DIRECTOR John Schlesinger
WRITING Waldo Salt wrote the screenplay based on the James Leo Herlihy novel.
PRODUCER Jerome Hellman
CINEMATOGRAPHY Adam Holender
EDITING Hugh A. Robertson
MUSIC John Barry

The film won Oscars for Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Writing and was nominated for Best Actor in a Leading Role (for both Dustin Hoffman and Jon Voight), Best Actress in a Supporting Role, and Best Editing at the 1970 Academy Awards. In 1994, the National Film Preservation Board entered the film into the National Film Registry.

CAST
Jon Voight…Joe Buck
Dustin Hoffman…Enrico Salvatore "Ratso" Rizzo
Sylvia Miles…Cass
John McGiver…Mr. O'Daniel
Brenda Vaccaro…Shirley
Barnard Hughes…Towny
Ruth White…Sally Buck
Jennifer Salt…Annie
Gilman Rankin…Woodsy Niles
Georgann Johnson…Rich Lady
Anthony Holland…TV Bishop
Bob Balaban…Young Student

JOHN SCHLESINGER (b. February 16, 1926, Hampstead, London, United Kingdom—d. July 25, 2003, Palm Springs, CA) made his first film at age 11, a documentary about one of his indomitable Jewish grandmothers with his new 9.5mm camera. He did short reportage films for BBC program *Tonight* (1957) and documentaries for BBC arts program *Monitor* (1958-1961) and worked several years as an actor. By the 1960s, he had virtually given up acting to concentrate on a directing career, and another of his earlier directorial efforts, the British Transport Films' documentary *Terminus* (1961), gained a Venice Film Festival Gold Lion and a British Academy Award. His first two fiction films, *A Kind of Loving* (1962) and *Billy Liar* (1963) were set in the North of England. *A Kind of Loving* won the Golden Bear award at the 12th Berlin International Film Festival in 1962. His third feature film, *Darling* (1965), tartly described the modern way of life in London and was one of the first films about 'swinging London'. Schlesinger's next film was the period drama *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967), an adaptation of Thomas Hardy's popular novel accentuated by beautiful English country locations. Both films (and *Billy Liar*) featured Julie Christie as the female lead. Schlesinger's next film, tonight's film, *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), was internationally acclaimed. A story of two hustlers living on the fringe in the bad side of New York City, it was Schlesinger's first film shot in the US, and it won Oscars for Best Director and Best Picture. He said he was drawn to *Midnight Cowboy* by its theme of loneliness: "The security and happiness that people achieve in life always falls short of their expectations and they must simply make the most of it." He says he tried to "breathe

into the film 'the mixture of desperation and humor' he found all along Forty-second Street while filming in NYC" (Phillips, *Major*). During the 1970s, he made an array of films that were mainly about loners, losers and people outside the mainstream world, such as *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971), *The Day of the Locust* (1975), *Marathon Man* (1976) and *Yanks* (1979). Later, came the major box office and critical failure of *Honky Tonk Freeway* (1981), followed by films that attracted mixed responses from the public, and low returns, although *The Falcon and the Snowman* (1985) made money and *Pacific Heights* (1990) was a box-office hit. In Britain, he did better with films like *Madame Sousatzka* (1988) and, the delightful and charmingly funny, *Cold Comfort Farm* (1995). Other later works include *An Englishman Abroad* (1983), the TV play *A Question of Attribution* (1991), *The Innocent* (1993) and, his last film, *The Next Best Thing* (2000).

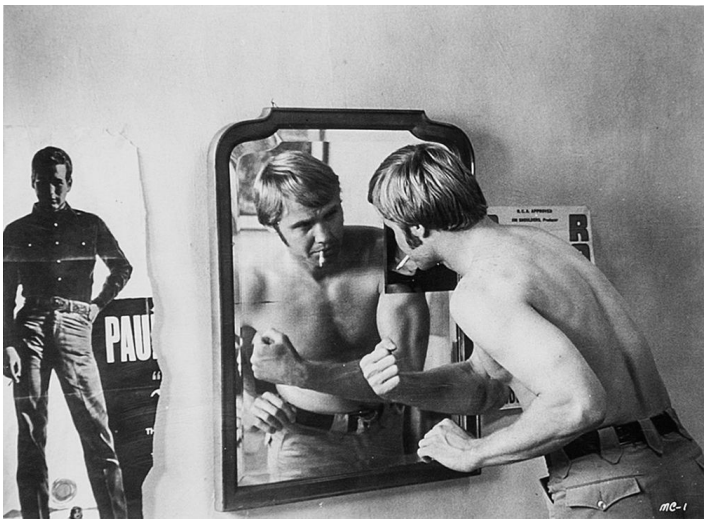
WALDO SALT (b. October 18, 1914, Chicago, Illinois—d. March 7, 1987 (aged 72), Los Angeles, California) was an American screenwriter (27 credits) who won Academy Awards for both *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and *Coming Home* (1978) and was nominated for *Serpico* (1973). The first of the nineteen films he wrote (or participated in writing) was released in 1937 with the title *The Bride Wore Red*. He went on the write for films starring some of the leading actors of the time, including the screenplay for *The Shopworn Angel* (1938), starring Jimmy Stewart, and adapting (uncredited) *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1939), with Mickey Rooney. He had an uncredited contribution to the screenplay for the beloved Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn screwball comedy *The Philadelphia* Story (1940). He wrote for the 1944 Edward G. Robinson film *Mr. Winkle Goes to War*, as well as the screenplay for Robert Mitchum's *Rachel and the Stranger* (1948) and 1950's *The Flam and the Arrow*, with Burt Lancaster. Salt's career in Hollywood was interrupted when he was blacklisted after refusing to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1951. Before writing *Midnight Cowboy*, he would work on *Wild and Wonderful*, with Tony Curtis, in 1964. One of his last screenplays was his adaptation of the Nathaniel West novel *The Day of the Locust*, once again for John Schlesinger, released in 1975.

