Francois Truffaut's new film, *Small Change*, is a graceful, humorous elegy to the world of children. It has a wistful gaiety about it that shows how much fun Truffaut had making the film. As in *Day For Night*, his good spiritis are infectious to the audience, and, if you can put up with the dubbing in the version being shown here, the film is irresistable and refreshing to watch.

I wouldn't count this among Truffaut's major works. It doesn't have the depth and layers of characterization that marked *Jules and Jim, Story of Adele H.* and *The 400 Blows* in which Truffaut conveyed senses of frustration, joy and confusion much more than he does here. *Small Change* is not about just one child. Truffaut lends his gentle humor towards all children, and, with admirable dexterity, portrays them as something other than cloyingly cute and silly.

In a series of vignettes about young schoolboys, Truffaut and his energetic cinematographer follow them as they move in and around their own special, mischievous world. One of the boys Patrick (Gory Desmonceaux) lives with his paralyzed father, and therefore, has a kindly, devoted but independent spirit. Goaded into helping an older friend pick up a couple of girls and take them to the movies, Patrick watches shyly and half-relieved as his friend winds up making out with both girls, freeing him from romantic responsibilities. Actually, Patrick has a crush on the shapely mother of one of his friends. Finally, he takes her some roses, only to get a real surprise at her reaction.

The film's jokes are the best things about it. Though many of them are not original, Truffaut has a different sense of comic timing from most people. He doesn't go in for big effects; he slows down a little and lets the scenes play out in their own good time, giving the humor more of a natural air.

In one sequence, a little girl named Sylvie stubbornly refuses to go out to eat with her parents unless they allow her to take her animal pocketbook. The parents leave her to pout, but she turns the tables by grabbing her father's bull-horn and soliciting food from the neighbors.

The film does have it's flaws, however. Sometimes, the kids take on that kind of endearing precociousness that grates on your nerves, particularly when they are talking about sex. This kind of cliched, middle-class, adult attitude toward children is seen in TV many times, and it's too bad that Truffaut doesn't resist lapsing into it.

But what really doesn't work is the subplot involving a welfare student named Julian (Phillipe Goldman) who lives in a shack and is cruelly mistreated by his mother. Such a serious side is certainly useful in the film, but child abuse is too complex a subject for the superficial treatment it is given here. This poorly written scene, the worst in the movie, has a hit-em-over-the-head quality that is out of whack with the mood of the film.

Nevertheless, Truffaut has cast the childrens' roles superlatively. He seems to have found faces that fit the characters perfectly, and the unabashed naturalness in the childrens' gestures and expressions gives the film its true liveliness and points to a special kind of understanding and ease between the director and the performers. The adults are treated almost as part of another world and therefore, are not developed.

I judge the performances strictly on visual terms because the version being shown is, unfortunately, dubbed. Although the dubbing does not destroy the film, it certainly takes away something vital—the feeling expressed vocally by the original actors. Dubbing is an insult to the filmmaker and it cheats the audience out of getting the full effect of what was originally filmed.

—Hank Baker

'I would have done better to watch 'Roots'.'

Owens 'insight into 'Sambo's' South is limited

by Larry Shore
Staff Writer

This Species of Property
Leslie Howard Owens
Oxford U. Press, 1976
$12.95

With the ascendance of Mr. Carter, we have been treated to a flood of articles on the South, particularly the "new" South. But the Old South continues to be the focus of attention for many historians. Indeed, much of the finest recent work by American historians centers on the institution of slavery. In 1974 the ever-growing list of slave historiography also received a boost from a not-so-fine work, Fogel and Engerman's *Time On The Cross*. The controversy over the findings of Fogel and Engerman (who depicted slaves as proto-capitalists), and the publication—also in 1974—of an outstanding book by Eugene Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, intensified interest in a field already heavily plowed but yielding little that was agreed upon by the community of scholars.

The subtitle of Genovese's massive study, *The World the Slaves Made*, reflected a shift in historians' focus on the "peculiar institution." Sources pertaining to slavery were considered from new perspectives; the slaves' view of the institution became the essential concern for many historians.

In 1976 Oxford University Press published Leslie Owens' *This Species of Property*. Owens' subtitle (*Slave Life and Culture in the Old South*) immediately reveals that his study is the effort of yet another historian to describe and analyze the world the slaves made. Unfortunately, Owens doesn't do a very good job. With the huge amount of work available on slavery, people who want to learn about the institution (and, in passing, about the Old South) without devoting eight hours a day to constant study, must be very selective about the books they read. I don't think most people should select Owens' book.

Owens attempts to answer the question, "How did it feel to be a slave?" The extent of his research is impressive: he has consulted numerous manuscript sources, slave narratives and secondary works. Desirous of tearing away stereotypes, Owens concentrates his attack on that already shell-shocked figure, historian Stanley Elkins' lazy, docile, infant-like slave type known as "Sambo." Owens' attack on Sambo, however, is not nearly as successful as Genovese's or John Blassingame's (in *The Slave Community*). Owens serves up a ponderously written, confused synthesis of old arguments that sound better and make better sense when one reads *Roll, Jordan, Roll* or *The Slave Community*.

