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PLAYBOY

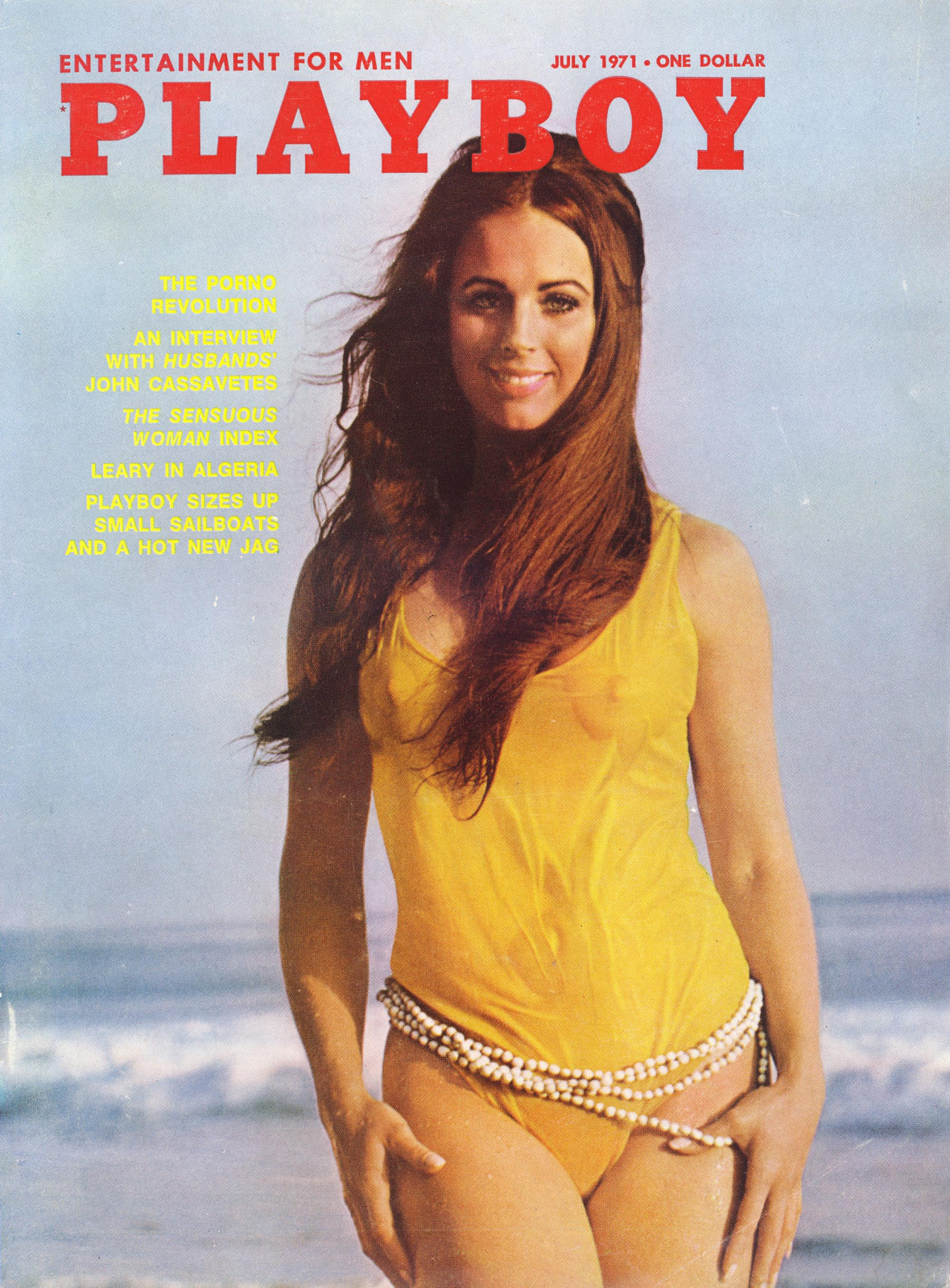
THE PORNO REVOLUTION

AN INTERVIEW WITH *HUSBANDS'* JOHN CASSAVETES

THE SENSUOUS WOMAN INDEX

LEARY IN ALGERIA

PLAYBOY SIZES UP SMALL SAILBOATS AND A HOT NEW JAG



PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: JOHN CASSAVETES

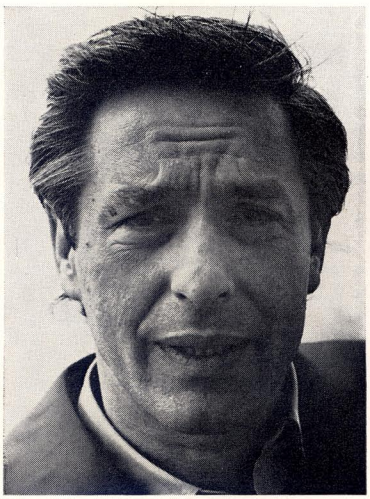
a candid conversation with the consummate actor and fiercely independent writer-director of "shadows," "faces" and "husbands"

