Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media; Requiem pour un beau sans-coeur; Blast 'Em; Secret Nation; Legal Memory

that lays out an entire **Times** on a gymnasium floor.

This film sets itself huge tasks—outlining Chomsky's thought in an entertaining though appropriately sophisticated fashion, offering something of the man's biography, and itself serving to dismantle the cool facade of popular media. It's a film of ideas, a biography and an activist film all in one, so its vast scope should come as no surprise.

Actually the biography is only a brief part of the film's two-part, three-hour length, which has to be a decision arrived at by Chomsky and the filmmakers. We get glimpses of his family life—his father wrote a book on Hebrew grammer, his uncle ran an unsuccessful newsstand—but almost no psychologizing, no revealing interviews with neglected children of workaholic dad.

Achbar and Wintonick favour an articulation of Chomsky's "liberation socialism," starting from his notion that "propaganda is to democracy what violence is to a totalitarian regime." Corporate media, particularly "agenda-setting" media like the **Times** and the major networks are the conduits of propaganda.

Manufacturing Consent's real success lies in constructing Chomsky within the film as a discursive rather than a psychological subject, and in embedding him within media, however uncomfortably. The professor is rarely presented "clean"—his image shows up on a giant video wall in a suburban mall, he's shown reading a teleprompter, being interviewed, constantly hooked up to some microphone in some different part of the world.

He is forever mediated, which prevents us from looking on his words as gospel. Decentring his own authority is, of course, a part of Chomsky's strategy, but the film could do more in this area. While there are ample broadsides of his work from frothing reactionaries and media insiders—will anyone who sits down to watch this film really take what William F. Buckley has to say seriously?—critiques from intellectuals on the left, those who question the originality of his ideas, for example, are missing.

Chomsky has been continually, if not loudly criticized for adapting, popularizing and benefiting from others' ideas. Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, as well as lesser-known writers, do find echoes in Chomsky's work. But even if Chomsky is the left's Carl Sagan, that's no reason for undue sniping. It's important to know, for instance, that the "experts" who show up on ABC's **Nightline** are "92 percent white, 89 percent male, and 80 percent from the professional/managerial class." Chomsky didn't compile that information—a group called Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting did—but he gets it out there.

One of his most significant ideas, something I wish the film had devoted even more time to, concerns the time limits of most broadcast media and the role that plays in limiting ideas. A TV current affairs program with no more than 12 minutes between commercials not only limits how much can be said, but also **what** can be said. Networks call this the necessary demands of concision, but Chomsky goes further. "The beauty of concision," he notes, "is that you can only repeat conventional thoughts." In other words, you can articulate commonly held ideas in a much shorter time than you can ideas that go against the grain. Unconventional ideas expressed concisely—that the U.S. government is one of the world's most successful terrorist organizations, for example—inevitably make the speaker sound like a crackpot.

Near the end of **Manufacturing Consent** there's a sequence dedicated to alternative media that's central to both the film and its context. It's a reminder that Achbar and Wintonick's film comes out of these networks of grassroots publications and community broadcasting, and not educational hagiography. Despite its length and scope, this still feels like a homemade film, put together out of desire and sweat and political need, not to fill a PBS time slot. In the end, this may be the film's greatest success.

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Reviewed by Maurie Alioff

Requiem pour un beau sans-coeur

Written and directed by Robert Morin, produced by Lorraine Dufour and Nicole Robert, with Gildor Roy, Jean-Guy Bouchard, Klimbo and Sabrina Boudot. A Lux Films/Coop Vidéo de Montréal production, with the participation of SOGIC and Super Ecran.

■ Robert Morin's Requiem pour un beau sans-coeur (Requiem for a Heartless Bastard) tracks the last days of a gangster who obsesses everyone crossing his twisted path. Régis Savoie

(Gildor Roy) is—for much of the time—a portrait of the criminal voraciously gobbling up what's left of his life. "Reggie" snorts thick lines of coke, performs an impromptu belly dance for his girlfriend, and rounds up the hookers and johns in a "five-star message parlour" to burn them alive.

The persona of seductive, mocking evil extends back to fictional outlaws like **A Clockwork Orange**'s Alex and Shakespeare's **Richard III**. Princes of darkness (and occasionally princesses) have a way of arousing audience empathy, no matter how loathsome their crimes become. Moviegoers are both horrified witnesses and enthralled accomplices when Hannibal Lecter clubs in a man's skull and then blisses out on the Goldberg Variations; when the serial killer of the mock documentary from Belgium, **Man Bites Dog**, chatters with infectious enthusiasm about snuffing golden-agers; when **Reservoir Dogs**'s "Mr. Blond" razors off an L.A. cop's ear and murmurs to him, "Was that as good for you as it was for me?"

Not as elegant as **Silence of the Lambs**, nor nearly as close to the edge as **Man Bites Dog**, **Requiem** nevertheless works its own territory of transgressive crime story. The picture opens on Savoie's ten-year-old son Mathieu (Simon Maturin Guilbert) visiting dad in prison and handing him a drawing of a baseball-playing frog, Reggie's favorite animal, and his nickname in the tabloid press.

It's a sentimental moment, abruptly shattered by the sudden violence of a breakout. Clutching his son's artwork and magnum, burning to escape but pissed-off with his fellow cons for choosing this particular moment, Reggie embodies his lawyer's description of him: "everything about Savoie was ambiguous."

As incarnated with credibility by Gildor Roy (in his first major movie role), Savoie is a memorable creature with big, liquid eyes set off by heavy brows. Roy plays the character as a raging frog capable of turning into a charming prince—especially in the company of his incongruously dignified and soulful girlfriend (Brigitte Paquette).

