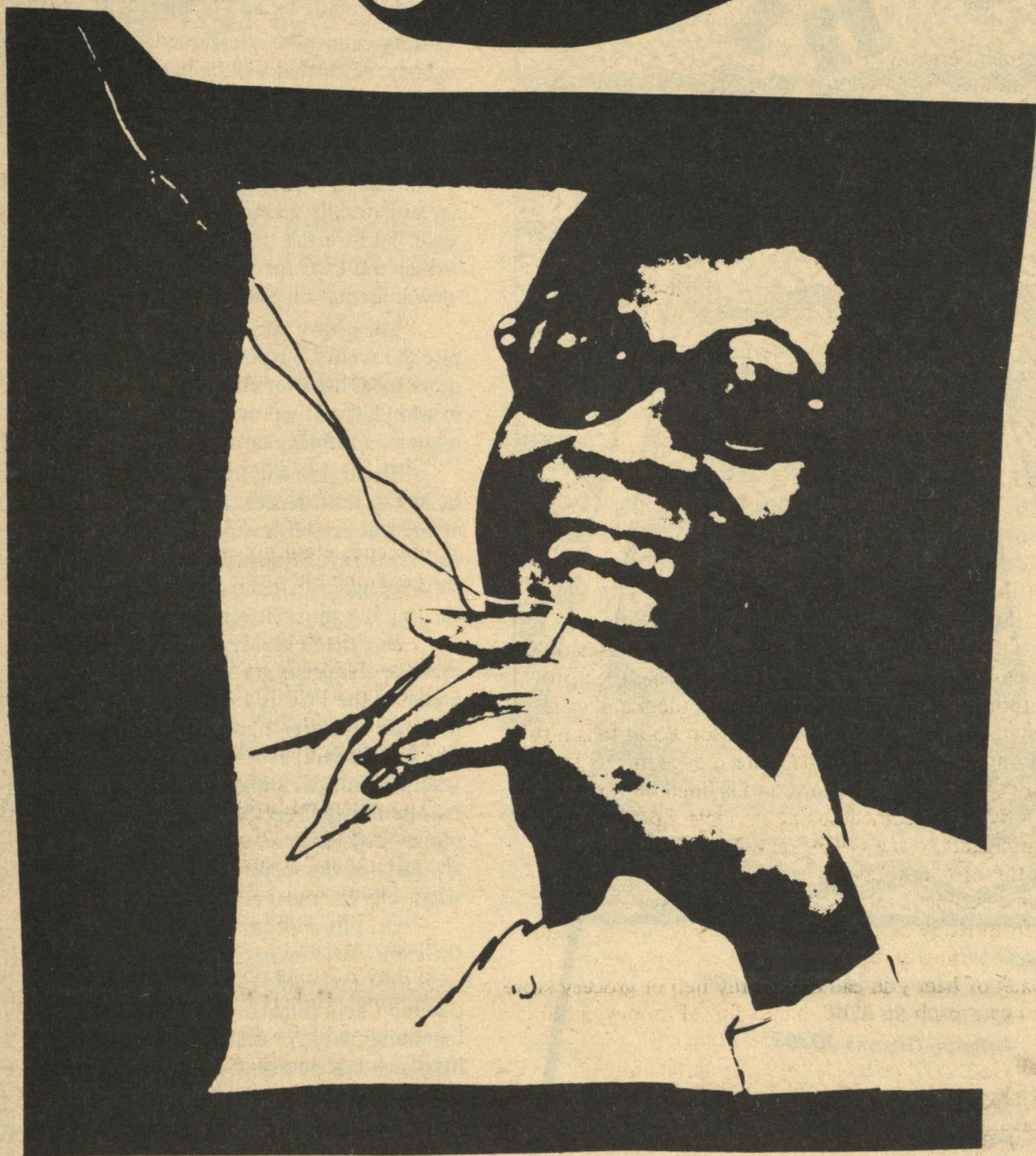


portrait

OF

Jason



Shirley Clarke's *Portrait of Jason* (shown this past week at the Festival Cinema) is film-making of the highest order. But because of its unusual subject matter (i.e., unusual for the movies) it is easy to overlook the power of the medium in which it is presented, and the skill with which Miss Clarke works within that medium.

