

Man Alive! (1952)

Cartoon Fun with Cancer, Cars and Companionate Marriage in Suburban America

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***Man Alive!* (1952)**

Producer	United Productions of America
Presented by	American Cancer Society (ACS)
Story	Bill Scott, William Roberts
Design	Art Heinemann, Sterling Sturtevant
Music	Benjamin Lees
Voices	Vic Perrin, Dorothy Scott, Bill Scott
Animation	Cecil Surry, Phil Monroe, Rudy Larriva
Color	Robert McIntosh, Boris Gorelick, Michi Kataoka, Jules Engel
Medical Advisor	Charles S. Cameron (Medical and Scientific Director, ACS) ¹
Production manager	Herbert Klynn
Executive producer	Stephen Bosustow
Director	William T. Hurtz
Color	Technicolor

1 film reel (417 ft.), sound, color, 16 mm. answer print.
NLM Unique ID: 8800584A

The release of *Man Alive!* in 1952 signaled a change in American anti-cancer campaigns.² Since their emergence in the early twentieth century, such campaigns had focused most attention on recruiting women into programs of early detection and treatment.³ But from the 1940s on, they supplemented this approach with one that targeted men. In the film component of the ACS anti-cancer campaign, this began with *Enemy X* released in 1942, followed by *You Are the Switchman* (1946), *The Traitor Within* (1946) and *You, Time and Cancer* (1948).⁴ *Man Alive!* built upon this new appeal to men, but added much that was new.⁵

At one level, this novelty might not be obvious. Much of *Man Alive's* message was not dissimilar to that of other educational movies about cancer circulating in the 1940s and early 1950s.⁶ Like those films it sought to persuade viewers to go to a regular physician at the earliest sign of what might be cancer. It warned against delay in seeking competent help; against going to "quacks"; against listening to the unreliable advice of friends; and against turning to home remedies. Finally, it taught viewers to recognize the "danger signals" of cancer, encouraged them to go for a regular health check-up from a recognized physician, and urged them to seek medical attention the moment cancer or its possibility was identified. All these themes had been a regular part of cancer education programs since the 1910s, whether aimed at men or women.

Part of what was new about *Man Alive!* was where it was screened. It was shown both in movie theaters as part of the regular theater schedule [Fig. 1], and in “non-theatrical” venues such as factories, clubs and other locations as part of special educational events. As such, it blurred a distinction that had emerged in the 1910s, when educational films began to be dropped from the regular schedule of film theaters, and shown in such venues only for special events. *Man Alive!* was one of a select few cancer educational films that made it back into the motion picture theatre (and the drive-in) as part of the regular film schedule, not as the feature, but as a short subject that

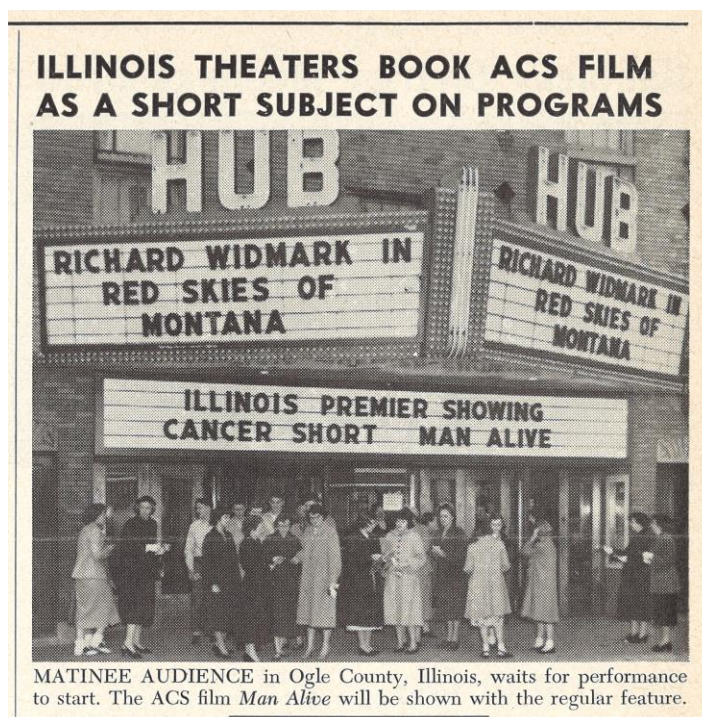


Figure 1: *Man Alive!* was sometimes shown as part of the regular theatre schedule. Source: ‘Illinois Theaters Book ACS Film as a Short Subject on Programs,’ *ACS Bulletin* 1, 17 (May 5, 1952): 3.

accompanied the feature.⁷ So great was the theater-demand that in 1953 the ACS set up a rental service for 35 mm theatre prints. Television stations also made frequent use of the film.⁸ There were also plans for a Spanish-language version.⁹ It was the subject of a spread in *Life Magazine*, and was nominated for an Oscar (Best Documentary, Short Subjects) in 1952.¹⁰ One commentator later described it as an “educational film rivalling Woody Woodpecker in popular appeal.”¹¹

If the screening location of the film was novel, so too was its content and style.¹² This was the first cancer education film to try to get its message across by using a purely comedic approach, producing “some hilarious results,”¹³ according to the ACS. Earlier films had occasionally had humorous scenes, and cancer trailers and public service announcements (generally treated as distinct from educational shorts),¹⁴ had also striven for comedic effect.¹⁵ But *Man Alive!* was the first educational film to use comedy throughout, and set the stage for other humorous cancer education films in the 1950s, virtually all made by one studio – United Productions of America (UPA).¹⁶