In a year when the success of "Love Story" has shown signs of persuading the ailing American film industry to grind out a plethora of mawkish romances, John Cassavetes has singlehandedly scored a major victory for realism. In "Husbands," which he wrote, directed and starred in, Cassavetes limned an evocative portrait of three suburban executives confronted, upon the death of a close friend, by their own mortality. After the funeral, the three husbands, Cassavetes and co-stars Ben Gazzara and Peter Falk, get drunk and run off for a richly seriocomic weekend of gambling and gamboling in London; in the end, each in his own way, they come soberly to grips with the fact of middle age. The innovative, improvisatory style of the film inspired some reviewers to call it a self-indulgent cinematic conceit and others—most prominently Time*—to overpraise it as "one of the best movies anyone will ever see . . . certainly the best movie anyone will ever live through." For Cassavetes, "Husbands" marked his first fully overground triumph in a stormy acting and directing career that has spanned nearly 20 years.*

Born to Greek immigrant parents in New York City on December 9, 1929, Cassavetes grew up in more than a dozen Manhattan neighborhoods. "We didn't have any money, but we never worried about it," he recently recalled. "We would move every 30 days—landlords were so anxious for tenants that they'd offer a month rent-free for moving in. When the month ran out, so did we." By the time Cassavetes was a teenager, his father was doing well enough in the travel business to move the family to Port Washington, New York. After a short-lived fling at college and a year of acting school, Cassavetes worked as a movie extra and then as a Broadway assistant stage manager before landing his first featured role in 1954—as a bullfighter in Budd Schulberg's teleplay "Paso Doble." His well-received performance quickly led to steady TV employment; during the next two years, Cassavetes acted in more than 80 video dramas, usually portraying a juvenile delinquent as introspective as James Dean and as mumbly as Marlon Brando. As those two superstars began bringing their legions of followers into movie theaters, Hollywood called on Cassavetes to re-create his TV hood roles, beginning with "The Night Holds Terror." He never got the right parts to make him a star, however, and he never went out of his way to make—or keep—friends in the front office.

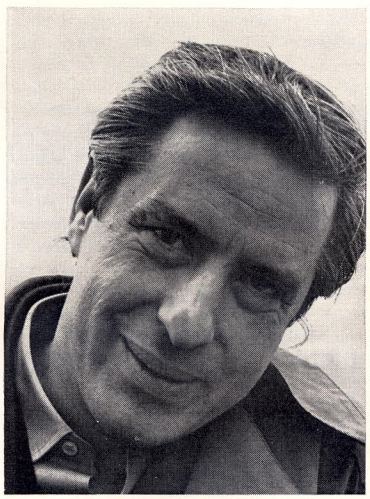
Then, in 1954, he married Gena Rowlands, a beautiful and accomplished young actress who, much to his surprise, was able to stabilize her mercurial husband. "I used to walk around angry all the time," Cassavetes remembers. "One night many years ago, we were backstage at a play and Gena said, 'You can't go around looking mad and not saying hello to people. There's Ben Gazzara—say hello to Ben.' She was talking to me as if I were a child, but she was right. That's how I met Gazzara. Gena got me to be civilized."

Not quite. On sets of television plays and movies, Cassavetes argued constantly with producers, directors and writers—and earned a well-deserved reputation for being difficult to work with. "Aside from cameramen," he once said, "everyone else on a set is the actor's natural enemy, because they just don't give a damn about what they're doing. You've got to go to war with people like that." Fed up with acting in other people's movies, Cassavetes embarked in 1957 on one of his own: "Shadows," a black-and-white film he made on a shoestring budget by shooting in 16mm and blowing it up to 35mm, which accounted for the film's graininess. Although it fared well in Europe, "Shadows" was a monumental bust in the U. S., despite favorable comments from such critics as The



"It's bullshit when people say that ego is a bad trip. It's the only trip. You are who you are because of your ego, and without it nothing counts. My sense of self makes me competitive."

"I think sex is dirty. I like it dirty. And the thing that makes it dirty is to grab something clean and defile it. Yeah! Most movies can't convey that illicit kind of thing, even though they try."



"Being short is a great character builder, even though it sure as hell doesn't seem that way when you first start out. You have to compensate for it: You become funnier, more outgoing."

New York Times's *Bosley Crowther, who called it "fitfully dynamic and endowed with a raw but vibrant strength." The major studios also liked what they saw and Cassavetes was summoned to California to direct "Too Late Blues" and "A Child Is Waiting"—both eminently forgettable. "You can do well in Hollywood as long as you don't kid yourself that they want creative ventures—and I kidded myself," he said afterward. "You cannot work for a studio and make a personal film."*

After these two abortive directorial efforts, Cassavetes acted in several undistinguished movies (such as "The Killers"), bided his time and saved his money. Then, he began shooting "Faces"; when the film was released almost four years later, it earned critical praise—and more than $7,000,000. Cassavetes, however, remained as abrasive as ever. When a magazine interviewer congratulated him on the complex optical effects achieved in both "Shadows" and "Faces" through the use of hand-held cameras, Cassavetes snapped, "You stupid bastard. I couldn't afford a tripod." If he has often been rude to directors, producers and reporters, the actors he's directed swear by him. Says Seymour Cassel, who co-starred in "Faces," "John's totally dedicated to his films, to giving 100 percent of himself. When people give him less, he gets annoyed. Wouldn't you?" Peter Falk and Ben Gazzara are no less lavish in their praise. "Few people have an instinctive understanding of what is fake and what is real and immediate," says Falk. "John is one of them, maybe the only one." Gazzara goes even further. "John creates an atmosphere in which the actor can do no wrong," he says. "'Husbands' was a labor of love, the greatest, most creative experience I've ever had."