JAMES LEO HERLIHY (b. February 27, 1927, Detroit, Michigan—d. October 21, 1993, Los Angeles, California) was an American novelist, playwright and actor, known for his novels *Midnight Cowboy*, 1965, and *All Fall Down*, 1960, and his 1958 play *Blue Denim*, all of which were adapted for cinema. Other publications include the 1971 novel *The Season of the Witch* and several short stories. Born into a working-class family in Detroit, he was raised in Detroit and Chillicothe, Ohio. He enlisted with the Navy in 1945, attended Black Mountain College in North Carolina for two years, where he studied sculpture, then moved to southern California and attended the Pasadena Playhouse College of the Theatre. He was a close friend of playwright Tennessee Williams, who served as his mentor.

ADAM HOLENDER (b. November 13, 1937, Kraków, Poland) is a Polish cinematographer (34 credits), best known for his work on *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), which was his first cinematography assignment; he was recommended to Schlesinger by Holender's childhood friend, filmmaker Roman Polanski. He has worked with Jerry Schatzberg on *Puzzle of a Downfall Child* (1970), *The Panic in Needle Park* (1971), *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* (1979), and *Street Smart* (1987). He worked with Paul Newman's directorial efforts: *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* (1972) and *The Shadow Box* (1980). He photographed two projects involving Alan Arkin: *The Other Side of Hell* (1978) and *Simon* (1980). In the 1990s, he worked with novelist Paul Auster on a film Auster wrote, 1995's *Smoke*, and a film he wrote and directed, 1995's *Blue in the Face*. In 2000, he photographed a television movie reunion: *Mary and Rhoda*. Most recently, he photographed the documentary *Apollo 11* (2019).

DUSTIN HOFFMAN (b. 8 August 1937, Los Angeles, California) is an American film (85 credits) and stage actor. He is known for his versatile portrayals of antiheroes and emotionally vulnerable characters. He is the recipient of numerous accolades including two Academy Awards, six Golden Globe Awards (including the Cecil B. DeMille Award), four BAFTAs, three Drama Desk Awards, and two Emmy Awards. Hoffman received the AFI Life Achievement Award in 1999 and the Kennedy Center Honors Award in 2012. Hoffman had a minor production job in Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* in 1963. Miller said that when Hoffman was older he'd be a perfect Willy Loman, the protagonist of Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, that Hoffman was the size and build of the person he'd had in mind when he was writing the play. An older Hoffman did play Loman in the play's 1984 revival.

In 1964, he was set to play the lead in novelist Philip Roth's failed attempt at playwrighting, a play titled *The Nice Jewish Boy*, which, though abandoned, became material for Roth's bestselling *Portnoy's Complaint* five years later. Interestingly, Lenny Bruce, who Hoffman would play in Bob Fosse's 1974 film, *Lenny*, was cited by critics as an influence on Roth writing *Portnoy*. Hoffman first drew critical praise for starring in the 1966 production of the Henry Livings play *Eh?*, directed by Alan Arkin, for which he won a Theatre World Award and a Drama Desk Award. In 1966, director Mike Nichols auditioned Hoffman for a lead role in the Broadway musical *The Apple Tree* but rejected him because he could not sing well enough and gave Alan Alda the part; however, Nichols was so impressed with Hoffman's overall audition he cast him as the male lead in the movie *The Graduate* (1967), which earned Hoffman his first Oscar nomination. He was paid $17,000 for his role in that breakthrough film (and $250,000 for, tonight's film, *Midnight Cowboy*). Hoffman won best actor Oscars for *Kramer v. Kramer* (1979) and *Rain Man* (1988), and was also nominated best actor for *Wag the Dog* (1997), *Tootsie* (1982), *Lenny* (1974), and *Midnight Cowboy* (1969). In 1989 he played Shylock in a London production (later moved to New York) of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, for which he was nominated for a Tony. The American Film Institute gave him its Life Achievement Award in 1999. In the 2000s, Hoffman appeared in *Moonlight Mile* (2002), followed by *Confidence* (2003) opposite Edward Burns, Andy García and Rachel Weisz. Hoffman finally had a chance to work with Gene Hackman in Gary Fleder's *Runaway Jury* (also 2003), an adaptation of John Grisham's bestselling novel. Hoffman played theater owner Charles Frohman in the J. M. Barrie historical fantasia *Finding Neverland* (2004), costarring Johnny Depp and Kate Winslet. In director David O. Russell's *I Heart Huckabees* (also 2004), Hoffman appeared opposite Lily Tomlin as an existential detective team member. Seven years after his nomination for *Wag the Dog*, Hoffman got another opportunity to perform again with Robert De Niro, co-starring with Barbra Streisand and Ben Stiller in the 2004 comedy *Meet the Fockers*, a sequel to *Meet the Parents* (2000). In 2005, he had a cameo on Larry David's *Curb Your Enthusiasm* as Larry's guide in an afterlife scenario. In 2006, he appeared in *Stranger Than Fiction*. In 2012, Hoffman's directorial debut film *Quartet*, starring Maggie Smith, Tom Courtenay, Pauline Collins, Billy Connolly, and Michael Gambon, premiered at the 2012 Toronto Film Festival where it earned respectable reviews from critics. In 2017, Hoffman starred Noah Baumbach's Netflix film *The Meyerowitz Stories* alongside Adam Sandler, Ben Stiller, Elizabeth Marvel and Emma Thompson. The film premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on May 21, 2017 where it received a four-minute standing ovation. His most recent projects are: *As Sick as They Made Us* (pre-production) and *Into the Labyrinth* (2019). Some of his other films are *American Buffalo* (1996), *Billy Bathgate* (1991), *Dick Tracy* (1990), *Straight Time* (1978), *Marathon Man* (1976), *All the President's Men* (1976), *Papillon* (1973), *Straw Dogs* (1971), and *Little Big Man* (1970).



JON VOIGHT (29 December 1938, Yonkers, New York) became a star because of his Oscar-nominated performance as Joe Buck in *Midnight Cowboy*, but he was a late choice. The part had previously been offered to Michael Sarrazin and Elvis Presley, among others. He won a best actor Academy Award for *Coming Home* (1978) and was nominated *for Runaway Train* (1985). Some of his other films are *Roe v. Wade* (2020), *Surviving the Wild* (2018), *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2016), *Tropic Thunder* (2008), *Transformers* (2007), *National Treasure* (2004), *The Manchurian Candidate* (2004), *Holes* (2003), *Ali* (2001), *Pearl Harbor* (2001), *The Rainmaker* (1997), *Mission: Impossible* (1996), *Heat* (1995), *The Odessa File* (1974) and *Catch-22* (1970).

