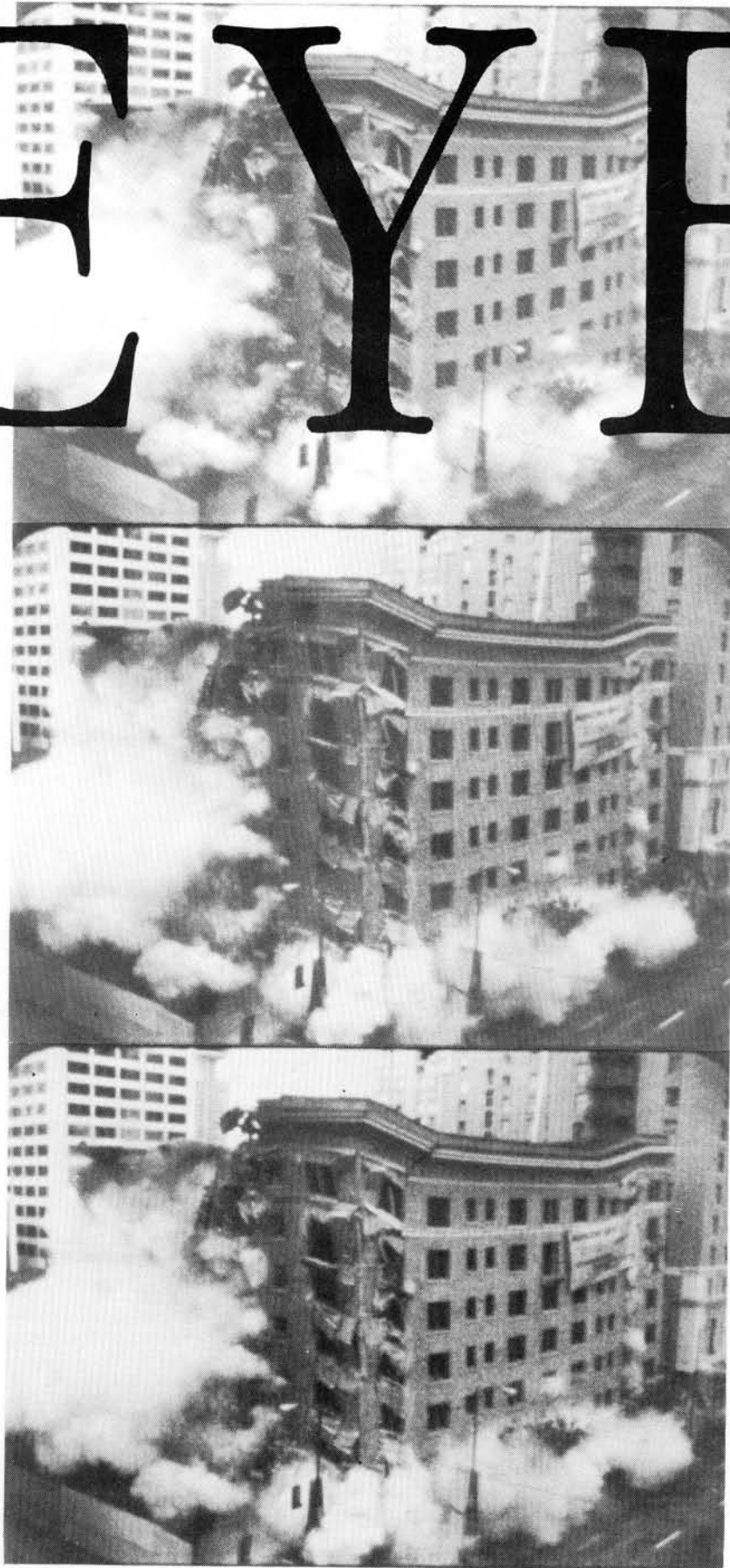


DESIRE IN RUINS  
I N D E P E N D E N T

# EYE



DESIRE IN RUINS

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*BOURGEOIS SOCIETY HAS DIVIDED  
EROTICISM INTO THREE AREAS: A  
DANGEROUS ONE, GOVERNED BY THE  
PENAL CODE; ANOTHER FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND  
WELFARE, AND THE THIRD FOR THE  
ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY. ORGASM IS  
THE UNIVERSAL GOAL - ONE MORE  
PRODUCT OF THE SYSTEM.*

*Octavio Paz*

The **D** word of **DESIRE** lives on everyone's lips these days, along with the **G** spot and the **X** corridor our interiors are coming more and more to resemble an alphabet in motion. The papers, letters, musings, rants and interviews gathered together here issue from a body whose common tongue is **Pacific**: all look to **west coast films and filmmakers**, all moving from an obsolescent technology (cinema) to the bodies it has marked along the way. Between these two bodies, the body of the machine and the body of its operator, lies the question of their mutual effect. The way we sit or stand, our relation to the newly born or newly dead, the mysterious force that finds millions the world over somehow wanting the same thing - a weekend with **Batman**, scraps of patterned fabric or etchings on vinyl - all this speaks of a **DESIRE** to which we've yet to attach words, a **DESIRE** without objects or ends, only means: a **DESIRE** in ruins.

