



## Film Programs



### No Wave: The Cinema of Jean Eustache

October 4, 2008 - October 22, 2008



*The Mother and the Whore*, October 4

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"You have to record things; whether they're pretty or not, they're important."—Jean Eustache

The rigorous and pitilessly personal work of Jean Eustache (1938–1981) investigates and illustrates the mutual influence between cinema and life. "An ethnologist of his own reality" (Serge Daney), Eustache documented the archaic rituals of the French provinces and the mating habits of post-1968 Parisians with the same detached fascination. His experience was

the raw material for narratives that are both unvarnished and tightly scripted, including the centerpiece of his career, *The Mother and the Whore* (1973), a scathing record of sexual misbehavior filmed in his own apartment. His approach explores and finally disregards the distinction between documentary and fiction; reality is just another genre. "I have no point of view; I am my point of view," he said. And: "The films I made are as autobiographical as fiction can be."

Born in Pessac, near Bordeaux, and reared by his grandmother until being sent to live with his mother in coastal Narbonne—a shift depicted in *My Little Loves* (1975)—Eustache eventually made his way to Paris. There he began frequenting the offices of *Cahiers du cinéma*, where his wife was a secretary; the films of *Cahiers* editor Eric Rohmer were among Eustache's early inspirations. Working alongside the New Wave, Eustache was never exactly a part of it; his status as a working-class provincial autodidact and his relentless skepticism about all faiths, including the creeds of bohemianism and progressive politics, marked him as a perennial outsider. Concluding a life of restless creativity and notorious dissipation, he shot himself at age forty-three.

While Eustache is a cult name among cinephiles, few in the United States have seen his films other than *The Mother and the Whore*. This series is a rare chance to discover Eustache the archivist, narrative trickster, and relentless experimenter for whom film was not just a matter of aesthetics or morals, but "a question of the human condition."

Juliet Clark  
Editor



## Film Programs



### No Wave: The Cinema of Jean Eustache

Thursday, October 9, 2008

8:00 p.m. **My Little Loves**

Jean Eustache (France, 1975)

(*Mes petites amoureuses*). Eustache takes up the great European tradition of the coming-of-age film and quietly dismantles its emotional conventions. *My Little Loves* is autobiographical but impartial, empathetic but not sympathetic, sentimental only in the Flaubert sense of sentimental education. For Eustache's twelve-

year-old alter ego Daniel (Martin Loeb), puberty is a process of learning by observation and imitation. In a series of episodes that unfold in a muted, Bressonian rhythm, he learns how to perform, how to work, how to enact comically solemn sexual rituals. The overarching lesson is disillusionment, not just about sex but about class, and about the relation between the two. While many of Eustache's films are famously logorrheic, here the emphasis is on gaze, gesture, and setting. Nestor Almendros's cinematography calmly captures the beauty and shabbiness of Pessac and Narbonne, where Eustache puts in an appearance on a park bench, watching his younger self watching.

—Juliet Clark

- Written by Eustache. Photographed by Nestor Almendros. With Martin Loeb, Ingrid Caven, Jacqueline Dufranne, Maurice Pialat. (123 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 35mm, From MAE, permission Tamasa/Connaissance du Cinéma)



## Film Programs



*Santa Claus Has Blue Eyes*

### No Wave: The Cinema of Jean Eustache

Saturday, October 11, 2008

8:50 p.m. **Bad Company**

Jean Eustache (France, 1963)

*(Les mauvaises fréquentations/Du côté de Robinson)*. "When I play, I win," declares one of a pair of not-so-lovable losers in this breezily abrasive featurette, Eustache's first. The suburban-Parisian protagonists pass an afternoon playing pinball and trying to play the field. Picking up a young mother, they lift her wallet and then wonder what to do with it.

Combining casual observation of setting and character with discomfiting moral overtones, the film both reflects its New Wave moment and forecasts Eustache's particular preoccupations.

—Juliet Clark

- Written by Eustache. Photographed by Philippe Théaudière, Michel H. Robert. With Aristide, Daniel Bart, Dominique Jayr. (40 mins, In French with English electronic titles, B&W, 35mm, From Tamasa/Connaissance du Cinéma)

*Followed by:*

#### **Santa Claus Has Blue Eyes**

Jean Eustache (France, 1965)

*(Le Père Noël a les yeux bleus)*. Set in a gray, wintry Narbonne, this was Eustache's first film with Jean-Pierre Léaud as his alter ego. Impoverished, yearning for a fashionable duffel coat, and getting nowhere with girls, young Daniel (Léaud) finds that a stint as a street-corner Santa solves all three problems, at least temporarily. (Léaud's Alexandre in *The Mother and the Whore* refers to this escapade.) The film was produced by Jean-Luc Godard and shot on stock left over from the making of *Masculine Feminine*, but in mood and approach it is more reminiscent of Rohmer.