Having written and directed two profitable pictures in a row, Cassavetes now has the financial footing to launch several new film projects. This fall he'll direct Gazzara in "Two Days in Rochester"; he's searching for a story for his other "Husbands" co-star, Peter Falk; and as we went to press, he had just begun shooting his newest movie, "Minnie and Moscowitz," starring his wife and Seymour Cassel. While it was in rehearsal, PLAYBOY *assigned former Associate Editor Lawrence Linderman to interview the fiercely independent film maker.*

Reports Linderman: "I met Cassavetes in his office at L. A.'s Universal City—he has three connecting rooms in an old, converted motel. When I entered, he was on the telephone noting box-office receipts for 'Husbands,' talking to a production assistant about shooting locations for 'Minnie and Moscowitz' and also casting for 'Two Days in Rochester.' At least two inches shorter than the five feet, nine inches listed in his studio biography, he rose to greet me—with enthusiasm. That's how John Cassavetes does everything in life. He's an animated man who delights in clowning and doing imitations of his friends; when Peter Falk dropped by the office late that afternoon, Cassavetes entertained a roomful of people—and Falk most of all—by imitating Peter's speech at a banquet they'd both attended. Although his thick black hair has begun to sprout slivers of silver, Cassavetes looks younger than his 41 years, probably because he keeps himself in shape by playing as much softball, basketball, tennis and touch football as he has time for.

"As we got to know each other, it became apparent that Cassavetes prefers to go through life either up or down—nothing in between—and he probably loves being angry almost as much as he dotes on his own goofiness. He also loves to argue. Since I'd arrived at noon, he invited me to lunch at a bar nearby; and while we guzzled beer and ate meatball sandwiches, Cassavetes debated politics, mostly in an effort to force me to challenge him. He had several meetings planned for the afternoon and asked me to stop by later on, just before that day's rehearsal for 'Minnie and Moscowitz.'

"When I returned several hours later, Cassavetes' wife had already shown up—ahead of time. Gena Rowlands is a lushly beautiful blonde in her mid-30s and is almost as shy as her husband is extroverted; they complement each other perfectly. Cassavetes had spent some of the afternoon rewriting a scene in which Minnie, a single girl who's anxious to settle down, goes to dinner with a blind date. The table talk is uncomfortable and sinks to new lows as the scene unfolds. Cassavetes wanted to see how it played and, since no one else was around, he suggested I read it with Gena. I declined as politely as I could, but the pair of them shamed me into it. Cassavetes, of course, was as interested in putting me on the spot as he was in seeing how the scene played. I don't know whether he was being entertained by what he had written or by my delivery of it, but he kept snickering throughout my reading.

"Because the rehearsal lasted late into the evening, we weren't able to begin the interview until the next afternoon. Before we started, Cassavetes had been talking about direction. So, with the tape recorder switched on, I did my best to get even for the lousy trick he'd pulled on me the night before."

PLAYBOY: Before you became a director, didn't you once say, "On a film set, the only person less important than a director is a talent agent"?

CASSAVETES: When I said that, I was a giggling young actor; but I don't really take it back: I loathe directors.

PLAYBOY: Why?

CASSAVETES: Mainly because they *decide.* They decide this must be this, that must be that, and they have set images of everything—and most directors don't allow for anyone else's images. God knows, there's no reason to be in the business except to express something, and directors are the only people who disallow that.

PLAYBOY: As a director, do *you* allow for other points of view?

CASSAVETES: I think I do; at least I try to. I'm always aware that somebody else on the set may have some good ideas. For instance, I sincerely think that Ben Gazzara knows a lot of things about acting and film making that I don't know, and I want them if he's got them. When we were working on *Husbands,* I wanted to know what he was thinking, because I wanted him at his best. Maybe what he knew made the movie a little better, and the same was true of Peter Falk. You have to work that way if you're worth anything as a director. Godard and Bergman work that way, but they're the exception.

PLAYBOY: Why?

CASSAVETES: Most directors are full of shit. They're concerned with nothing more than their own ambitions and pleasing a studio and an audience. And if it's not an audience they're concerned with, it's some personal problem that really has nothing to do with their work.

PLAYBOY: Which directors do you have in mind?

CASSAVETES: Look, this isn't a cop-out—at least I don't think it is—but I tune out directors that I hate until I forget their names. I remember all the directors I've ever liked working with as an actor—guys like Don Siegel and Robert Aldrich. The thing I feel directors have to realize today is that they must become like the Beatles: They must write their own material. It's really incredible that directors would allow someone else to write their scripts for them. I can understand that happening when a guy starts out, I suppose, but to make a career out of directing other people's work is just all wrong.

PLAYBOY: Do you think screen adaptations of novels and plays are bad per se?

CASSAVETES: Yes. A director should create his own films.

PLAYBOY: Would you have refused an invitation to direct, say, *The Godfather*?

CASSAVETES: Absolutely. Why make *The Godfather*? It's an entertainment? Terrific. I consider myself an artist, and whether I'm a good artist or a bad one is beside the point. I address myself to the art of film, and making a best-selling book into a best-selling movie is in no way art to me. Francis Ford Coppola is a great young guy and a terrific artist, but it's obviously going to cause him a lot of pain to direct *The Godfather.*

PLAYBOY: Why should that necessarily be the case—and why is it obvious?