SYLVIA MILES (b. September 9, 1924, New York, NY—d. June 12, 2019, Manhattan, New York, NY) was an American actress (47 credits). She was twice nominated for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her performances in *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and *Farewell, My Lovely* (1975). These are some of her other film appearances: *Japanese Borscht* (2019), *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010), *Go Go Tales* (2007), *Sex and the City* (2002, TV Series), *Denise Calls Up* (1995), *Wall Street* (1987), *Critical Condition* (1987), *Evil Under the Sun* (1982), *The Funhouse* (1981), *Shalimar* (1978), *The Great Scout & Cathouse Thursday* (1976), *92 in the Shade* (1975), *Heat* (1972), *The Last Movie* (1971), *Parrish* (1961), and *Murder, Inc.* (1960).

BRENDA VACCARO (b. November 18, 1939, Brooklyn, New York City, New York) is an American stage, television, and film actress. In a career spanning over half a century, she received one Academy Award nomination, three Golden Globe Award nominations (winning one), four Primetime Emmy Award nominations (winning one), and three Tony Award nominations. She was born in Brooklyn and raised in Dallas, TX before returning to New York to study acting under the guidance of Sanford Meisner at the Neighborhood Playhouse. Vaccaro appeared with Dustin Hoffman and Jon Voight in the 1969 film *Midnight Cowboy*, for which she was nominated for a Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress. For her performance in the 1975 film adaptation of Jacqueline Susann's *Once Is Not Enough* she gained an Academy Award nomination and won the Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actress. Additional screen credits include *House by the Lake*, also known as *Death Weekend* (1976), *Airport '77* (1977), *Capricorn One* (1978), *The Pride of Jesse Hallam* (1981), *Zorro, The Gay Blade* (1981), *Supergirl* (1984), *Heart of Midnight* (1988), *The Mirror Has Two Faces* (1996), and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019). Her television credits include the title role in the 1976 series *Sara*, a number of television movies, and a regular role in the short-lived 1984 series *Paper Dolls*, in addition to guest appearances on *Banacek* (1972-1974), *The Fugitive* (1963-1967), *The Defenders* (1961-1965), *The Love Boat* (1977-1987), *St. Elsewhere* (1982-1988), *Murder, She Wrote* (1984-1996), *The Golden Girls* (1985-1992), *Columbo* (1971-1978), *Touched by an Angel* (1994-2003), *Friends* (1994-2004), *The King of Queens* (1998-2007), and *Nip/Tuck* (2003-2010).

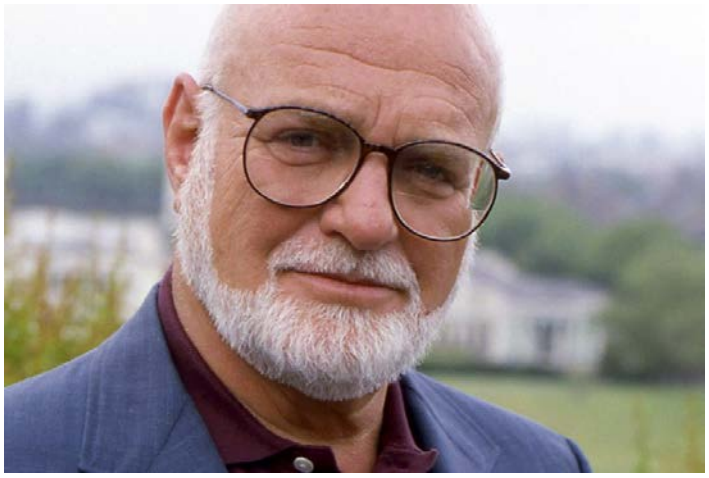
BOB BALABAN (b. August 16, 1945 (age 74), Chicago, Illinois) is an American actor (116 credits), author, producer, and director. His uncles founded the Balaban and Katz Theatre circuit in Chicago, a chain which included the Chicago and Uptown Theatres. Balaban's father, Elmer, and uncle, Harry, founded the H & E Balaban Corporation in Chicago, which operated its own movie palaces, including the Esquire Theatre in Chicago. They later owned a powerful group of television stations and cable television franchises. His uncle Barney Balaban was president of Paramount Pictures for nearly 30 years from 1936 to 1964. His maternal grandmother's second husband, Sam Katz, was a vice president at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer beginning in 1936. One of his earliest appearances in film was in *Midnight Cowboy* (1969). Prior to that, he filled the role of "Linus" in the original off-Broadway production of *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown* in 1967. Some of his early roles in the 1970s were in *Catch-22* (1970), *The Strawberry Statement* (1970), and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). In 1979 he received a Tony Award nomination for his role in *The Inspector General*. During the 1980s he appeared in films including Ken Russell's *Altered States* (1980), *Absence of Malice* (1981), and the 1984 *2001: A Space Odyssey* sequel *2010* (as Dr Chandra, the creator of HAL 9000). In the 1990s, Balaban had supporting roles in films such as *Bob Roberts* (1992) and *Deconstructing Harry* (1997), as well as a recurring role on the fourth season of *Seinfeld* as Russell Dalrymple, the fictional president of NBC; in the 2000s *Ghost World* (2001), *The Majestic* (2001), and *Lady in the Water* (2006). He was one of the producers nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture for *Gosford Park* (2001), in which he also appeared. Balaban has directed three feature films, in addition to numerous television episodes and films. He is also an author of children's novels.
Balaban's other film appearances include narrating *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (2015), *The Monuments Men* (2014), *Girl Most Likely* (2012), *Howl* (2010), *Capote* (2005), *The Mexican* (2001), *Cradle Will Rock* (1999), *Clockwatchers* (1997), *City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold* (1994), and *Alice* (1990); the Christopher Guest "mockumentaries" *Waiting for Guffman* (1996), *Best in Show* (2000), *A Mighty Wind* (2003), *For Your Consideration* (2006), and *Mascots* (2016); and the Wes Anderson films *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012), *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), *Isle of Dogs* (2018), and the upcoming *The French Dispatch* (2020).

