

founded the Ratings Board and saying they are "equally responsible for it."

That it was too "difficult" to get that rather critical information into "This Film Is Not Yet Rated" is as absurd a claim on its face as making a documentary about the American constitutional system and then claiming it was too "difficult" to mention one of the three branches of the federal government. It is an all the more ludicrous statement for anyone who's actually seen "This Film Is Not Yet Rated," which finds time for aforementioned digressions into HUAC, Vietnam, Columbine and the Holocaust as well as the Abu Ghraib prison scan-

dal and other tangential items the MPAA had nothing to do with, but which never once veers from its inaccurate presentation of the ratings system as a sole proprietorship run by Jack Valenti's MPAA.

Including NATO in the discussion would of course wreak havoc on Dick's depiction of the MPAA as a shadowy monolith, answerable only to itself and the major studios in its ratings activities. The major studios are also never analyzed for the totality of their contributions to American culture, which include the very "uncensored director's cut" DVDs from which it must be assumed

Dick assembled his many examples of "suppressed" footage cut from major releases in order to placate the MPAA.

The argument being avoided here is the obvious one: that there is a fundamental difference between watching something in a public space owned by someone else and viewing it in a more extreme form in the privacy of one's home—a fruitful distinction that has fascinated constitutional scholars since the birth of the American republic, but which Dick seems to have found too "difficult" to include in his very "complex" film.

Is the Voluntary Rating System highly imperfect? Of course it is, partly because of the addiction to secrecy Dick's film ingeniously turns against it. (He has managed to unearth the identities of most of the members of its "secret" ratings and appeals panels, and he gleefully exposes them here—a true service, not only to audiences and filmmakers but to the ratings system itself, which ideally should have nothing to hide, and no one to hide from.) But the truly insoluble predicament the ratings system reflects is that there is not and probably never will be a uniformly accepted definition of "obscene," although Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's legendary 1964 verbal shrug "I know it when I see it" comes close.

The stubborn fact remains, though, that screen artists of the past 35 years have been far more likely to reach wide audiences with difficult, troubling, sexually charged and explicitly violent content than any other American public artists that came before them or since. The cliché that "This Film Is Not Yet Rated" exploits is that the CARA's Ratings Board is a censoring body. The reality is that it is a body created to deflect censorship by creating a system that neither directly tells filmmakers how to make movies nor leaves parents to transform into outraged and mobilized pressure groups because of an inability to assess what they'll find in the movies they allow their children to see.

In our hyper-violent and oversexed media culture, it may be that the Voluntary Rating System is a quaint vestigial organ in need of excision, but that's another discussion "This Film Is Not Yet Rated" pretty much fails to examine in depth. Still, the film does provide an insight into at least one essential cinematic truth: that "obscenity" is not the only tricky word in the aesthetic lexicon, because "propaganda" is almost equally difficult to define.

But I know it when I see it.

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