Sabrina Boudot in Requiem pour un beau sans-coeur ►

Less **un beau sans-coeur** than a working-class victim with a polluted heart, Savoie reacts to his damnation by flaunting it. Grinning maniacally, cracking primitive jokes ("Why do beaver have flat tails? Because they got sucked off by ducks..."), suggesting film savages like Cagney in **White Heat** and Pacino in **Scarface**, Reggie is on a suicidal joyride toward the ultimate getaway—from himself. Well into **Requiem**, an oddball scene reveals that he has painted a bull's eye onto his chest.

On another level, Morin uses Reggie's exploits to make various points about crime in an era when killers negotiate TV mini-series deals. Reggie keeps tabs on his press, takes bows in strip clubs, and constantly videos himself. And the glamour quotient is low. Morin is clearly entranced by scuzzy, low-life detail: a big, ugly ring on a prison guard's finger; hideous home furnishings; a foul-mouthed girlfriend; an alcoholic argument climaxing with an elderly woman stomping on her antagonist's dentures.

Requiem is also distinguished by its formal experimentation with multiple points-of-view offering a jigsaw of contradictory impressions. Morin structured the picture into eight chapter-like sequences, each shot from a different character's perspective and with an entirely subjective camera. In each "chapter" you hear, but don't see, the point-of-view character (Savoie's mother, lawyer, henchman, and so on) unless she or he happens to be looking into a mirror. As far as I know, the last feature to attempt this trick was Robert Montgomery's 1946 adaptation of Raymond Chandler's **Lady in the Lake**. New York film critic Pauline Kael called that picture's relentless subjective camera a "nuisance."

Watching **Requiem**, you are more acutely aware than usual of the screen actor's relationship to the camera, and vice versa. The camera—constantly standing in for an invisible character—often seems to take on the status of one. You might find yourself wondering about people who can lateral track through bingo parlours, whip pan their heads from side to side, and cut to close-ups.

If you like movies to provide their own deconstruction, Morin's method offers plenty to mull over. On the other hand, when it falters, it is labored, discombobulated, working against itself with its incongruities and zany twists. In the longest takes, actors in front of the camera tend to grimace and cavort as if they're in the midst of a screen test that isn't going well. Morin took chances with his experiment. Obviously, one of them is that it interferes with his sulfureous portrait of a tormented soul, in a movie summed by the line: "We're all part monster. And there are all kinds: pretty and not so pretty."

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Reviewed by Rachel Rafelman

Blast 'Em

Written and directed by Joseph Blasioli, co-directed by Egidio Coccimiglio and produced by Anders Palm. A Silent Fiction Films production.

■ "A picture celebrity is like hard currency," says an unidentified paparazzo in Joseph Blasioli and Egidio Coccimiglio's documentary **Blast 'Em**. "You can sell it anywhere on earth...and photo editors do not care who made it or how it was made."

As we learn during the next 100 minutes, the best celebrity photos are taken by the paparazzi, a.k.a. "assault photographers." They take them any way they can, and as far as **People** magazine and the **National Enquirer** are concerned, the more tasteless and intrusive the better. It's war. It's the paparazzi versus the celebrities, and the paparazzi are winning. Still, it's hard to know which side to root for. There is a suggestion of the Bacchanalian about the hungry aggression of the paparazzi, as if they would just as soon tear the celebrity apart as take his or her picture.

Victor Malafronte is a 29-year-old New York City paparazzo and the subject of **Blast 'Em**. In choosing to hang their entire film on Malafronte's twitchy shoulders, filmmakers Blasioli and Coccimiglio have taken a considerable risk, one that for the most part pays off. An incessant, emphatic and rapid-fire talker, Malafronte relates his photo-escapades as if delivering reports from war-torn Sarajevo; he is a guerrilla fighter in his own personal combat zone, determined to win at all costs. Fortunately, Blasioli and Coccimiglio and their camera are every bit as resolute in their pursuit of Malafronte as he is of his own subject-victim. While his prey escapes, the filmmakers have Malafronte in sharp focus. This irony eludes Malafronte. Sneering at two Michael J. Fox fans, he says, "You can tell they're fans. You can tell there's something wrong with them...with someone who has nothing better to do than stand around just to see a celebrity."

Malafronte's fixation on Michael J. Fox provides the film with a structure of sorts. His goal is a clear head shot of the star's baby son, never before pictured in the press, and he goes to great lengths to get it, including stakeouts outside Fox's home. It is a form of revenge, and the viewer's realization that it is so is a bit chilling.

Malafronte thwarted is not a pretty sight, although in **Blast 'Em**, it is a common one. A smiling Christie Brinkley, who has had the effrontery to sweep past without a glance in Malafronte's direction, evokes a violent volley of obscene epithets, most of them derived from the female anatomy. Madonna, who has repeatedly refused to pose for him, is called every name in the book, as well as a few that aren't. Publicity people who refuse him entry to events and whisk the stars away from the camera are even lower in his estimation. He accuses them of cowardice. "They're just afraid to ask their celebrities to do anything. And they wonder why we keep sneaking around and trying to crash their events."

Malafronte must be the gate-crashing champ of NYC. Watching him duck down halls, leap over gates and hustle through an immense hotel kitchen is more like a sequence from an action flick than a documentary. It takes your breath away. Finally inside the event, Malafronte cooly and deftly mingles with the accredited press, even commandeering a chair to stand on for a better