*mike hoolboom*

## DESIRE IN RUINS

**JOURNAL  
NOTES  
FROM**



# ENDANGERED

BARBARA  
HAMMER

**THE MACDOWELL COLONY  
PETERBOROUGH, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

**SEPTEMBER 6, 1987**

I had the idea to endanger the film itself - the existence, the materiality. To punch holes in it, run over it, scratch it, stamp on it, don't give it enough light, puncture it. To put it under a sewing machine needle.

**SEPTEMBER 7**

Make a list of endangered species with Experimental Filmmaker in the middle of the "e's".

**SEPTEMBER 11**

The philosophy behind the film is based on the concepts of the origin of the species, the reasons for diversity and why that diversity is shrinking now.

**SEPTEMBER 25**

Couldn't light itself be endangered? Isn't it the abstract where I want to go using the contrast of black and white of the shadows from the MacDowell studio windows with the color of the Chicago snow.

**SEPTEMBER 26**

I feel like I am getting scattered with these mattes - first light framed, then animals and birds, then snow within snow and now I introduce a woman on crutches. It's too much. I need to focus. Go back to the light, the basis of film: light is endangered.

**SEPTEMBER 27**

I showed my films last night to artist residents here at MacDowell. This morning at the breakfast table Louise

Talma, a composer now in her eighties, tells me she was up three times during the night trying to figure out why she was so disturbed. Last night after the films she complained of a headache. This a.m. she said the images were very beautiful, but they went by too fast. A defense immediately rose up at the table around the analogy of music to film - one can't hold onto a note, a chord, a passage one particularly

**SEPTEMBER 28**

We talked about John Keats' theory of "negative capability" at the dinner table tonight. It seems relevant to my filmwork and I borrow Keat's statement to examine it. "I mean negative capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason".

This is the last day at MacDowell and I have my most creative ideas. I fill my notebook with continuing possibilities for the film. The first is to make new mattes of "camerawoman" working and then to fill both mattes with chemical bubble paintings using hydrochloric acid on the emulsion.

