract the film critic. It is about the aesthetics of the cinema as well as technical aspects of film-making. It is not, however, a handbook of motion picture techniques, Bayer talks about collaboration without which technique is utterly useless. It is his attention to the details of attitude and approach that is so important to the young film-maker.

No handbook can give these insights. He is a man who respects his art and in his book the man that does not respect film-making as an art is clearly defined as an enemy of the film-maker.

Obviously the distributor does not respect the film-maker. As Bayer defines him in these words. "Of all the bad people in the film industry, distributors - the men who market a film, and place it in theatres - are among the most wicked and dishonest." And Bayer is not just shooting off his mouth. He goes into the details of the "deal".

He does his defining without rancour. There is a touch of humour about it, "They (the distributor) will frequently tell you, 'That's a beautiful picture Kid. Too bad it's not going to make money. Next time try to work in a little more tit.' They will pat you on the back and suggest you call them again when you've made something else".

If only distributors and exhibitors would read this book and take it seriously, the experience might revolutionize the business. Bayer knows that it needs drastic changes, but he also knows that he is first of all an artist: a film-maker, and if one uses the revolutionary impulses with film-making the practitioner of this "art" renounces film as a means of creating art.

Bayer makes several suggestions about the approach a film-maker can take to this problem. There are alternatives within the system and there are possibilities outside the system that only the new film-makers can develop.

Of course, there are the passages in any book that have particular appeal to the individual reader. I enjoyed his comments on Cinéma Vérité. It can be an easy target, but Bayer is not interested in the put-down. He traces the influence this development has had on commercial cinema and points out that "... there exists in the subconscious of the audience an absurd equation that says film graininess, an unstable camera equals reality". He also points out that if you ignore this absurdity you risk a greater absurdity that is staging the situations and producing a phoniness that suspends the audience's willing disbelief.

Bayer's delightful and acute observations on the clichés of the cinema are:

- the lyrical sequence, with rock music over, in which the lovers ride a bicycle, walk along the beach, or cavort in an idyllic meadow;
- the homosexual friend to whom the girl confesses her heterosexual difficulties;
- the quarrel at the family dinner table that exposes the generation gap.

The section on the critics is also valid and entertaining. "Among film critics there are fools, acid-throwers, gunslingers, neurotics, and cultists, as well as men and women of intelligence, perception, and taste". I bristled a little at this, but I was comforted, moderately, by the following. "Fortunately the the important critical pulpits - The New York Times, Time, Life, Newsweek, and The New Yorker - are held by decent and intelligent people".

Yet he gives the film-maker the best advice when he says, "There is only one way to deal with film critics and that is to ignore them". Bayer is right, but alas, many of the so called

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