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Screening Room

## Going Really Big

*USC's Annenberg Center is presenting wide-screen projections of three CD-ROMs that are part of its eclectic Labyrinth Project.*

September 07, 2000 | KEVIN THOMAS | TIMES STAFF WRITER

The Labyrinth Project of USC's Annenberg Center for Communication is offering its newest CD-ROMs in a big way. On Sunday, from 3 to 6 p.m. at the Ahmanson Auditorium of MOCA, 250 S. Grand Ave., "Electronic Fictions From the Labyrinth" shows wide-screen projections of Nina Menkes' "The Crazy Bloody Female Center"; "Mysteries and Desire: Searching the Worlds of John Rechy," which was written and produced by the Labyrinth Project's director, Marsha Kinder; and excerpts from Pat O'Neill's work-in-progress, "The Decay of Fiction."

Last week, Kinder, professor of critical studies in USC's School of Cinema-Television, offered a private guided tour of these challenging works in her office at Kerckhoff House on West Adams Boulevard. Kinder's Labyrinth Project CD-ROMs are an invaluable tool in widening audiences for experimental filmmakers and writers. All three of its new CD-ROMs allow viewers to chart their own course through the very different works of these three distinctive major artists.

For her CD-ROM, Menkes contributed abridged versions of her films, which include "Magdalena Viraga," "Queen of Diamonds" and "The Bloody Child," plus footage shot in Cairo and Beirut for her upcoming feature, "Heatstroke," and incorporating texts drawn from "Alice in Wonderland" and "Sleeping Beauty." Her films, available on DVD, are marked by a sense of the claustrophobic and a yearning for release in a world saturated with violence, much of it directed toward women.

As a onetime male hustler--and former altar boy--Rechy has long explored the conflicts and connections between sexual and religious experience in a complex interplay of fiction and autobiography, past and present, love and desire, within a compulsive temperament expressed in bodybuilding, writing and the pursuit of sex. Kinder drew from Rechy's family photographs and historic images to create collages of Rechy's formative years as part of an impoverished Mexican family in El Paso.

Rechy's grandfather, of Scottish descent, had been the personal physician of Mexico's dictatorial President Porfirio Diaz before the family fell on hard times. Rechy wrote and spoke the narrative for his CD-ROM, which suggests the remarkable arc of his career and his identity as a gay man, a Chicano, a prize-winning writer of landmark fiction and an innovative teacher of creative writing.

No, the CD-ROM does not depict the steamy sex of "City of Night," "Numbers" or "The Sexual Outlaw" but rather their psychological states. In the interplay of images, what emerges most strongly is a quest for spiritual redemption in which the rituals of sexual pursuit and religion seem to become one. The logo for "Mysteries and Desires" is of the facade of the church at Selma and Las Palmas in Hollywood, a famous gay cruising spot in decades past.

The Ambassador Hotel is the setting for O'Neill's "The Decay of Fiction," in which his camera wanders the corridors, lobbies and suites of the long-closed legendary hotel in which lush, spacious images flow into one other as ghosts of times past appear fleetingly amid settings of decaying grandeur.

Viewers can move among various domains: the hotel as an evocation of film noir, as a playground for Hollywood celebrities and ceremonies, including the Academy Awards; as the site of the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy and other historic events, some revealing issues of class and race relations; and as an exploration of its architectural spaces--the 1920 hotel as designed by Myron Hunt, with significant alterations and additions by Paul Williams--and the Los Angeles Conservancy's effort to save the structure.

All three of these "interactive fictions" will become part of a DVD-ROM called "Doors to the Labyrinth." O'Neill is set to attend the screening, along with Menkes and Rechy, who will sign copies of their CD-ROMs, due for release Oct. 1, distributed through Amazon.com and other retail outlets. Admission is free. (213) 743-2524.

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LACMA's "The Talented Alain Delon," a seven-film, two-weekend tribute to the durable French star, begins Friday at 7:30 p.m. in the Leo S. Bing Theater, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., with Rene Clement's classic 1959 "Purple Noon," in which the cool, ambiguous Delon will, for many, always be the definitive Tom Ripley (recently reincarnated by Matt Damon in "The Talented Mr. Ripley"). It will be followed by Henri Verneuil's "Any Number Can Win" (1962), an example of the caper picture at its sleekest, with Delon memorably teamed with Jean Gabin, an aging ex-con who needs the agile young Delon to carry out his elaborate plan to rob a Riviera casino, which becomes the film's knockout set piece.

Saturday brings Jean-Pierre Melville's classic "Le Samourai" (1967) with Delon as a professional assassin who blends the look and style of a Bogart with the code of a Japanese warrior. It will be followed by the first screening in more than nine years of the never commercially released Jean-Luc Godard 1990 masterpiece, the elliptical and deeply affecting "Nouvelle Vague," in which Delon plays a reflective financier amid a crowd of super-rich in a Swiss chateau with oddly philosophical servants. There are Godard's usual quotes from his favorite American films, but they have a more elegiac quality than usual. (323) 857-6010.

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The Laemmle Theaters' "World Cinema 2000" series commences at the Monica 4-Plex, 1332 2nd St., Santa Monica, with Saturday and Sunday 11 a.m. screenings of David Evans' "Fever Pitch," an amiable sports-romance comedy loosely based on Nick Hornby's autobiography.

It really helps to be a soccer fanatic to become involved in this tale of a laid-back London high school teacher (Colin Firth) and an uptight colleague (Ruth Gemmill) who prove that opposites do attract--and whose romance is further challenged by Firth's primary allegiance to his favorite soccer team, which just may end its 18-year losing streak.

"Fever Pitch" screens Sept. 16-17 at 10 a.m. at the Sunset 5, 8000 Sunset Blvd., and Sept. 23-24 at 11 a.m. at the Playhouse 7, 673 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena.

Information for the Monica: (310) 394-9741; Sunset: (323) 848-3500; Playhouse: (626) 844-6500.