

LE MAGAZINE DE L'IMAGE

zoom



PETE TURNER • MOHOLY-NAGY • BISHIN JUMONJI • GIUSEPPE PINO

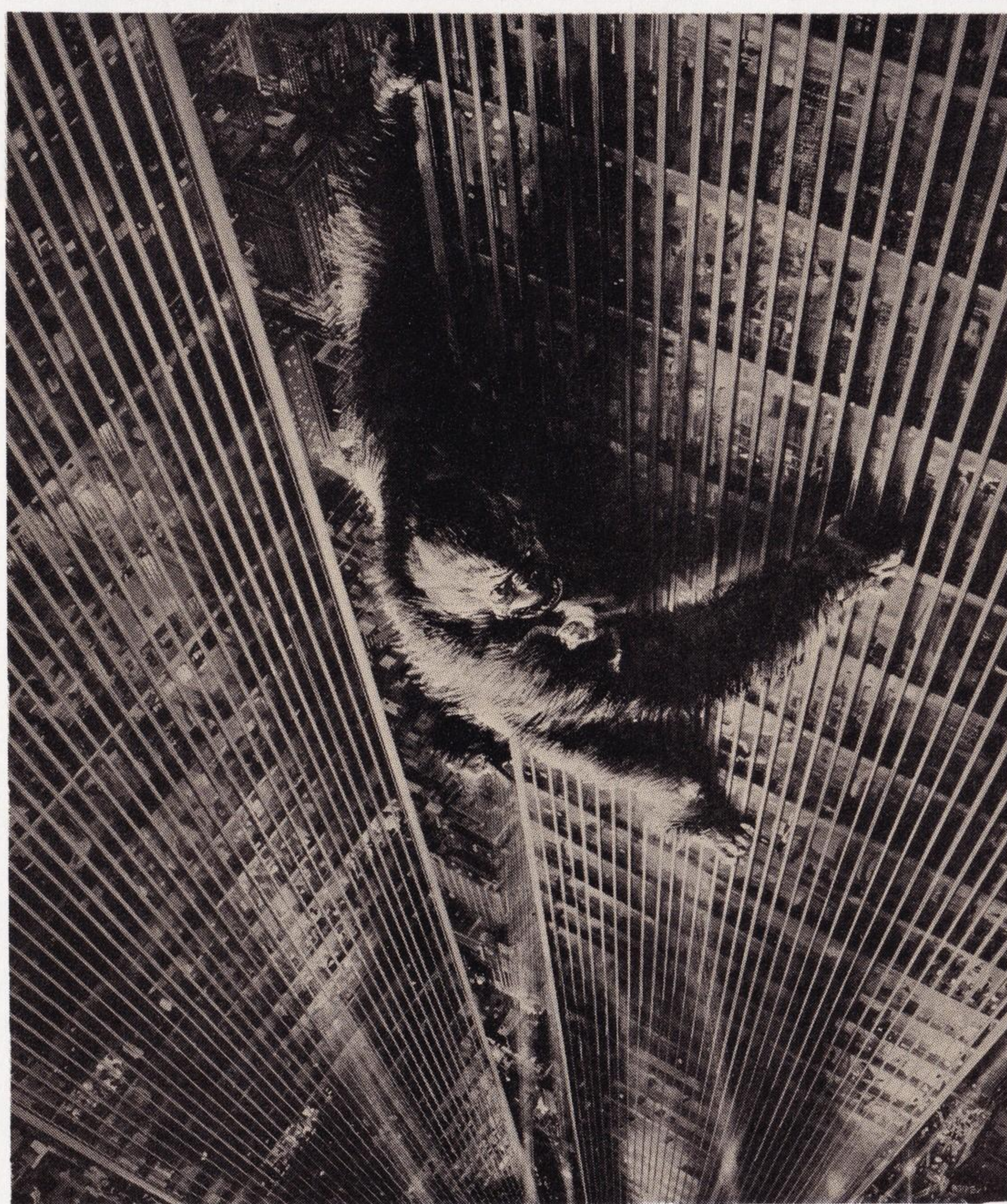
K I N G

If the year 1976 was marked by Jaws, 77 risks being the year of King Kong, with this remake started in June 75 by Dino de Laurentiis. This blockbuster with a barely conceivable budget (planned for sixteen million dollars initially, it finally reaches twenty-two to twenty-six million dollars, according to the sources, i.e. a little less than forty times the price of King Kong of 1933) is directed by John "The Infernal Tower" Guillermin (Polanski having refused). It is undoubtedly the most "expensive" film in the history of cinema (if we except Liz Taylor's Cleopatra, which incidentally comes out oddly enough). The film does not benefit from press screenings (the latter being invited in the company of the public from December 17), it is therefore without having seen it that we are talking about it here. Kong appeared on the screens in 1933 - with the popular success that we know - in the midst of the American economic crisis. It was unemployed people who, for the most part, made up the long lines stretching in front of the rooms where King Kong was shown. No doubt Schoedsack and Cooper's film took on one of the functions (unconscious or deliberate, liberating or alienating) of fantastic cinema to make people forget reality by offering a new potential for dreams. It is not excluded that the film owes a good part of its triumph to the historical circumstances of its release - and, moreover, perhaps the leaders of the R.K.O. wouldn't they have bet on a blockbuster if the times hadn't been for the economic crisis? However, the fantastic being, of all the cinematographic genres, the one that is most related to the notion of the collective unconscious, one can also wonder about the demystifying function of the film, the social exorcism.

cial being streaked, in filigree, with vengeful, denunciatory connotations. Exegetes have already noted the disturbing evocative power of the scenes of panic, in the New York part of King Kong one went so far as to suppose that they were stock shots, probably borrowed from newsreels on the great strike movements of the moment, when we were indeed dealing with staged sequences - but with what realism! Beneath his moving fairy-tale Beast guise, Kong (whose com-

time when various important economic and political events occurred (Watergate scandal, fall of the dollar, increase in unemployment). And chance is not enough to explain everything, especially since the musical theme accompanying the formidable evolutions of the great shark of Jaws infallibly recalls that which, forty-three years earlier, accompanied the inexorable advance of the brutal Kong. It remains to be seen whether the return of King Kong (now in color, that is to say modern, universal as the current

crisis is) does not correspond, precisely, to some vast international political plan by means of which our leaders would not be sorry to make us believe that "the" crisis has reappeared - and that we should therefore trust them to overcome it. Because, of all cinematographic genres, the fantastic. (see above). The immense Kong personifying Mad Love, the lyricism and the timeless universality of the myth of the Beast with a pure heart, in love with Beauty with a perverse soul. . . : it would be easy, and somewhat puerile, to resume here the usual discourse on King Kong, as it has been published a hundred times in the absence of the slightest serious analysis (the attempts at psychoanalysis of the myth - cf Boullet more often coming under fantasy or delirium than methodological criticism) who, from



Painting by Perkey for the promotion of the new 'King Kong'.

bearing and the size itself, for whatever practical or dramatic reason, change as soon as he arrives in New York, his amorous romanticism giving way to the blind brutality that nothing can stop) he would symbolize police repression, dictatorial power and the threat of starvation? It is, however, rather disturbing to note that giant animal films became fashionable again in the United States around the same time.

psycho-socio to economics, saw in King Kong the symbol of what we want there. see. Kong is, in fact, the heir to a tradition in popular culture, the great apes are lovers of ladies because they are always male. In Edgar Poe, already, it is women who perish under the blows of the doubly murderous monkey of the rue Morgue. In 1922, Félicien Champsaur (this now unknown brilliant author) fixed lit-