United Productions of America

Founded in 1943, and incorporated in 1945, UPA had begun life making sponsored films (industrials, political campaign movies, and educational and training films for the United States government), before expanding into theatrical shorts and television in the late 1940s and 1950s.¹⁷ The company was known for its innovative approach to animation, often using minimal detail in the layout and design of its films, and employing what came to be called limited animation.¹⁸ Such an approach was stylistic but it was also economic: the less detail and movement the less labor-intensive the artwork, fewer cels, the faster the production time, the lower the cost. *Man Alive!* was the second UPA film directed by Bill (William T.) Hurtz, who also directed many of UPA's industrial films of the 1950s. UPA would produce two other humorous films for the ACS in the 1950s – *Sappy Homiens* (1956) and *Inside Magoo* (1960), both of which targeted men.¹⁹

Man Alive! was not one of the company's more graphically-adventurous films, but it followed other UPA films with its playful use of color, mutable forms, exaggerated movement, and sleights-of-hand to evoke mood or emotions. Its background colors — sometimes bold and unmodulated, with abrupt transitions from one color to another — could signal a character's emotional state. For example, the central male character turns



Figure 2: Ed Parmalee shows “icy disdain” for his wife’s suggestion that he seek help.

into an angry devil, the screen suffused with red, or turns into an ice-cold “Eskimo”, the backdrop a block of blue.²⁰ [Fig. 2] The mutable human form in such scenes also serves to represent the moods and emotions the filmmakers sought to depict in the film: the male figure changes not only into a devil and an Eskimo, but also an angry caveman, a sarcastic jester and a childish schoolboy dunce to evoke emotions and attitudes.²¹ Likewise, he physically shrinks with fear, expands with (over)confidence, and leaps as high as the clouds in joy and relief. Such transformations and exaggerations help create the movie's antic humor, as do other visual tricks and sleights-of-hand that also serve to cut out costly transitions. Thus instead of making a man dress himself, the filmmakers have his clothes fly off the bathroom valet-stand and apply themselves to his body (6 mins. 50 secs. to 6 mins. 56 secs.); instead of making him drive home from an automobile garage, UPA simply changed the background so that as he walks the garage turns into his bedroom. (4 mins. 38 secs. – 4 mins. 40 secs.)

Such effects were more than entertainment: they were “entertainment with a purpose,”²² according to the *San Francisco News*. The colors, the shape-shifting human form, and the antic humor, all sought to promote the ACS’s message of early detection and treatment for cancer, and to explain the psychological reasons why a man might delay seeking appropriate care. The message was reinforced by elements of modernist design in the layout. For example, allusions to German expressionism played with perspective and rhythm to highlight both the man’s fear of cancer and the danger posed by the disease. Thus, in the shrinking man sequence mentioned above, the man’s fear of cancer is represented not only by his physically reduced state, but also by the stylized buildings and fence that tower over him, the slower pace his walk, and the fading of the jaunty music to the background (6 mins. 59 secs. to 7 mins. 09 secs.). In another scene, the danger signals of cancer are written on a billboard, which together with an angular warning signal, dwarf and frame the man and his wife, so indicating the threat posed by the possibility of disease.²³ [Fig. 3]

Such visual cues were not unique to UPA. Mutable human figures were a common device in animation; German expressionism had influenced filmmaking since the 1910s; limited animation was occasionally used by Hollywood animators; and theories of perception grounded in minimal graphic design pre-dated the creation of the company. UPA’s innovation was to bring these ingredients together in both mainstream theatrical animation



Figure 3: The warning signs of cancer and the railway warning signal.

and sponsored film. *Man Alive!*’s director, Bill Hurtz was particularly enthused by *The Language of Vision* (1944), György Képes’s treatise on the transformative power of what he called visual language. Képes’ focus was on the role of modern art, design and advertising in visual education: He makes only a brief reference to film, and devotes not a word to animation. Nevertheless, he had experimented with animation in the 1930s, and, as Anna Vallye notes, his early thinking on visual education was influenced by wartime public service initiatives, such as Disney films which, as he put it, were “designed to instruct soldiers... in the proper handling of their weapons, and to teach civilians how to combat disease [*sic*], improve sanitation and to perform other functions contributing to war efforts.”²⁴ He is often seen as providing a rationale and justification for UPA’s playful use of geometry, line and color.²⁵

Influenced by wartime research on the role played by psychology in the management of human resources, Képes argued that modern art was not only different from but also superior to classical painting. Preoccupied with linear perspective and object-centered representation, classical art was based on an

erroneous belief in the fixity of experience, which failed to account for the dynamic ever-changing condition of modern life, and so created a disconnect between viewers and their experience of the world. In Képes view, classical approaches to painting should be and were being replaced by new approaches to art that reclaimed surface treatment, highlighted the difference between a painting and its object (obscured by classical art), and focused on the dynamic qualities of color, plane, line, tone, and rhythm – a modern art that, he believed, could reinterpret the world for a people facing a dynamic constantly changing world by feeding into human desires for balance and unity. Thus, designers and advertisers, he claimed, had much to learn from modern artists. Képes argued that the latter had in effect created a new visual language that was universal and international: it knew “no limits of tongue, vocabulary, or grammar,”²⁶ and could be read and understood, at a glance, by almost anyone, “the illiterate as well as by the literate.”²⁷ It was capable, he claimed, of disseminating knowledge more effectively than almost any other vehicle of communication, and so offered a powerful set of intellectual techniques or tools for training, education and social action.

