

15th January 1979

Mainline Films

Category: 'X'

No cuts

Country of origin: U.S.A.

Footage: 7,977 feet

Running time: 88 minutes

Funded by the American Film Institute and made in black and white, ERASERHEAD has an elusive, surrealistic quality similar to a dream, which leaves the viewer baffled, repulsed or amused - or perhaps all three. The sound quality, often muffled, or even not present, contributes to the dream-like effect especially in the opening where

x bizarre visuals are disorienting enough.

Henry, whose hair grows straight up from his head, lives in a one-room apartment in a concrete tenement block where a radiator is the source of his fantasies. He receives an invitation to dine with Mary, an old girlfriend, and her bizarre family. He learns that she has had a baby and that he must marry her. Mary, Henry and Baby, a hideous membrane-covered foetus-like creature with a tail, calmly set up home in his apartment, but Mary soon packs her bags and goes home to mother. Baby, who makes tiny croaking noises, becomes sick, covered with large, pimply excrescences and while Henry watches, it retreats into the fantasy world of the radiator. Here a blonde singer in a night-club squashes a monster-like Baby under her foot. Then Henry's unspecified bed partner gives birth under the bed-clothes to bits of tail. Later Henry's sexy neighbour knocks on the door and they spend the night together which conjures some visual sexual clichés. Henry's next fantasy returns him to his chubby-cheeked blonde night-club singer. His head is suddenly lopped off and rolls away in blood while his torso grows a head like Baby's. The head rolls to a waste ground where a boy picks it up and takes it into a workshop where a man tests a sample to see if it is suitable material with which to make pencils with erasers. When Henry wakes he cuts off the bandages protecting Baby's lower half revealing an exposed organ. Digging in the scissors produces blood gushes and then a spectacularly repulsive spurt of what could be cottage cheese from the belly. As its tail tries to get loose the electric points short and lights flicker and then go out. In the closing sequence Henry seems to be locked into his fantasy world.

Well, it's different and well enough made to merit some consideration. Fortunately the only criterion for this report is category and we all settled for the 'X' chiefly because of the truly obnoxious foetus. 14 and 15-year-old girls ought to be spared that, indeed all pregnant women should be advised of the film's content.