

by Peter Wintonick

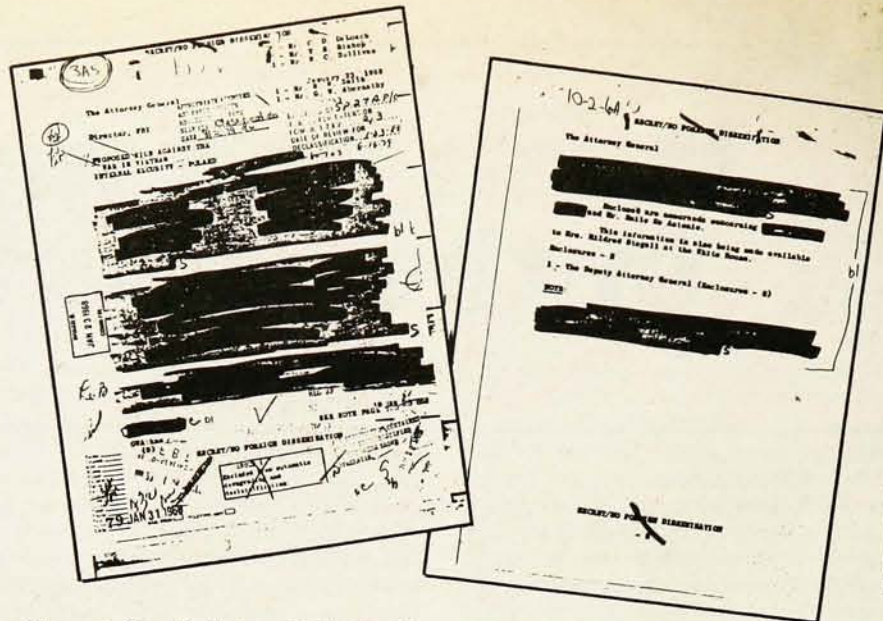
Lock up your filmmakers. The end draws near. The mad dog of the cinematic revolution is loose. An iconoclast with much subversive intent is in our midst. His global plan: to ferment the firmament, to plant fire and ice in the hearts of student filmmakers, to put actual thought and real ideas into the public's mind, and, the most hideous and audacious act of all, to show us his films.

Emile de Antonio (known to his friends as "dee" [as in d]) recently crossed the border to attend a major retrospective of his work at the Conservatoire d'Art Cinématographique, speak to students at Concordia University, meet his peers at the National Film Board, and keep latenight insomniacs alive on CBC radio's *Brave New Waves*.

de Antonio was born to intellectual parents in Pennsylvania 60 years ago. A chauffeured existence and private schools led to much distain, angst and revolt. Leaving Pennsylvania for Massachusetts, dee started studying philosophy and history at Harvard at the ripe age of 16. The Second World War intervened, as war is wont to do, and the young Emile enlisted in the airforce and rose aerodynamically and eruditely to the rank of Major. Upon the completion of this sacred duty he returned to America where he attended the greatest film school of them all—the Academy of Street and Night Life of New York City. He continued his investigations into the cultural and artistic nightlife of that city, working as a longshoreperson, a barge captain, a playperson, an impresario/lothario, a libretto translator, a book editor, a war surplus broker and a friend of the more famous avant-garde artists of our time—Cage, Warhol, Kerouac, Rauschenberg, Stella, etc. He has been married five or six times and has two children.

Twenty-five years ago, dee discovered the power of film. Influenced by Cage's ideas of chance determinism and found music, he created a remarkable film from more than 180 hours of Kinescopes of the Army-McCarthy hearings called *Point of Order* which revealed, for the first time, the political power of film and television and the inner non-workings of the American system of government. He then made, in 1967, *Rush to Judgement*, a frank legal document which investigates the real reasons and unheard testimony concerning the Kennedy assassination. In the Year of the Pig, the first historical analysis of Vietnam, did much to attune the American public to their immoral involvement in that area of the world. dee went to Cannes with it and it was the first political documentary to be nominated for an Academy Award. *America is Hard to See* is about the 1968 campaign for president of Eugene McCarthy. *Millhouse: A White Comedy* concerns Richard M. Nixon's rise to power and includes the entire *Checker's Speech* which established Nixon's mastery of the maudlin medium of television. These devastating attacks were enough to allow de Antonio to become a privileged member of a very exclusive club: he was the only filmmaker to be on Nixon's Enemies List.

Peter Wintonick is an award-winning videomaker and film editor living in Montreal.