CASSAVETES: I have one answer to both questions: Bob Evans, Paramount's head of production. When he got his job,

Evans said he was going to give directors working with Paramount total creative control of their movies. That never really happened, of course, and to understand why, you'd have to understand the pure bullshit involved in dealing with major studios. At any rate, about $150,000,000 after Evans became head of production, Paramount had made some winners, some losers, some pictures like *Catch-22*—God knows what that film was about; I still don't—and some pictures that were just lost in the shuffle. And then they make *Love Story* under tight studio control and it becomes a fantastic hit and Evans suddenly says he's a creative film maker. Did Evans direct it, write it, act in it, film it? He contributed his wife as the star. And when it turned out to be a winner, he announced that he's never going to give away creative control again. Give *away*? Who the hell gave him the right to give *anything* away? Evans is nothing! He's a hanger that was put in a closet and grew into a boy. The only thing he ever did was to manufacture a line of clothes. How *dare* he compare himself with an artist!

PLAYBOY: You sound as if you've had unfortunate business dealings with Evans.

CASSAVETES: No. In fact, I haven't had *any* dealings with him. As a person, Bob Evans is probably a very nice guy—but as an artist, you wouldn't even let him into the room. It's a wonderful thing for the film industry when it has a big picture, but the fact of the matter is that *Love Story* didn't have anything to do with Bobby Evans—any more than Paramount's *failures* had to do with him. Or with Charles Bluhdorn, head of Gulf & Western, which owns Paramount. Those people don't have anything to do with the making of a picture. They just say go ahead or don't go ahead; you can have the money to make a film or you can't have the money. If they were to tell the truth, studio executives would say, "We panic when they spend too much and we feel elated when moviemakers finish a picture on time and don't spend a lot of our money on it. Then we sit down and look at the picture and we like it or we don't like it. But we really don't know if the public will like it or not and we get worried because there's a lot of money at stake." That's the truth about those people.

PLAYBOY: By "those people" do you mean not merely Bob Evans and Paramount but all the major studios and their top executives?

CASSAVETES: It's true about everybody who's not involved in making a movie but only in financing one. No head of any major studio today has ever made a film himself, has ever sweated through the ordeal a moviemaker has to go through to get a picture filmed. They've only dealt with money, and anyone who says otherwise is a goddamned liar. Robert Evans is the laughingstock of Hollywood, and I'm just using him as an example, because he said about the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

PLAYBOY: Are you as outspoken in your dealings with studio executives as you're being with us?

CASSAVETES: I don't edit what I say for anybody, but not all studio executives are dumb. Studios should have no pretense about what they are: moviemakers. They should stick with what they know how to do; and some of them do. But by the same token, an artist shouldn't interfere with a studio on money matters. If he does, he's stupid; because if he gets concerned with money matters, it's going to drain energy from his films, maybe even make him a little nuts. I'm probably a genius at business, but I have two producers to take care of that end of a film for me, because if I get too involved in the finances, I'll be distracted from my real work, which is moviemaking, not bookkeeping. In *Husbands,* if I had devoted more time to the budget, it would have taken away from the time I spent off the set with Benny and Peter, which would have affected my directing, writing and acting.

PLAYBOY: Why did you choose Falk and Gazzara to co-star with you in *Husbands*?

CASSAVETES: No special reason except that I thought they'd be right for it and that the three of us would work together well.

PLAYBOY: Did you?

CASSAVETES: We worked well together. And we became friends on a level that's unqualified by duty or loyalty; those things don't count. The only thing that counts is that you're all doing the same thing, you're testing each other, testing yourself. In that situation, each actor is thinking, "How far up can I reach?" That's selfish—and honest. I don't think Peter and Benny were too concerned about how far I could go as a director; they were thinking about how far *they* could go as actors. And, in a realistic sense, Benny couldn't go anyplace unless Peter was good and unless I was good. So we knew we had to work on that level, and in order to do that, we had to get tight with each other.

PLAYBOY: Did the three of you hit it off personally from the beginning?

CASSAVETES: No, we were very wary of each other. We were all terrified that the three of us would get into a boring conversation and cease to be friends, which would make it impossible as actors to assume the friendship we needed as a background for our characters. One of the first nights we got together, we went to a bar and the table talk dipped, really got bad. Our characters' names at that point were Benny, John and Peter, because it's difficult for me to write for anonymous identities. To break what was getting to be a desperate silence, I said, "Look, since we have to come up with names sooner or later, why don't we each think of some? Let's all choose the names for our characters—and whatever names we want, we'll have in the movie." We started to talk about them, and it reminded me of a bunch of pregnant women talking about their children.

Anyway, the first thing Peter said was, "I like Archie." And I answered, "C'mon, Peter, you can't be an *Archie.*" To which he replied, "Jesus Christ, John, first you tell us to choose our own names, then when we do it, you say we can't. This is freedom?" Benny, not listening to Peter at all, said, "I'd like to be called Harold, after Harold's Show Spot," a New York bar he used to frequent. Then he thought for a second and said, "Or we could call me Harry—Harold will know who I mean." So he became Harry; Peter was Archie; and I always liked the name Gus, because it was Greek and a good name. By the end of the evening, we were really able to talk to each other, and when the picture began shooting, we were buddies. You need friends to function better; but that was our problem with the picture. When *Husbands* was finished, we all had a terribly empty feeling. The main reason we did so much press stuff together afterward—talk shows and interviews—was that we didn't want to give it up.