Although Hertz’s enthusiasm for *The Language of Vision* is well known, quite how Képes influenced him is less clear. Michael Barrier argues that Képes validated the sorts of sponsored films that Hertz and UPA were making by portraying advertising as “art” able to disseminate socially useful messages, and “train the eye, and thus the mind, with the necessary discipline of seeing beyond the surface of visible things, to recognize and enjoy values necessary for an integrated life.”²⁸ The problem with this argument is that although UPA filmmakers needed sponsorship to survive, some of their sponsors promoted values with which the filmmakers disagreed – the “fascist-minded” representatives of the American Petroleum Institute who sponsored *Man on the Land* (1951) are often mentioned.²⁹ If Képes did provide a validation of these films, it was not so much their explicit messages, for example about the petroleum industry or free enterprise. It was more fundamentally about what it meant to live in a world that was constantly changing – technologically, politically, socially and culturally – and how people might adapt to such change.

Such transformations and innovations were a constant theme in UPA films. In some, such as *Man on the Land*, they were primarily technological (petroleum and the social and technological transformations it facilitated), in others they were also cultural, such as in *Brotherhood of Man* (1946) which argued for cultural plurality and tolerance in a post-war world that seemed to be shrinking (through improved transportation?) and bringing previously separate cultures rapidly together. Others focused on the technological and social innovations and transformations of post-war life – including suburbanization, automobiles, highways, advertising hoardings, companionate marriage, and the baby boom. The sparse graphic design of these films, the mutations of form, the plays with color and perspective, all aimed to represent these ever-changing facets of contemporary life and the problems of adapting to them, and they did so in a distinctive modern way, akin to the Képesian dynamic language of forms – for

example, constantly highlighting the distinction between the film and its subject, blurring the boundary between figures and their background.

For UPA's filmmakers, animation was an ideal tool for representing such transformations and the process of adapting to them, and provided new ways of representing that were quite different to those of live-action films. Thus, in a 1946 article that drew on the company's experience of making films for the military, two of UPA's founders – John Hubley and Zachary Schwartz – called for a new approach to visual education based on the unique possibilities of animation.³⁰ In their view, animation offered something that photography never could. The drawings on which it was based could function as symbols for a general concept, unlike the photograph which could only record a single specific thing, from a single fixed perspective. Photographs, they claimed, created understanding only implicitly, through the vicarious experience of a specific situation. By contrast, animation represented the general idea directly, allowing the audience to experience an understanding of the entire situation. Hubley and Schwartz's examples were war-time training movies, but their account also suggests how animation was uniquely placed to explain the complex technological and social changes of the post-war world, the problems people faced in coming to terms with them, and the ways in which they might adapt.

Psychological knowledge played a key role such adaptive processes. Thus, on the one hand, Hubley and Schwartz turned to psychological tests and reaction studies conducted by the military to argue for the exceptional popularity of and effectiveness of animated technical and orientation films such as the *Snafu* series produced by UPA.³¹ On the other hand, UPA routinely used animation to present the science of psychology as a key to adaptive responses that the films sought to promote in their audiences. Thus, *A Few Quick Facts About Fear* (1945) explained the physiology of fear to servicemen, and, in the context of world war, presented it as a normal adaptive response to danger; *Flat Hatting* (1946) graphically represented the childish impulses that prompted Navy pilots to buzz the ground (so flattening hats) in an effort to wean them from the practice; *Swab your Choppers* (1948) explained the psychological roots of poor dental hygiene (portrayed as between a lazy and an ignorant self) that compounded the problems of eating in soft "civilized" foods; *Look whose Driving* (1954) highlighted the psychological impulses behind bad driving; and, as I shall show below, *Man Alive!* highlighted the psychological problems behind the problem of delay, and turned to the science of psychology to encourage men to overcome this and other maladaptive behaviors.

Films for Men

UPA's approach to moviemaking thus helped to transform cancer education films by introducing a new visual language, new concerns about the changes of the post-war world, the problems people had in adapting to such changes, and the role of psychology in helping them to adapt. Crucially, they helped distinguish cancer movies targeted at men from those targeted at women. Until

1952 most cancer education films – whether aimed at men or women – were live-action motion pictures in black-and-white, dramatic recreations of the paths by which patients got to the doctor, and morality plays about the need to seek early detection and treatment from a recognized physician. This began to change with *The Traitor Within* and later *Man Alive!*. While these films also traced patient pathways to the physician, and told moral tales about people's responses to cancer or its prospect, both were in Technicolor rather than black-and-white, and both were modernist animated cartoons rather than live-action. But *The Traitor Within* and *Man Alive!* were different in one key respect. While the former has occasional comedic moments, *Man Alive!* is a comedy, full of playful humor throughout the film.³²

Thus by the early 1950s films aimed at men began to include both modernist cartoon animation and comedy. By contrast, movies aimed primarily at women did not use cartoon animation, nor did they use visual humor of the sort that UPA excelled at.³³ Women's films in the 1950s were live-action (mostly black-and-white) melodramas and how-to movies, such as *Breast Self-Examination* (1950), which taught viewers that technique.³⁴ Furthermore, while many women's films highlighted anxieties about the potential cost to the family of a wife and mother with cancer, none of the films targeted at women in the 1950s deployed material, consumer and leisure pursuits as creatively as *Man Alive!*³⁵ In *Man Alive!* marital relations and the symbols of affluent suburban life became ways of explaining the ACS's recommendations regarding cancer. They also became ways of explaining how men might adapt to this way of life.