Béatrice Schatzmann-von Aesch: "John Schlesinger" (*Senses of Cinema* 2003)

John Schlesinger's career is interesting, firstly, because it covers half a century and therefore presents change and continuity in both his filmmaking and the society he has lived in over an adequately long period; and, secondly, because his corpus is big and complex enough to provide ample and significant information on the social and cultural conditions of his time. The cornerstones of Schlesinger's *oeuvre* are a lifelong preoccupation with gender relations, particularly homosexuality, a distinctive intellectual middle-class outlook, an interest in other

cultures and races, and a commitment to filmmaking as entertainment.

In 2001, shortly before being awarded a Bafta for directing Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* for the Los Angeles Opera, Schlesinger suffered a stroke at the age of 74. His fleeting appearance in *The Next Best Thing* (2000) may therefore have been his last one after half a century of occasional acting. Schlesinger has been an acclaimed director on both sides of the Atlantic and was honoured with the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival for *A Kind of Loving* (1962) and a Best Director Academy Award for *Midnight Cowboy* (1969). Despite working extensively in the States, Schlesinger has always considered himself a British director. Indeed, his contribution to British cinema has been more pronounced, particularly with respect to both his early films, on which his reputation is based, and his documentary work for British television. Music, drama, literature and an interest in the arts has informed and infused his filmmaking throughout his life. In this sense he is very much a product of his British upbringing. He was born into an intellectual, middle-class London family. His mother Winifred was a musician and his father Bernard a paediatrician. They raised five children, of whom Schlesinger is the eldest. Although Jewish, he attended an Anglican boarding school. After serving in the army in World War II in England and the Far East, he studied English Literature and graduated from Oxford in 1950. During this time, he acted with the Oxford University Dramatic School, worked with the local Experimental Theatre Club, was a still photographer, and produced his first short, *Black Legend* (1948). The British-Transport sponsored cinema documentary *Terminus* (1961) was the culmination of his series of documentaries for BBC-TV between 1958-1961.

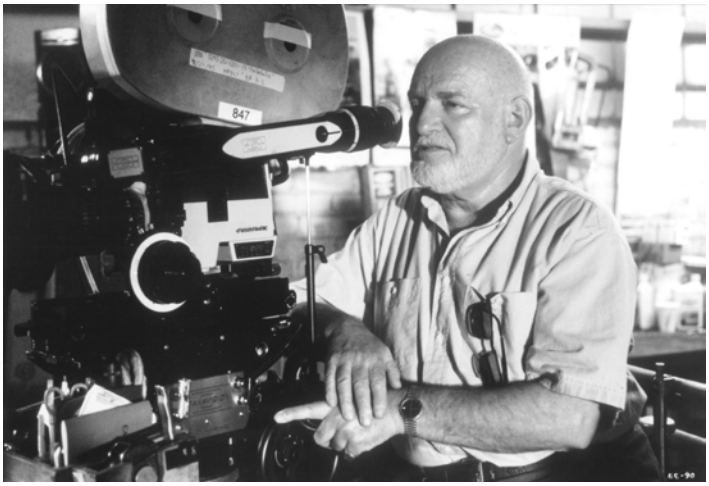


Schlesinger had his debut as a filmmaker as one of the Angry Young Men, who sought to bring to screen minority and working class issues in a Social Realist way and in a Free Cinema style. What *A Kind of Loving* and, for example, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karl Reisz, 1960) have in common is a distinctive middle-class outlook, that is, a certain lack of working-class authenticity; what distinguishes Schlesinger's work is his sensitive, complex, open, and unprejudiced depiction of gender relations. In the second half of the 1960s, Schlesinger's films, and often their elements, were part and parcel of the vibrant British youth-culture. A case in point is Julie Christie, who, wind-blown, capricious and independent, starring in *Darling* and *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1967), became the epitome of the swinging sixties British girl. With *Midnight Cowboy* Schlesinger joined the New Hollywood movement exemplified by films such as *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) and *Medium Cool* (Haskell Wixler, 1969). *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971) was produced during the so-called declining years of British cinema and is, in comparison with Ken Russell's wild, extraverted and disturbing *The Devils* from the same year, a quiet, introspective and harmonious film. Stylistically and ideologically, both *Yanks* (1979) and *Madame Sousatzka* (1988) are comparable to the new Heritage Film of the British film renaissance in the 1980s, which was founded on the critical and public success of films like *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson, 1981) and *A Room with a View* (James Ivory, 1986). *Pacific Heights* (1990) was very much a Melanie Griffith film, albeit with a surprisingly strong and dominant female character. To the same Hollywood tradition belongs *The Next Best Thing* (2000), a star-vehicle with Madonna and Rupert Everett; it is a mix of American family romance and gay-straight comedies such as *One Fine Day* (Michael Hofmann, 1996) and *The Object of My Affection* (Nicholas Hytner, 1998), respectively.

Comparing *A Kind of Loving* with *The Next Best Thing*, it is evident that Schlesinger's depictions of gender relations (in terms of sexuality and family) have changed unevenly in the course of time, and unequally for the sexes. While for—at least heterosexual—women, sexuality has remained a source of frustration, men have increasingly displayed a considerable degree of contentment and fulfilment. Ingrid (June Ritchie), dominated by her possessive, sexually frustrated mother, tries desperately to keep alive Vic's (Alan Bates) interest in her, and therefore consents to make love to him. Consequently she gets pregnant, gets married and is stuck in a marriage with a man who will sooner or later have other relationships. Similar to Ingrid, Abbie (Madonna) longs also for marriage and family life, but, unfortunately, the partner she chooses is not inclined to have sex with her. The result is an unhealthy ten-year-long sexual abstinence on her part before she ends up in the arms of Ben (Benjamin Bratt). By 2000, Schlesinger's women seemed to have not been significantly better off than their sisters in the '60s. In

contrast, men in general, and homosexuals in particular, seem to have made better use of the Sexual Revolution. While Vic had to hide his bisexual inclinations and was trapped in a marriage, which the social norms of the day required, Robert (Rupert Everett) has had his share of lovers to the extent of boredom but he has, in this modern age, the liberty to refuse marriage to Abbie. Hence, his frustration does not reside in repressed sexuality but in the legal obstacles to parenthood in consequence of his homosexuality.