# DESIRE IN RUINS

**NEW YORK CITY**

**NOVEMBER 20**

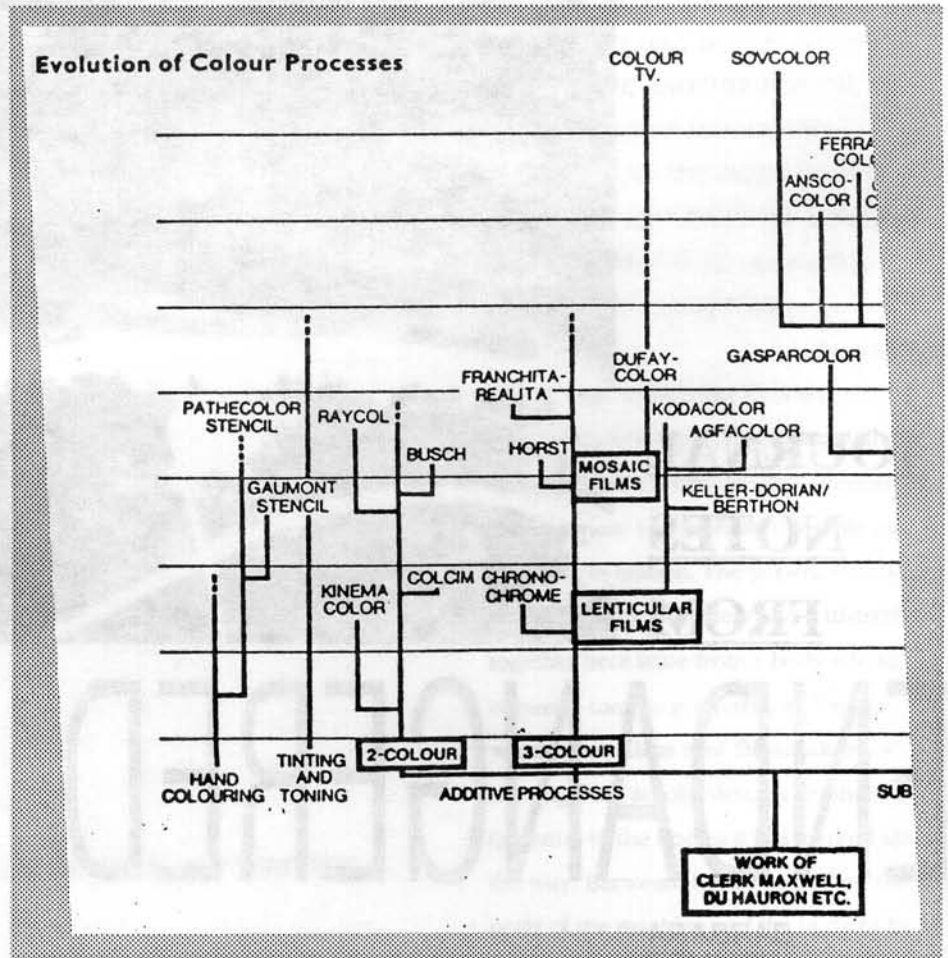
There is a section of the new footage shot using the colors of the fall foliage at MacDowell that is breathtaking a series of frames abstracting movement through color (by moving the camera faster than the shutter speed and in different directions very quickly, I was able to do a series of discrete paintings of light, color and movement). There is one series of 11 frames I would like to have printed as a horizontal photograph. Even though the film is called "Endangered" I musn't let my early conceptions for its progress dominate my choices. I must follow the directions of the film - returned from the lab now six weeks since I shot it - that I discover in frame to frame examination. After all, it is me who is endangered and this particular form/genre of film that I am about.

The manner in which the moviescope reveals the frames to me is like a horizontal curtain opening from the middle (caused by the revolving shutter action).

Another way to explore the strip is not with the individual frame as in Eisenstein's theory of emotion in frame-to-frame relationship caused by montage of planes, movement, color, etc., but this mantra-like form I am creating with the Buddhist meditative paintings of rectangular design within rectangular design, a frame within a frame.

**DECEMBER 16**

I think I have nearly as much material film as the content and form can bear without going into narrative interludes. I think I'll make one more matte - the jagged, torn one with the smooth envelope opening - plus return to the Galapagos footage and see if I can't get someone to photograph me working on the optical printer. The other idea is to use parts of "Man with a Movie Camera" in my film. Then, why not Richter's "Rhythmus 21" as well? I can hear the finish line approaching - the wind down, the loss of enthusiasm for the project, the need to move to a new stage, editing for sound (is Helen going to do the sound?)



**DECEMBER 27**

I would like to put this film away for awhile, then edit it, then reshoot if I need connecting links. Then, add narrative acted in 1" video transferred to film. Or save that for the next piece. Also, maybe by just taking a break from it I could return with new enthusiasm. But, it's more - how much can the material hold?

**OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA**

**JULY 27**

Finished the Sound mix. Happy with the final result. Finally, Helen and I are satisfied with the fruition of completion. It is a powerful and changed film because of her sound track.

**AUGUST 1, 1988**

The Galapagos Islands off Peru feature in Hammer's most recent film "Endangered" (1988) where blue-footed boobies, seals and iguanas are equated with the filmmaker herself who identifies light, life and experimental film to be threatened with extinction in this late twentieth century. Every image is marked and cancelled before it disappears. Even the emulsion of the film is treated with acid marking its fragility. The film is a highly effective compilation: image, color, sound building upon each other, slowly heightening the sense of urgency. Against this mood there is a reassuring image of a silhouetted woman working at the film projector. A strong, competent, fearless woman. Woman documenting, warning, saving.