It should first be noted that before *Man Alive!* few cancer education films aimed at men had focused on such issues. For example, *Enemy X* (1942) is not located in the suburbs, but in a city threatened by a murderous killer: a gangster or perhaps a fifth columnist (the film was released the year after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor). By contrast, the enemy in *The Traitor Within* (1946) is a factory worker gone bad: a transformed cell that kills its coworker cells and disrupts the production line (within the factory-like organ). Such a portrayal harkened back to wartime scares about fifth columnists; touched on post-war concerns about the "threat" posed by labor unions in an age of full employment; and suggested emergent Cold War anxieties about communist disruption of American industry. *Man Alive!* shifts the focus from industry to the home, from city to suburb, from production to consumption, and from work to leisure.

There were good reasons for a cancer campaign to focus on suburban life and leisure. Despite growing post-war optimism that many cancers could be cured if caught early, this group of diseases remained one of the most feared. In part, the concern focused on the disease itself (which threatened pain, disfigurement and death) and its treatments, mainly surgery and radiotherapy (which also threatened pain, disfigurement and death). But public concern about cancer went far beyond the disease and the therapeutic interventions against it. For many people, cancer also raised the specter of financial hardship, and the stigma of dependency and pauperism. A huge demographic shift was taking

place from city to the suburbs, fed by the construction of highways, a booming economy, and G.I. mortgages that subsidized white flight out of the big cities to outer suburbs (and migration to suburban California). Cancer endangered the dream of a middle-class, suburban life, with a house, family, car, and the leisure to enjoy them.

The high cost of cancer care was a particular concern here. Cancer was enormously expensive to treat, especially in the terminal stage of the disease, and imposed a sometimes-overwhelming strain on family budgets and cohesion. Alone in suburbia, far from the help of other relatives, post-war families often had few resources that they turn to alleviate the strain of caring for someone sick with cancer.³⁶ Much of the burden of care fell on the spouse of the person with cancer, and the fear was that their financial and emotional resources would quickly be depleted, forcing them to turn to church, charity and welfare for help. Cancer thus disrupted hopes of financial and social independence upon which the post-war nuclear family depended for survival. As seriously, it also threatened to disrupt the division of labor within the 1950s family, forcing men into roles that were gendered female, and women into roles that were gendered male.³⁷ It also raised the prospect of such families producing maladjusted children, so feeding into concerns about the role of the family in producing juvenile delinquency and childhood psychic ills.³⁸

Much of the concern about family breakdown focused on the impact of cancer on the employment prospects of men, the breadwinner in 1950s domestic ideology. Thus in 1954, the federally-supported National Cancer Institute noted that many cancer patients found it difficult to take advantage of new opportunities for creative or productive employment, since most industries refused to employ individuals who had had cancer because of the increased risk of compensable illness.³⁹ And while such problems affected both men and women, the NCI argued that men were particular hard hit. It also affected all those who normally relied on him. A man's wife and his children would also be harmed as cancer ate into family budgets through the combination of the high cost of care and the loss of male income. It was here that the other dangers to the dream of post war independence and affluence threatened. The NCI noted that there was the loss of status or self-respect when a family was forced to accept relief which they had never previously needed. There were also the long-term effects on children whose mother assumed a wage-earning role because of the father's illness, and the difficulties faced by a father who had to assume the role of caring for the children when a mother was ill.

One of the first films to deal with such issues was *You Are the Switchman* (1946). The film comprises two morality plays about John Dole, who is, as the narrator puts it, "just an average American", with a good job, a comfortable home, and almost enough money saved to build the house he and his wife Mary have dreamed of. In the first of the two stories, John dies because he delays consulting a physician: his wife is left a widow, forced to seek paid employment and to care for their children alone, their dreams of a future family life together destroyed.⁴⁰ In the other story, John survives because he does not delay. This

second story ends with the “Dole family team still intact,” and with a promotion coming up at work, John is making plans for the dream home he hopes to build for Mary and the kids. Mary too is able to plan for the future, and their children, Bob and Jane (seen playing with toys in front of the family radiograph) are, as the narrator puts it, “snug and secure” in the family home.

Man Alive! built on such concerns about the impact of cancer on married life, albeit without the children. The movie tells the story of Ed Parmalee who

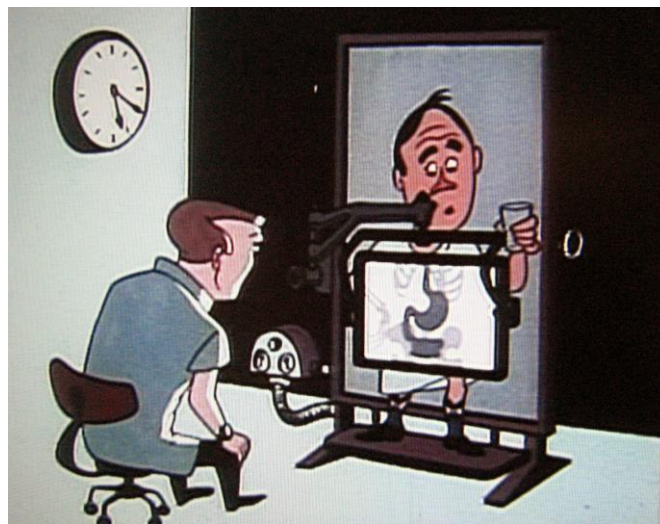


Figure 4: After much hesitation and procrastination, Ed Parmalee gets a thorough check-up from a reputable doctor.

