

arts/entertainment

'Delightful' film comments on TV's role in society

By Jennifer Bauman

Television has the means to teach its viewers every aspect of life. Even a complete idiot can learn the right behavior to contribute to society. Taken even further, this proposition implies that the idiot, schooled in the ways of the media, can rise to a position of social prominence.

movie review

This is the case for Chauncey Gardiner (Peter Sellers) in *Being There*. Chauncey began life as "Chance," so named because he arrived by chance. Brought up as the gardener for a wealthy man, he never stepped outside of the house his whole life.

Through the years radio and then television provided his only contacts with the outside world. Gardening is Chance's only skill, and the broadcast media are his only teachers. When the owner dies the house is closed up and Chance suddenly must make his way in the real world.

Facing the 'real world'

Chance is innocent intellectually, sexually, socially and politically. He doesn't have any idea how to take care of himself. On his first day out he stops an old woman carrying a bag of groceries to ask her if she can give him something to eat; Louise the maid has always taken care of his meals before. When he is threatened by a group of teenage boys, he responds by flicking at them with his remote television control, because life for Chance consists of changing channels.

In spite of these shaky beginnings, Chance is taken in by a wealthy industrialist and his wife, Ben and Eve Rand. Misunderstood as saying his name is Chauncey Gardiner in-

stead of "Chance the gardener," he emerges into the world with a new identity.

Idiot makes good

In line with the initial proposition of *Being There*, Chauncey soon finds himself in the limelight. He becomes known as an important financial adviser to Ben Rand, talks to and is quoted by the President of the United States (Jack Warden), appears on a nationally televised talk show and generally hobnobs with the Capitol Hill crowd.

With a less skillful group of actors, all of this could have become tedious, but *Being There* maintains its fluidity right up to three minutes before the end. Sellers' Chauncey pulls a marvelously blank expression, occasionally breaking into a small grin when he is pleased by something he sees on TV. His performance is as fine as that of James Caan as a brain-damaged ex-athlete in *The Rain People*. Instead of being stock patsy characters, Ben and Eve Rand (Melvyn Douglas and Shirley MacLaine) come across as fully individualized personalities. This is largely due to the subtlety and empathy that the two actors bring to their roles.

Being There is an adaptation of Jerzy Kosinski's 1971 novel. Kosinski's film screenplay exhibits great sensitivity for the types of alterations necessary in the transition between artistic media.

'Square peg' movies

Director Hal Ashby's projects have tended to deal with square-peg-in-the-round-hole characters: a love affair between an elderly woman and a teenage boy in *Harold and Maude*; a wandering Depression-era songwriter in *Bound for Glory*; Vietnam war veterans adjusting to life in the States in *Coming Home*. Once again Ashby works with a character who is "different," but the tragedy of Chauncey's maladjustment is lessened by society's immediate acceptance of him. Chauncey's particular brand of non-conformity, his dim mental ability, is obscured by his association with acceptable behavior from television programs.

In one way, the story is heartening: this poor guy who is really quite likable manages to survive. But the more frightening side of *Being There* shows that the means for attaining great power in the U.S. are in the hands of anyone with access to a television set. The people around Chauncey are so immersed in the media that they fail to recognize his moronic nature.

If the media can school and market an idiot, can it not do the same for even worse products? And if the masses saturated by the media are such puppets that they allow this to happen, then what? If mass media consumers are made so passive and indiscriminating that they fail to intelligently criticize the media, then the corporate interests that control it will have virtually unlimited power.

On the surface, the story of Chauncey Gardiner is delightful entertainment. But underlying this, *Being There* raises important issues to be reckoned with.

Being There is showing at the Plaza 4 Theater, 12th and P Streets.



Photo by Jerry McBride

Singer guitarist David Bromberg will perform in the Omaha Music Hall, Friday, April 4 at 8 p.m. Tickets are currently on sale at \$6 and \$7 the day of the show.

Other concerts in the Omaha/Lincoln area include: Graham Nash, April 5, in Omaha; REO Speedwagon, April 5, in Lincoln; John Denver, April 6, in Omaha; The Oak Ridge Boys, April 8, in Omaha; Frank Zappa, April 12, in Omaha; and Linda Ronstadt, April 23, in Omaha.

In addition, The Who will play several concert dates in the Midwest, including an April 26 concert in Kansas City at the Kemper Arena.

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'Excellence II'...

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The plan continues: "The office for Student Affairs and the Division of Continuing Studies have been cooperating to develop new admission, registration, and advising procedures designed especially for the non-traditional student. Efforts to provide convenience as well as excellence of educational opportunity will continue over the five-year period."

Ware said "advising procedures designed particularly for the non-traditional student means that the advising department should take a strong look at how it advises Native American students," especially those from reservations who may have little or no idea what education is all about.

Roach said if the regents are really concerned about inequities at the professional level, a special advising program needs to be set up for minority students.

Ware said that many students come to UNL unaware of class requirements and meet with failure.

Roach said that he is aware that all students face problems "but because of the limited number of Native American students, we can't afford to lose any."

Regent Ed Schwartzkopf said "non-traditional" students doesn't refer to Indian students. Schwartzkopf interpreted "non-traditional" as a way of studying—not a type of student.

Schwartzkopf said Centennial College is the answer for non-traditional students because it has a flexible and non-traditional type of education.

The regents' affirmative action program is cited for improvement and expansion. Roach pointed out one paragraph:

"The intensified recruitment and consideration of minority group members and women to insure that students, candidates and employees with appropriate qualifications, potential, and responsibilities are afforded equal opportunity for selection, training, promotion, and compensation without disadvantage to race, age, color,

religion, sex, disability, or national origin."

About recruiting minorities, Schwartzkopf said that it is difficult to recruit minorities when they don't graduate from high school. He said that a lot of the effort has to come from minority families, in supporting education.

Schwartzkopf said he doesn't think there is a lack of recruiting effort at UNL.

Another goal of the plan is: "Thus the university will attempt to expand the range of students it serves both in

terms of their ages and location in the state; it will offer these students alternative educational programs suited to their needs, interests and life styles; and it will strive to make the intellectual, artistic, cultural and practical resources of the university more accessible to Nebraskans in all walks of life."

Ware said that UNL cultural activities must include minorities. The Russian ballet is not the only type of cultural activity in the world, he said.

TV missing from Selleck

A lounge in Selleck Quadrangle was broken into Sunday morning and a 19-inch color television and its wooden stand was taken, said Bob Fey, UNL police investigator.

The items, valued at \$500, were stolen between 3 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., he said.

The burglar entered by prying open and crawling through a lounge window.

Although there are no suspects in the case, Fey said he thinks someone would have seen the thief carry the stolen items out the door. He added that more than one person may have been involved.