

SCHMEERGUNTZ

By Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley. Distribution: Nelson, Muir Beach, Via Sausalito, California. 16 min.

Home-made in the best sense of the word, *Schmeerguntz* is one long raucous belch in the face of the American Home. It wallows in the putrified ultra-American form of what Godard was (in his still civilized way) dealing with in *The Married Woman*. But it makes the life of Godard's effectively childless, wistfully romantic heroine seem delightfully soulful.

Its elements are unprepossessing—in fact revolting. Random items from the public, sanitized, ad-glamorized American scene are thrown rapid-fire against homey shots of the unmentionable side of the Home: the guck in the kitchen sink, the dirty clothes mountain, the squalling infants, the filthy rump, the used kotex. Even Motherhood gets its knocks: after an organ prelude with shots of the moon, an incredibly distended belly and a funny problem with dressing, followed by doleful pregnancy exercises and recurrent urps in the toilet.

The film operates as a non-stop counterpoint of the Ideal and the Real, with both suffering: for the latter makes the former look cheap and grotesque, while the former makes the latter look intolerably grubby. Although the technique

is simple and slapdash, it is effective, and the juxtapositions are often cruelly comic. Over a sylvan scene a TV reporter recounts, deadpan, an item of mob behavior (in Watts?), quoting participants saying "Kill! Kill!" After a series of fetal drawings come a child's voice from a storytelling session, "O Hansel you're so clever!"—over the wiping of babyshit. Random asinine quotes from the public media abound, and are used in an offhand savage way, stripped from immediate context yet horribly relevant in a larger way: "Johnson has thus been able to make decisions. [pause] Hubert Humphrey has made none." Much of the iconography is of course not new in this satiric genre, which is well trodden by experimental film-makers, but it is used here with great effect—the roller-derby females, the Miss America contests, the endless ads—because it is constantly and not just generally undercut, and by what we see rather than by what we may believe.

A society which hides its animal functions beneath a shiny public surface deserves to have such films as *Schmeerguntz* shown everywhere—in every PTA, every Rotary Club, every garden club in the land. For it is brash enough, brazen enough, and funny enough to purge the soul of every harried American married woman.

—ERNEST CALLENBACH

R. M. HODGENS*

Entertainments

Born Free was supposedly rejected as a Disney project because animal experts feared the mauling of actors. But producer Carl Foreman went ahead, working behind heavy wire screens; he had his actors spend months living with a pride of 19 lions. The results are remarkable. The dozen cats who portray Elsa at various ages are photographed without the tell-tale flatness of the telephoto lens; there are only a handful of places where coy editing is used to dupe the viewer. The magnificent depth of field and the startling intimacy of the animals testify to the integrity of the filming. But this technical achievement is drowned in vacillating direction, a maudlin soundtrack, and

soap-opera histrionics. Director James Hill was luckily unable to get slushy acting out of the animals, but he succeeded egregiously with the people; and the editing plays every scene for its maximum corn content. With its focus split between Elsa and her problems and the Adamsons' undercurrent of neurosis (Joy refers to her husband as "Father" when talking to the lion) the film as a whole lacks cohesion and continuity. Its most moving passages come when showing Elsa's transition from household pet to jungle hunter: a

*All items are by Mr. Hodgens except those bearing a special signature.