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K O N G

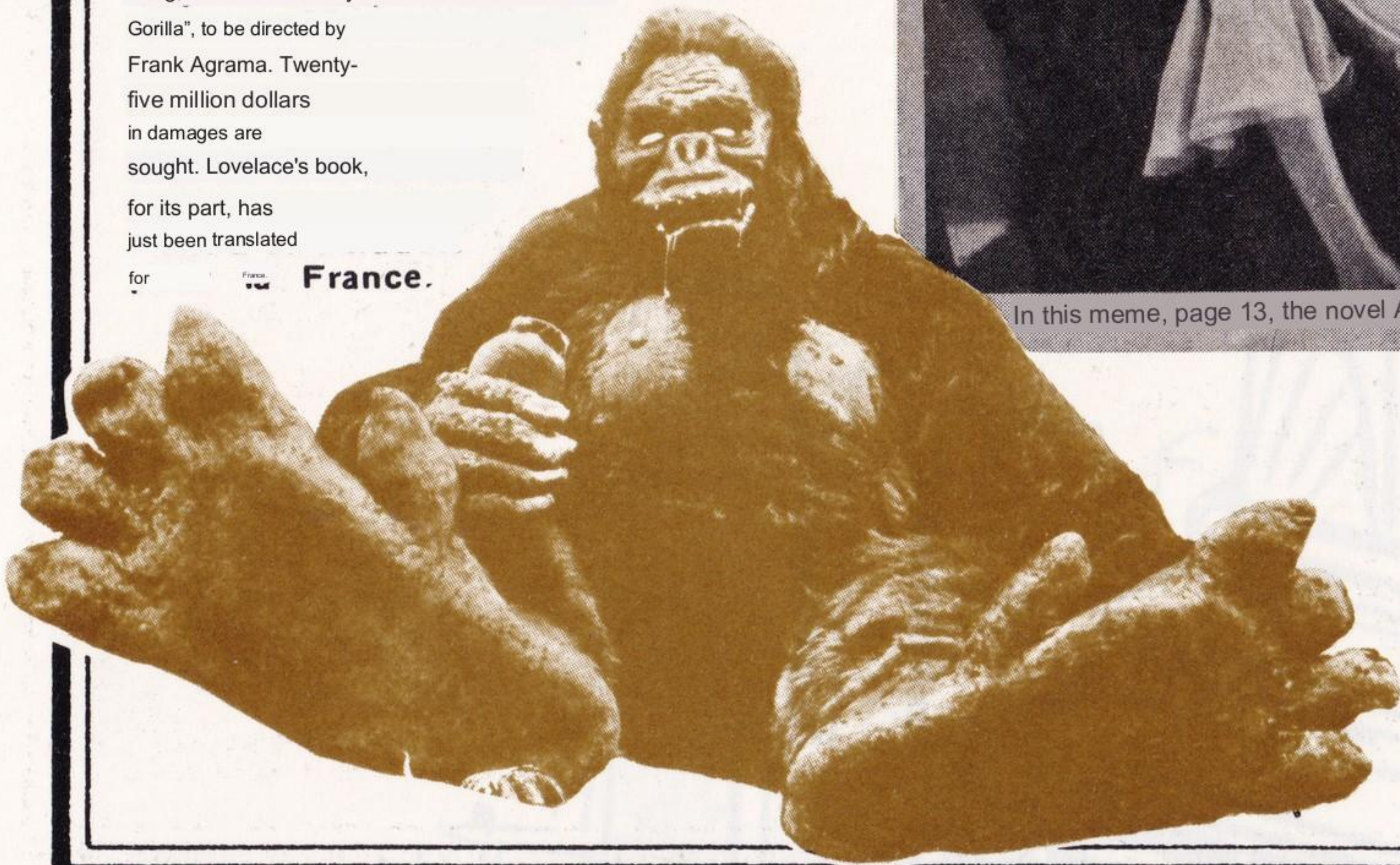




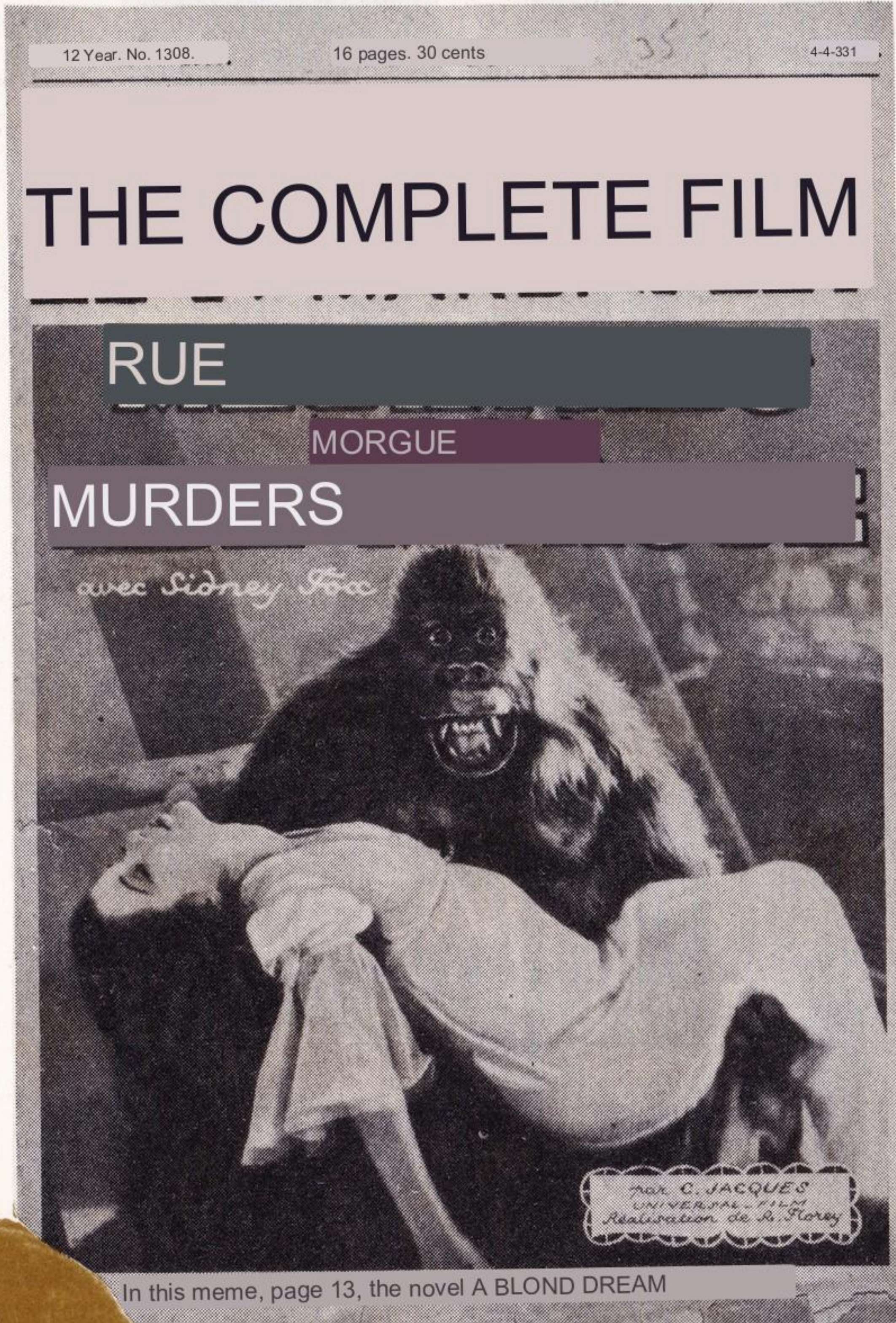
Below is an anonymous illustration for the reissue (Bantam Books, 1965) of Delos W. Lovelace's book based on Edgar Wallace and Merian C. Cooper, novel adaptation published in 1932. This publication, which thus put the story of the monkey in the public domain, played its part in the procedure between Paramount-De Laurentis and Universal. Indeed, Universal was negotiating parallel-



retains the rights of the original "King Kong" to R.K.O. Long legal fight which ended in a compromise De Laurentis gives up 11% to profits of his film to which will have to wait until Guillermin's film has been released for eighteen months to start work on its own version ("The legend of King Kong", entrusted to Joseph Sargent). Another lawsuit (publicity?) De Laurentis attacks the French producer André Génovès, who intends to co-produce with England "Queen Kong, the liberated lady Gorilla", to be directed by Frank Agrama. Twenty-five million dollars in damages are sought. Lovelace's book, for its part, has just been translated for France.



