

Alice and Freddie rehearse. "What's the matter with you?"

"You know perfectly well what I'm talking about." Look into what you've been doing, says Alice.

Cut out all the double-talk, Freddie counters, you've got me foxed. You're really something.
You think everyone in the world is stupid except for you, says Alice. A white couple
having a gender-normative argument
in the late sixties. "I'm a woman and not a fool, Freddie.
I know what goes on
around me," continues Alice.

"Him?" Freddie is incredulous. Yes, him, that faggot boy.

A different women plays Alice now. "You've been killing my babies
one right after the other."

She's been through abortion after abortion. The scene cycles
through seemingly every social issue except for race.
I can't

help but think about Greaves being behind this, a Black director
of white drama. They keep repeating the word, "faggot."

Freddie says Alice is projecting
onto him what she sees in her own self.

Does he mean Alice is closeted? He couldn't possibly mean that.

"You just want the gay world, Freddie," Alice screams. Hell, *I* want the gay
world, but it's not the same world Alice is talking about. Microphone feedback
once Alice starts yelling,
"Fuck you!"
For the first time,

a shot of the camera crew. This is around four minutes in.

The director, Bill Greaves
comments that the audio quality is dreadful.

A montage of American people
in a New York City park: a Black family,
then mostly whites as the microphone feedback
blends into a funky groove. Leisuring

in the park are loving couples, images of romance,
babies. It's the circle of life. Black baby and white baby,
a woman's armed hooked around a man's slightly,

Black family walking with their baby,
an older child rolling in the grass,
an East Asian family, a slightly older child shirtless,
looking around, lying down

people in their twenties with bikes.
continues to pitch up, higher and higher,
wearing a fabulous green mesh shirt.

in the grass, then young men playing soccer,
wearing yarmulkes,
Microphone feedback
before a guitar riff settles in. Bill Greaves

He has a charming relationship
to his actors. He instructs them,
“The name of the game is sexuality.”
Everything that happens on the set, whether it’s among the actors
or the crew, should be shot constantly.
Here’s that woman
with the tits, says Bill excitedly. Get her.
“They’re bouncing, chaps.”
He sounds like a porno director. Don’t
take me seriously, he chides.

The director is directing the person in charge of filming this film being filmed.
If you see us in trouble, come and help us out. His name is Terry,
the man who’s in charge of shooting the actors. Terry’s asking questions.
Someone else is in charge of shooting Terry shooting the actors. The actors are in two shots
on screen at the same time.
Terry says they ought to start with a fresh magazine.
Members of the crew argue about where the magazine is.

I can feel the excitement both of the crew and public,
who watch from the side, about the shooting of this movie, an excitement
which will fade as production wears on. What it means to document
Black people in the park. Note the editing here.

You see that the editor has left intact both the inanity and the public’s excitement.

The name right now of the picture is *Over the Cliff*,
but it might be changed, Bill explains
to a crowd he’s asking to be very quiet. Did he decide

already then
the film was going to be
what it was? The police check what’s going on.
Fourteen minutes in, we’re preparing to start shooting.

It doesn’t feel like
one of those “behind the scenes” productions because everything
is behind the scenes. Freddie asks
a question about how exactly
to approach Alice. He wants to make it

look like he's been chasing her around the park
for hours. He thinks
he should start the scene from several yards behind her. Alice asks Bill
if she's walking too quickly. He affirms.
She says she thinks she is going home; she has to find a way to walk home
and make it look like she's walking quickly, but walk slowly.
Each of the actors trying
to imagine the interior worlds
of their characters. The crew works
towards the film they imagine is the one Greaves wants.
They don't know what he wants. The crew
is going to rap a little bit about the film.
Bob, who is obviously the crew leader,
says Greaves has no idea what he's doing. The whole crew
without its director, beyond the reach
of the actors. This conversation isn't part
of the film, which is open-ended, plotless,
without end. We can only fill in the gaps about the film
we understand ourselves to be we're watching.
We can only conclude he wanted it like this,
says a member of the crew. This debate
is like the one people have when arguing
about whether God is intelligent or if
there is no God because how could there be a God
if there is all this chaos. Another member
of the crew asserts that Bill wants them
to help make the film, but Bob thinks Bill
is so far into the making the film
he has no perspective. Meanwhile the actors know only their lines.
Everyone has a sort of myopia.
They function like a chorus to Bill's
unstated thoughts.
The crew is interracial.
They've been filming for four days. "He doesn't know how to direct,"
says a cool-looking Black guy wearing sunglasses and a scarf around his neck.
Instead of talking about how good or bad
his direction is, let's talk about how interesting
his "non-direction" is.
This filmed conversation is the crew leaving a note to Bill "and anyone else

who may be watching,” says Bob. This two-hour clip of film that Bill

can edit any way he wants.