PLAYBOY: Is your relationship with Falk and Gazzara similar to the relationship of the three characters in the movie?

CASSAVETES: We lapsed into that once in a while after the film, but more infrequently as time went by. Certain parts of Peter and Benny are close to Archie and Harry, but it's really impossible to say which parts those are.

PLAYBOY: Were there any times on camera when you or Gazzara or Falk was being put down by the other two guys and reacted personally?

CASSAVETES: Sure, it was all personal—which is the point actors try to get to, where they can genuinely react to what you're saying. In *Husbands,* Gazzara's character was continually frozen out by me and Falk—and Benny was really getting personally paranoid about it. In a three-person relationship, there's always one guy on the outside, and during the picture, Benny was usually it.

PLAYBOY: When the three of you get together today, is Gazzara still the odd man out?

CASSAVETES: No, not at all. I would say that Benny's the motivating force in our friendship; he's probably the most articulate of the three of us. Not that Peter isn't articulate, but often he chooses not to be; he tends to be a little more contained. But when something displeases him, he'll come out of that container in a split second.

PLAYBOY: Though you were more or less an equal acting partner with them, you had final authority over Falk and Gazzara as the director. Did you have any

difficulties playing that dual role?

CASSAVETES: I don't ever have trouble with authority. I don't relate like that to the position, mainly because I'm not *aware* of the position. The title of director or actor is only to establish continuity in our business. Ben and Peter couldn't *make* me a director. Either I'm a director or I'm not. Either they would have respect for me or they wouldn't, and that's not something you get on demand. So I didn't worry about it. Instead, we addressed ourselves to the problems at hand, and sometimes Benny solved them, sometimes Peter solved them and sometimes I did. As a director, I don't have any conditions except to enjoy myself while filming and to have the people I'm working with do the same. But I wouldn't want you to think the three of us made the movie without any disputes. We still have some violent disagreements about the film today; Benny and Peter disagree with me on a lot of things.

PLAYBOY: Like what?

CASSAVETES: I can't really tell you, because if I understood them, I would have found a way to resolve them. Our biggest point of dispute had to do with the film's length; we were under a lot of pressure to make it shorter than 139 minutes, which the studio felt would result in bigger audiences. They may have been right. I could see Benny's and Peter's anxiety about that, but I could feel my own stubbornness, and I still say that our bargain was with purity and not with success.

Look, many people walked out on *Husbands*; I'm aware of that because Columbia would call me up to report that 52 people had stormed out of one theater in one day. Well, *Husbands* is an extremely entertaining film in spots, just as I think life is extremely entertaining in spots. Like life, it's also very slow and depressing in areas. The one thing it's not is a shorthand film. I won't *make* shorthand films, because I don't want to manipulate audiences into assuming quick, manufactured truths. If I had my way, *Husbands* would be twice as long as it is and *everyone* could walk out if they wanted to. Maybe I'll get better, but I can't change a movie merely to pacify people.

A lot of people got uptight about the scene in which Peter and I vomit in the men's room of a bar. The characters weren't vomiting just because they happened to be drunk; they got drunk *so* they could vomit—vomit for their dead friend. Some people may find that disgusting, but that's their problem. When somebody dies, I want to feel something. I want to be so upset that I could cry, throw up, feel the loss deeply. If that offends some people, then let them be offended.

PLAYBOY: Had Gazzara and Falk ever approached moviemaking in that way before *Husbands*?

CASSAVETES: Peter says no, that this was the first experience he's had where working was really fun, where he was really creating a character and much of the character's dialog. I think that in Benny's first film—*The Strange One*, which he also did on Broadway—he probably worked in a freer way than usual. All of us were affected—most of it very positive—by making *Husbands*. Only time will tell if their good feelings about the film will hold, but at least it was an experience the three of us will never discount. I don't think three guys could get much closer to each other than we did.

PLAYBOY: Was all the physical touching among the three of you intentional?

CASSAVETES: No, not at all. Benny, for instance, is a thoroughly outgoing man, the kind of person who sees you, throws his arms around you, hugs and kisses you, and there's absolutely no feeling of self-consciousness about it; it's just his greeting, a very Mediterranean greeting, I guess. I always hugged my family and kissed them and still do with my son, who's 11. Peter's just a little bit more reserved than Benny and me—and he's a *very* exuberant person. Our backgrounds really show up in our friendship—Benny's Sicilian, I'm Greek and Peter's Jewish. I suppose we did touch a lot, but I'm not defensive about it.

PLAYBOY: It didn't seem that way in the film. After Gazzara has informed you and Falk that except for sex, he loves the two of you more than his wife, he delivers his self-kidding "fairy Harry" line, lest anyone think he's homosexual. Did you think such a disclaimer was necessary?

CASSAVETES: When Benny dropped that "fairy Harry" line on us, we all thought it was funny, because he was saying that maybe he'd be better off if he *was* queer, an absurd thought, something a million miles away from the characters. That was an improvised line; in fact, the whole moment was improvised. I don't know if the cold reality would be all that humorous for the character, but the feeling was comical.