Next Best Thing not only demonstrates how unstable the institution of the family had become by the end of the century, but also how deeply ingrained family values still were. Abbie's lifestyle is more or less typical for industrial societies in the late '90s: people had babies, divorced, looked for new partners (gay, lesbian or straight), and remarried or did not. But, most importantly, Abbie only succeeds in court because she is a mother and a wife. Her boyfriend had died in a car accident when she was pregnant and Robert was willing to become the father of her unborn child. By giving Abbie custody of her son Sam (Malcolm Stumpf), eight years old by now, the film evinces the ideological significance of family as a social and political institution. Hence, Schlesinger's films show that, as in the '60s, society at the turn of the century still regards the traditional family as the key to prosperity, sexual mores and social order.



Schlesinger's middle-class perspective is generally veiled by the fact that he has often sought artistic expression in analysing and representing subcultures, minorities or other discriminated social groups. Accordingly, Schlesinger depicts social reality primarily for the sake of making his protagonists' psychological condition transparent in order to show their personal human drama. The derelict house in which Madame Sousatzka (Shirley MacLaine) and her neighbours reside in Schlesinger's 1988 film is thus an expression of their personal fragility and social vulnerability rather than the film making a plea for better living conditions. Focusing on the individual rather than on the collective, Schlesinger's view of society is basically horizontal; class struggle and social mobility are not an issue in his work. Negotiation, compromise, renunciation and acceptance of a certain degree of pain and frustration are the means by which the individual operates in society. While in the '60s, Schlesinger seemed to have believed in some sort of collective negotiation by which a social equilibrium could be achieved, his later work offers a society where the individual is alone if she or he is not able to cope with the rapidly changing society.

Far From the Madding Crowd, set in the early 1870s, is a complex interplay of giving and taking: The elderly William Boldwood (Peter Finch) loses everything but his life because of his deep, almost pathological attraction to the beautiful, young Bathsheba Everdene (Julie Christie). She, in turn, loses her beloved husband, the flashy Sergeant Troy, but gains shepherd Oak (Alan Bates) as her husband. Oak thus becomes a wealthy farmowner but has a wife who does not love him back. Whereas there is a certain symmetry of sacrifice and victory in this film, the life of Madame Sousatzka is one endless series of losses. Not only can't she accept that it is in the nature of her profession as a piano teacher that her students move on and leave her, but she is also not able to establish relationships outside her work. Hence, despite her music she passes her lifetime in bitterness and isolation. In order to bring out the drama of her inner life, Schlesinger contrasts her with the young, sociable Asian-British pupil Manek (Navin Chowdhry). Hence Sousatzka, the relic of a conservative, dogmatic, eurocentric culture, is contrasted with Manek, the child of a liberal, pragmatic, multicultural society, where everything is possible if the individual has the necessary resources.

As with social organisation, Schlesinger has approached racial and cultural issues on an individual, rather than collective, level. For him, cultural diversity is a way to puzzle out mental landscapes and to define cultural identities by means of juxtaposition. Hence the bar mitzvah scene in *Sunday Bloody Sunday* depicts the proceedings in the synagogue, the religious implication of the rite, the strong bond of the male community and the feeling of exclusion for non-practising Jews with a great deal of sensitivity and knowledge. The party that follows is evidence of the tightly knit Jewish society, where everybody knows everybody else's secrets. Middle-aged gay bachelor Dr. Daniel Hirsch (Peter Finch) could not and would not accept the social restrictions and pressures of British Jewish society. But he appreciates his Jewish background as an element of his own cultural identity. In *Yanks*, the cultural clash of two nations (the USA and UK) is transposed to the encounter of two American GI on their way to the European front and two British girls in rural Britain during World War II. Interestingly, while

in *Sunday Bloody Sunday* the Jewish culture is represented in an insightful, versatile and kind way, the characters in *Yanks* are boiled down to mere stereotypes. The Americans are represented as a hoard of aggressive, out-going, beer-drinking and gum-chewing cowboys, and the Britons as a bunch of traditionalist, repressed, tea-drinking and bike-riding country yokels. Particularly bad examples of their respective species are the constantly grinning officer John (William Devane), who courts and finally seduces Helen (Vanessa Redgrave), wife of a RAF-pilot and mother of two teenagers; and the pale, clumsy and slightly retarded British soldier Ken (Derek Thompson), who happens to be engaged to Jean (Lisa Eichhorn), who, in turn, is in love with Matt (Richard Gere), a respectable, dynamic and sexy young GI. Schlesinger's strategy to break down national and cultural difference to an individual level was fortunate because conflicts became immediate, personal and comprehensible. However, sensitive socio-political issues, for instance racial tensions in the US army, were levelled and occasionally glossed over. Schlesinger's depiction of stereotypes (unusual for him) may have been, on one hand, an expression of his own insecurity as a person who lived and worked in both cultures; on the other hand, it may also have been what the British and US producers required, in particular, easily identifiable characters for an international mass audience. However, it may also have had to do with Schlesinger's wish to change his style. He came to believe that if a story were told in a simple and direct style, the impact would be bigger. (1)

Schlesinger produced a coherent body of work with a distinctive theme and style. All of his feature films for cinema have circled around one theme, namely "the problems of trying to face compromise in one's life and relationships". (2) A case in point is Robert in *The Next Best Thing*, who has to come to terms with the consequence of his homosexuality in a still considerably gay-hostile society. Schlesinger's stories are told in a style that can be defined as classical Hollywood with occasional wild montage sequences. Some prominent characteristics of his work are, firstly, the music, carefully selected and often highly innovative; secondly, acting, making full use of the skills and resources of actors and actresses; and, finally, a distinctive set of recurrent motives, such as glass and liquids, spectacles, feet, dogs and fireworks.

Although *The Next Best Thing* leaves a lot to be desired, the sequence where Robert and Abbie exuberantly dance is exceptionally eloquent and a kind of synthesis and summary of Schlesinger's craftsmanship. A night of drinking and fooling around is depicted in a two-minute dance sequence. The effect is achieved by the transposition of cocktail glasses, fireworks and faces. Robert and Abbie, both attractive examples of their respective sex, dance in perfect harmony to the flowing rhythm of a carefully selected Irving Berlin song, an act that paradoxically emphases their sexual incompatibility. The music, bridging the on and off screen spheres gives the illusion that Fred Astaire's warm baritone singing suggestively "Stepping out with my baby" comes out of Robert's elegant, tanned, and half-naked body; a stylistic device which makes Abbie's frustration comprehensible to the—at least heterosexual female—audience. (3) Everett visibly enjoys himself in doing the scene, and Schlesinger does not hold him back but lets him play first fiddle and thus prepares the terrain for the audience's identification with Robert's cause.