ignores the warning signs of what might be cancer as he ignores the warning signs that his car engine needs attention.⁴¹ When Ed’s car eventually breaks down he goes to a dodgy car mechanic, Clyde, hoping to save money, but Clyde ruins the engine, costing him more than if he had gone to a reputable car mechanic in the first place. Ed’s failure to respond to the

early warning signs of car-trouble is mirrored by his response to persistent indigestion, one of the warning signs of cancer. The movie shows how Ed avoids seeking qualified medical attention much as he had previously avoided seeking qualified mechanical help for his car: he is afraid of what the doctor might find. The movie also shows the consequences of delay, but not the same consequences as in *You Are the Switchman*. Where the earlier film highlighted the mortal consequences of delay, *Man Alive!* highlights its emotional and psychological consequences. In particular, it shows how the psychology of delay can destroy the tranquility of married life and the pleasures of automotive and sporting activities.

But *Man Alive!* also uses married life and leisure in another way. It uses them as pedagogical tools to explain the ACS’s approach to cancer. Take for example Ed’s car. In this film the car provides an opportunity to show how Ed’s anxieties about the engine exacerbate the pain of ownership and dampen its pleasures. But it is also an opportunity to explain about the early warning signs of cancer and what to do about them: just as a car engine gives early warning signs of a problem, the narrator tells Ed, so too does the body. Thus, when Ed’s stomach plays up, the narrator reminds him that he had earlier ignored the warning signs that his car engine needed attention just as he is now ignoring the warning signs of what might be cancer. Clyde’s quick fix had junked Ed’s engine. The risk is that he may suffer the same fate as his car.

As historian Leslie Reagan has noted, such mechanical analogies were not found in movies targeted at women.⁴² Despite rising numbers of female drivers, automobiles and their engines were generally seen as masculine domains, opportunities for men to assert individuality and freedom. Historians have portrayed such assertions as against the conformity of post-war managerial culture, and the encroachment of a feminized suburban American culture, that devalued vigorous masculine traits, and validated matriarchal values.⁴³ Hence the jokes about women drivers: While women might have needed an automobile to run the suburban household, they were represented as timid, unskilled drivers, unknowledgeable about what happened under the hood, the repeated butt of male humor. *Man Alive!* reversed the humor, presenting Ed as a willful protagonist who ignores the warning signs of his car (and body) going wrong and the good commonsense of his wife Marion that he go to a reputable mechanic (and doctor).

If *Man Alive!* reversed the humor about women drivers to encourage men to seek appropriate cancer care, it also used fears of the city to highlight male pretensions to knowledge and the dangers of quackery, patent medicines, and folk wisdom. At a time when affluent white Americans were fleeing to the suburbs, *Man Alive!* reminded them of the perceived disorder and dangers of the city they had left behind. The film located the problems of dodgy car mechanics and quacks in the city, in seedy, lower-class, perhaps 'ethnic', neighborhoods.⁴⁴ By contrast, Glassner's, the name of the business of the reputable mechanics, is located in a clean, efficient, modern garage, and the reputable physician works in a suburban location, with a manicured hedge or lawn, *Life Magazine* in the waiting room, and an efficient female receptionist. It is to this world that Marion constantly directs Ed, but Ed does not take his wife's advice, at least at the beginning



Figure 5: The Dangers of Quackery and the City

For Ed the city is both a site of temptation and peril. It attracts him with the promise of an easy and cheap fix, but it is also where his claims to knowledge are exposed as sham. He is a stranger in a strange land, an innocent in a world of predators, where his ignorance of cars, bodies and the city is exploited by the unscrupulous and compounded by the ill-informed. Thus his car engine is ruined behind closed doors, in a shady backstreet garage (a contrast to Glassner's open, modern, and efficient garage); his fears of cancer are almost exploited by

a quack, J. Kirkham Headstone, the self-styled Edison of Medicine [Fig. 5], whose seedy urban doorway is peppered with a mess of self-advertising and extravagant claims of cures (a contrast to the physician's understated suburban office with a single shingle listing his name); and he is misled by automotive advice he gets from the ignorant public, the same figures who offer him worthless advice on cancer as he plays a game of golf. Apparently the smell of urban decay and bad advice can follow a man, even to the fairway and green.⁴⁵

To add to his problems, Ed's ignorance is exacerbated by fear. Fear helps propel him into the hands of the dodgy car mechanic (and almost to the quack), and opens his ears to misinformed advice and his wallet to the enticements of quick fix patent medicines. It also leads him to ignore the advice of his wife. It is she who, like the wife in *You Are the Switchman*, encourages Ed to see his physician. Yet, Ed refuses to listen to her, and eventually explodes in anger before repenting and agreeing to go. Thus, one of the messages of the film for men is that a wife can bring wise counsel, but it should also be noted that – unlike in *You Are the Switchman* – it is not the wife who persuades Ed of this fact. Ed's conversion comes only after a conversation between him and the film's male narrator. It is this narrator who persuades Ed that his anger toward Marion is unreasonable, and that he should do as she says and go to the doctor. Ed's wife may be a source of sound advice, but it takes a man-to-man talk to persuade Ed to listen to her.

