

incommensurate projects—"loose assemblages" of assumptions, vocabularies, and research techniques. There are no tears in his eyes when he announces that unity is nowhere in sight. He is wary of imperial decrees and cautions us to beware of all forms of "destructive integrity" (intellectual and political).

Amidst the tumble of the fields of psychology and the cognitive neurosciences, Geertz gives his blessings to "cultural psychology," an interdisciplinary inquiry into the role of meaning in producing and explaining psychological differences across human populations. While parts of cultural anthropology remain stuck in a state of irrational "psycho-phobia," Geertz calls for a semiotic study of the emotions. He fully recognizes that "semiotics" is not simply the study of symbol systems detached from individual experience, bodies, and selves.

In the collections' final essay, "The World in Pieces," Geertz takes on "borderless capitalism" and the connections between globalization, multiculturalism, and the reemergence of ethnic and religious identities. Against the odds, he is searching for a liberalism "with both the courage and the capacity

to engage itself with a differenced world." Critics of liberalism, Geertz says, argue that such commitments either prevent liberals "from recognizing the force and durability of ties of religion, language, custom, locality, race, and descent in human affairs" or force them to regard the entry of such considerations into civic life as "pathological—primitive, backward, regressive, and irrational." Characteristically resisting dichotomies, Geertz replies: "I do not think this is the case."

Available Light is also full of sharp judgments about well-known scholars and fashionable schools of thought. But most of all, this collection helps set some records straight. Geertz is critical not only of the intellectual fanatics in the academy (the total systems builders) but of the infidels (the skeptical anti-science postmodernists) as well. This may surprise some of his detractors, who often misread his pluralism as a version of radically skeptical postmodernism.

That is not to say that the author has proved that he can have his cake and eat it too. Rejecting subjectivism while refusing to place anything (other than banalities) outside of culture is not an easy position to

defend. It is still a stretch to embrace both liberalism and the durable bonds of community. And reading Geertz (like reading Wittgenstein, his kindred spirit), one is left wanting something more, which he will certainly refuse to provide—namely systematic theorizing about his own philosophy of translation. If there is very little that transcends culture and history, how is it possible for "others" to be simultaneously different from us yet comprehensible to us? But this is where serious engagement with this important book should begin.

Available Light opens with a 1999 autobiographical address, described by the author as an act of "public self-concealment." The G. I. Bill launched him into academia where, as he puts it, he just kept catching the right wave. He progressed from Antioch College to the Department of Social Relations at Harvard to the University of Chicago. For the last 30 years, he has represented anthropology at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. If 30 minutes ago you didn't know who Clifford Geertz is, you should definitely read this book. Everyone who already knew probably grabbed *Available Light* hot off the press.

FILMS: ASTRONOMY

Be Awed, Be Very Awed

MAX technology, which creates large format film for multistory screens in almost lifelike three dimensions, has come a long way since it was introduced in 1970. Now it has traveled the 93 million miles to the surface of the sun for the creation of *SolarMax*, a 40-minute-long action documentary. The film combines digitally retrieved images of the sun's corona and the solar wind from a bevy of satellites with time-lapse footage of shimmering sun rises and vibrant pastel aurorae captured by IMAX cameras. The pictures from space and ground are woven into an almost apocalyptic journey from the human realization that the sun is the center of the solar system to models of a solar storm deforming the magnetosphere.

SolarMax

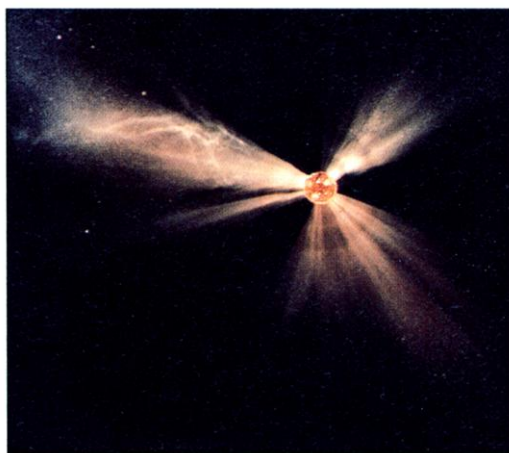
John Weiley, Director

Heliograph, in association with the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago. See: www.solarmovie.com

On Earth, the film presents huge, richly colored landscapes from Alaska to the Andes. A 180-degree field-of-view camera captures the never-setting sun circling Earth's north pole. Fast film (800 ISO) and fast lenses (f-stop 1.0) nab sizzling images of aurorae created by solar storms. The aurorae seem so big and so real that you can feel the electricity in the air; you might even fear for your satellite-connected cell phone.

From space, the dynamic nature of the sun explodes from the screen, as if a burst of plasma that would vaporize the audience could be released at any moment. A highlight of the film is the carefully sequenced combination of surface images of the sun from the Solar

and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO), which show the coronal mass ejections, and images from SOHO's Large Angle Spectrometric Coronagraph, which show 30-million-mile-long flares of the solar



wind. Data from the Transition Region and Coronal Explorer spacecraft have been used in a mesmerizing fly-by over the delicate magnetic loops that form on the solar surface. Another must-see sequence is the full 11-year sunspot cycle, dramatically captured in data gathered by the Yohkoh satellite since its 1991 launch. We are currently approaching a solar maximum (from which the movie gets its title), when the sun's surface activity reaches an 11-year peak and its magnetic poles reverse.

The images make the movie, but the original music score and the sound effects for the solar wind, aurorae, and the "singing sun" heighten the intensity of the experience. The narration is informative and entertaining. At one point in a discussion of the relatively mundane task of sunspot counting, the narrator quips that the sun is "as spotty as a teenager." Perhaps the film's one weakness is the lack of explanatory descriptions of the different views of the sun, which were collected in many wavelengths with various contrasts and resolutions by the cornucopia of satellites and telescopes.

IMAX may be the best medium to contain the big, bright, brawny sun for a general audience. This well-choreographed film is entertaining for everyone from seven-year-olds to solar physicists. *SolarMax* is big, very big; and its star attraction is awesome, very awesome.

—LINDA ROWAN

CREDIT: FROM SOLARMAX