A recurrent motif in Schlesinger's films is breaking glass or porcelain. Here, it is the insertion of a high-angle, slow motion shot of a falling and shattering vase. It serves to disturb the harmony of the sequence and to foreshadow Robert's final breakdown. Moments of terror, violence or destruction, often gratuitous and in some instances even exploitative, are another element which firmly belongs to Schlesinger's stylistic and narrative repertory. In Schlesinger's *oeuvre*, style is a means to tell a story. There is no such thing as 'art for art's sake'. He wants to tell a story, to entertain, that is, to engage the attention of the viewer, to pose questions, and to give the audience a special experience. (4)

The fact that Schlesinger's early films were more experimental and his later works have consciously become simpler and more direct has led to the misconception that his earlier works are of a higher quality. It is therefore not surprising that films like *A Kind of Loving*, *Midnight Cowboy* and *Sunday Blood Sunday* have entered the film canon. However, his later work shows an equally high degree of craftsmanship added by an eloquence and maturity his earlier films lack. From a cinema-historical point of view, his corpus is a rich source of social artefacts, which allows him to examine selected issues over a

relatively long stretch of time. With respect to gender, Schlesinger's films indicate the unequal progress of the sexes despite the sexual liberation, and society's adherence to traditional family values. In general, society has become more individualistic, more liberal, multicultural, but harder to succeed in. And, finally, nationality is still a precarious issue, depending on the politics and economics of the day. Schlesinger has been—with the exception of gay politics—a rather apolitical filmmaker, who has preferred to concentrate on drama at the individual level. He has aimed to pose issues for discussion by entertaining his audience in the hope of offering new perspectives on old problems and by engaging the viewer both intellectually and emotionally. Schlesinger has accepted the dialectics of life and filmmaking and has produced an *oeuvre* with which he can be satisfied.

Koraljka Suton: "How John Schlesinger's Homeless and Lonesome 'Midnight Cowboy' Rode His Way to the Top and Became the First and Only X-rated Movie to Win a Best Picture Oscar" (*Cinephilia & Beyond*).

*A friend of mine, an American painter living in London, had read the book and suggested that I look at it. I read it and thought 'If I'm going to make a film in America, then this is the one that I want to do.' David Picker of United Artists had issued a kind of blanket invitation, saying "When you find something you want to do, do bring it to us." So Jerry Hellman, who was a producer I knew, and I brought the book to David, who agreed to do it if we could keep the budget low enough. You couldn't make 'Midnight Cowboy' now. I was recently at dinner with a top studio executive, and I said, 'If I brought you a story about this dishwasher from Texas who goes to New York dressed as a cowboy to fulfill his fantasy of living off rich women, doesn't, is desperate, meets a crippled consumptive who later pisses his pants (...) would you—' and he said, 'I'd show you the door.' —*John Schlesinger

Although highly controversial at the time, British director John Schlesinger's daring, unconventional but primarily profoundly moving and honest film *Midnight Cowboy* managed to ride its way to the very top in 1969, despite all conceivable odds. After having made the hit movie *Darling* in 1965, which was nominated for three Academy Awards, earning the director his first nomination and winning Julie Christie the golden statue, London-born Schlesinger was set on making a picture in the United States. Despite his success, he was inherently a double outsider in his country, seeing as how he was both Jewish and gay. And as a gay Englishman who came to the States and suddenly wanted to do a movie about New York, that status did not change. While working on *Darling*, Schlesinger read *Midnight Cowboy*, a novel including a few sex scenes between men, written by James Leo Herlihy. Having liked the book, the director wanted to make it in collaboration with his producer Joe Janni but the latter asked Schlesinger whether he were crazy, proclaiming the source material "faggot stuff" that would surely destroy his career. Although disheartened, Schlesinger did not want to give up on the prospect of turning the novel into a motion picture, so he called producer and friend Jerome Hellman, whose project for the production company United Artists he had previously dropped out of. Hellman thought the material was great but was worried about the execution.

"I thought that the relationship between the two guys was something that would work. But that if there was any hint of homosexuality it would be a catastrophe. I was a little embarrassed to say that, because when I met John he was still carrying on this charade of being a straight man. In the little house on Peel Street, he had a guy living in the attic, but he never let me meet him. He told me I was not supposed to know that there was a guy scurrying in and out. So I knew he was gay, but he absolutely agreed with me [about *Midnight Cowboy*]. I said, 'O.K., look, it'll be very hard to get money for it—we'll have to work for nothing—but I'd love to try to do it with you.'" —Producer Jerome Hellman

And try they did. Well-known author Gore Vidal was asked to write the screenplay, but he replied that the novel was crap and wanted to persuade Hellman and Schlesinger to go with one of his stories instead. The duo refused and temporarily found a suitable replacement in playwright Jack Gelber, but his first two drafts of the script did not

seem to work for them. Luckily, they soon hired a more than suitable candidate for the job, talented author Waldo Salt, who was reduced to working on television under a pseudonym due to being blacklisted for his "communist affiliations" back in the 1950s—*Midnight Cowboy* was the wind in his sails he had been waiting for. What Salt managed to pull off was a faithful adaptation, taking the movie's most memorable scenes directly from the novel—dialogue included. But the most important thing he got right was placing the relationship between the two main characters, Joe Buck and "Ratso" Rizzo, front and center, which turned the script, and subsequently the movie, into a genuinely emotional, relationship-based social commentary on marginalized communities.

