



TCM BREAKFAST CLUB SCREENING

Blowup | 1966

Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni

Made at the height of the Swinging London era, *Blowup* really did catch the spirit of the age, although it took an Italian to do it. Michelangelo Antonioni (who died on July 30 this year, aged 84) brilliantly conveys what made Britain's capital city so irresistible to artists, writers, musicians, designers and free spirits thirsting for changes to the old order. But he also hints at how the standard-bearers of this revolution slumped into self-parody and indolence, weighed down by the cynicism and ennui that were the inevitable byproducts of their newfound wealth and glamour. TCM writer David Humphrey sums up the film, here shown in digital format, that many regard as one of the most significant elements of the sixties cinema revolution are, like *Kin*, former geishas. In contrast to the comfortably-off

After concluding that first-choice Terence Stamp was not the actor he wanted, Antonioni cast unknown 24-year-old David Hemmings in the starring role of Thomas, the hip young photographer catapulted to fame by his good looks and fashion sense as much as his ability to capture a memorable picture. On the face of it he has everything – a Rolls convertible, trendy pad and queues of girls desperate for his services – but Thomas is bored and unsettled. He spends his days in frenetic photo shoots and his nights visiting seedy locales to take 'reality-chic' pictures that will add contrast in his achingly stylish book of fashion photography. Rarely without his trusty camera, Thomas looks for inspiration one day by taking a walk in a park and comes across a couple acting oddly. His interest aroused, he fires off a number

of shots at them and is spotted by the woman (Vanessa Redgrave) who pursues him, begging for the return of the film. When he refuses, she follows him to his studio and tries to seduce him in order to steal it. Thomas sends her away with another roll. Then he blows up his photos, and, in the process, realises he may have recorded a murder.

As the blow-ups grow in magnification, Thomas tries to make sense of the light and shadow, dots and blurs, projected before him. There's a brief diversion when he allows two of his young female admirers into his studio and they engage in sex play as they cavort in crumpled backdrop paper. Thomas dismisses them and he returns to the blowups, making more of the grainy prints he hopes will provide a clue to what was happening in the park. It emerges that the woman is looking toward some bushes, and that there is a gunman there, and in one photo what resembles a man can be seen lying on the ground. Thomas returns to the park and comes across a man's corpse. But has he witnessed a murder? Later the body and the photographs disappear, along with the woman who pursued him. The final sequence is played out in the park, where Thomas watches a group of students playing tennis with an imaginary ball. He pretends he can see the ball, and the sounds of tennis can indeed be heard. Then Thomas wanders across the grass until he, too, disappears. Antonioni's first English language film had the tabloids in a frenzy for its full frontal female nudity, a first for a British feature film. But it was notable in another, more significant aspect: as a way of bypassing the still-powerful Production Code in the US, MGM created a company called Premiere Productions which was unaffiliated to the code and therefore not bound by its strictures.

By this simple expedient, MGM did not have to cut the nudity or other sexually explicit scenes and maintained all rights to the film. Film historians say this act of defiance showed up the toothlessness of the American censors and helped trigger the code's collapse a year or two later. Meanwhile the character of Thomas was built around London's two foremost snappers of the time, David Bailey and Terence Donovan, while a third well-known photographer, the Vietnam war chronicler Don McCullin, supplied many of the still photos featured in the film. Other 60s personalities and emerging celebrities have bit parts or lend props to the film: Thomas' Rolls Royce, for example, belongs to the disc jockey Jimmy Savile. The Yardbirds perform on film, with Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck playing side by side, while Python-in-waiting Michael Palin can be seen in one crowd scene and a very young Janet Street-Porter dances in striped trousers. In a bizarre revelation fully in keeping with the film's surreal nature, McCullin later revealed in his autobiography *Unreasonable Behaviour* that Antonioni had some grass sprayed green in one of the park scenes because he wasn't satisfied with its real colour. Three decades on, Mike Myers had fun at *Blowup's* expense in his comedy *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997) with a hilarious take-off of the passage in which Thomas photographs a model while barking commands and encouragement at her.

Further reading: Michelangelo Antonioni: *The Complete Films* by Seymour Chatman (Taschen); *Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship and the Production Code from the 1920s to the 1960s* by Leonard J Leff and Jerold L Simmons (Weidenfeld & Nicholson).

ESCAPE TO A WORLD OF FILM THIS OCTOBER WITH TCM

TCM presents a special season entitled **Movies and Memories**, in which viewers select films that rekindle special moments in their lives – joyful, sad and even life-changing. The result is a superb line-up of 32 titles across a huge range of emotions, showing on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through the month. **Meanwhile Halloween Horror Night** on 31st October brings a TCM premiere with Richard Attenborough brilliantly portraying mass-murder John Christie in **10, Rillington Place** (1971). Even more horror is guaranteed in *The Exorcist: The Version You've Never Seen* (1973/2000), and the director of *The Exorcist*, William Friedkin, gives a revealing OFF SET interview about how the film was made. Elsewhere, Mylene Klass hosts a packed edition of **CNN's The Screening Room** from the prestigious Toronto and Venice film festivals, with unmissable news, star interviews and celebrity gossip. October's must-see movies are **McCabe and Mrs Miller** (1971), **Legends of the Fall** (1994), **The Wild Geese** (1978) and **The Exorcist: The Version You've Never Seen** (1973/2000).