It is a fashionable practice for Southern historians to mention in passing that the antebellum South was a region of tremendous diversity and then devote 200 pages to the description of an unchanging area as diverse as a lump of butter. It is therefore a bit unfair to single Owens out for criticism on this account. But he manages to surpass the blindness of many previous historians. Owens' study completely lacks the dimension of time—a serious failing for any historian, whose task is rather intimately tied to time. Owens treats slave life in the period 1776-1860 as if it were a static unit. I can understand his narrow focus on slave life and his failure to put slavery in the context of Southern society as a whole. But I find his failure to recognize that slave society and the institution itself may have been in a process of change from 1776-1860 very irritating. Furthermore, he displays a considerable lack of sensitivity to the diversity of slave life itself within the context of a diverse geographical area.

Owens' effort to rebut Elkins suffers from his inability to construct a coherently organized study. His major chapters deal with the following topics (in this order): disease in the Old South, slave diet, slave resistance, the "household slave," the "black slave driver," the slave quarters, slave music and the slave family. Each one of these chapters is full of grossly oversimplified generalizations supported only by Owens' seemingly haphazard selection of examples from manuscript sources. We must be satisfied with Owens' assurance that he has selected representative examples. I am not satisfied.

Owens argues that the Sambo slave personality was the exception and not the rule. I think that Elkins is wrong, but I wouldn't like to rest my case on *This Species of Property*. First, let us consider the chapters on disease and diet. Owens' emphasis in these chapters is on the oppressive burden of sickness and poor diet of the slave. He depicts a miserable existence which, in some cases, leads to insanity in slaves (a curious way to destroy the Sambo thesis). But he hastens to show that these physical burdens did not impair "ego-development": slaves found other slaves as adequate role models. Owens' evidence concerning the oppressive burdens on slaves is more convincing than his inept handling of psychological theory and the skimpy evidence he uses to support his assertions about role models.

Second, Owens weakens his argument concerning slave resistance by tossing out assertions not supported by the evidence that he offers; e.g., "... the evidence is strong that slaves resisted by challenging the slavocracy at every level, and, perhaps, forcing it toward a breakdown." I am not aware of the slavocracy being forced towards a breakdown; indeed, recent studies stress the resiliency of the slaveholding class at the time of the Civil War.

Finally, in attempting to demolish the Elkins thesis Owens hints at Genovese's thesis of paternalism (which explains that the lack of slave rebellions did not indicate a lack of slave resistance) without explicitly referring to it. Genovese's exposition of his own thesis is far more convincing than Owens' exposition of Genovese's thesis. At one point Owens shows us what happens when an unskilled craftsman tries to duplicate a delicately wrought piece of art like Genovese's thesis: "The slave child's early experiences helped to hone him into readiness for but not acceptance of bondage." There is a subtle distinction here, and Owens is incapable of explaining this distinction.

In short, Owens has not made a significant contribution to the study of slavery. One would do better to read Genovese and Blassingame. Personally, I would have done better to watch "Roots."

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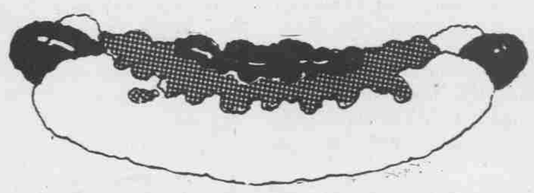

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20 — loss
21 Brunch
22 Clean the blackboard
23 River of Belgium
25 Off course
28 Blouse fronts
30 Tale
31 Blackbird
34 Chasm
35 Garden pests
36 — shoe-string
37 Atl. pact
38 On the fat side
39 Burglar's take
40 Ordinal ending
41 Gathering
42 Sleuth Philo
43 Poker verb
44 Fiend or duke
45 Restaurant help
46 Cabdriver
48 Make slow progress
49 Pursuit
51 Relax
53 Significant period
56 Gets the benefit of
57 "...nothing like—"
59 Fiber source
60 Wing: Fr.
61 Quarrel
62 Superior
63 Final
64 Alpaca's milieu
65 Due

DOWN
1 Fr. writer
2 Way out
3 Capture
4 At all
5 Brain-teasers
6 The Bruins
7 Topography
8 Spleen
9 After ex-penses
10 Ghana's capital
11 Upbraid
12 Dear me!
13 Dub
21 Shea athletes
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24 Not bad, not good
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32 Within — of
33 OTB action
35 Thanks, in Dijon
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55 Hewn
57 Sky altar
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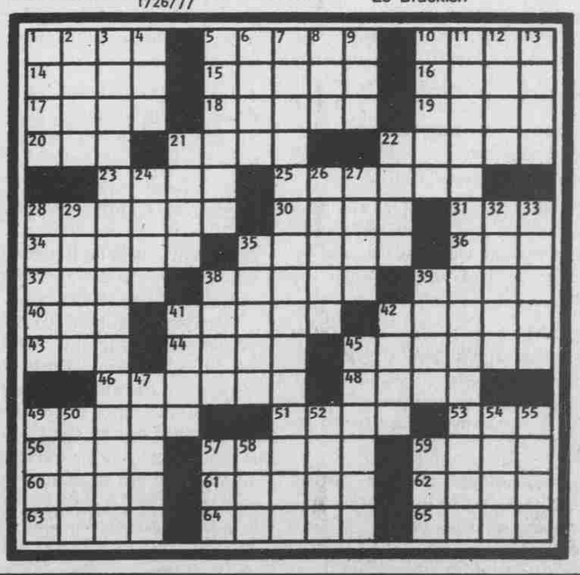

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