If a wife's wise counsel alone cannot persuade a man to change, what can? The answer the film suggests is the science of psychology, and the self-awareness it brings. As I've noted above, the theme was not new to UPA films, but it was new to cancer movies.⁴⁶ *Man Alive!* is unique among cancer movies of the 1950s in the attention it gives to the psychology of delay (and of not listening to wives). The narrator divides Ed's responses to Marion's suggestions into four categories—denial, sarcasm, icy disdain, and unreasoning anger (where he changes respectively into a schoolboy, jester, Eskimo and caveman) —which he describes as the consequences of excessive fear of the disease. Part of the aim of this movie is to help Ed and the film's viewers recognize these responses in themselves and thereby combat their inclination to turn a deaf ear to good advice by cultivating a healthy, self-controlled fear of the disease that balances fear and assurance. As the narrator tells Ed: "It is foolish to worry day and night about cancer, but it's just as foolish not to worry about it at all. Be on guard. Don't let fear make a mess of your life again. But, use your good common sense."

It should be clear by now that *Man Alive!* is much more than a film about cancer. It is also about the dangers of the city, and the pleasures and pains of suburbia, car ownership, and companionate marriage. In this new world, men had to identify and confront their inner fears, listen to the calm commonsense of their wives, and turn to reputable professionals when necessary, be they mechanics or physicians (or the psychologists who taught them how to listen



Figure 6: Living happily ever after at the drive-in movies.

to themselves and their wives). Critics of suburbanization saw it as a feminizing force that devalued rugged masculinity. But *Man Alive!* suggests that what was also going on was an attempt to redefine masculinity to fit suburbia: a definition that was rooted in companionship and cooperation in the home, collaboration and consultation with a variety of expert (generally male) professionals, and the development of self-knowledge and self-reflection guided in part by the science of psychology. Thus *Man Alive!* was about teaching men how to live in this new suburban world, and the regular check-up from a physician was part of it. With this regular check-up Ed (and Marion) can rest assured that they don't have cancer, that if they get it in the future they will have a good chance for successful treatment, and that they can enjoy the richness and pleasures of life in the suburbs, its order and efficiency. The film ends with Ed and Marion watching a movie at the drive-in, companionable, content, secure—and all because they both had a check-up [Fig. 6].

Further reading

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Notes

¹ "'Man Alive' Nominated for Oscar," *ACS Bulletin* 2, 11 (February 23, 1953): 1.

² See David Cantor "Choosing to Live: Cancer Education, Movies, and the Conversion Narrative in America, 1921-1960," *Literature and Medicine* 28 (2009): 278-332, pp. 296-300. David Cantor, "Uncertain Enthusiasm: The American Cancer Society, Public Education, and the Problems of the Movie, 1921-1960," in David Cantor (ed.), *Cancer in the Twentieth Century* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 39-69.

³ Kirsten E. Gardner, *Early Detection: Women, Cancer, and Awareness Campaigns in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). An exception is *The Reward of Courage* (1921) see David Cantor [*The Reward of Courage \(1921\). A Rediscovered Cancer Film of the Silent Era*](#) (Bethesda: National Library of Medicine, 2013).

⁴ "New Film Ready For Use in Drive, *ACS Campaign Bulletin* 42 (March 30, 1948): p. 2. "Murphy Seeks Check on Film," *ACS Campaign Bulletin* 44 (April 13, 1948): 2. "ACS Drive Film Clicks in Capital," *ACS Campaign Bulletin* 47 (May 4, 1948): 4.

⁵ For a discussion of the gendered nature of cancer films, see Leslie J. Reagan, "Engendering the Dread Disease: Women, Men, and Cancer," *American Journal of Public Health* 87 (1997): 1779-87.

⁶ On cancer films more generally, Cantor, "Uncertain Enthusiasm." Cantor, "Choosing to Live."

⁷ American Cancer Society, *1952 Annual Report*, 15, 37-38. "Illinois Theaters Book ACS Film as a Short Subject on Programs," *ACS Bulletin* 1, 17 (May 5, 1952): 3. "Ed Parmelee's Journey Replaces Travelogue," *ACS Bulletin* 1, 19 (May 26, 1952): 4. "'Man Alive' Film Enjoys Record Run," *ACS Bulletin* 2, 22 (June 22, 1953): 2. For use as a television film, see "How to Tell Neighbors, Your County about Cancer," *ACS Bulletin* 2, 1 (September 29, 1952): 4. For other showings of *Man Alive*, see "Marine Depot Workers Get Cancer Education," *ACS Bulletin* 1, 21 (June 23, 1952): 2; "Army Conducts Intense Education Program in Germany," *ACS Bulletin* 4, 23 (June 27, 1955): 4; "Safety Representatives View ACS Film," *ACS Bulletin* 5, 2 (October 17, 1955): 1; "Neighborhood News," *Signals: [ACS] Public Education Newsletter* 5, 3 (Spring 1961): n.p.; "Mass Film Audiences Via Theater Distribution," *Signals: [ACS] Public Education Newsletter* 5, 4 (Summer 1961): n.p.; "Male Call," *Signals: [ACS] Public Education Newsletter* 7, 2 (Spring 1963): n.p. For the drive-in, see "ACS Film Shown at Drive-in Theater," *ACS Bulletin* 3, 1 (October 5, 1953): 3.