- Written by Eustache. Photographed by Philippe Théaudière. With Jean-Pierre Léaud, Gérard Zimmermann, Henri Martinez, René Gilson. (47 mins, In French with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, From MAE, permission Tamasa/Connaissance du Cinéma)

- (Total running time: 87 mins)



## Film Programs



### No Wave: The Cinema of Jean Eustache

Sunday, October 12, 2008

5:00 p.m. **The Pig**

Jean Eustache, Jean-Michel Barjol  
(France, 1970)

(*Le Cochon*). "An extraordinarily concentrated study in artisanal process" (Nick Pinkerton, *Moving Image Source*), *The Pig* dispassionately observes the slaughter and processing of a hog in the southern Massif Central, depicting a rural

tradition in all its social and physical detail. The same event was shot by two crews, one directed by Eustache, one by Jean-Michel Barjol; the footage was then combined into a single film, creating a fascinating doubling of points of view. The butchers' patois is nearly unintelligible, even to most speakers of French, so the film is shown without subtitles.

—Juliet Clark

- Photographed by Philippe Théaudière, Renan Polles. (50 mins, In French, B&W, 16mm, From MAE, permission Tamasa/Connaissance du Cinéma)

*Preceded by:*

**Bosch's Garden of Delights** ("*Le jardin des délices*" de Jérôme Bosch) (Jean Eustache, France, 1979). Writer Jean-Noël Picq looks at a reproduction of Hieronymus Bosch's grisly phantasmagoria *The Garden of Earthly Delights* and talks about what he sees. But what does his narration tell us? The attempt to describe the painting becomes a study in the failure of meaning, and a sly parody of the act of criticism: "Actually," Picq says in the midst of holding forth from his pompous armchair, "discussing this work is very hard." (34 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, Beta SP, From MAE)

- (Total running time: 84 mins)



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### **No Wave: The Cinema of Jean Eustache**

Sunday, October 12, 2008

7:00 p.m. **Number Zero**

Jean Eustache (France, 1971)

(*Numéro zéro*). Eustache's grandmother Odette Robert was a key figure in his life, serving as a substitute mother during much of his childhood (*My Little Loves* was dedicated to her). In 1971, he recorded an interview with her that went largely unseen until 2003—Eustache never screened the complete film publicly, although a radically truncated version was presented on television. In a string of long, stationary takes, the camera watches over Eustache's shoulder while he pours countless glasses of whiskey and Odette tells the stories of her life. A number of her themes resonate with those of Eustache's films: cruelty, male philandering, the Rosière festival of Pessac. *Number Zero* is a return to origins—of cinema and of the self—and an experiment in narration, both restrained and deeply personal.

—Juliet Clark

- Photographed by Philippe Théaudière. (110 mins, In French with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, From Tamasa/Connaissance du Cinéma)



## Film Programs



### No Wave: The Cinema of Jean Eustache

Wednesday, October 22, 2008

8:40 p.m. **A Dirty Story**

Jean Eustache (France, 1977)

*(Une sale histoire)*. "Sex has nothing to do with morals, not even with aesthetics. Sex is a metaphysical affair," Eustache said. Hence this two-part film, "a contemporary treatment of sexuality, of communication, presented in yesterday's manner, like a philosophical

discussion in a salon." The first half, shot on 35mm, creates a sophisticated atmosphere for a sordid tale of voyeurism, told by Michael Lonsdale in the first person to a small group of friends, who discuss its implications with bemused detachment. In the second iteration (actually filmed first), shot on 16mm in a casual documentary style, the same story is presented by Jean-Noël Picq. The two pieces add up to a sly experiment in performance and the limits of credibility, as well as "a very funny rumination on sexual imagination in the age of pornographic reproduction" (Nick Pinkerton, *Moving Image Source*).

—Juliet Clark

- Photographed by Jacques Renard, Pierre Lhomme. With Michael Lonsdale, Jean-Noël Picq. (49 mins, Color/B&W, 35mm)

*Followed by:*

**Alix's Pictures** (*Les photos d'Alix*) (Jean Eustache, France, 1980). Alix, a photographer, describes her images to Eustache's son Boris. An "essay in the shape of a hoax," Eustache's last film wittily questions the relationship between showing and telling as it gradually shifts Alix's narration out of sync with what we see. Photographed by Robert Alazraki. With Alix Cléo-Roubaud. (18 mins, Color, 16mm)

- (Total running time: 67 mins, In French with English subtitles, From MAE, permission Tamasa/Connaissance du Cinéma)