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Film

The Tip of the Seberg

MARK RAPPAPORT has been making movies since the mid 1960s, but it wasn't until he invented *Rock Hudson's Home Movies* that he made a splash on the international film festival circuit. In reality, Hudson made no home movies—the film comprised clips from the gay star's Hollywood films, given new meaning by intimate “first person” narration, with actor Eric Farr standing in for Hudson. But facts, Rappaport explains, are not as intriguing as images. “I'm not an investigative reporter. What's interesting is the face on the screen and what it means.”

Rappaport's follow-up to that cult success is the similarly structured *From the Journals of Jean Seberg* (Planet Pictures), a hit at last fall's New York Film Festival and now opening at theaters across the country. “So what made you pick on Jean Seberg?” I ask, thinking of the actress' notoriously tragic life of drug addiction, involvement with the Black Panthers, FBI harassment, and death at age 40, an apparent suicide.

“Not pick *on*, pick!” Rappaport replies, a little testily. But soon he's talking passionately about his love of the movies in general and Seberg in particular. In 1960, when he was 18, Rappaport saw Seberg in the French New Wave film *Breathless*. “She had something special—her face and her voice—which was ironic and innocent at the same time.” (Rappaport shares his fascination with Jodie Foster, who may play Seberg in a biopic.)

Impersonating Jean Seberg in Rappaport's film, actress Mary Beth Hurt comments that film history is one long gossip column. But gossip, Rappaport tells me, is uninteresting unless it relates to broader issues. His

movies free-associate gossip, movie clips, and film factoids, and stir in a heady dose of social commentary. “It's a way of thinking about film and cultural history,” he says. “I hope all these years of watching *Entertainment Tonight* yield some results. Otherwise it's just crap floating around in your brains!”

The filmmaker is now working on *The Silver Screen/Color Me Lavender*, which will examine gay imagery beyond the well-known cache of old movies with acknowledged gay content. Rappaport has hit upon new (and unlikely) veins of homo ore: the war comedies of the '40s, the Dean Martin–Jerry Lewis movies, the films of Danny Kaye, Randolph Scott westerns.

“I am eating dinner, I turn on AMC [American Movie Classics], and I'm watching these movies from the Stone Age of moviemaking, and these things leap out at you. You just knock your food off the table from disbelief,” says Rappaport. As an example, he mentions the scene in *The Road to Morocco* where Bob Hope and Bing Crosby think they see Dorothy Lamour in the desert and try to kiss her; they wind up kissing each other instead. “Is the mirage a subterfuge to help them realize their true desire? I don't think you have to be a Freudian analyst to put it together.

“Let's face it, you don't get positive reinforcing images from the screen,” continues Rappaport, who has aptly dubbed his film company Couch Potato Productions. “You get something else. We are not quite sure what.” Whatever it is, he says, those images influence our thoughts and dreams and how we respond to the world. “I think it's time to dismantle that screen, to throw stone in the hall of mirrors that is reflecting back endlessly.” —GERARD RAYMOND

BLUE JEANS:
Rappaport
and his
subject.

Gerard Raymond has written for *The Village Voice* and *Harper's Bazaar*.