⁸⁸ American Cancer Society, *1953 Annual Report*, 15, 22, 24. See also American Cancer Society, *1954 Annual Report*, 25, 27; *1955 Annual Report*, 30, 31; *1956 Annual Report*, 29.

⁹ "Spanish-speaking Vets See ACS Cancer Films," *ACS Bulletin* 3, 2 (October 19, 1953): 2; "Our Good Neighborhood Policy," *Signals: [ACS] Public Education Newsletter* 5, 1 (September 1960): n.p.

¹⁰ "Grim but Funny," *Life* 32 (April 21, 1952): 100-1.

¹¹ Richard Braddock, "Films for Teaching Mass Communication," *The English Journal* 44, 3 (March 1955): 156-158+167, at p.158.

¹² "Humor, Cancer Combined," *ACS Bulletin* 1, 14 (April 14, 1952): 4; "Grim but Funny."

¹³ "'Man Alive' Nominated for Oscar." See also "Scenes from 'MAN ALIVE!'" *Cancer News* 6, 3 (July 1952): [23].

¹⁴ On the distinction between shorts and trailers see *Cancer Publicity: What It Is and How to Get It* (New York: ASCC, c. 1942), 13 (distributed free to officers of the WFA, not for general distribution), in *Catalog of Educational Material* (New York [?]: American Society for the Control of Cancer, n.d.) (copy available in the National Library of Medicine at call number QZ 200 qA518c 1941). For an early example of animation and comedy in an educational trailer see for example *By The Way* (Visugraphic Pictures, 1929) a motion picture trailer for an educational booklet, in which animated cartoons from the booklet stepped forward from the screen and introduced themselves. "By the Way," *Campaign Notes of the American Association for the Control of Cancer* 11, 9 (September 1929): 7. "Booklet Trailer," *Campaign Notes of the American Association for the Control of Cancer* 11, 9 (September 1929): 6. On the background to this film see Ella Hoffman Rigney, "Cancer Publicity — Ten Years of Growth," *Quarterly Review* (New York City Cancer Committee) 1, 3 (October 1936): 42–52, esp. pp. 46–47. The cartoons were produced by the illustrator Francis Rigney, Ella's husband. On Rigney see "Francis Rigney is Dead," *New York Times*, April 21, 1962, 17. See also Chuck Romano, "The Art of Deception or the Magical Affinity Between Conjuring and Art," *The Linking Ring* (September 1995): 75–78. Chuck Romano, *The Art of Deception, or, The Affinity Between Conjuring and Art* (South Elgin, IL: C.J. Romano, 1997).

¹⁵ There are several examples of the use of humor in cancer education films that appear before *Man Alive!*. But whereas *Man Alive!* uses comedy throughout, these others use comedy more sparingly. For example in the melodrama *The Reward of Courage* (1921) there is comedic moment when (at 4 mins. 57 secs.) the daughter ignores the offer of a handshake of the quack Morris Maxwell, who is also the suitor preferred by her mother. Maxwell is left with his hand outstretched and unshaken, and clearly discomforted. For another comedic moment see the sequences in *The Traitor Within* (1946) where various faces illustrate erroneous popular remedies and beliefs about cancer, and cancer, and perhaps the portrayal of cells as workers in a body factory.

¹⁶ ACS trailers and PSA's also made use of comedic effects throughout the 1950s, see for example those shown in the American Cancer Society film, *The Man on the Other Side of the Desk* (1957).

¹⁷ Adam Abraham, *When Magoo Flew: The Rise and Fall of Animation Studio UPA* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), for *Man Alive!*, see p. 99. More generally see Michael Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Limited animation meant a number of things. It could include including limiting the amount of movement in a frame so that the characters moved only a part of the body, perhaps an arm or leg instead of the entire body; repeating movements so that, for example, a character waving goodbye might involve

only two movements which would then be repeated; and using fewer frames to represent a movement, perhaps using one drawing for every two frames rather than a different one in each frame.

¹⁹ For a list of these films see Cantor "Uncertain Enthusiasm," 57-58 and "Choosing to Live," appendix. For the storyboard of *Sappy Homiens* see Leo Slatkin, *Story-Telling Home Movies. How to Make Them* (New York, Toronto and London: McGraw-Hill, 1958) 88-91. A copy of *Sappy Homiens* is available at the Library of Congress. It tells the story of the eponymous cartoon character, Sappy Homiens. Sappy checks himself for the seven danger signals of cancer, but does not go for a regular checkup from a physician, until the characters in his television persuade him otherwise – that cancer can grow silently, and that only a doctor can identify the disease. At one point, Sappy is sucked into the television set, where the characters show him how cancer grows and spreads.

²⁰ On the use of color by Jules Engel and Herbert Klyn in UPA films see Abraham, *When Magoo Flew*, 82.

²¹ For example, the transition from man to devil and schoolboy dunce is reminiscent of the scene in an earlier UPA film *Flat Hatting*, where a pilot turns into among other forms, a devil (3 mins. 45 secs.) and progressively from young man, (3 mins. 56 secs.) to schoolboy (4 mins 13 secs) to baby (4 mins 27 secs). All these transitions aimed to indicate his immaturity. Other transformations can be seen in the pre-UPA *Hell-Bent For Election* where the conservative figure turns briefly to Hitler (5 mins 16 secs) trying to stop the Roosevelt war train.