His next film, *Painters Painting* is an intelligent study of how artists think and work. de Antonio used most of his friends in the New York school to create his own work of art.

With Mary Lampson and Haskell Wexler he then made *Underground* about The Weather Underground. For his trouble he was subpoenaed by the court to turn over his film, tape and sources. The ensuing debate heard a member of Congress, Larry McDonald, call the film "a propaganda puff piece" and de Antonio "a Hollywood left-wing crackpot, a notorious ring leader." Fortunately, a number of Hollywood heavies including Hal Ashby, Warren Beatty and Mel Brooks rallied to dee's side and the subpoena was dropped. His last film, a fictional documentary about the trial of peace activists The Plowshares 8, is called *In The King of Prussia*. These eight pacifists entered a GE plant in Pennsylvania, hammered two Mark 12A Nuclear Nosecones and poured their blood over documents before they were arrested. Martin Sheen, who plays the judge, said of his experience working with Dan and Phil Berrigan, Molly Rush, de Antonio and the others that it was as close to bravery that he would ever likely get. (Most of these films are available from DEC films in Toronto.)

Marv Davidov, a veteran peace activist and organizer of the Honeywell Project wrote to de Antonio that "the film (*In the King of Prussia*) inspired many to civil disobedience. This is a lovely, powerful example of how art and politics provoke actions which will one day be undeniable." Indeed, all of de Antonio's films are informed by a sense of history and the ability of history to move us to act to create new history. He pioneered the non-narrative documentary, the document without commentary, the compilation film and the feature political documentary. He is the godfather of many of the young social and political filmmakers and video-makers of this generation in North America and around the world. He wouldn't approve of the word godfather. He is an atheist and feminist. Also a radical, a marxist and an anarchist in the pure senses of those words. He continues to do incredible amounts of work and research. He only slept four hours in the three days that he was here. He continues to investigate and experiment. In *The King of Prussia* was shot on 3/4 inch and one-inch video, then transferred to 35mm film at Image Transform in California. He is currently publishing two books about the politics of American art. He is

## Quotations from

### Decodifying

also writing a new fictional auto-biographical film based on the more than 5,000 pages of documents that he has obtained under the Freedom of Information Act from the FBI files on his life and work. He lists as his hobbies drinking, reading, body surfing and suing the FBI & CIA.

I first came to know of this most dangerous of film people while I was working for a private eye here in Montreal. I was rummaging around in the garbage on the room service tray that dee left outside his hotel room when, much to my surprise, I found the only copy in existence of one of the most revolutionary books ever written—*Quotations from Chairman dee*—lying under a half-eaten sandwich de boeuf. I would rank it right up there with Marx's *Das Kapital*, Ché's *Memoirs of the Revolutionary War*, or Emily Post's *Book of Etiquette*.

This book is not unlike Mao's little red one, or Robert Bresson's *Notes on Cinematography* except that it is now out of print and thus available only through this special arrangement with Cinema Canada. The original copy has been sent to Emile de Antonio's Archives at the University of Wisconsin. So you can take it or leave it. If I were you I would skip this whole section and move to the back pages of this issue where all the up-coming productions are listed. Because that's where I am—looking for a job.

#### de bacle

"Quality is the only thing that ever matters in art, and you can't judge quality except by time. I am interested in art that is living, and adventuresome, and new, and of its own time. I am not interested in the art of fifty years ago. I'm interested in the art of my time."

#### de bauchery

"All my films are collage films. They are classical collages."

#### de bris

"There is a certain surrealism when expertise goes off the track, and that's when I like it most."

#### de bunk

"What I chiefly emphasize is my independence. That's what I mean when I say that I make films for myself. I make films with a hope of arousing emotion,

and passion, and of revealing things to people they didn't know or feel before."

#### de but

"I'm interested in reaching the widest possible audience I can reach, but I will make no concessions to that audience. I will not make a film shorter; I will not make a film less difficult; I will not make it more or less explicit. I am my own man, and that means a great deal to me. That's the only advantage that I have in making low budget films that never reach the audiences that Hollywood reaches."

#### de cadence

"I don't think that my questions are important. The answers are important: the answers and the way that I want to manipulate them."

#### de capitare

"The way that you perceive something with the eye and ear in film is different than the way you perceive something in reading. It is a different kind of experience. It is a much faster experience, and conditions of character, weakness of character and suppressed moments in character are revealed in film in a way that the written word rarely reveals."