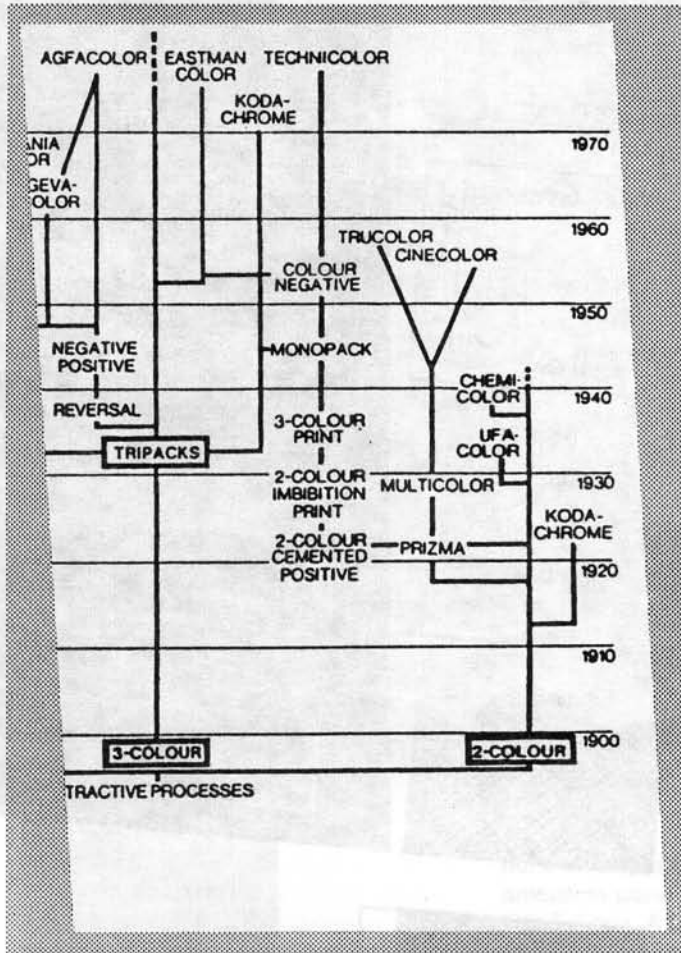
## DESIRE IN RUINS

COLOURSEPARATION:

## YESTERTECH

## AND

## BEYOND



THE 1980'S HAVE SEEN A MAJOR TRANSITION IN 'SMALL FORMAT' MOTION-PICTURE TECHNOLOGY, FROM FILM-EMULSION TRANSPARENCIES TO ELECTROMAGNETIC-OXIDE TAPE.

PETER LIPSKIS

WHEN I BEGAN MAKING MOVIES IN THE MID-70'S, 8 AND 16MM COLOR-REVERSAL FILMSTOCKS were relatively cheap and easy to work with. A 3-minute roll of Super-8 film cost about \$5, and processing at the local Kodak lab took less than two days. In the late 1980's it costs four times as much, and processing is done in Palo Alto (California) which takes about two weeks. The former local Kodak lab is now an empty building. And my Super-8 sound camera seems to have become an antique; a recent repair took six months because, apparently, schematic diagrams and a transistor were difficult to obtain. Is this progress?

It doesn't seem too long ago that 16mm color reversal films were processed locally five days a week. When I was an art-student, a TV-news cameraman used to give me raw stock left over from the 400' rolls that were used before the switch to 'electronic news gathering' (ENG). It seems ironic that the only 16mm color reversal films to survive extinction in this decade is the first such stock introduced, in 1935, Kodachrome, which many consider to possess richer colors, better blacks, and more permanent dyes than the others.

My interest in the history and evolution of film color began about ten years ago with the appearance of articles on the gradual fading of some movies from the '50's and '60's, which had turned pink because the turquoise and yellow dyes literally vanished into thin air over a period of time. However B&W and early technicolor films were not at risk. B&W emulsion is fairly stable, and the early Technicolor cameras exposed three rolls of B&W film simultaneously; one for each layer of dye in the color print. This system required large cameras with extremely precise registration and beam-splitter optics, elaborate lighting and tests, as well as more labwork and three times the storage space required by the single 'tripack' that eventually replaced it. Producers are obviously more concerned

# DESIRE IN RUINS

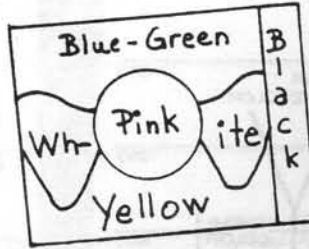
Peter Lipskis 1988

3-Color Separation (Subtractive)

DYE (Emulsion Layer) = White Light Minus...

CYAN (Blue-Green) = White minus RED  
 MAGENTA (Pink) = " " GREEN  
 YELLOW = " " BLUE  
 WHITE = " " 000  
 BLACK = " " RGB

THEORETICAL MODEL



Black & White Neg.