PLAYBOY: *Husbands*—and *Faces* before it—deals with many sexual matters, yet there was no nudity in either film. Why?

CASSAVETES: Probably because I only like to see beautiful people nude, and in *Husbands*, neither myself, Falk or Gazzara is too much to look at naked. Peter and Benny might disagree. In *Husbands*, the girl I rolled around in bed with was tall and slim and looked terrific in her clothes, but I don't think she would have looked all that good undressed. I don't know, it just seemed that we could do the movie without it. I really think nudity in films is being overdone anyway.

PLAYBOY: Yet you've played nude scenes in other films, haven't you?

CASSAVETES: Don't remind me. I don't think there's anything morally wrong with seeing a nude body on the screen, but it offends me to watch people kiss without genuine love or passion. I don't think I've ever seen a good picture helped or hurt by nudity, but I've seen lots of pictures where nudity was self-conscious, where it was apparent that the actors were uncomfortable. Maybe I just can't handle the idea of seeing something on screen that's so personal—and dirty.

PLAYBOY: Dirty?

CASSAVETES: I think sex *is* dirty. I *like* it dirty. And the thing that makes it dirty is to grab something clean and *defile* it! Yeah! Most movies can't convey that illicit kind of thing, even though they try. I thought the nudity in *Rosemary's Baby* was called for. It didn't offend me as an actor.

PLAYBOY: Why do you think nude scenes have become almost obligatory?

CASSAVETES: The reason there's so much nudity in movies today is that we're becoming a voyeuristic society, and producers are responding to that demand with a great big supply. Not only are we becoming more voyeuristic, but I also think we're starting to lose faith in the idea that one man and one woman can totally please each other in bed. Sex is becoming something of a community activity; more and more people have to hop into the sack together in order for all of them to achieve sexual satisfaction. I wouldn't want to interfere with anyone's right to conduct orgies, you understand, but I personally think that kind of thing finally robs sex of all its delicious and very private pleasures. When sex becomes commonplace, when the girl you want is trying out half your suburban community and the same is true of you, where are the romantic and secret pleasures you need out of sex? I don't like sex to be ordinary and rational and organized and sane. But I don't like sex in groups and I believe in—and practice—fidelity in marriage. Maybe I should have gotten some of that into the movie, but *Husbands* dealt with the problems of three men facing middle age and all terribly affected by the death of their friend.

PLAYBOY: Is that what you were trying to say in the movie?

CASSAVETES: I don't know if the movie *tried* to make a statement; it either said something or it didn't. I'm really unable to interpret it. I've talked to people who've liked *Husbands* and some who think it's the saddest movie they've ever seen. I find that hard to understand. In the last scene in the movie, for instance, a lot of people think that when I return home and my two kids come out to see me—those were my own children, Nick and Xan—I'm kind of resigned to my lousy life and my lousy marriage. But that wasn't the case at all. The fact that Gus was about to get some heat from his wife because he'd gone off for a weekend in

London isn't unpleasant to me. It's kind of flattering, really, when a man goes home to his wife and gets some static that way. You don't want too much of it, but you actually *need* a little bit—it's an indication that there's something there, that we're living, that people care, that our silly endeavors have some meaning. Which is why I can't see that scene as sad. Anyway, *Husbands* is over and done with and I'm now in the middle of the next movie, *Minnie and Moscowitz.*

PLAYBOY: What's it about?

CASSAVETES: It's a film about why two people get married, starring Gena Rowlands and Seymour Cassel, who did such a great job in *Faces.* Also appearing in the film will be my entire family on both sides and Seymour's entire family. As the casting might indicate, I believe totally in nepotism.

PLAYBOY: Why?

CASSAVETES: Because it impresses the hell out of my family and friends. Anyway, I conceived of *Minnie and Moscowitz* in early February and got the company, cast and script together within a couple of weeks. It didn't take long to write, because the idea has been around in my head for a while: how and why people get married. It's funny, I've always been against the institution of marriage, even though I've been at it—with Gena—for quite a while. And rewarded by it. But I don't really approve of a lot of marriages, because they seem to be false and lacking in spirit and individuality. I'm troubled by the idea that so many people get divorced and married again, and the idea that they have to say "I love you" and go through all the adjustment stuff again. I think the best way to examine a man and a woman and their singularity is through the institution of marriage. And both Minnie and Moscowitz are very singular people.

PLAYBOY: In what way?

CASSAVETES: Gena plays Minnie, a girl whose love affairs have all been with married men, and who's tried to fill her life up with work and hobbies. At the point you meet her in the movie, she's just decided to get married, so that she can fulfill herself as a woman; before it's too late, she wants to have a home and children, build her future and find a way to take care of her mother. Women have a tendency, when they get married, to say, "All right, I will now set my life in order," which is what Gena's character does. Seymour plays Moscowitz, a funny long-haired drifter who meets Gena at his place of business; he parks cars at a restaurant she wanders into. Like any guy, his instinct is to just go with the marriage thing; if you love a woman, you don't think marriage will change the relationship. The shock is that it does. Depending on the girl, sometimes it's for the better, sometimes it's for the worse. But it's always a problem, because when a woman gets married, she insists on a new maturity while still holding onto the fun; a man doesn't usually know how to balance that combination very well, so either he tries to keep the fun or he gets terribly serious about being mature; he's usually unable to do both things.