#### de cay

"I've been a half-baked radical most of my life. I'm a free-wheeling-anarchist type."

#### de cency

"Truth in art is internal, personal and once committed in form offers itself for judgement. It is not discovered by a committee of reasonable men, however eminent. An English critic has called *Point of Order* the only good example of cinema vérité. I disagree. In fact, nonsense. Cinema vérité is what Henry Ford called history—'bunk'."

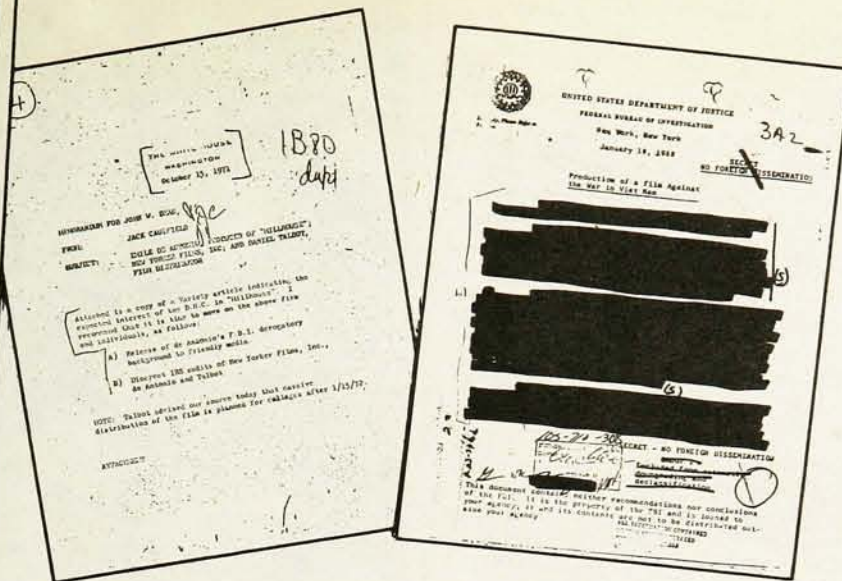
#### de centralize

"Documentary cinema is by far the best form of protest, the best possible theatrical form. Its great force is the force of

Emile de Antonio surrounded by some of the 5000 pages



FBI file



# Chairman 'dee'

## de Antonio

testimony. American TV documentaries are without content. They pose no questions. My films oppose. They provoke. Technically they are different. There's no narration. I believe that to impose narration is a fascist act."

### de ception

"Perhaps in a future society the dichotomy between art and politics will disappear. In a bourgeois society it's a true contradiction."

### de cipher

"What seems important to me is to make people see the same old things from a new angle. I use images from the mass media, political people and political life and I try to render a totality of process. This is something that TV is incapable of doing."

### de clamation

"I am interested in the political theories, in the mass of facts. I am interested in establishing a line of thought."

### de classify

"I am a radical; I believe in the Bill of Rights and I think that nobody can stop me from making a film."

### de cline

"I love the United States but I hate its government. I hate its military of which I was a part. I see no reason to hope that it ever wins anything."

### de compose

"No country has brainwashed its citizens as effectively as the U.S. History is not written in 4-minute snippets for TV news. We are getting a distorted view. We're inundated with stuff that has given us a pathological hardness, an indifference to other peoples' suffering. We've lost our sense of generosity because we've become a consumer population."

### de corate

"Critique is montage."

### de cree

"The networks have made the American

people comfortable with war, because it appears between commercials. There's never the question 'Why are we doing this?'"

### de cry

"From the very beginning my films were not only political; they also contested the main assumptions of Hollywood as film. To me, Hollywood produces industrial products. Like Twinkies. High production values were usually empty screens. I wanted to make a political filmic art with the barest of means. I believed that what was spare could be dramatic, emotional, and revealing."

### de fame

"I am an American Marxist. I believe in history. I made *In the Year of the Pig* to reveal history that was systematically being hidden by networks between commercials for mastodonic cars and deodorants. The quotidian makes life and death irrelevant. I will never forget the funny face that Fred Astaire made when he announced its nomination for an Academy Award."

### de fence

"The goal of a truly didactic work is to move beyond and to suggest why. I would describe my own sentiments as democratic. I wish not to teach people but to reveal things to them; to have them arrive at the same conclusion as I do - it's a democratic didacticism without having to say a firstly, secondly, thirdly."

