



FILM: **Brewster McCloud**

FDG RATING: 1.9 ☹️ 😐 ○ ○ ○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Robert Altman: *director*
Bud Cort: *actor, Brewster McCloud*

DATE: August 18, 2024

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **Brewster McCloud**

Although we usually select current independent films for our monthly discussion, sometimes an older title on our suggested films list, peaks enough interest to be voted as the film to be discussed. The 1970 film, *Brewster McCloud*, is a prime example. Has it retained its relevance or lost its appeal? One enthusiastic discussion participant explains why he liked it when he was a kid and why he still enjoys it:

Brewster McCloud (1970) is probably the most eccentric film that was directed by Robert Altman, who has a reputation for making off-beat films. The central character, Brewster McCloud is a soft spoken introvert who lives in a nuclear fallout shelter under the Houston Astrodome. Brewster, who wants to build wings and fly, is often confronted by those who try to make life difficult for him, after which a mysterious woman appears and bird feces drop down from the sky onto the confrontational troublemaker, who is soon found dead from strangulation, under unknown circumstances. We start to get a sense of an anti-establishment 1960s counterculture theme driving the film after the national anthem band rebellion and when bird feces drop down onto a newspaper article describing a speech by Spiro Agnew. As the film progresses, we see bird feces dropping onto racist and homophobic characters who are wealthy, using their money to exert power over others in a mean-spirited manner and an abusive, misogynistic and corrupt police officer. Beyond this, there is a kooky ornithologist who sporadically enters the film, lecturing on (and exhibiting) the behavior of birds and a police investigator who tries to solve the murders by examining the bird feces. The movie then continues along in an equally eccentric/weird manner, which seems to suggest that the film isn't so much about the surreal plot as much as it is mostly about Altman's directorial style as well as his off-beat sense of humor and his anti-establishment orientation. While younger viewers might not understand some of the retro particulars (e.g., who is Spiro Agnew??), today, *Brewster McCloud* can best be classified as an art house cult classic.

Although acknowledging the excellent performance by Bud Cort, most other discussion participants had a negative reaction. Some stopped watching the movie after hearing racist comments and noting the male police officer who abused his wife. She had large bruises on her arm. Yes, the message is anti-establishment, but maybe we've become much more sensitized to ugly behavior. We see horrible people are doing terrible things including visible racism, homophobia, and misogyny. One comment was that there was not a single positive character in the establishment; the cops were completely incompetent. The creepy ornithologist who had bird-like characteristics was interesting and his narration description of various bird species that matched the characteristics of the person in the film frame was clever. Brewster's attempt to fly, ie to escape convention, doesn't succeed. A couple discussion participants appreciated the 70s nostalgia and were amused by some funny, silly scenes. However, one critical resident reviewer noted, the film could have been zany but instead was sloppy.

Brewster McCloud took a collective nose dive score of 1.9 on our scale of 1 to 5. 5 is the best.



See you at the movies!
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