PLAYBOY: Does directing your wife in a film—as you did in *Faces*—put strains on your marriage?

CASSAVETES: No, we've never had any problems that way. Gena is an actress and, therefore, is always looking to better her part or at least protect it; that's the only problem actors and directors ever have. Actors—and Gena is no exception—always worry that some dumb director will come along with a theory, tear up the script and, in the process, ruin their part. As a director, I have to reassure Gena that I won't do that and ask her to have confidence in me not to do that. We really have no problems on that score. As a matter of fact, because of the very personal nature of the way I work, directing my wife is probably easier than directing a woman I don't know.

PLAYBOY: You seem to be a happily married man, but two of the three pictures you've written and directed independently—*Faces* and *Husbands*—depict marriage as an excruciating state of male incarceration. Do you feel that way?

CASSAVETES: No, I don't feel like a prisoner at all. I just couldn't compare bachelorhood with marriage. The only things I remember about bachelorhood are loneliness, tiredness, sleeplessness and a certain camaraderie—based on a mutual solitude—that I shared with a lot of other young guys at the time. But I couldn't go back to that now. I look at my three kids and they're terrific; they give me a lot of pleasure, a lot of pain and a lot of concern—but I love them all. I love them on their own terms, not just because they're kids or because they're *my* kids; life is just better with them around. I enjoy Gena because she enjoys some of the same things I do, because she hates some of the things I like and because I hate some of the things *she* likes. We keep learning how to play together, so that I can step on her toes gently and she can step on mine gently and we can make a lot of noise. Our kids understand it to the point where we've all become some sort of a team, a group of people who really enjoy each other.

I don't think of our house as a prison, either, and I enjoy going back to it. That's a result of a hard struggle by my wife to make my home life as good as my outside life—and I have a terrific outside life. I enjoy my work, my friends, putting things together, being clever, being stupid, creating things, not creating things, losing and winning. And then I go home, and what has my house got in it? It's got a way of life much more than it has people. I can feel the walls coming in on me when it's bad; but I can also feel a marvelous joy, a joy that means some kids tumbling down the stairs and almost breaking their necks, and me seeing where my kids are at and knowing that in order for them to really gain something from us, we have to give them something of ourselves. And I don't have to do it in a rush, because it's cool, it's going to be there for a long time. It's the same thing with my wife.

PLAYBOY: Tell us more about her.

CASSAVETES: She has a terrific sense of humor. And she's beautiful, a woman I'm always attracted to. But I really don't think of her when I'm away from her, and I hope she doesn't think of me when she's away from me. I don't think about my children when I'm away from them, either. I think about them and her when we're together. At the end of the day, though, when it's time to go home, I want to go home. I know a lot of people who don't like their families and who don't like going home. There are a lot of reasons for it, and most of them are sexual—and lead to withdrawal. I know that the people I see who don't get along at home don't get along in their lives. Oh, they can be socially acceptable and they can be polite, but they don't like to go to work and they don't like to go home. I don't say I have a great life, but I just don't know any better. If it's bad, I'm certainly not feeling any pain from it. I'm feeling joy from it, so I don't question it.

PLAYBOY: Don't you and Gena ever argue?

CASSAVETES: Yeah, we fight. I believe that any two people who disagree should really go as far as they can, and I think we do: screaming, yelling, petty acts of hostility and cruelty—but it's all meaningless. It's always meaningless if that essential love is there. Like a rubber band that you stretch out, no matter how far you pull it—and even if it stings snapping back—it returns, the love reappears.

PLAYBOY: Do you try to do things as a couple?

CASSAVETES: No, I hate that. I only want to be with my wife when I want to be, and I hope she only likes to be with me when she wants to be. It would be disastrous to have to do a lot of things you don't really want to do. I think we both try to consider the other person's true feelings. For instance, I'm not introverted, but when I go home, I like some private breathing time. It takes a while for a woman to get used to that, and not to feel something is wrong with her if her man wants five minutes alone just to go upstairs and wash and maybe smoke a cigarette. It's a serene pleasure: Don't bring me a drink, don't bring me anything, I just want to be left alone, and then, when I come down, I feel

great, refreshed. Just because you're married doesn't mean you have to cease being an individual and stop doing the things you like to do.

PLAYBOY: Didn't Gena virtually give up her acting career to be your wife?

CASSAVETES: I don't know—only she would know that. I'm sure that if we were split up for long periods of time, our marriage wouldn't be as good as it is. We both considered that and made a pact that we'd always avoid long separations. When we first got married and were both acting, she would go with me if a job took me out of town. And if Gena got a job, I would go with her. We worked it out so that the jobs never took precedence over something more real—us.

PLAYBOY: Have you and Gena always gotten along so well?

CASSAVETES: Hell, no! The first time I saw her, I was with an actor, John Ericson, and I said, "That's the girl I'm going to marry." Well, it was a hard struggle to convince her. From my point of view, if I was going to give my precious self to a woman, she was going to have to love me unconditionally. I kept Gena under constant scrutiny, I was enormously jealous, filled with suspicions about other men and with the terror that those suspicions might be correct. She wouldn't put up with that. And finally I relaxed.

PLAYBOY: Is it important for you to be dominant in your marriage?

CASSAVETES: No. The important thing is that I am not her and she is not me, and that we remain individuals. It takes a long time to come to those conclusions, and that's the best way for us to work it.