Emulsion Layer / Light Wavelengths

WHITE transmits all wavelengths  
 BLACK absorbs " "

CYAN Dye / RED Light Separation

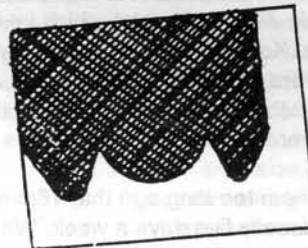
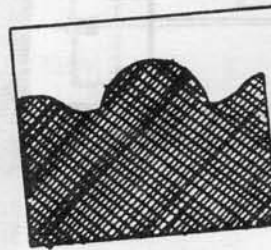
CYAN absorbs RED wavelengths  
 MAGENTA transmits RED w.l.  
 YELLOW transmits RED w.l.

MAGENTA Dye / GREEN Light Separation

CYAN transmits GREEN wavelengths  
 MAGENTA absorbs GREEN w.l.  
 YELLOW transmits GREEN w.l.

YELLOW Dye / BLUE Light Separation

CYAN transmits BLUE wavelengths  
 MAGENTA transmits BLUE w.l.  
 YELLOW absorbs BLUE w.l.



1) Red-Green-Blue	2)
Original 'Natural' Colors	Ma
Yellow Flag	F
Green Flag & Grass	
Pale Blue Sky	
Cherry Red Car	
Pink Skin	

# DESIRE IN RUINS

Peter Lipskis 1988

THE GREEN FLAG

R-B-G	3) G-R-B	4) G-B-R	5) B-G-R	6) B-R-G
G. ↔ Yel.	Cyan ↔ Mag.	Cyan → Mag. Mag. → Yel. Yel. → Cyan	Cyan ↔ Yel.	Cyan → Yel. Mag. → Cyan Yel. → Mag.
ink	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Pink
Purple	Orange	Blue	Green	Purple
Turquoise	Pink	Pink	Yellow	Yellow
Orange	Green	Olive Green	Purple	Blue
Yellow	Green	Green	Purple	Blue

with the bottom line than long-term archival value. An era ended in the early 70's when Technicolor sold their antiquated equipment to China.

As a filmmaker, I naturally began to wonder about the fate of my own footage. Was it possible to revive the defunct Technicolor process? Thus began a six-year exploration of film color, which climaxed in 1988 with the completion of 'The Green Flag'. Not only is it possible to make 16mm color separations with present day lab facilities; this technique is also the basis for a range of graphic effects of which I've only scratched the surface. What follows is an account of four works that I produced in the process of 'reinventing' three-strip Technicolor.

My first experiments with color separation resulted in 'Crystals', which was

done on the National Film Board's animation stand with the assistance of Eric Erikson. A B&W roll of snowflake images was bippedack three times with color negative stock in the animation camera; once each with a red, green and blue filter. A stroboscopic effect was achieved by pulling the film one and two frames out of sync during the second and third run-throughs. Only one out of three frames contains a pure white snowflake; the other two frames are white only where consecutive snowflake images overlap, and colored where they're different.

Next came 'Color Experiments', in which the principles of three-strip Technicolor were applied to a Bolex camera and multi-roll contact-printing. By filming each shot three times with red, green, and blue filters, some semblance of natural color was attainable where the subject didn't move; any change in position produced multi-colored ghost-like images. Three years after this work was

completed, I saw Arthur and Corinne Cantrill's color-separation films which utilized the same technique.

The most interesting discovery in my research of film-color history was the amazing array of methods developed during the early decades of this century; everything from cementing together two strips of toned monochrome film to superimposing three separate projected images. The 'Evolution of Color Processes' chart gives some idea of the many approaches which eventually fell by the wayside.

One of the few that can be simulated with present-day equipment is Kinemacolor, which was patented in 1906 and consisted of filtering alternate frames of B&W film - red and green and/or blue, both in the camera and projector. This method is known as 'additive', which is also the basis of color-TV; in contrast to the 'subtractive' system that has prevailed in film since the '30's. The former consists of adding red, green, and blue light to obtain white; the latter requires cyan (blue-green), magenta (pink) and yellow filtration of white light. Kinemacolor effects in "The Red Car" were done with optical printing. The main problem with 'additive alternate-frame' color is blurring of fast-moving objects and flicker, which was originally reduced by increasing the frame-speed to 32 or more per second.

Since building a 16mm three-strip camera was out of the question, I decided that contact-printing existing color films would be the way to achieve Technicolor-type separation. However, several obstacles immediately sprang up; special color-separation filmstock (7235) seemed impossible to obtain, and experts told me that registration would be a major problem. But I was able to persuade Tom Henderson at Alpha Cine Lab to try it with another B&W stock (7234), and the registration turned out perfect. Therefore, this technique has archival as well as creative applications. My objective in 'The Green Flag' was to show six basic color variations that are possible when the three primaries are shuffled as indicated in the diagram. I imagine that in the not too distant future it will be possible to do this sort of thing with home-computer video toys.

