

The Return of David Holzman

By Richard Brody

June 15, 2011



We're not usually in the business of quoting catalogue copy, but MOMA's mention of its week-long reprise (starting tonight at 7 P.M.) of the 1967 film "David Holzman's Diary," one of the crucial moments in the history of American independent filmmaking (which is to say, in the cinema as such), is noteworthy:

In 1968 the Department of Film started its ongoing Cineprobe (now *Modern Mondays*) series with a screening of Jim McBride and L. M. Kit Carson's low-budget 16mm film *David Holzman's Diary*.

I disagree with the annotator, though, who thinks that this masterwork "is a prescient send-up of the kind of onanistic egotism endemic to the age of Facebook and YouTube." It's sometimes funny, but it's no sendup; the fictional protagonist's self-documentation—undertaken under the Damocles' sword of the draft, during the time of the Vietnam War—is, under its sardonic and self-mocking humor, desperately urgent and entirely authentic. I wrote about it in the magazine this week; at the Fandor site, the most important young filmmaker working in a similar

vein, Joe Swanberg, wrote about it—and its powerful influence on his work—and he says, more aptly,

The film is a blog. It's a Facebook page. It's a Twitter account. It's also the sharpest critique of, and deepest investigation into, those media that I know of.

I agree—a critique isn't a sendup, and the movie is no rejection of its own methods but a frank unstinting interrogation of their emotional, aesthetic, and personal implications—and thus the filmmaker's own stringent questioning of himself, as are Swanberg's own films (and, in his post, he suggests the sorts of questions that he and Holzman—i.e., McBride—share). The restoration of "David Holzman's Diary" that's being screened at MOMA is "a new, digitally restored version courtesy of Kino Lorber," and the DVD release is set for August 16th.