

RSVP: BLACKBALLED¹
INVASION OF THE MIND SNATCHERS²

I accepted an invitation to a Hollywood party once. Howie³ was high- on his -balls when he told the secretary to invite a couple of the blacklist'ed⁴ to the *soirée*, who were so hungry they had to accept.

"I meant a few *film noir*ers! Remember that *caligariesque* weekend with Billy⁵?" he repented, wooden-mawed the next morn but the invites were already posted so what could he do? We were forced to sit at the children's table nibbling animal crackers while Cary and Kate⁶ were served the soup course.

"Probably not kosher anyway." Naturally we were grouchy. Howie meanwhile circled us like a Hawk harping surprisingly over the curly golden locks of one of our brothers.⁷ Caesar Z. stood suddenly but sullenly on the table and delivered some remarks on the Cinema (1953)⁸:

"Neorealism has this as its goal: To give all the people the courage, to give them the consciousness, to be human beings. The term neorealism implies- in the broadest sense- rejection of the technical-professional work staff, the script writer included. Handbooks, programs, grammars no longer have any meaning." At this point he belched.

"Even designations such as close-up, reverse shot, etc. no longer have any meaning. Each person has his personal film script. Neorealism breaks through all patterns, rejects all rules, which are basically nothing more than codification of restrictions." The children's table broke and he fell without missing a beat.

"It is reality which breaks these patterns. For there are endless possibilities of encountering reality for a man of the cinema..." he was walking through the party now. *"There can be, a priori, no close-ups."*

"I shoulda known better than to invite the Italians," Howie punched him, spilling his own highball in the process.

"Screw you," I screamed and thus was born another movie genre.⁹ "Bring it on, baby!" With that, I dumped the duck soup on him. He had been jealous all night as his wacky humor fell flat and our one-liners drew reluctant guffaws.

I have never been invited to Hollywood since, until now, and promised never to go again if I were. Please excuse my absence¹⁰ and keep your animal crackers!

1 Woody's undelivered Oscar rejection speech for *Annie Hall*, best picture, 1971

2 Paranoia ran rampant at this point, as evidenced by Welles' *War of the Worlds*: fear of invasion from the 'red' planet (Mars, god of war), the 'Reds' being obvious references to Communists, and also felt by some Americans to lurk within, the 'Red Scare' of McCarthy's and Truman's 1950's.

3 Howard Hawks, director of screwball comedy and, later, some film noir.

4 HUAC hearings targeted New Deal intellectuals, many Jews, those in the movie biz adding panache, TV exposure, ultimately legitimacy to the circus. After the Hollywood Ten went to prison rather than name names, others were more 'friendly' witnesses- such as Disney who claimed Commies struck against Mickey. This censorship, depicted in Woody's movie *The Front*, was as bad for Hollywood as Andeotti's Law in Italy was good for Hollywood.

5 Billy Wilder, German émigré auteur of *Lost Weekend*. Film noir, inspired by post-War techniques of poverty gave first permission for many devices used by Woody: spoken internal narrative, depth of focus in naturalistic city settings, distance from character, causality, and chronology, past time frames cut in on anti-heroes future as in Trümmerfilm,

6 Grant and Hepburn, stars of Hawks' screwball comedy *Bringing Up Baby*.

7 Harpo of the Marx Brothers, stars of *Animal Crackers* and *Duck Soup*.

8 Cesare Zavattini, *"Some Ideas on the Cinema,"* (1953)

9 Screwball comedy was usually hi-so, undermined by anarcho-humor such as Marx's. It depended, whether it knew so or not, upon the confusion of gender roles brought on by Rosie the Riveter, "good bad girl" or femme fatale, Rita

Heyworth in Orson's mirrors in *Lady from Shanghai*. Film noir introduces another post-war, anti-ism confusion between white-hat good and a *Touch of Evil*: sheriff's planting evidence like an existentialist in Merceau's pocket. The question was not who shot J.R., rather who killed Chandler's chauffeur while Ray slept.

10 The word-play is 'ab'surd, as before reluctant 'guffaws' references Hollywood's reluctant applause.

11 This whole piece is a fiction, never happened, and was never written, except by me, not Woody!