A director’s film is his mind

photographing the world, but does the director know

what’s in his own mind? Bill Greaves walks around the park

alone as the crew talks about him, a hilarious montage that invites speculation as to

whether he’s a total idiot. Who is shooting him? Bill argues with the crew. He seems

delightfully confused, or oblivious. Every time you’ve had sex with me, it’s as though you’ve

raped me, says Alice. Bill tells the actors to do whatever comes naturally. All of these guys are

geared to capture the reality of the moment. He’s trying to make a non-film and the actors are

delighted, the only ones who seem to share the director’s excitement. The only ones who get to

be oblivious to the action. The central drama is Alice’s heartbreak over this man being gay, but

it’s hard to relate to her because she calls him a “faggot.” The acting has actually improved at

this later take. The chemistry is unbelievable. There’s a real relationship between them. The

shooting is a little crazy, continually zooming into their faces, now scrolling over to Bill’s face,

who briefly, accidentally, looks into the camera then looks away. They run out of film.

I’m laughing as Bill asks the actors

how they feel about the scene. He seems to be inviting chaos.

Alice says she needs to slow down

and blames

“plain old insecurity” for her rushed performance. Freddie wants

just to act better. Alice is every American woman and Freddie is every American man.

It’s like these lines were planted in their heads, they’re so generic.

“You’re ineffectual.” A camera person says

Bill is also acting and Bill is a bad actor.

“That’s immaterial,” says someone else. But he acts off-camera, he

is performative. The director is hiding.

He needs to find out where the lines

between everyone else’s acting and his own meet. They seem

to be getting somewhere with figuring out

why the film is happening.

Freddie asks if he should be playing a “faggy fag or a butch fag.”

He embodies a kind of masculinity

as he’s trying to figure out how to play

a fag. Which would you prefer to play, asks Bill.

I would prefer to play a closet fag, answers Freddie.

Bill assures Alice about her performance. The more she leans into her character, the funnier.

The film is about how much these actors can be lured in,

in this real way, into these fake

characters in this fake movie.

How many times can you watch

the same scene? But the scene develops.

There’s a little more of a story. They become

more emotional, more incredulous.

You believe them more and more. She’s getting upset.

“Why should I take it easy?”

It’s *not* going well. Alice walks away.

“It’s a certain experiment.”

He’s doing a screen test

or just one piece of dialogue in different ways. But why film it?
Why give them lines? You should give them a story
instead of giving them lines.
The story could be anywhere.
He could do it on a stage.
He's making a film that's designed

to be a work of art.

The crew discussing the film enacts
the audience having a conversation,

playing out their thoughts on the film,
so that you can't watch it and talk

about it and not be part of it. There's argument about what is happening, a collective
exploration of the levels of reality and "supra levels of reality." The men
of the crew interrupting the women, playing their roles. "Maybe we're all acting."

The genius of this film is that it was provided for that somewhere during the film
the crew would take control. "You believe in God after all." Laughter. A faggot is not a homosexual.
"Faggot" is a mentality. A faggot doesn't know what he wants. All I really know is myself. Eight days
of horrible conversation, horrible Black faces, white faces, tall ones, old ones. The crew is sleeping;
they're over it. Come up with a better script, a screen test for a pair of actors. Talk
in a more sexually explicit way, suggests a member of the crew. "Don't you like me to eat you,
Alice?" The film is a useless faggotry,
a semi-annual conceit between two people.
Make it into something that never has to be repeated again.

Greaves says the screen test is unsatisfactory from the standpoint of the actors and from his own.
Now they must undertake to improvise something better, a "palace revolt." Revolution.
The crew hates him. Greaves represents the establishment, trying to get the crew to do something
they've become disenchanted with. Come up with better suggestions. It doesn't matter
if you understand. We should

surface from this experience

with something that's the result
of our collective, creative efforts.

The actors (I wrote "artists" by accident) start singing. The crew can't take that for very long so they start
asking questions and interjecting and giving Bill struggle. The actors give suggestions, too.

"I think we can use this,"

concludes Bill. It will add interesting

texture to the film. The crew doesn't think so.

They think it sounds terrible.

"There's no sense of reality." Who goes about singing to each other? They together
try to figure out what is real. Someone approaches the crew, a personality, Victor

Vikowski: the interloper. Get a release form for this gentlemen,

orders Bill. He's been living in the bushes and got kicked
out
of his apartment, which he was paying \$45/week to live in.

He could be drunk.

"Are you such a virgin like I am?"

"We're virgins in the brain if you want
to be that way." Can't we be ourselves?

He's talking about sucking, sexual freedom. He's exactly what the film needed,
someone who is so totally himself. He hates bullshit. He went to Columbia for four years.

He went to Parsons. He's an architectural designer. He's an alcoholic
too. When you live alone, you need something to keep you warm. Bill catches on
that he needs this guy. Did anyone ever know you were sleeping in the park? Do the police ever
bother you? Everyone is interested in him. They're trying to get him to sign the release form.
You know how politics works. The crew is loving the action. The guy is signing his name.
Everyone enjoys bringing this man into the film. He's like a gift from God that even Bill
couldn't have predicted, only taken advantage of. Victor invites the crew into his bushes. It's
not worth it when you have to live off someone's back. When I saw the Negroes and Puerto
Ricans and the whites pushing their wagons, with all the intelligence I've got I gave up. I can't
fight politicians or money. The only people who don't seem interested are the actors. "Love is
a feeling of desire, one for the other," says the interloper. I never like to say goodbye; I say
so long. They all walk away together. I never say goodbye, I like to say ciao.

The film returns

to Bill instructing a Black couple

on how to do the scene. He's going
to do a line reading with them.