### de finition

"I think that, as all my thoughts and sympathies move toward the third world, we must, my friends and I, make films as if we were living in the third world. Not only as a point of view but with a small budget as well."

### de liberation

"I think that it is better that revolutionary ideas be expressed in new forms, but not if they are only masturbatory exercises; not if they are only cries of anguish that don't attract anyone; not if they don't express a real point of view."

### de livery

"If you say that art only addresses an aristocracy, or a small band of intellectuals then your art has an anti-evolutionary essence - it become like American painting or the court of Louis

XIV. Art must attract people. Sometimes that takes time. Sometimes we must take that time. And wait. You can wait as Mallarmé did, knowing that someday you will read. But today even time is different. We are living in the most important period in the last 1,000 years. We have the means of destruction to put an end to time, to everything; we have little choice left. Machines change people. What we have to say - we must say now."

### de lirium

"History is the theme of all my films... filmmaking is risk-taking... I don't know the distinction between propaganda and passion; propaganda and politics."

### de magogery

"As the old Hollywood adage has it 'If you have a message, then use Western Union.' Well, my films have messages but I don't want to send them Western Union. I have never looked upon documentary as an apprenticeship for the making of Hollywood films. That's bullshit. I love documentary film - its political tradition and the subjects that it can treat."

### de mentia

"I'm an American. This is my space, and that's why I want to change it."

### de mon

"McCarthyism was the triumph of the art of advertising - the art of saying absolutely nothing, the triumph of technique over content."

### de pression

"The question now remains - how can one maintain a revolutionary life? How can I conserve my enthusiasm, my ideas my belief in others; the possibility of analysis and the belief in a state that is not a police state? That is the central problem of my marxist and anarchist universe."

### de sign

"If you really want to make a film then you will do everything possible to get the money to do the film and you will make the film."

### de rigueur

"One of the great clichés of Marx was that religion is the opium of the people. This is absolutely shallow, foul and untrue in our times because religion has no influence on people compared to what film and TV have. They form our morals, our basic social mores, our habits, the way we live and dress."

### de scribe

"We have censorship of ownership. The people who own the country own the media. It is not 'the medium is the message'. The real fact of the matter is -

who owns the medium owns the message."

### de sire

"We're just being surrounded by garbage. We're choking. We are like these characters in Hades who are drowning in our own excrement - which is the media - producing of tons and tons and millions of words and images that are useless, pernicious and de-meaning."

### de terminism

"The real history of my country now is the television out-take. What you see on the tube is not what is really there. So much of the material that I discovered in the trash bins of ABC, and CBS have been exactly those ideas about what was really going on in Vietnam, or what Nixon was about, or some other aspect of our culture and politics."

### de test

"My life is my work, my work is my life. I see myself as a film artist who is essentially political."

### de value

"I believe in freedom of expression; I believe in a lot of hard things; I also believe in economic justice. In that sense I am a Marxist. All the work that I do is informed by notions about the nature of society - what you should do in respect to people. In the U.S. we've painted in the word 'radical' to mean somebody who's unbalanced and willing to betray the country or willing to sacrifice everything for some rather abstract and unusual notion. Radical has a very different Latin root. It's the basis. A radical solution is not a crazy solution, it's a root solution that goes to the heart of the matter. The United States is in need of a radical solution."

### de velop

"Reagan makes it clear that virtues is to be measured by money; the rich are the virtuous, indeed, the poor shall serve them. To me that's the most obscene idea that I've come across in my lifetime."

### de vil

"I've just finished a film about Christian Pacifists, who are the strongest people I've met in a long time. I would like to be a Christian Pacifist, but there are a few problems: a) I don't believe in God and b) I think that violence is still necessary. I'd like to get rid of that idea, I'd really like to get rid of that idea, but I think I'm stuck with it because it's my understanding of the world."

### de votion

"In each project I try to keep an open mind in relation to the material and to myself, so it doesn't come out hard edged; so it doesn't come out like a totally predictable quantity like canned salmon or something except today canned salmon is no longer predictable. It's probably poisonous."

### three de

"Distribution does mirror the rest of our culture. The big companies are uninterested in anything that won't clearly project a profit. The mistakes they make are business errors, they are not mistakes in art. No art can live and grow without errors. I embrace all my mistakes. Success bores me. I want to go on to some more things. You learn from mistakes. Unless you have room to make mistakes you will have some kind of abstract, technological perfection which is what most films are about. My films are raw. I intentionally make my films raw. What our French friends would call *l'art brut*."