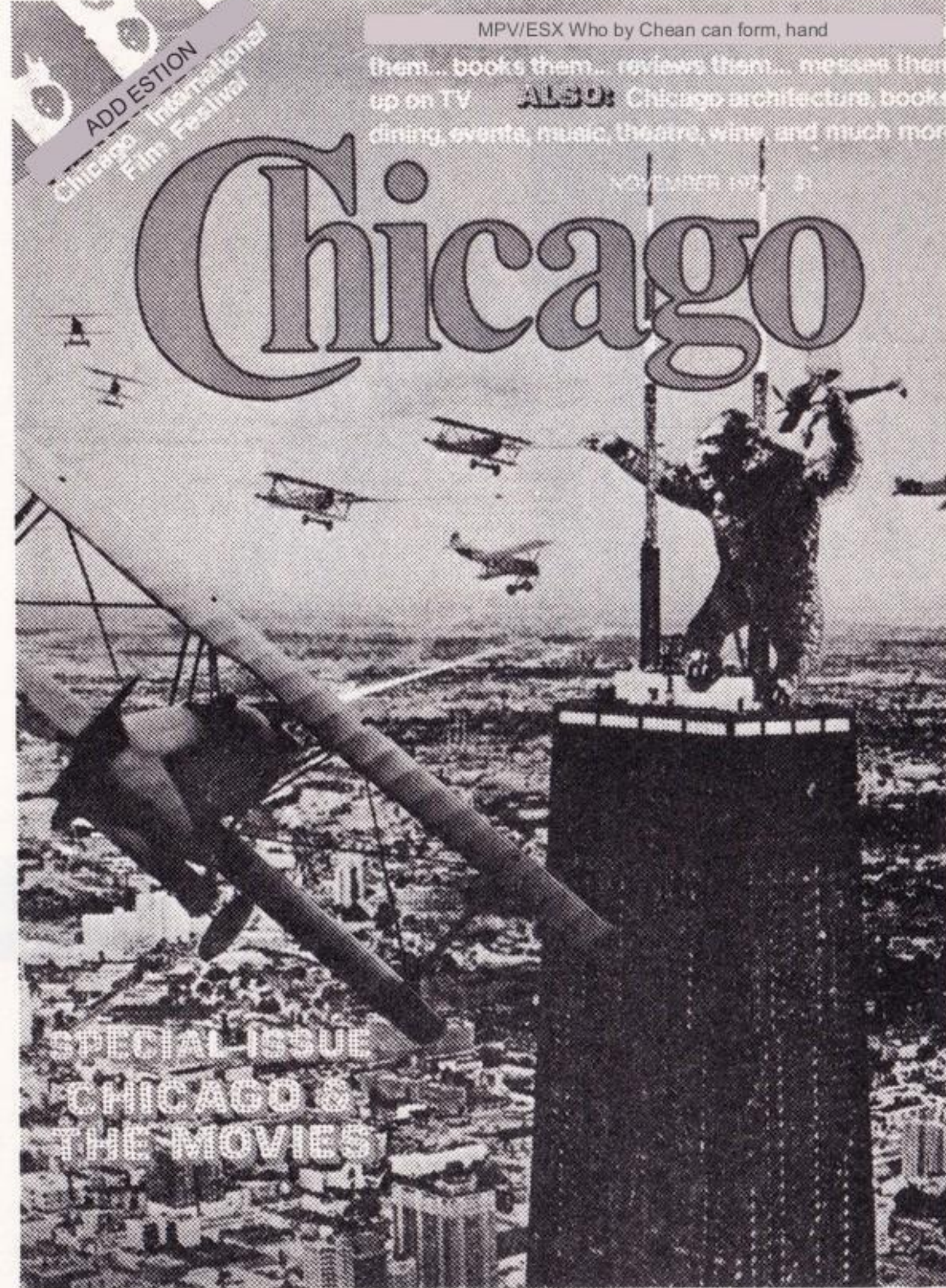
Above engraving by Granville for "Gulliver's Travels"; or Kong first version, amateur little gentlemen.



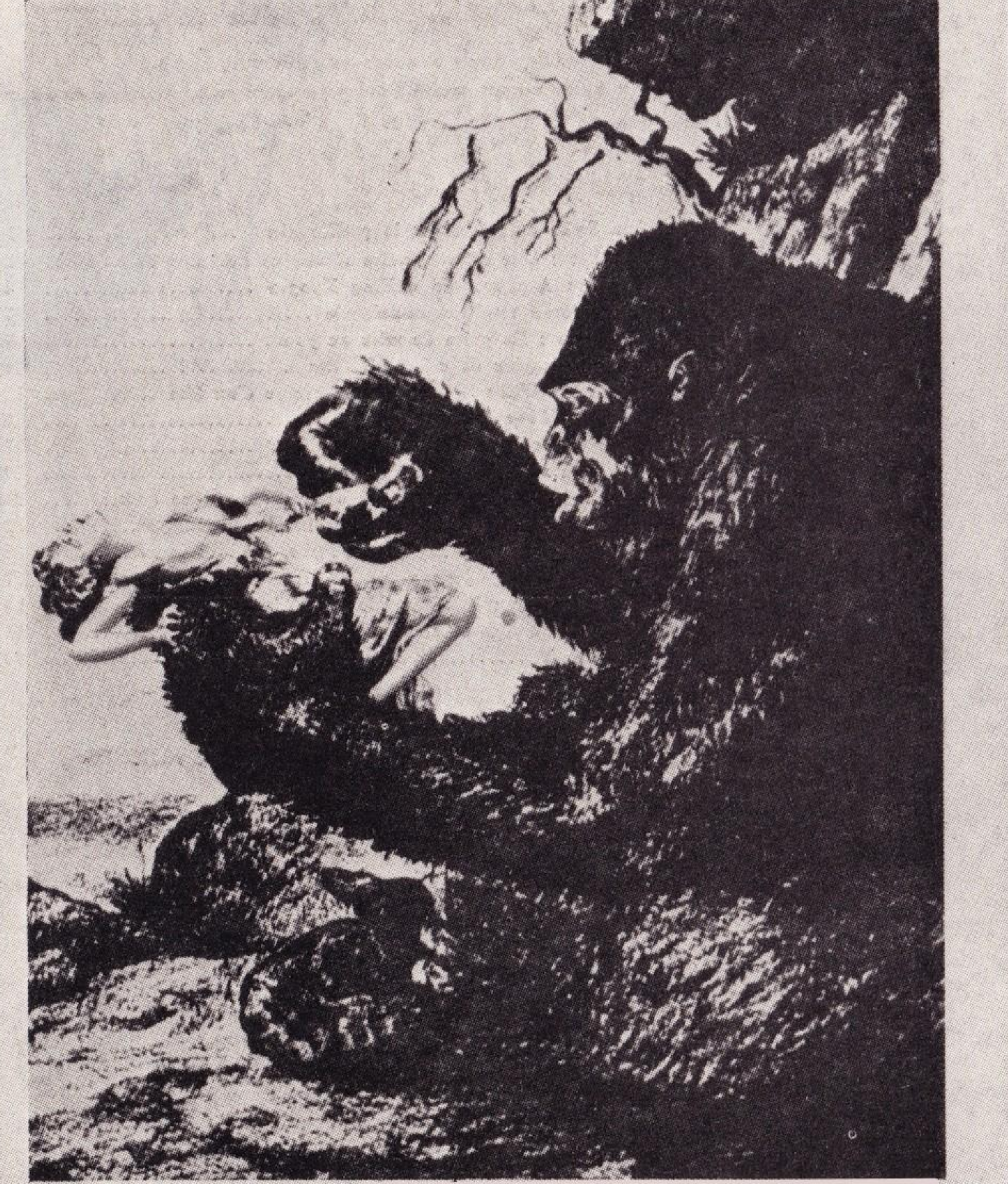
In this meme, page 13, the novel A BLOND DREAM

Above <<Murders in the rue Morgue>>, filmed by Robert Florey after Poe («The Complete Film»), 1933). Right: Kong psychoanalysis by Jean Boulet in his famous book "La Belle et la Bête". On the left Kong, follower of idleness in the film of Inoshiro Honda "King Kong against Godzilla".

