



Assault and Battery from Punography.

tain people cannot handle the gifts that set them apart; instead they must destroy their own talent. Mank was one of those men.

Today, Mankiewicz is a symbol to many of the new breed of Hollywood writers. There's hardly a successful scripter who can't hold a group spellbound with Mank stories. It's not hard to understand the Kane creator's appeal: he was the best and the brightest, and he did the job (when not too drunk). But he paid the price every Hollywood writer fears—a lessening of that exclusive but necessary commodity known as self-respect. For Mank was an honorable man, with a strong sense of justice and his own moral code; he never quite resigned himself to the fact that he could play the moguls' dirty games and win.

Much of the territory in *Mank* is familiar, including the drinking, the inability to meet deadlines, the crassness of the deities who ran the studios. What makes this book special is the man himself. They don't come any more fascinating than Mank—they certainly don't come any more brilliant. Would that talent alone had been enough.

Jacoba Atlas

A Most Important Critic

Walter Benjamin was for too many years a lost writer. Born in Germany in 1892, he committed suicide in 1940 after being told—wrongly it seems—that he would not be allowed to travel from Nazi-occupied France to free Portugal. As a German Jewish writer, Benjamin apparently decided living in Fascist France was too difficult, and until very recently he was known only to the most devoted scholars of modern criticism. Now this edition of his writings gives us a comprehensive introduction to the man Hannah Arendt calls "the most important critic of the time."

Reading *Reflections*, (edited and with an introduction by Peter Demetz), it's easy to see why Benjamin receives such praise. He's truly a compelling thinker. He's part of that learned, European tradition of critics that embraced Marxism and then moved even further along on the evolutionary scale. As a young man, Benjamin was part of the idealistic German Youth Movement, a group that refused to submit to Wilhelmine German standards. He then managed to sit out World War I, reading Kant and the German Romantics, preparing himself for his life-long romance with the philosophy of language and contemporary linguistics. Later, in his 30's, Benjamin traveled throughout Europe and wrote insightful observations of the Continent's chaotic social situation, a turbulence so devastating it eventually led to World War II.

As Benjamin was a communist, it's particularly interesting to read his comments on Russia during Stalin's reign of terror and to note his obvious distress trying to mesh individualistic thoughts with the creed of mandatory social realism in art and manda-

tory revolution in politics. His essay on Russia is rich in detail and bears the mark of a man confronted with a reality that is in direct conflict with the idealism he imagined. Needless to say, Benjamin was not the first—or the last—communist to find Russia a confusing disappointment. He is also particularly effective when discussing Bertold Brecht's theory of epic theatre (the two men were, interestingly enough, great friends).

What makes Benjamin so timely is that he wrote from a political point of view while still indulging in a healthy dose of moralism. Nothing was too high or too low for Benjamin. He was quite at home writing of whores as well as heaven. He also pioneered the current fascination with semiotics, writing of the change in language and understanding wrought by movies, advertising and other forms of mass communication which we now lump together as The Media. *Reflections* is an important contribution to the world of modern thought.

J.A.

Are You Sure Boston Did It This Way?

Just as Scientology has been referred to as the "fast food" of religions, this \$7.95 softbound *The Record Producer's Handbook (How to make your own record for \$500)* by Don Gere, (Acrobat Books), is the McDonald's of record-biz information at the buyer's expense. Wait, we take that back! At least we like McDonald's. No, we weren't jarred by the amateurish appearance of this volume (but it certainly does look schlock), or the fact that at a price of eight samolians you kind of expect more than only 50 or so pages of even the most invaluable advice—which, believe us, this ain't. And it's not just on account of L. Ron Hubbard's name appearing twice in the first four pages either. Really.

Let us say, at the outset, that unless you had absolutely no idea what was happening at all, this book would be tantamount to useless. (Note the use of big flashy words on the part of the reviewers. Hey, at ten cents a

word, it adds up, you know?) Don Gere knows a little bit about recording, but unless you enjoy the remedial aspects of a check list every few pages to remind you to eat and rest and pay your bill, etc.—come on, who needs this? Of course, this all comes from a guy who says he's seen thousands of dollars of studio time wasted in the studio by drugs and alcohol. He recommends coffee; that figures.

What this book says is know your material, here's a picture of a real producer, here's a few machines, how to copyright your songs, and how to make an ass of yourself by either selling them to your friends or pestering some local disc jockey until he either plays your record or has his cousin Guido break your lips. There's a cute little post-card simulation in the back that says, in effect, "Dear Mr. D. J., How many times have you played my record and if not, why not? Do you have any suggestions for me?..." My friends, you just don't do that sort of crap. It's irritating, ya' know?

Also, in the event that you can ever really find a way to manufacture a \$500 record, the author suggests that you sell 500 records at a dollar apiece to record stores. (Now why didn't Warner Bros. or Columbia think of that?) It also doesn't mention paying any musicians or singers or unions or anything, so we must assume that the maximum application of this volume is to either stimulate a "New Wave /No Money" approach or a "Hey-we're-a-band-let's-make-a-record" angle. Listen, send your cash to Flo and Eddie—we'll tell you what to do, suckers.

We're not discouraging new labels or bands—quite the opposite—but unless you only want 600 garage-fidelity Frisbees to hold in your lap, there is nothing to be said for throwing good money after bad. Gere has us spending three hours in the studio to record tracks, vocals and overdubs on two professional-sounding songs, and that's if you're well-rehearsed and do the vocals "live" and don't allow any time to change the entire recording set-up before mixing—a necessary little step, to say the least. It's a good idea to be a little spontaneous in the studio too, you know, but the author, being a Scientologist, doesn't allow for any of that "fun" stuff. Of course in a 16-track studio that only costs \$20 an hour, fun is in the mind of the beholder.

Five hundred dollars hasn't made a hit single since "Louie, Louie" (but what a hit single!). However, if your dad's rich or your band is pooling its funds, or you're just a bored weirdo looking to impress a lady or a promoter or a lady promoter, you might have the money to waste on a naive, incomplete Ding-Dong School manual on how to be as studio-wise as the Dead Boys. When you consider that the author advises paying only 25¢ to manufacture each disc, you can then scientifically put the bite to your friends for the other seventy-five. We can't help but wonder how much this book cost to manufacture and research. Not much! But maybe the profits will buy Mr. Gere another trip on Ron's boat.

O.K. It's time for a quiz. Did you...

Understand the review _____

Learn about making records _____

Kill a few minutes _____

Decide to forget about music as a career _____

You see what we mean? Pretty dumb, huh?

Flo & Eddie

Punning for Gold

The very title (*Punography*, Penguin Books, \$2.95) is a pun, and this slender book of photographs is basically a one-joke volume, with many variations in which several sequential photographs illustrate more than a dozen clichés. Some are cute, many contrived ("Buoys will be buoys" is just too labored) and a few inspired: "A fork in the road has—you guessed it a dinner fork lying in a fork in the road; "Roll with the punches" shows a dinner roll between two punch bowls; and "Shooting the breeze" is illustrated by two grizzled men firing rifles at the sky.

Photographer Bruce A. McMillan probably had a great deal of fun thinking about this book, devising clever ways to illustrate bromides like "Half in the bag" or "Making a clean breast of it"—more fun, I dare say, than we have reading it. But it's a nearly perfect gift book, mildly amusing, inexpensive, completely inoffensive, and appropriate for everyone...except serious photographers.

Judith Sims