Joe Buck, a naive, wide-eyed and blond-haired cowboy fan from Texas decides to leave his job as a dishwasher and, dressed like his childhood idols, find his luck in New York, satisfying lonely and wealthy women in exchange for cash. His dreams of working as a hustler and the joy with which he approaches his journey—both the literal and the metaphorical one—resemble those of aspiring actors and singers, who strive to capitalize on their talents by becoming stars, recognized and adored by all. For Buck, listening to a radio show on his way to New York in which women describe what kind of a man they are looking for, only fuels his fantasies of the luck and prosperity that will come his way in the Big Apple, where his only talent—"lovin"—is going to be appreciated and optimally utilized. It never once occurs to him that hustling on the streets of NYC is not all that it is cracked up to be, and that there are not that many ladies willing to be taken to bed and billed afterwards, especially by someone in cowboy attire. Another thing that does not cross his mind is that, given his chosen line of work, gay men would be much more suitable and willing customers. New York quickly proves itself to be a fickle mistress, one that welcomes you with open arms, only to chew you up and spit you out after having its way with you. One such encounter proves to be rather serendipitous—upon meeting "Ratso" Rizzo, a homeless, limping con-man who dreams of moving to Florida, Joe starts to believe that his luck has changed and that he might have found his "manager," only to be proven wrong soon enough. Despite getting off to a rough and fraudulent start, the two become unlikely companions, squatting together in an abandoned building with no electricity or heat and seldom earning a buck or two, courtesy of Rizzo's pickpocketing talents and diversion tactics. Joe's hustling career struggles to take off, with him managing to arrange just a couple of hook-ups, two of which are with men and none of which end happily for Joe and the other person.

Loneliness, a byproduct of marginalization that these two characters endure, oozes out of *Midnight Cowboy*'s every single frame, brilliantly filmed by first-time cinematographer Adam Holender—recommended to Schlesinger by Roman Polanski—whose camera captures the "gritty and realistic" microcosm that is the underbelly of NYC in the 1960s. The extent of the characters' poverty is not an inconvenience conveyed through conversation or the occasional monologue, but is rather a given showcased by a number of situations depicting the two friends' day-to-day lives. Both are highly delusional individuals—with Joe fantasizing about succeeding as a hustler and Rizzo daydreaming about a life in the Florida sun—and for good reason. Were it not for their delusions of a bright future that lurks just around the corner, slightly out of reach but still attainable, they would have given up on life a long time ago. It is their delusions that help keep the crippling feeling of loneliness at bay, enabling them to hold on to their sanity and their will to live. This kind of visceral portrayal is what enables *Midnight Cowboy* to be a truly triumphant piece of cinema, giving us one of the most heart-wrenching, raw and deeply empathetic depictions of homelessness we never asked for, but obviously badly needed. In many films, poverty is portrayed as an obstacle to overcome, a circumstance to be delivered from, a tribulation that is often a necessity if a protagonist is to be propelled into the life he is truly meant to live. But in Schlesinger's movie, there is no "before" and "after." In Schlesinger's movie, the tribulation that is extreme poverty does not constitute the first plot point, but rather the entirety of the plot. In Schlesinger's movie, there is no deliverance and no catharsis, just different variations and degrees of the status quo. We are given a glimpse into the hidden underworld of New York City in the 1960s (and any city of the world in any given decade, with homelessness being an occurrence

as old as time), one which is very easy to shy away from and turn a blind eye to when walking the busy streets in pursuit of one's own daily mission. But *Midnight Cowboy* makes it impossible for us to look away and unapologetically faces us with the facets of a homeless person's experience we would rather not face, for they possess the power to reflect back to us our own fears regarding lack, loss and loneliness. What they also hold is the key to unlocking both our deepest gratitude for the lives we take for granted, and our endless capacity for feeling empathy, the state which enables us to take another human being as part of ourselves and walk a mile in their shoes, regardless of the fact that that person is but a fictional character on a silver screen.

This deep empathy that we have the privilege of experiencing, thereby expanding our own inner worlds and emotional capacities, is not only a result of the fantastic script that Waldo gifted us with, but also the actor's terrific portrayals of these two relatable human beings. The role of the titular cowboy was initially given to actor Michael Sarrazin (*They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*) but luckily for Jon Voight, the producers decided to go with him after all because Sarrazin reportedly wanted to be paid more. Voight, on the other hand, agreed to be paid "scale"—the Screen Actors Guild minimal wage—because he so badly wished to be in the movie. The story goes that the producers wanted to look at Voight and Sarrazin's screen tests back to back in order to make their final decision. Casting director Marion Dougherty reportedly stated that Voight was clearly the better actor, and Dustin Hoffman, who had already been cast as Rizzo, apparently said the following after being shown the tests: "When I look at my scene with Michael Sarrazin, I look at myself—when I looked at my scene with Jon Voight, I look at Jon."

When it came to the role of Rizzo, the first and only pick was Hoffman, who had, until then, managed to build up his all-American image thanks to the lead role in *The Graduate* two years prior. Schlesinger was the one who needed some convincing though, since Hoffman was hardly considered a character actor, with his performance in *The Graduate* not quite guaranteeing that he could pull off the role of the limping, coughing, scruffy Rizzo. Although the character is described in the novel as being "a skinny, child-sized man of about twenty-one or twenty-two… (a) little blond runt," Jack Gelber had told producer Hellman that he had seen Hoffman in an Off-Broadway play called *Eh?* and thought the actor would be perfect for the role. Hellman went to see the play and was blown away by the one-character drama, thinking "Oh shit, this guy was born to play 'Ratso' Rizzo." When meeting with Schlesinger and the producer, Hoffman took it to the next level so as to show that he would indeed be a good pick for the part—they were to meet on a Manhattan street corner and he showed up dressed in rags. Schlesinger did not even notice the beggar who was asking people for change until Hoffman revealed himself and got the part. But *The Graduate* director Mike Nichols tried to change his mind about accepting the role, thinking his performance would imply taking a few steps backwards, instead of forwards: "Are you crazy? I made you a star. This is an ugly character. It's a supporting part to Jon Voight. What are you doing? Why are you sabotaging?" But Hoffman stood his ground and it ended up being one of the best decisions he had ever made: "The truth was, I saw *The Graduate* as a setback, because I was determined not to be a star." Little did Hoffman know that he would become an even bigger star and also get his first Academy Award nomination, along with co-star Voight.

There was one scene in particular that went on to become a classic one and it was, according to Hoffman and Voight themselves, entirely improvised. It is, of course, the famous "I'm walking here!" scene, in which Buck and Rizzo talk while crossing the street when all of a sudden a cab almost hits Rizzo, who in turn starts hitting the hub and exclaiming: "I'm walking here!"