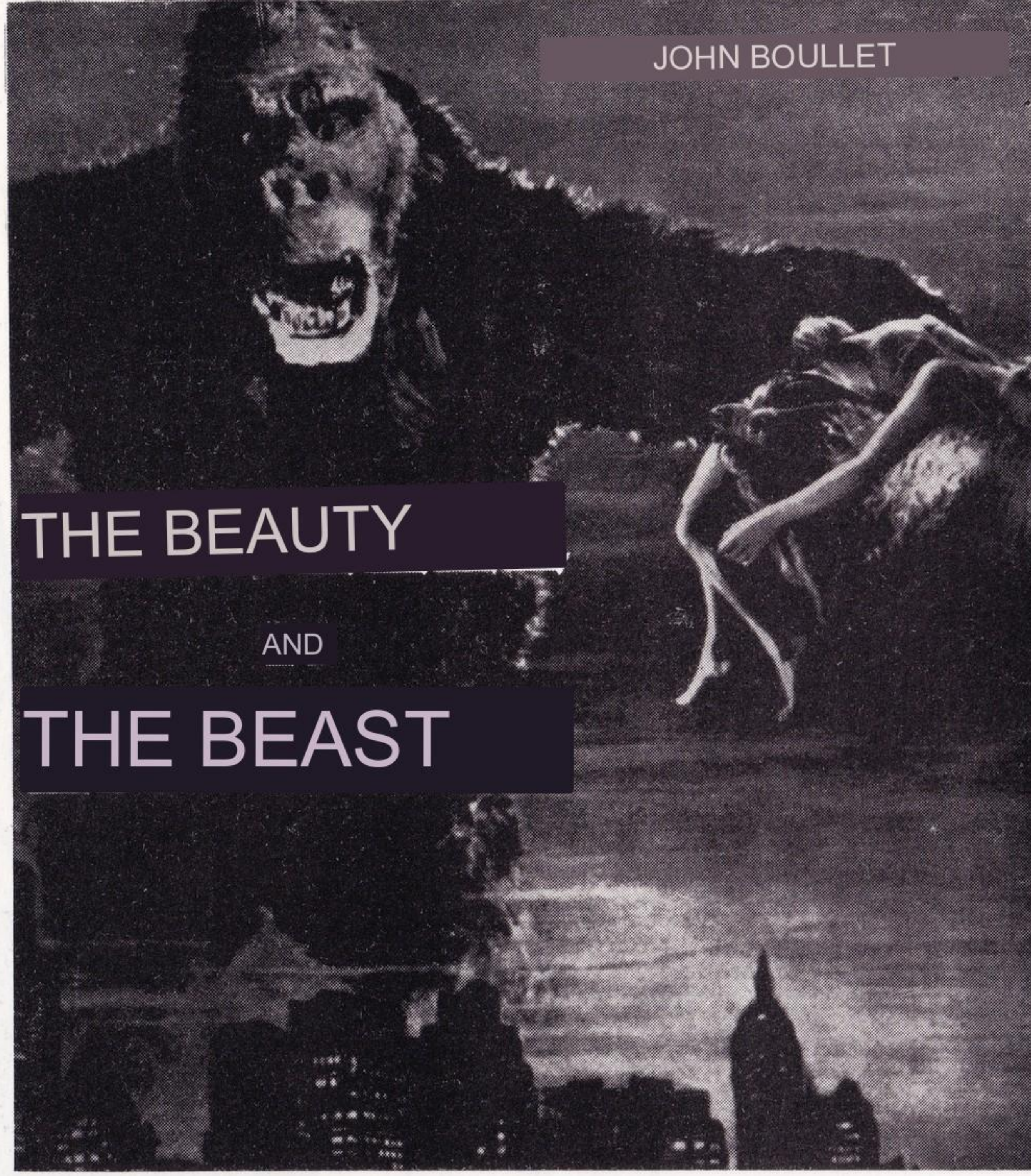
It is practically impossible to list the films or any. monkey, usually of good size and proud presence, jeopardizes the sexual purity of a swooning young explorer (on the left), and we know of bands where the service gorilla serves as a knight serving, sometimes as a concubine, always a pretty savage a that bold settler will bring back, for the "happy ending", to more banal orthodox feelings and mores (in the center). Anyway, the Beast is traditionally struck down by Beauty, it is she who kills Kong, more surely than the bi-planes (on the right, on the cover of the magazine "Chicago">, November 75).

