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By John Ardagh The London Observer

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LOS ANGELES — The vogue for shooting films on authentic locations, rather than in studios, has now come home to Hollywood itself. Two of the most interesting films now being made here by the big companies are using real local settings, because their subjects are local, too.

One is "The Loved One," a version of Evelyn Waugh's satirical novel about California funeral habits, which British director Tony Richardson (he made "Tom Jones") is shooting in a Beverly Hills villa and park that closely resemble the famous "Forest Lawns" crematorium in Los Angeles, on which the novel was based. Richardson hates using studio sets: for the scenes in the film company offices, early in the novel, his location is as authentic as can be—the offices and corridors of MGM, the company backing the film.

The other film has a stronger documentary flavor. It is about a strange organization called Synanon, a self-help rehabilitation center for drug addicts that has its original headquarters in an ugly building down on

the beach at Santa Monica, one of Los Angeles' many sprawling and hideous suburbs.

I found the building full of a medley of people — film technicians, actors and genuine inmates. "Bet you can't tell which are movie stars and which are ex-addicts," I was told.

I talked to a group of smiling young Negro women most of whom, I was informed, had been prostitutes as well as dope-fiends before they came to Synanon to be cured. One of the cast looked like Eartha Kitt. It was Eartha Kitt. The real-life director of Synanon, a burly rhinoceros-faced man called Chuck Dederich, was talking to an actor who looked a bit like him and was playing his role in the film. It was Edmund O'Brien. But the non-stars were harder to pick out. And many of the small parts are being played by real inmates.

"This, and having the house used every day as a movie studio, rather throws out our routine," said Dederich. "But it's worth it for the publicity the film will bring us."

The idea for making the film came from its director, Richard Quine, who

has strong opinions that the drug-addict problem is being mishandled by the authorities in the United States and is one of the growing band of Americans who are fascinated and impressed by the Synanon experiment.

He spent some time there, got a script drafted, got Columbia Pictures to back him and has persuaded most of his professional cast to work for half-salaries so that more of the profits can go to Synanon. By a coincidence, one of his cast, Barbara Luna, had a sister who died of heroin poisoning.

THE FILM traces the fictional fortunes of a group of ex-addicts. It is highly dramatized, but fairly true to the realities of life at Synanon. Miss Kitt plays one of the senior "cured" ex-addicts who help run Synanon. For the secret of Synanon is self-help. It is run entirely by ex-addicts themselves, without any help from doctors or wardens.

It is a remarkable enterprise. It was started about six years ago by Dederich and a group of friends who felt that current methods of trying to

cure addiction were inadequate. Dederich was an ex-alcoholic, not an ex-addict, and says he owes a big debt to Alcoholics Anonymous for his own cure. But he felt that AA was too religious, and placed too much emphasis on help from a higher power, whereas what many addicts needed, he thought, was more self-analysis and self-reliance. He gathered a few addicts round him, bought the old house on the beach, and gradually the venture grew till now Synanon has 480 inmates in its five centers in California, Nevada and Connecticut.

Every addict enters voluntarily. No addict is forced to stay. But he has to observe the fairly strict discipline of life at Synanon, the most obvious being: no drugs. Every addict on entry undergoes a rigorous cross-examination to see whether he is sincere in wanting to be cured, or whether he is simply trying to avoid prison or to have a pause before starting drugs again. Then he is encouraged, even forced to strip his soul in front of his fellows in order to see what are the faults in his character that led him to drugs.

This intensive do-it-yourself psychoanalysis is conducted at nightly seminars knows an "synanons" (someone's malapropism for "seminar" — hence the name of the organization). Ex-addicts ruthlessly criticize and expose each other's weaknesses.

THOUGH DEDERICH does not care to quote statistics, he claims a far higher percentage of successes than at the Federal prison hospitals where over 90 per cent of those released go back to drugs. Dederich says that half of those who enter Synanon elect to stay there and stay "clean." He reckons that it takes two to three years, on average, to effect a "cure" (which he looks on more as a personality change). Most of the Synanites who have been there as long as that are still at Synanon, like Dederich himself, helping to run it. The number who have gone back to normal private lives in the outside world is still too small to give a full idea of Synanon's effectiveness. But, while still living at Synanon, ex-addicts are allowed gradually to go out on parole,

and take outside jobs. There are outside quarters for married couples.

Synanon has come in for a good deal of criticism—both from doctors and sociologists who mistrust its non-professional direction and methods, and from local communities who dislike having a bunch of ex-whores and ex-hoodlums in their midst.

There are also some people who begin to question Synanon's moral and philosophical basis.

No drugs are allowed at Synanon, and no drink—but cigarettes and sex. Dederich has been under fire also for sanctioning free love at Synanon. He defends it by saying, "Addicts when they come to us are often emotional five-year-olds. Sex can help shock them into the adult world."

Synanon is at least sincerely tackling one of the major problems of diseased modern society. The morbid necrophilia that is the subject of "The Loved One" satire is another symptom of the disease. It seems suitable that both should be set in that alarming *reductio ad absurdum* of modern living, Los Angeles.

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