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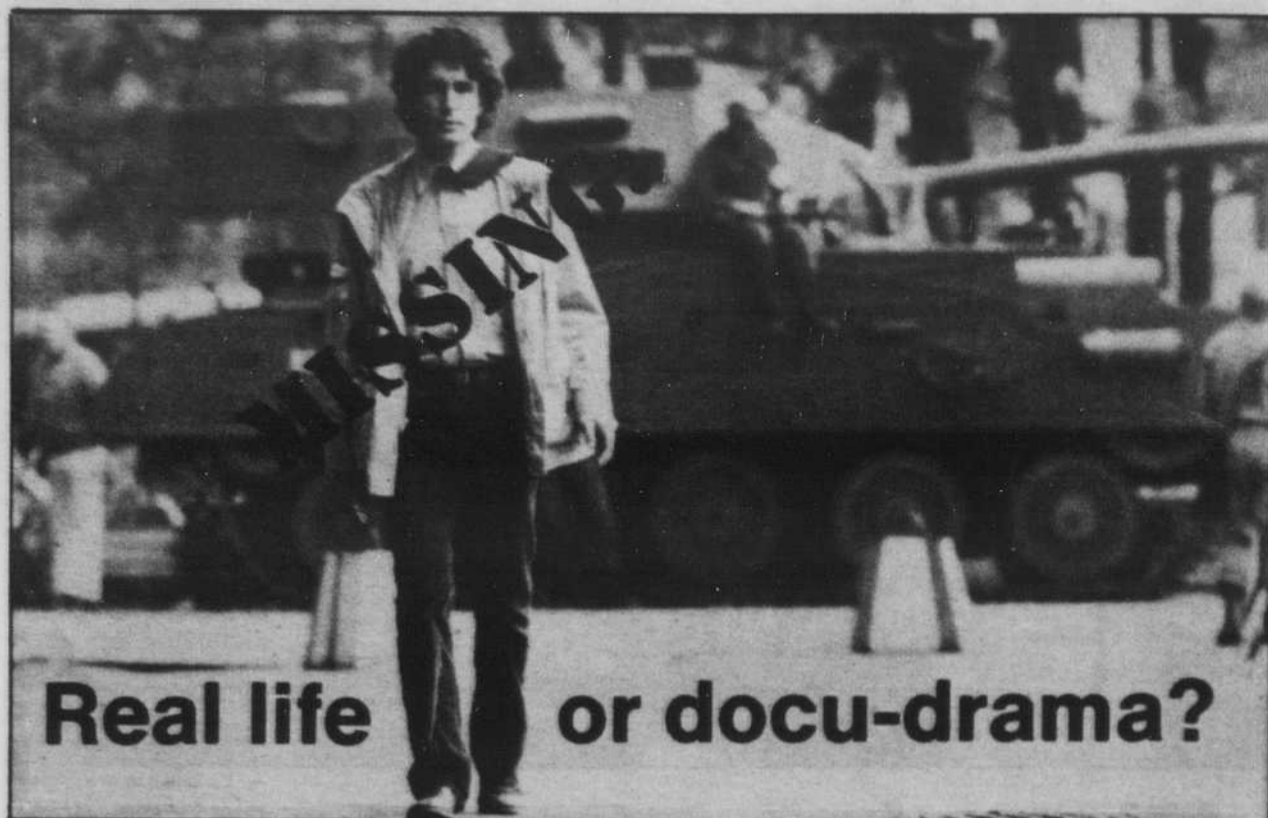
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Real life or docu-drama?

"Missing"
Jack Lemmon
Sissy Spacek
A- West 11th Cinemas

Machine guns pop like fire-crackers in the distance, getting nearer. Puddles of blood bathe the street. Piles of corpses fill the plazas. Beth Horman searches for her husband in the rubble of a military coup.

Beth (Spacek) is an American whose husband, Charles (John Shea), mysteriously disappears following the 1973 coup in Chile. After weeks of official double-talk and denials, Charles' father Ed (Lemmon), a New York businessman, comes to straighten things out and bring his son home.

Director Costa-Gavras ("State of Siege," "Z") develops this real-life struggle into a powerful docu-drama highly critical of America's involvement in foreign political uprisings. The film makes its point forcefully, and few in the audience leave without anger at their government for interfering where it doesn't belong.

The main question in my mind is how much of the story is fictionalized and exaggerated for

the sake of the strength of the film's message. According to the studio's press kit, Ed Horman wasn't quite the underachieving radical the movie painted him to be. Horman worked at summer jobs for CBS Television and the New York Times, and at KING-TV and WNET after graduation from Harvard.

It's no sin to creatively "adjust" facts to better serve the story, but this must be remembered by the audience. Was pre-coup Chile as wonderful as the movie makes it out to be? Just how involved was the U.S., and why?

Regardless of the degree of "adjustment" Costa-Gavras made, the final product is a tight, convincing argument with incredible power. Much of this power comes from the frighteningly realistic picture of a bloody coup that acts as a backdrop for the characters' actions.

These characters are similarly exaggerated. Lemmon's character could be a commercial for the American way of life, a staunch defender of capitalism, free trade, business and apple pie. He feels that his son *must have* done something to deserve arrest. He sees his son

and daughter-in-law as underachieving hippies who moved to Chile because they couldn't make it in the States.

We also get a few too many shots of "what a great guy Charles was." Although a few of these are necessary to tie the audience to the character, Costa-Gavras goes a little overboard, and makes it painfully clear that Charles was a Great Guy.

When it is finally revealed that the U.S. government had something to do with the coup, the writers (Costa-Gavras and Donald Stewart) hit us over the head with the film's message, point-blank: "If you hadn't been personally involved," says a U.S. official to Lemmon, "you'd be sitting complacently back in your easy chair in the States." He goes on to say that there are many multinational corporations doing business in the country whose needs must be protected. (Just in case you missed the point.)

In spite of its simplifications, stereotypes and blunt statements, "Missing" is a powerful indictment of U.S. intervention in foreign government activities, and a pretty good film to boot.

by matt meyer

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