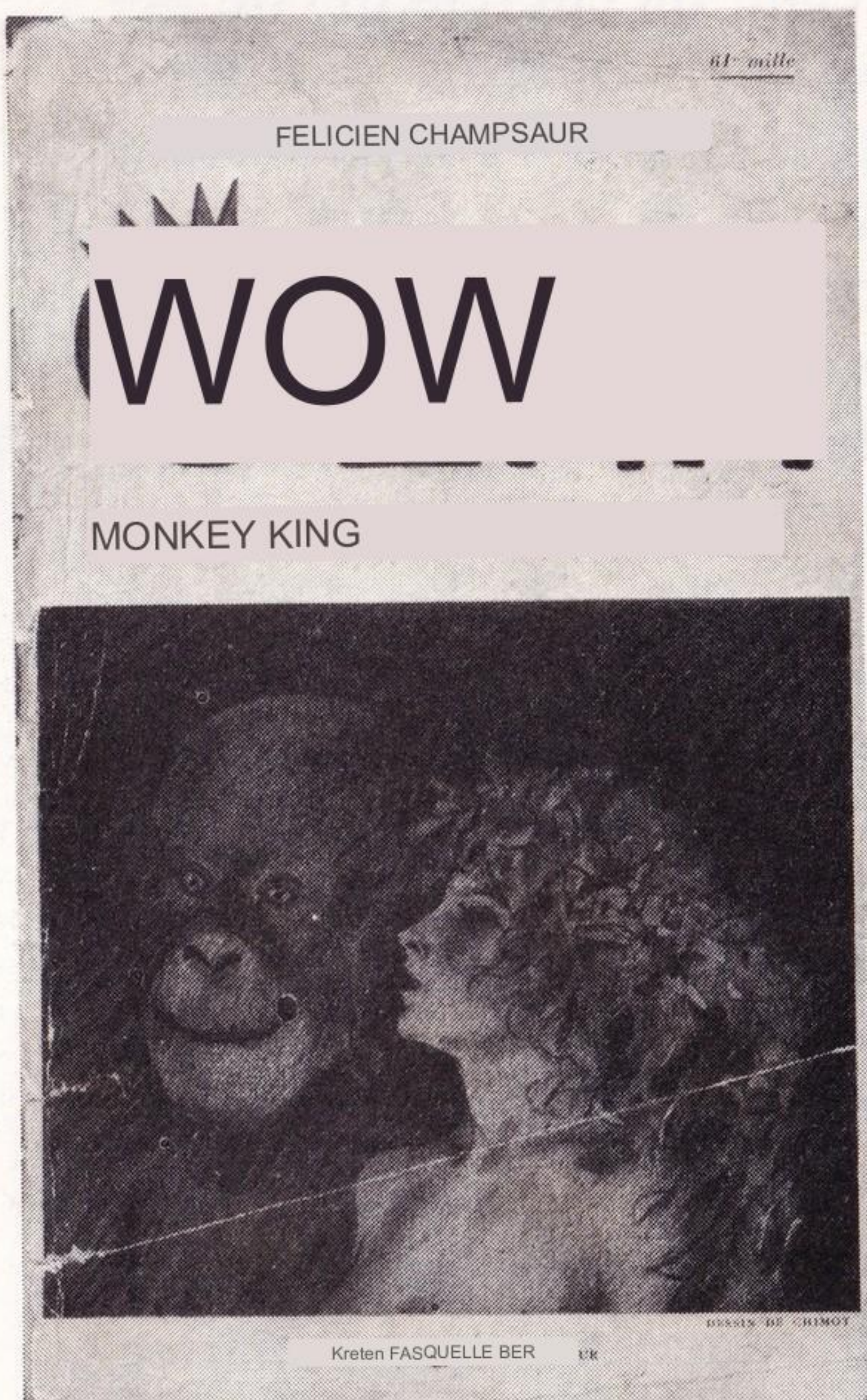


FANTASTIC NOON-MIDNIGHT



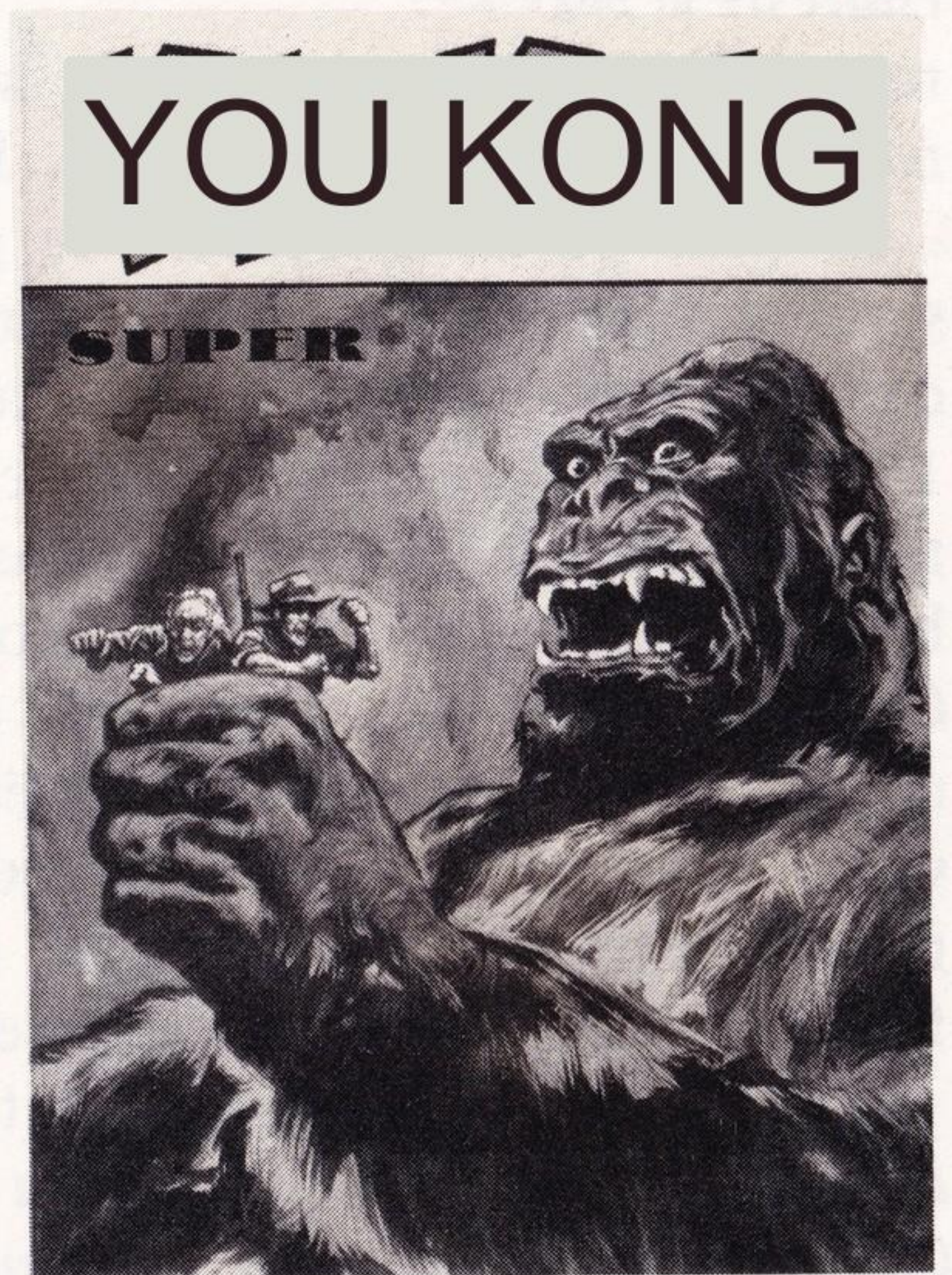
Above an incunabula, the n° 3 of M.M.F. on "King Kong".