"They didn't have the money to close down a New York street, so they were going to steal it. The camera was in the van across the street. It was a difficult scene logistically because those were real pedestrians and there was real traffic, and Schlesinger wanted to do it in one shot—he didn't want to cut. He wanted us to walk, like, a half a block, and the first times we did it the signal turned red. We had to stand there talking, and it was killing us,

because Schlesinger was getting very upset. He came rushing out of the van, saying, 'Oh, oh, you've got to keep walking.' 'We can't, man. There's fucking traffic.' 'Well, you've got to time it.' 'Well, we're trying to time it.' It's the actors that always get the heat. It was many takes, and then the timing was right. Suddenly we were doing this take and we knew it was going to work. We got to the signal just as it went green, so we could keep walking. But it just happened—there was a real cab trying to beat the signal. Almost hit us. John, who couldn't see anything in the van, came running out, saying, 'What was that all about? Why did you ruin it by hitting the cab? Why were you yelling?' I said, 'You know, he almost hit us.' I guess the brain works so quickly, it said, in a split of a second, Don't go out of character. So I said, 'I'm walking here,' meaning, 'We're shooting a scene here, and this is the first time we ever got it right, and you have fucked us up.' Schlesinger started laughing. He clapped his hands and said, 'We must have that, we must have that,' and re-did it two or three times, because he loved it." —Dustin Hoffman

And the audiences loved it too. But at certain points prior to award season, things were not looking so good for *Midnight Cowboy*. The movie was initially rated R, then the rating was changed to X (no admittance for those under 17) upon its original release in 1969. From today's standpoint, that might seem highly exaggerated, but in those days, nude scenes and content that involved sex, drugs and implicit homosexuality were considered scandalous. The MPAA was especially not on board with the notion of youngsters witnessing the sexual adventures of the good-looking Buck who agrees to get a blow-job from a guy in exchange for money. The MPAA reportedly consulted with a Dr. Aaron Stern, a Columbia University psychiatrist, who cautioned that the homosexual scene "could have an adverse effect on youngsters." It was his statement that allegedly made the MPAA give the first-ever X rating to a major studio film. And among those who had seen *Midnight Cowboy* in theaters were numerous people walking out particularly during the aforementioned, by no means explicit, scene. Such reactions even frightened the actors—Hoffman's agent told him his decision to star in the movie may have "buried his career" and talked him into starring in the romantic drama *John and Mary*, a decision Hoffman later regretted: "They told me to appear in a love story where you look like a respectable person, because you could be finished otherwise. I was talked into doing a movie I wished I hadn't done." What later followed, hardly anyone could have predicted: *Midnight Cowboy* went on to receive seven Academy Award nominations and earned three wins—apart from Hoffman and Voight, both nominated for Best Actor, Sylvia Miles was nominated for Best Supporting Actress and Hugh A. Robertson for Best Film Editing, with the movie winning Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Director and, ultimately, Best Picture. This made *Midnight Cowboy* the first and only X-rated movie in history to have won an Oscar for Best Picture. Two years later, the rating was changed back to R without a single scene having been altered or cut.

Schlesinger's film is, ultimately, not at all about sexuality, although it did break new ground in terms of its acknowledgment of various sexual preferences and practices, but rather about the importance of connection and true intimacy. In a world that gave them nothing and expected nothing from them, Rizzo and Buck were, to steal a quote from Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, "each the other's world entire"—and we were given the opportunity to take a glimpse inside and really feel what it means to survive, as opposed to thrive.

The *Cinephilia & Beyond* entry on *Midnight Cowboy* includes Suton's article, the original script, and interviews with key participants.

BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS SPRING 2020, SERIES 40
Mar 31 Alan Pakula *Klute* 1971
Apr 7 Robert Altman *McCabe and Mrs Miller* 1971
Apr 14 Martin Scorsese *King of Comedy* 1983
Apr 21 Wim Wenders *Land of Plenty* 2004
Apr 28 Wes Anderson *Isle of Dogs* 2018
May 5 Pedro Almodóvar *Pain and Glory* 2019

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SHOE SERVICE
CAT'S PAW
Rubber Heels - Soles
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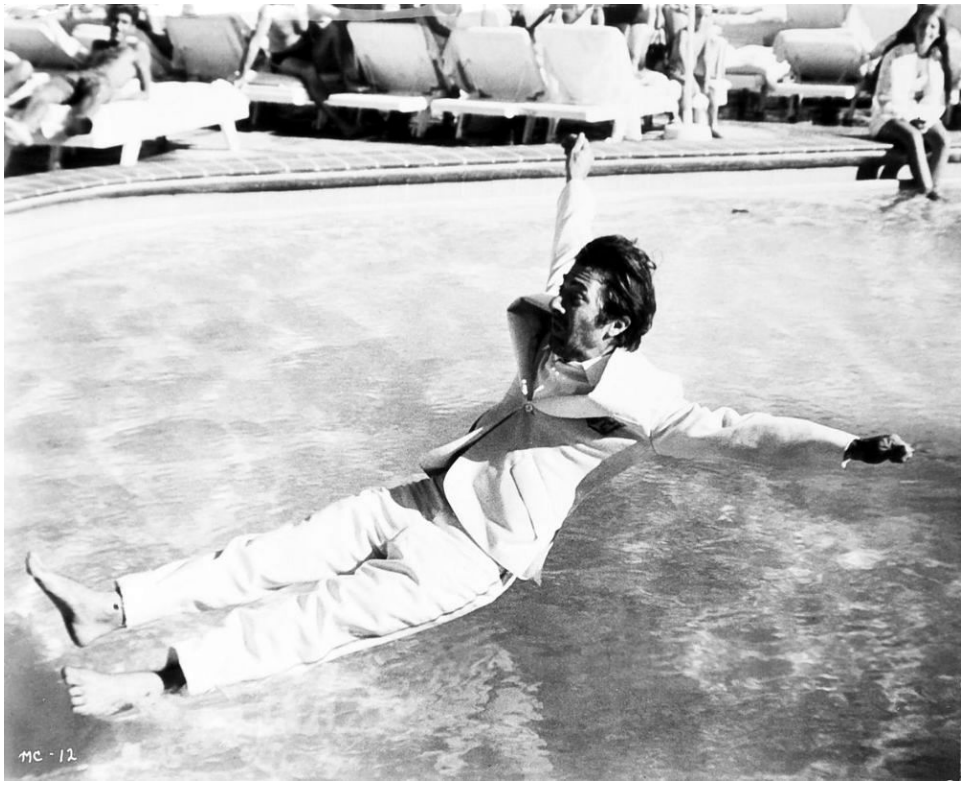
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