PLAYBOY: Have you made any films you've never seen?

CASSAVETES: No, I've eventually seen them all, thanks to television. Some night I'll have nothing to do, the tube will be on about two in the morning and some cruddy film I did will start showing. Ah, what a wonderful feeling it was to see *Crime in the Streets* again recently. It was one of my first movies and I played a juvenile delinquent and my usual prop was a switchblade knife. I also watched *Edge of the City* on TV not long ago. In it, Sidney Poitier and I played two longshoremen who kept getting pushed around by Jack Warden—who eventually killed Sidney in a cargo-hook duel, and who I somehow managed to beat up at the end of the movie.

PLAYBOY: There's even more violence in films today than there was then. Why?

CASSAVETES: I don't know why it's escalated, but there's always been an appetite for that sort of thing, and I think there always will be. We all secretly crave it, for whatever reasons. And I'm no exception. I'll never forget the violence of *Public Enemy*, with James Cagney. I loved it. I didn't care *how* many people got killed. But Cagney played a man you didn't want to see die. Whether he was right or wrong, he was a guy who could stand up to life and to as many gangsters as would come up against him; he was the toughest guy I'd ever seen. I'm sure Cagney's height didn't make any difference; you'd never believe he couldn't win any fight he got into. He was my childhood idol, the guy most responsible, I suppose, for getting me into films; I loved him. I love everything I've ever heard or seen about the man—especially his retirement. He stopped acting because he felt he just couldn't cut it anymore and he didn't want to louse up what people thought of him. He got old and content and he knew he no longer had the drive that had made him a great star. Cagney was an original. He set up a terrific force on screen; he always portrayed an average guy who could somehow knock down giants. He was almost like a savior to all the short guys in the world, of whom I am one. As a kid, I idolized him just because he was short—and tough.

PLAYBOY: Did your shortness cause you any grief while you were growing up?

CASSAVETES: I guess it did. When I was 14 years old, I think I was just about five feet tall, which meant that I had enormous problems getting dates with girls. So you have to compensate for it: You become funnier, more outgoing. Being short is a great character builder, even though it sure as hell doesn't seem that way when you first start out. It was a hell of a handicap, but it didn't louse up my childhood, because I had—and still have—a very rich family life. My mother is a warm and wonderful woman and my father is an extraordinary man.

PLAYBOY: In what way?

CASSAVETES: That's a long story. Are you sure you want to hear it?

PLAYBOY: Why not?

CASSAVETES: You asked for it. My father came over to America with his kid brother when he was 11 years old. He was born in Piraeus, Greece, and heard about this country when a missionary came through town one day, saying there was brotherhood in America, that if you wanted to work and learn, the American people would open their arms and hearts to you. Soon afterward, my father, his younger brother and sister began their trek here, going first to Bulgaria—where they deposited my aunt with relatives—and then to Constantinople, where they worked until they saved up boat fare. When my dad and his brother arrived at Ellis Island and were asked who they knew in America, my father, who'd heard of Providence, Rhode Island, said he knew someone there. He was asked for written proof of this and he said he didn't have any because the man, a very wealthy man, had arrived in New York on the boat before theirs. And then my dad pulled out his big line: "I want to work and I want to learn."

PLAYBOY: Did it produce results?

CASSAVETES: Absolutely; an immigration officer gave my father and my uncle five dollars for bus fare to Providence, and when they arrived, they didn't know a soul. My dad began looking for Greeks all over town, searching for that familiar dark-olive skin tone, until he found fellow immigrants who gave him work. Shortly after that, he got a job just outside Boston, working in an ice-cream parlor. And five years after he'd come here—at the age of 16—he'd really put it all together: He'd learned English to add to the Greek and French he already knew, he'd gone through the Mount Hermon School, near Boston, in six months on a scholarship, and he'd won a partial scholarship to Harvard University, where he worked his way through school. And every time he'd run into money difficulties, he'd say to someone, "I want to work and I want to learn," and somehow he'd get the money he needed to continue his studies. And he *did* work and learn.

The man is older now and he still works close to 18 hours a day. He won't stop; he's in travel and immigration, and he has plans to make millions. He's probably responsible for bringing in most of the Greeks who now live in America. My mother calls him the champion of lost causes; he's one of those Greek-American patriots who tries to move mountains. Right now, he's fighting an archbishop because the archbishop wants to replace Greek with English as the language in church services. A few months ago, I was having dinner with my mother and I asked her where my dad was. He was out on the street picketing the archbishop.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel a strong Greek identity?

CASSAVETES: I think of it as a great club to belong to. I speak Greek a little bit and, like any member of an ethnic group, I derive a good deal of pride from belonging. But I don't really carry it further than that.

PLAYBOY: How did you feel about the overthrow of the Greek government by the military junta?

CASSAVETES: Bad. Most Greeks are really insane about it, because their whole cultural background is freedom, and when somebody destroys that freedom, they become a little hot on the subject. My father's more philosophical and fatalistic about it. When I asked him what he thought about the military coup, he told me that governments are only people and that, like people, they rise and fall. But the junta, he said, is never going to starve to death—only poor Greeks, who will go hungry in the name of freedom, will starve. Of course, he also said that poor Greeks weren't much better off under the more liberal regime. The country still feeds off tourism, though, and with tourism falling off because of the political situation, the poor won't survive as well