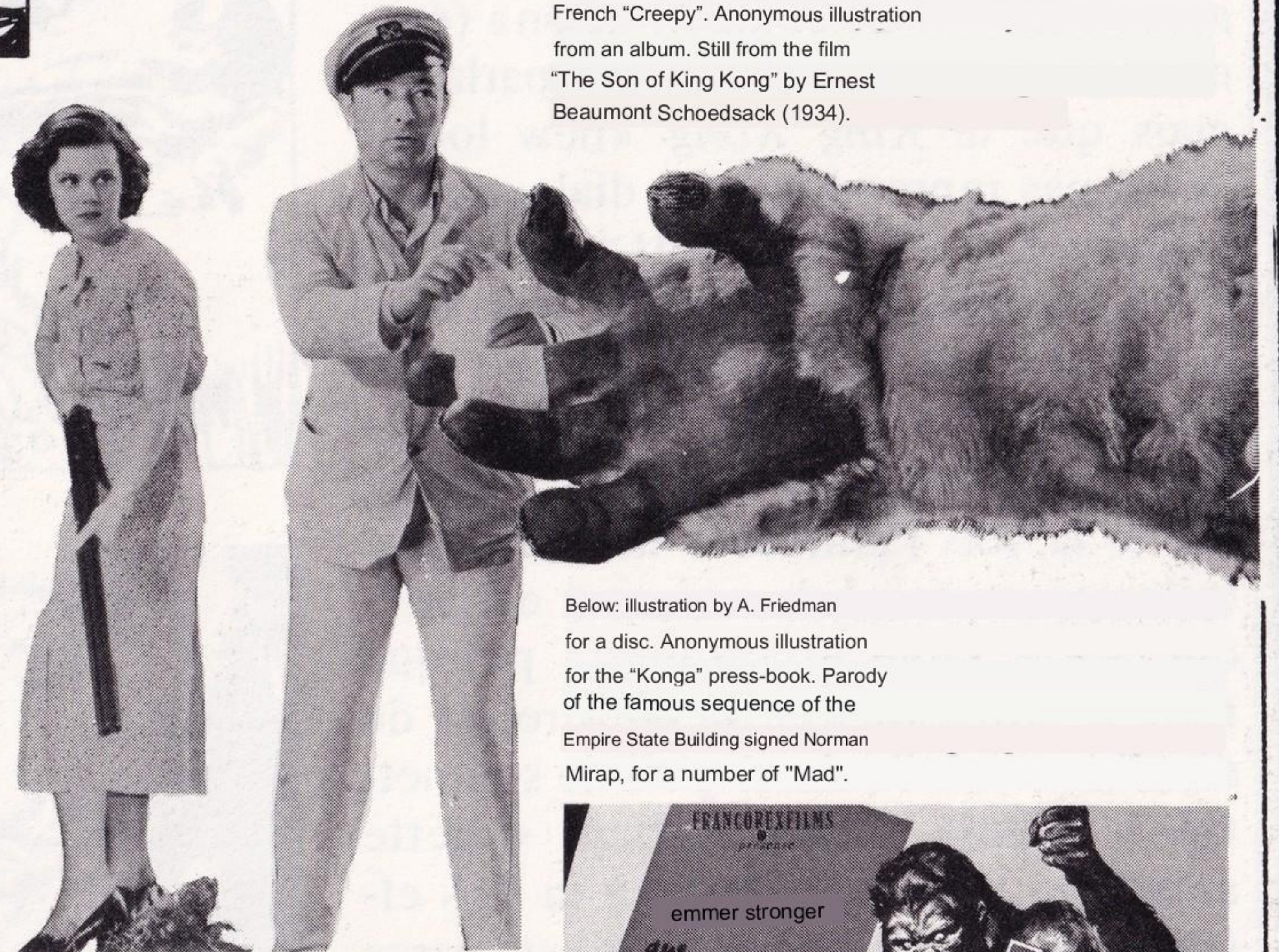
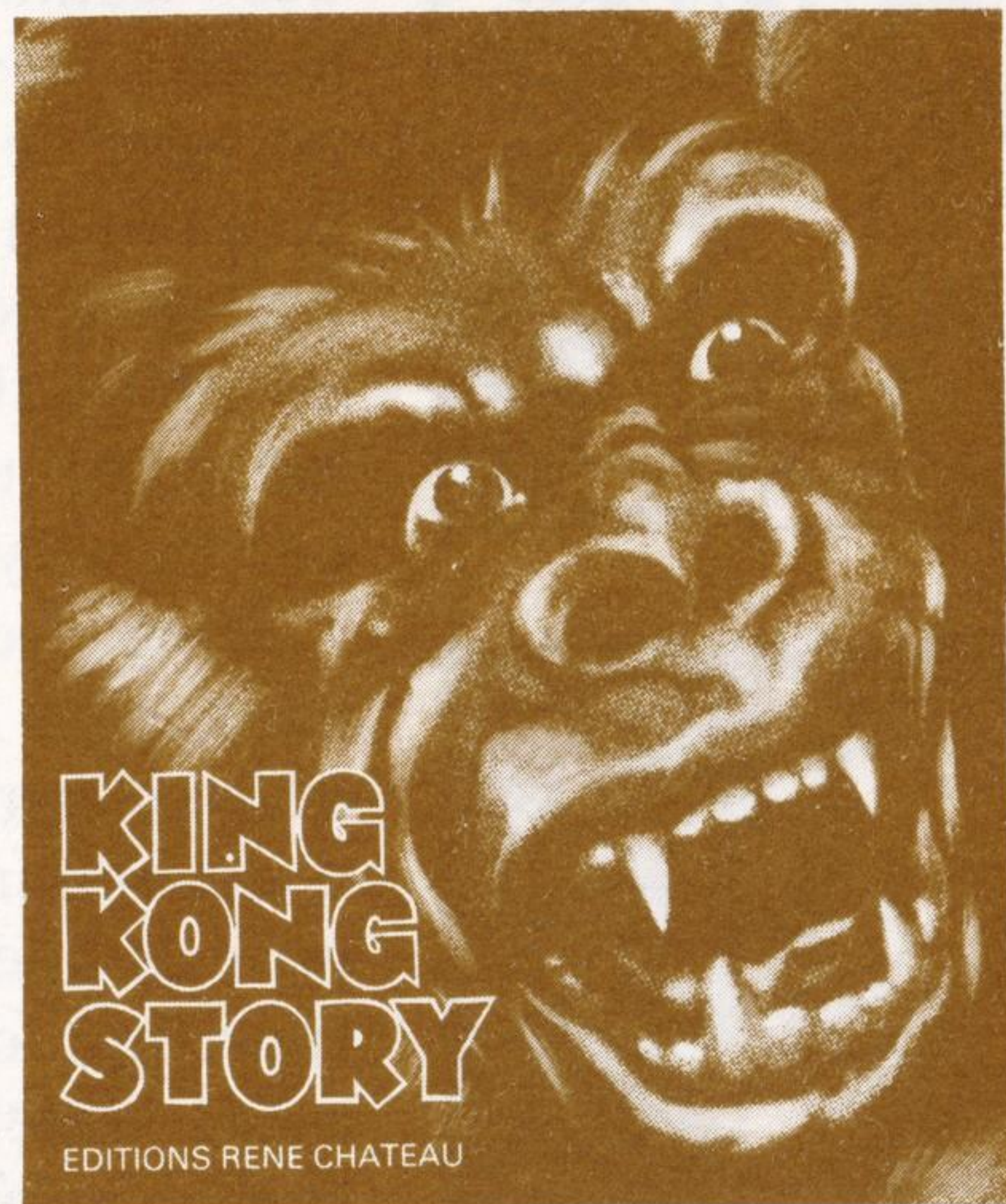
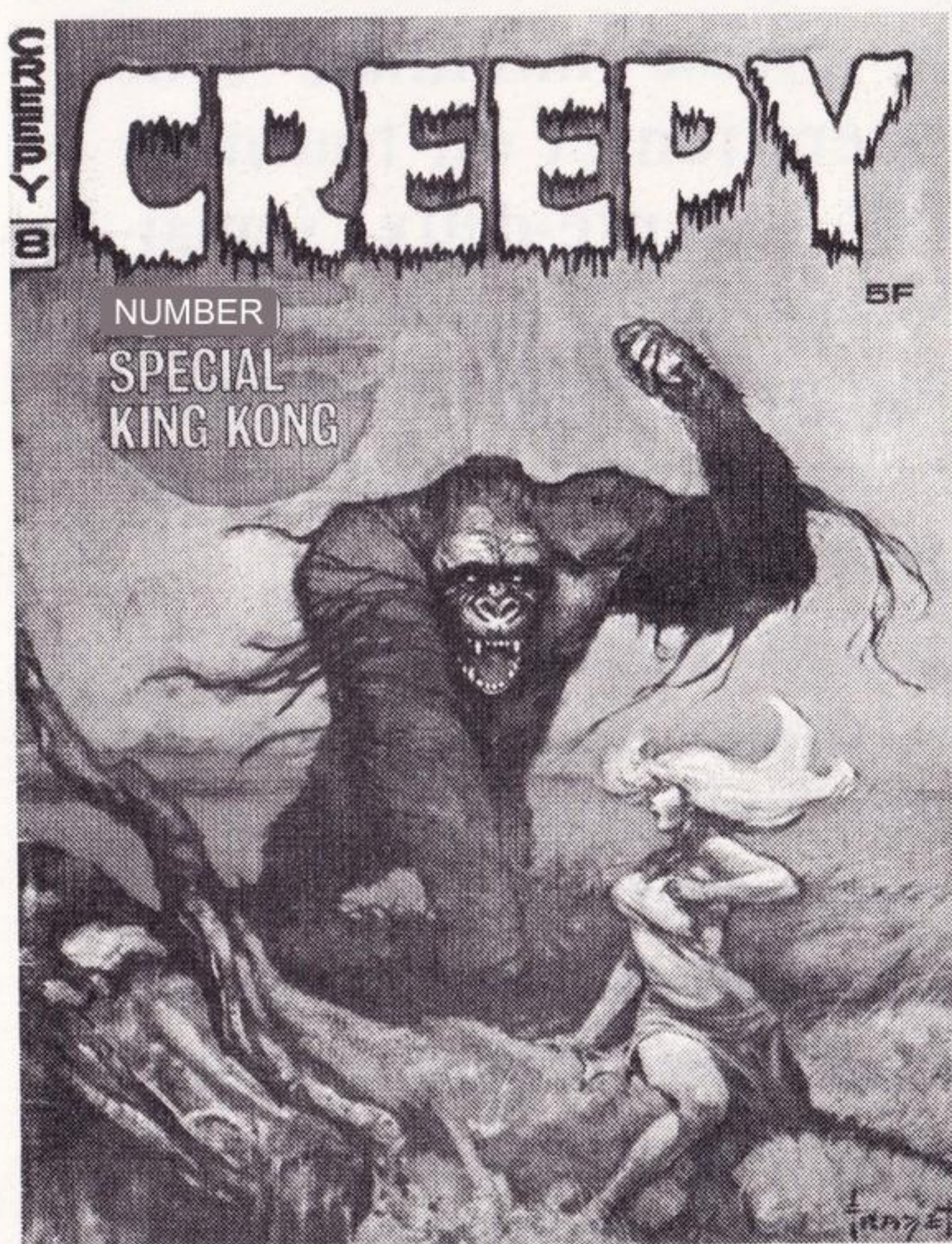


On the left "Uha, king of the monkeys", by Félicien Champsaur, published in 1922 with a cover by Chimot, the first title of a trilogy: endowed with superior human intelligence, a superb gorilla, in the strength of age, collects the hearts of those seduced by its savage baits. In the middle: "Kalar", titular hero of an inexhaustible series of comics, appearing in booklets, willingly powerful monkeys, substitutes for the dragons that the valiant knights of yesteryear had to defeat. But it is King Kong, the real one, who gives his name to a comic strip published by Éditions de l'Occident since 1973 (right): would the great gorilla symbolize, under such a label, the (oriental!) communism?

