

THX-1138-4EB by George Lucas, Jr., 23 year old student at the University of Southern California, won the first prize in the Dramatic film category in this year's National Student Film Festival. It was also recently awarded second prize at the Oberhausen Film Festival in Germany.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about George Lucas' film is the effectiveness of its statement despite the short length (about 15 minutes). THX is a good example of a filmmaker knowing exactly what he wants to get and then employing every cinematic element at his disposal -- cutting, composition, camera angles, camera movement, lighting, music, etc. -- to achieve it.

This film is a dramatic portrayal of the rejection of a computerized, dehumanized world of the future by one of its inhabitants (the title character). It is simply structured, being centered around nothing more than the protagonist's efforts, and eventual success, at escape from this world. The science fiction treatment (i.e., extrapolation of a contemporary societal condition) is particularly effective here in presenting a truly frightening vision of "Things to Come." This is the type of film, if one is receptive, that seeps into the mind and to a certain extent formulates attitudes. After THX, you just can't look at a computer with an indifferent feeling.

Advanced technology dominates the imagery, with computers and TV monitors filling the screen. In this maze of machinery, the human element is reduced to a subservient role -- white-suited attendants at the service of innumerable banks of computers or viewing endless TV-monitored images. A dehumanizing composition is employed here -- human figures are almost always seen with a computer framing, and usually dominating, the composition. The human hand is seen here as nothing more than something to push buttons. Intercut with these technology-cluttered images are shots

of strong kinetic movement, detailing THX's flight through endless corridors as he slowly ascends the levels of the subterranean complex to the earth's surface.

The soundtrack complements the contrasting imagery -- the whine and chatter of computers, the electric hum of TV screens monitoring THX's progress and the persuading voices emanating from the Mind Control center ("You know ours is the best way. You know that.") contrasting with the swelling chords of organ music used over the images of THX running, lending a strange sense of religiousness to his flight.

Much of the cinematic style displayed here is derivative to be sure but it is an example of influences well-absorbed -- not stylistic affectation but technique dramatically integrated into the film. What is predominantly on display in THX is a rare sensitivity to the juxtaposition of shots -- particularly shots of stasis, camera movement and movement within the frame.

It's pretty well known by now that Lucas has signed a contract with Warner Brothers to expand THX to feature length. Although Lucas is a special case (he has friends\*), it goes without saying that the hope for similar arrangements for other student filmmakers is riding on the potential success of Lucas' efforts. As regards the film itself, if I know Warner Brothers, they're looking for a sci-fi programmer. Lucas, with THX, has the foundation for something more ambitious. It'll be interesting to see who wins out.

Gary Crowds

\* Lucas was assistant to UCLA graduate Francis Ford Coppola on the latter's FINIAN'S RAINBOW and it was partially due to Coppola's sponsorship that Lucas' opportunity with Warner Brothers came about.