²² "A Film That's Different," *ACS Bulletin* 2, 8 (January 12, 1953): 4.

²³ The warning signal itself is reminiscent of the X on the switch-lever in an earlier UPA film, *Hell-Bent for Election* (1944) which morphs into the X on a voting form, much as the warning signal in *Man Alive!* later turns into the X on the man's body signifying a warning sign of cancer (5 mins. 57 secs – 6 mins. 01 secs.)

²⁴ György Képes, undated handwritten note, quoted in Anna Vallye, "Design and the Politics of Knowledge in America, 1937-1967: Walter Gropius, György Képes," (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2011), 209. On his animation work in the 1930s see Leigh Anne Roach, "A Positive, Popular Art: Sources, Structure, and Impact of György Képes's *Language of Vision*," (PhD dissertation, Florida State University, 2010), 82.

²⁵ Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons*, 515. György Képes, *Language of Vision* (New York: Dover, 1995) (first published 1944).

²⁶ Képes, *Language of Vision*, 13.

²⁷ Képes, *Language of Vision*, 13.

²⁸ Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons*, 516. Képes, *Language of Vision*, 221.

²⁹ Abraham, *When Magoo Flew*, 99.

³⁰ John Hubley and Zachary Schwartz, "Animation Learns a New Language," in *Hollywood Quarterly. Film Culture in Postwar America*, eds. Eric Smoodin and Ann Martin (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2002), 63-68. Originally published: *Hollywood Quarterly* 1, 4 (July 1946): 360-363.

³¹ Hubley and Schwartz, "Animation Learns a New Language," 64-65.

³² For comedic moments in *The Traitor Within* see note 15 above.

³³ This is not to say that there was no animation in women's films. There was, but it generally did not include humor, and was used to illustrate parts of the body that might be difficult to show in a live action sequence, or to show how cancer developed in the body.

³⁴ On breast self-examination films see Leslie J. Reagan, "Projecting Breast Cancer: Self-Examination Films and the Making of a New Cultural Practice," in *Medicine's Moving Pictures: Medicine, Health, and Bodies in American Film and Television*, eds. Leslie J. Reagan, Nancy Tomes, and Paula A. Treichler (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 163-95.

³⁵ See for example Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2004).

³⁶ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 20.

³⁷ On the gendered division of labor in the 1950s home, see May, *Homeward Bound*.

³⁸ James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Deborah Weinstein, *The Pathological Family: Postwar America and the Rise of Family Therapy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

³⁹ United States Congress, House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Health inquiry; the toll of our major diseases, their causes, prevention, and control. Preliminary report of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce pursuant to section 136 of the Legislative reorganization act of 1946, Public law 601, 79th Congress, and House resolution 127, 83d Congress* (Washington: USGPO, 1954), 102.

⁴⁰ A copy of *You Are the Switchman* is at <https://archive.org/details/YouAreth1951>. The film was released in 1949, not 1951 as stated on this website. It is possible that the website's film is derived from a 1951 print.

⁴¹ The spelling Ed Parmalee is not consistent: sometimes he is Parmelee, sometimes Parmalee. See for example "Three New Educational Ads Ready for Distribution," *ACS Bulletin* 2, 2 (October 13, 1952): 3; "Film is Ready for Use," *ACS Bulletin* 1, 12 (March 24, 1952): 1, 4. There seem to be some UPA in-jokes in this film. The name Ed Parmalee is suspiciously close to the name of a UPA filmmaker, Ted Parmelee, though there is no obvious physical resemblance. For an image of Ted Parmelee, see Abraham, *When Magoo Flew*, 106. The name of the quack, J. Kirkham Headstone, may also be borrowed loosely from another UPA animator, John Kirkham Hubley.

⁴² Reagan, "Engendering the Dread Disease."

⁴³ Cotten Seiler, *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). John Alfred Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2009). More generally on men and masculinity see James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ Note for example the figure of the pump attendant and his accent who advises Ed to go to Clyde, the dodgy car mechanic (3 mins. 36 secs.)

⁴⁵ The figures who offer bad advice regarding cancer in *Man Alive!* are not dissimilar to the figure of the 'scoffer' who stands in the way of progress in the first film that Bill Hertz directed for UPA: *Man on the Land* (1951), for the American Petroleum Institute.

⁴⁶ As noted earlier many of UPA's earlier educational films had invoked the science of psychology as a crucial tool for helping people adapt to contemporary changes. *Man Alive!* seems to have been a model for a later UPA film *Look Who's Driving* (1954), directed by Bill Hertz for the Aetna Insurance Company, which graphically presented the psychological causes of reckless driving and the ensuing accidents. As in *Man Alive!* characters (including the hero Charlie Younghead) turn into children to indicate their immaturity behind the wheel. The device of talking to the narrator is also used in *Look Who's Driving* where the ghost of Charlie converses with the narrator who explains why he, Charlie, crashed his car, and the psychology behind dangerous driving: childish tantrums, impatience, stubbornness, daydreaming, over-confidence, speeding. As the narrator says: "no driver can afford to let his emotions drive him. When he does he's like a child, and no child should drive a car." And finally, like Ed Parmalee, when his ghost realizes he hasn't been killed in an auto accident, Charlie leaps as high as the cloud, declaiming, "I'm Alive" before being cautioned, like in *Man Alive!*, by the narrator to remember to drive carefully.