confronts



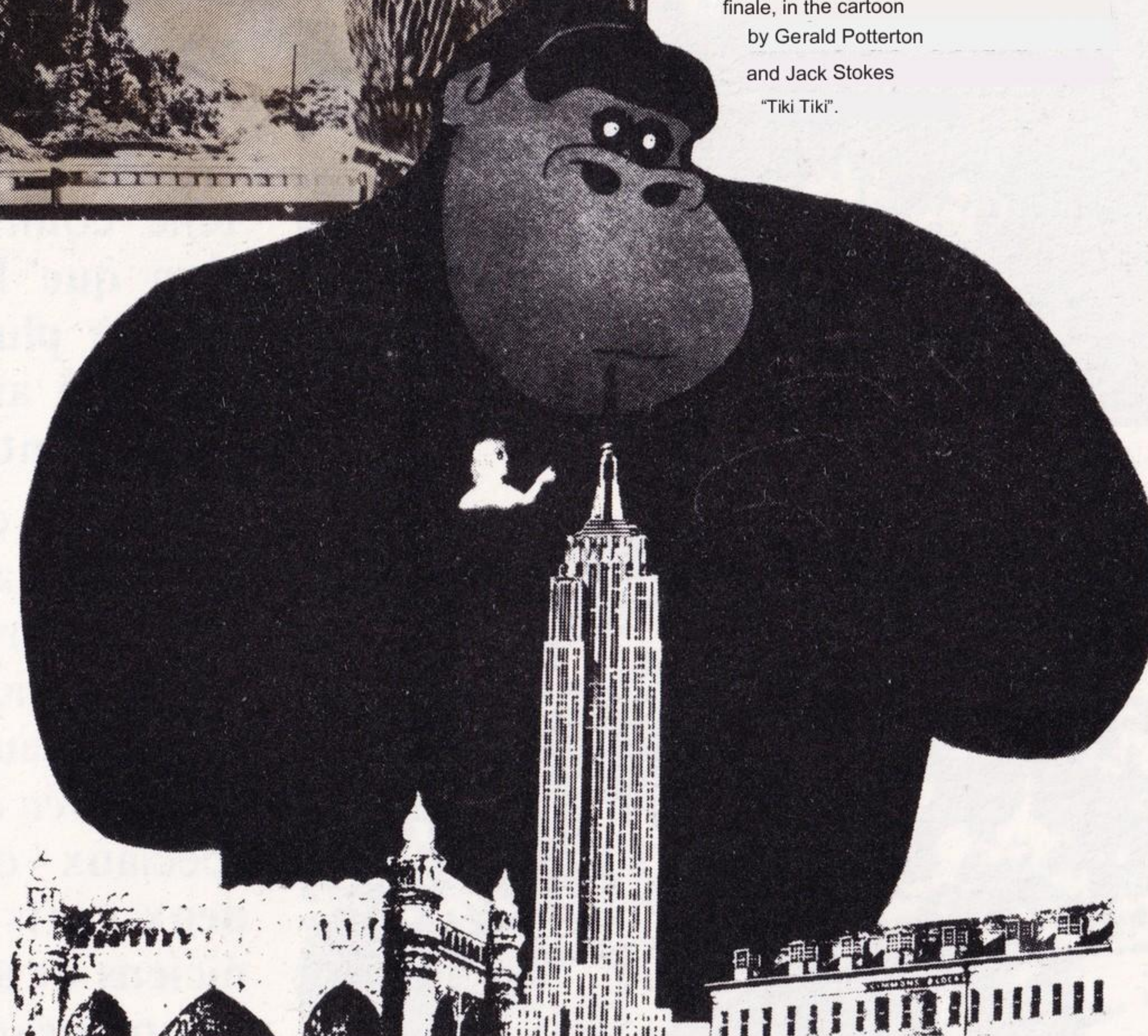
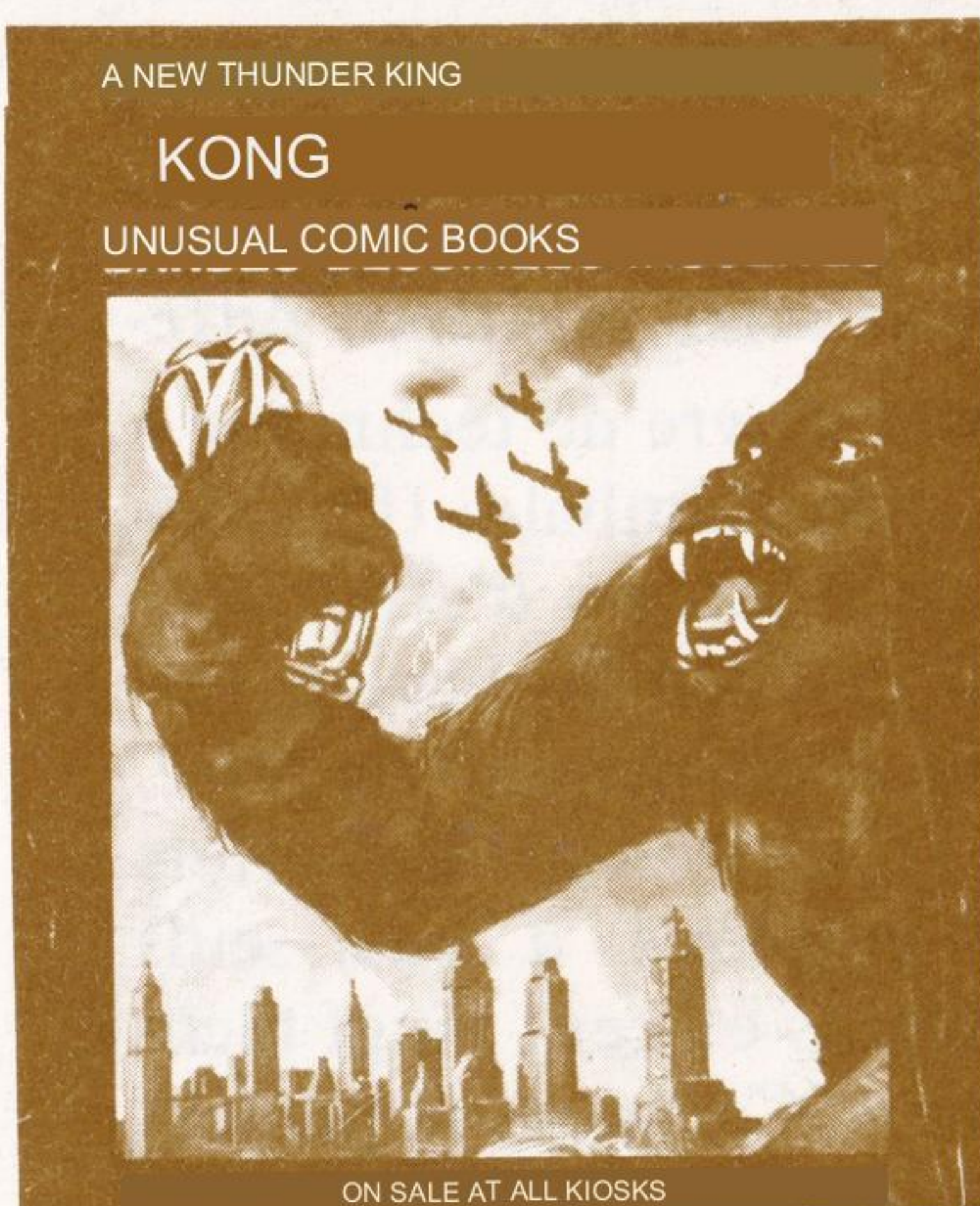
Below, from left to right, illustration by Frank Frazetta for issue 8 of the French "Creepy". Anonymous illustration from an album. Still from the film "The Son of King Kong" by Ernest Beaumont Schoedsack (1934).



Below: illustration by A. Friedman for a disc. Anonymous illustration for the "Konga" press-book. Parody of the famous sequence of the Empire State Building signed Norman Mirap, for a number of "Mad".



Opposite: Honda pits Kong against Godzilla. Below is a parody of the famous 1933 finale, in the cartoon by Gerald Potterton and Jack Stokes "Tiki Tiki".