DESIRE IN RUINS

ANN MARIE FLEMING

A

P

R

I

L

26

1989

Hi

there

Mike

IT'S ANN MARIE FLEMING HERE, ANSWERING YOUR CALL FOR SOMETHING ABOUT "WAVING". I'm just going to write down the words right now, off the top of my head. I think I should know them backwards and forwards by now:

"Throw her in the water", my father said  
"It's the only way she'll learn"  
Plunging down for what seemed like an eternity  
Only to float to the surface on inflatable wings.

My mother has a picture in her album  
Of my grandmother, teaching me how to swim.  
But I don't remember that at all.  
I remember, later, floating in the water,  
Waiting for the jellyfish to bite.  
I used to scream when I saw them,  
So mainly, I just kept my eyes closed.

Instead of snacks, she offered me chocolate.  
Chocolate till I was sick.  
I wore chapsticked lips  
And blew kisses to everybody.  
I was just like Granny.  
I was four years old.

At five I was alone in cold Vancouver,  
writing,  
"I miss my Granny".  
But I don't remember that at all.

At six, she came to be with us,  
Beckoned by my letters, no doubt.  
She was always up early, and snored,  
too.  
Grandpa and her shared a bed for the  
first time in thirty years.

I think that's when my time stopped for  
Granny.  
The measurement now how far from then  
I'd come,  
How far from that lonely little girl.

The doctor told me to get away from her.

Spreading nerves from generation to  
generation.  
When I refused to go to graduation,  
Granny wanted to wear my cap and  
gown.  
She hated all my friends and loved  
everything I ever made.  
I wrote a poem for her.

My mother and I discussed her to no  
end,  
Trying to explain things.  
How she was a Eurasian show-biz  
princess  
A ballerina, a magicians assistant,  
A saxophone player who never knew  
where the doves went to.  
She borrowed Andrew's saxophone this  
year,  
But I only ever saw her play cards,  
Short of breath from all those cigarettes  
she sneaks.

You know, as long as I've known her,  
she's never done anything.  
Except walk the dog,  
Curse in Austrian,  
Attempt to bake bread,  
Buy pyjamas for grandpa,  
Cross me when I went on a trip  
And ask, "What do you want out of my  
young life?"

Last time I talk to her she said,  
"Ann Marie, be careful, it's cold out. It's  
snowing."  
And as I said good-bye, I couldn't see  
She was  
not waving  
but drowning.