For all its "gutter realism," its film-in-the-making "documentary" quality, *Portrait* is actually an exploration into the world of social myth. It is easy to say that Jason is a male whore, a hustler, a female impersonator, a black queen, but to say that and no more is to overlook Jason's most significant role, the 20th century Western civilization version of the "shaman." An institutionalized form of homosexuality and transvestism found not only in the ancient world but in many nonliterate cultures of the modern world up to the present day, the shaman is a social position adopted by men who take on the role of women defined by their culture (dress, mannerisms, job, life style, etc.), but in addition they are looked upon as sooth-sayers, oracles, magicians, dream-interpretaters. The transvestism results from an evidently universally held belief that women are more closely in tune with the world of the psyche, the transvestite the ideal medium between the two worlds. It is perhaps inevitable for us to get hung up in "Jason" as a person, as an individual, and to interpret the truths he speaks as truths about himself, about his "sicknesses." But voices speak *through* Jason; he is "possessed" by the deities and demons that preside over our era, and the pleasure and fear we may experience as he enacts each role is due to his extraordinary skill in making the words become flesh. The cathartic emotions we feel come through watching our "suffering servant" on the rack, struggling with tears and laughter in a fight for survival with the psychic horrors we try to live in ignorance of.

Shirley Clarke has brilliantly conceived and executed her film with a mostly still camera, and episodes delineated by focusing in and out on Jason with hardly any editing. She and her aids talk with Jason, ask him questions, taunt him, curse him, attack him mercilessly in demanding the truth from him. This is just the proper role for them since in our literate culture tellers of the truth are despised, not revered. Thus the film as a finished product reflects Shirley Clarke's approach to Jason as a modern-day shaman while, within the picture itself, the taunts and patronizations reflect the hostile attitude of the world in which Jason must live and function.

Portrait of Jason illustrates just how much of what we relate to in a motion picture is inherent in the form itself rather than in any particular subject: Jason's powerfully expressive face functions like a landscape, his eyes and mouth and hands are characters involved in "action," and his shifting, evolving monologs affect us like "plot" development; the blurs and focuses between episodes (and reels), phasing us in and out, and the many "voices" of Jason are a soundtrack of musical themes holding it all together. Those out-of-focus interludes are the most crucial element of the film. Jason introduces us to each of his roles, "tunes in" to the world beyond, speaks in mythic tongues; then like the wisps of marijuana smoke from the joint he holds in his hand, our medium—ephemeral and ghostly—dissolves into textures of light and shadow only to reappear as if by magic. The spoken commentary leads us to believe that Jason has "passed out" again, or that the reels need changing; but on the other hand, perhaps Jason's own personality has yielded wholly to the power of the spirits haunting and possessing him, and, for a while, there is simply nothing physical to photograph.

—miller francis, jr.

Paschall...

The average Japanese fears the United States more than he does Red China; and 29 years after the end of World War II, Okinawans are prisoners of war in their own country, says Dr. Earle Reynolds, former professor of anthropology at Antioch College and now a resident of Japan when he is not touring with his Japanese wife.

Dr. Reynolds, speaking to Atlantans for Peace on March 11, reported a strong pacifist trend in Japan, coupled with a deep aspiration for complete independence and sovereignty. These trends combine in the growing opposition to the more than 100 military bases held by the U.S. in Japan.

According to Dr. Reynolds, Okinawa holds the key to U.S.—Japan relations. The Okinawans are POW's by the fact that they are not Japanese citizens, they are not American citizens, they do not reside in a U.N. trust territory because the U.S. did not turn them over to U.N. trusteeship as scheduled. Any vote of the people and any law of the civilian government can be abrogated by the U.S. military government. Okinawa is effectively a United States military dictatorship, being used by the U.S. as a hostage in negotiations over the U.S.—Japan Security Treaty which expires in 1970.

Dr. Reynolds and his wife visited North Vietnam two years ago as crew member of *The Phoenix*, carrying medical aid and supplies to the Vietnamese. He stated that he was impressed with a deep sense of culture thousands of years old, the great morale of the Vietnamese people and their sense of humor despite the war. He said that the people are fighting a war of nationalism, while the U.S. purports to be fighting communism. The Vietnamese cannot understand why it should matter to the U.S. whether or not they are communists. Despite the war, Dr. Reynolds still found respect for the American people, and saw in museums copies of their national Declaration of Independence, which begins with the same words as the Preamble to the American Declaration of Independence, quoted in English as a direct link to the American document.

The Reynolds plan a visit to Red China soon, in an effort to carry greetings from the American people to the Chinese people. Dr. Reynolds said our present policy towards China is not accomplishing anything and should be reversed. He also spoke of a strong nationalistic feeling in China—the feeling is that Asia is where Asians live, and Asians should control it.

—eliza paschall

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