(continued from page

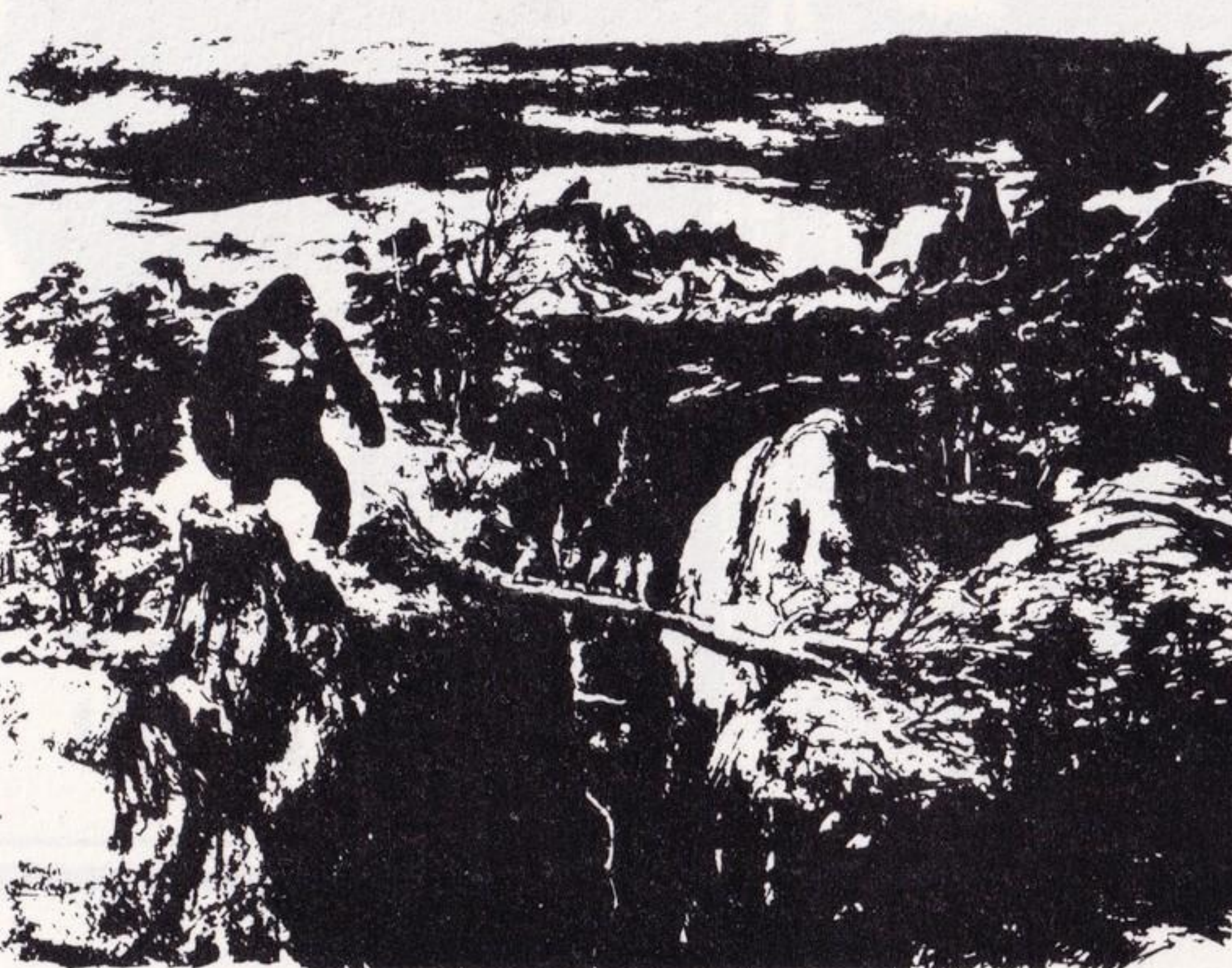
20) rally the laws of the genre, with its novel Ouha, king of the monkeys.

The monkey - and more particularly the gorilla seems to represent, for a long time certainly, but especially since the end of the 19th century, the apogee of a virility misogyny erected in worship let us not forget that a contemporary of Champsaur, Dr. Voronoff, conquered a showy glory by operating on failing old gentlemen to give them, obviously an indisputable remedy, male gorilla hormones!

Prof. André Akoun, interviewed Guillermin's French film press-book, thinks that King Kong of 1933 "corresponded to a collective phenomenon of compensation" (economically and socially speaking), but that King Kong "<new look>> does not not going to take up this dialectic again>> (an assertion that is debatable). He nevertheless recognizes the permanence of the erotic (or erotological) potential of the myth, in that the new Kong, "basically (...) actualizes both the monstrous animality, the which deep down inside us is in a way lurking and refused since the whole process of culture is to say "no" to the animal in order to subject it to the law".

According to Akoun, if this animality appears to us "both frightening and fascinating", it is because Kong "is all-powerful, that he places a power at the service of his desires that we do not have". This analysis is altogether rational and does not apply to Kong alone, but can serve as a "grid" for the whole ape-like myth of virility. It is, in this regard, revealing that L'Express, publishing a study on rape, illustrated it with a photo of King Kong: perfect knowledge of what one could call <the substance of the theme>>... and flagrant ignorance of the vehicle of the said theme, which was the 1933 film. To make the great ape the composite portrait of the rapist can still be surprising! Indeed, it seems to us that there are more rapists responding to the mechanisms of power and property than to those of an impossible love. For our part, we would be tempted to retain from this monstrous attempt at union, the fight against (sexual) taboos on the one hand, the illustration of the intolerance of a society for all humanity risking put her in danger, on the other hand.

The King Kong myth thus reappears on the screens, forty-three years after the release of what some (its authors first) did not hesitate to call the "8th wonder of the world". But myth "updated>>> since it is no longer a question here of the astonishing adventure of a group of filmmakers.



but that of oil researchers, that helicopters have replaced bi-planes, that the Empire State Building has given way to the towers of the New York World Trade Center

(which provoked a demonstration of individuals disguised as monkeys, of whom it is no longer clear whether they were protesting against the monster's lack of loyalty to the old building, against King Kong's march towards the E.S.B. as planned in the script, or if it was all just a well-run advertising campaign).

The phenomenon is significant enough for general information weeklies, such as Time or L'Express, to devote seven pages of editorial to it each, not to mention the numerous articles, notices and echoes in the world press throughout the period. operation and actual filming (thirty-two weeks!). The technical details are, it is true, sufficiently unusual, even for a blockbuster, for us to stop there.

King Kong is twelve meters high, weighs six and a half tons, has a metal frame of steel and aluminum covered with plastic, then with latex and finally with "hair" (this fur, designed by Michael Dino, was obtained from ponytails after studying thirty-four different kinds of hair. Braided, bleached, dyed, the coat alone cost one million seven hundred thousand dollars). Through a system of hydraulic valves operated by electric wires, the King Kong robot possesses a range of movements which, combined together, give it life. Twenty operators are at the control panel, each attentive to the single movement for which he is responsible. Thus, King Kong can walk (five-meter strides), pivot on his hips, move his head, open his mouth, roll his eyes; his legs bend at the knees, his ears prick up, etc. Its arms were designed separately (there would even have been such confusion in this construction that King Kong, given to several companies to manufacture, would have ended up with... two straight arms!) and can have sixteen positions. differ-annuities. This technical masterpiece was created by Carlo Rambaldi (one of the most famous Italian special effects designers) and Glen Robinson (special effects of Earthquake, The Hindenburg Odyssey). The special effects alone employed two hundred artisans and one hundred and twenty technicians and actors. Certain sequences were nevertheless performed by a man (Rick Baker) dressed in monkey skin, on miniaturized sets.



turized, with five different masks according to the moods to be translated, each mask being able to change its expression all the same by electronically controlled hydraulic "muscles".

As a "magazine of the image", having little space here for an in-depth study of the King Kong phenomenon (see for this the



bibliography at the end of the article), we preferred to consider it, as well as what it covers, through illustrations inspired by this myth, or having inspired it, with a quick overview, landmarks, a cinematographic chronology and some bibliographic data.

Jean-Pierre Bouyxou
and Jacques Boivin

Left page: An anthological sequence of paintings, cartoons, film stills and sketches about the "King Kong" of 1933 seem to have inspired the new "King Kong" according to the sketch above.

On the left, Fay Wray ("King Kong" 1933), on the right Jessica Lange ("King Kong" 1976). There is no need

to understand Fay's charm appeal. In her grotesque dress, Jessica

hardly hears comparison. First planned for Barbara Streisand who refuses it, the role will then be considered for Cher Bonno

the ex-duo Cher), and then Sonny for Dominique Sanda and a few others. Several thousand

(?) candidates would have presented themselves. It is (one wonders why) a model from the New York

Agency who is chosen Jessica Lange, twenty-seven years old,

a bit of mime in Paris, a bit of dance, comedy studies... "I never thought

of Kong as a monster; it's almost a great romantic..." she said. It is no doubt this

conception of things that helped her in the sequence that we are publishing, where King Kong's hand begins to undress her. "I responded to this mechanical hand like a lover's," she confided. The continuation on the screen.

(See bibliography and filmography on pages 107 and 111)