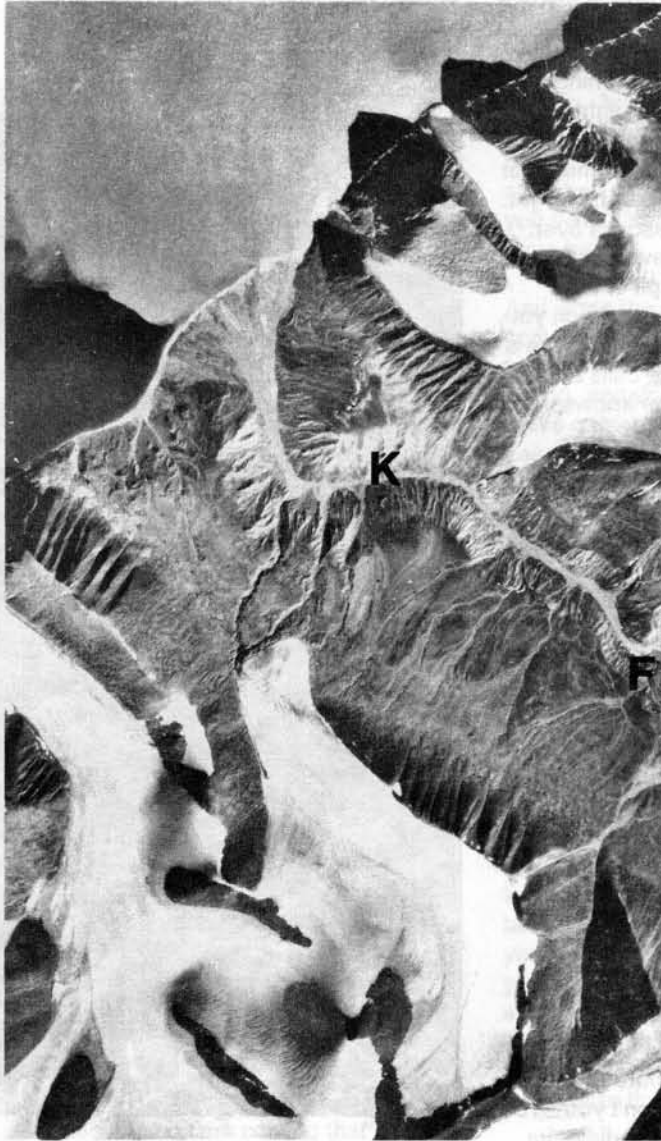
## DESIRE IN RUINS

**I KNOW THIS IS A CRAZY THING TO ASK, BUT, MAYBE COULD YOU CHECK THIS AGAINST THE FILM? I'M NOT SURE IF THOSE ARE EXACTLY THE WORDS I USED...I'M FINE WITH MY OWN THOUGHTS THOUGH, HERE THEY ARE:**

On "Waving"...well, you know, this was always meant to be a very personal film. I was doing a video documentary on mother/daughter relationships (featuring, who else? my own mother and grandmother) and had some interview footage shot when my grandmother had an aneurism, and had to be hospitalized. No one had expected it at all. And as I went every day to visit her in the hospital, hoping against hope that she would wake up and everything would be okay, and go on like it always did, yet knowing full well that it wouldn't, I had this image of a woman falling - through space, through air, falling, over and over again. Falling, not necessarily to death, but away from me. Away from everything. We had been told that one of my grandmother's frontal hemispheres had completely collapsed and if she were ever to regain consciousness, she would be a vegetable. Vegetable. What a strange word. So, one morning, at ten minutes past three, I watched almost with anticipation as the line on the monitor told me that she was dying, even though another machine was still breathing for her. It was the monitor that told me she was dead. And then the quick creep of cold up her fingers. And I felt so tired. So relieved. So angry. The funeral was three days later, after an open coffin lying in state. The next day I shot "Waving". (I don't know if you've seen it, I'm in thick water, looking calm and tranquil, but actually I'm in a lot of pain, since I have a sinus condition). But that doesn't really mean anything. And then I transferred the 16mm black and white film onto video 8, shooting slo-mo off the Steenbeck. Transferred the V8 onto 3/4", coloured it, turned up the luminescence and got the essence of what I thought I felt through this whole ordeal. I edited my grandmother talking about her life with the visuals and was completely happy with the result. This was a memento mori for myself.

And then I showed it to some people.

Who didn't get it. What did this voice have to do with this image? What did the history of this old woman have to do with



me? Okay, I said, I am going to make it so clear that you will have to understand. This is a film about death. About how we have only empty rituals to help us deal with this inevitable part of our lives. This is a film about how I feel when I lose forever the most important person in my life. And I want to communicate that to you, because that is why I am making a film. Because I want you to know. This is an elegy to my grandmother.

I wrote a script, that took me half an hour, because I had spent my entire life writing it. I transferred the image back onto film. And now I have to put it in

festivals where people can tell me that I'm not technically proficient or that they didn't like the Ave Maria that my aunt

sings at the end or that I speak a little fast or that the Satie music (which isn't Satie) is too familiar. But some of them say, "Haven't I seen that somewhere before?" And of course they have. They dream it.

So, I do tend to go on. By the way, I am finishing "You Take Care Now", another experimental treatment of some personal stuff. Dave Rimmer is going to bring it out to the Experimental Film Congress for his talk on 'Video/Film Interface'. I'd like it if you could take a look at it and tell me what you think, and maybe CFDC would like to carry that one too?

Umm, I think I'll give you a script for that one, too. Then I'll stop, before I get carried away. Too late.

*Ann Marie Fleming*

## YOU TAKE CARE NOW

### **PART 1**

I'm starting now. Close your eyes and think of a hotel room in Brindisi. You're sitting at a desk, looking out the window onto the street below. It's siesta time and there's not a lot going on out there. You're writing an entry in your journal. If you're having trouble visualizing, it looks like this:

*picture*

# DESIRE IN RUINS

You've been travelling on a train for the past three days, from Switzerland on down to the heel of Italy, trying to make it to Greece before your Eurail pass expires. You haven't washed or slept in all that time, it's early in the morning and you have all day to wait for a night boat to the Peloponnesus. The friend you met on the train has gone back to some other town to pick up a machine part he forgot. It's September. Tourist season is over. And you're alone in a city everyone has been telling you is the armpit of the world. The travel agent takes pity on you, and offers you his place to crash, have a shower, store your stuff. He calls a cab to take you there. The driver knows the place.

Oh, I almost forgot. You're female, and you're twenty-two.

*picture*

So, you're writing, after a lunch of fresh steamed prawns and enough coffee in your body that you feel yourself burning inside. You're in his room. You want to leave, but you just can't think.

So you stay anyway. Because you don't trust your intuition.

And then the locked door turns open, and the first fire starts.

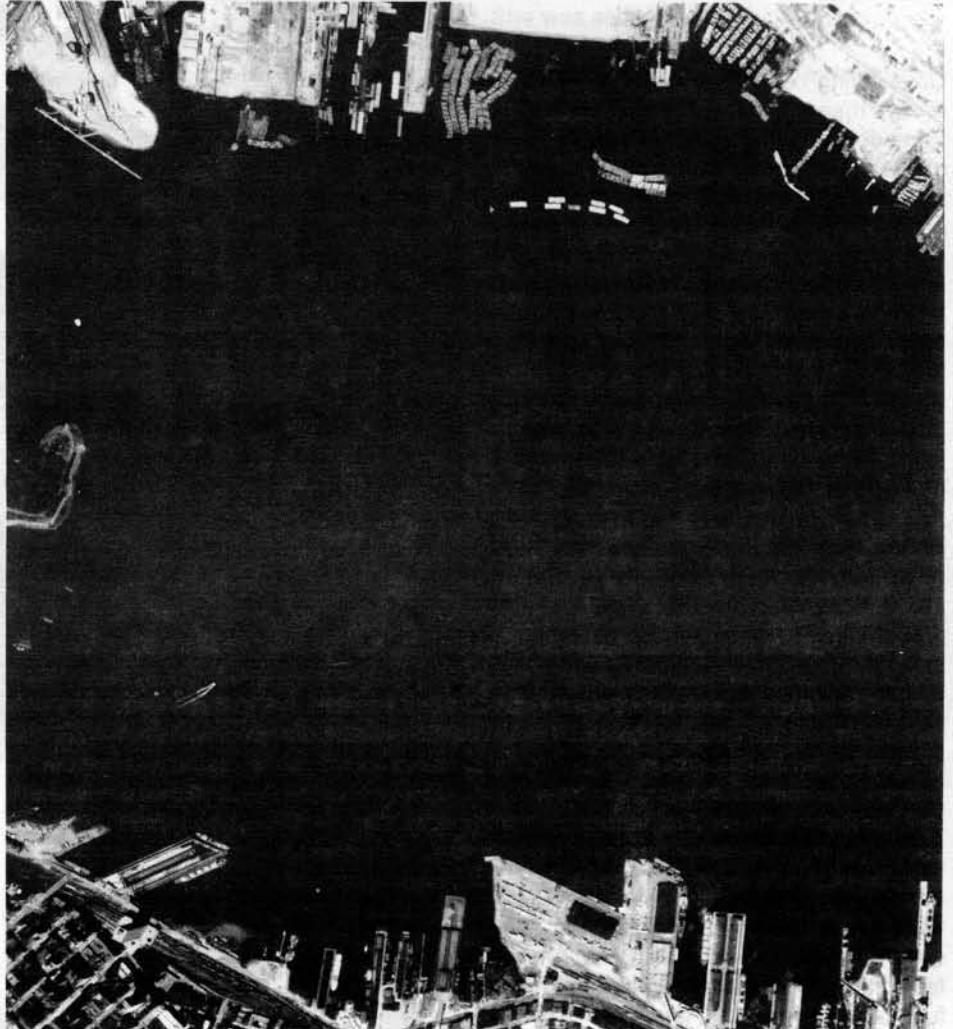
Now, the next bit is a little hard to explain. You get the idea, don't you? You get raped. Maybe a little bit of dialogue will help you to imagine...

"Why don't you come on over here and take a little nap? I think you need to rest. I'm not going to try anything...that you don't want me to..."

Now you're lying there waiting for something violent to happen, to be hit or beaten or for yourself to do something, like scream or fight or maybe pull out that ever-handy Swiss Army knife. But nothing like that passes. Because you're afraid you might hurt him, or you're afraid he might get angry and hurt you, or he'll call the police and tell them that you stole

something, and you don't speak Italian. And you've heard all about the police...And you lie there, passive and violated, feeling like someone told you you were going to win an award, and

400 years. So, you take a picture of yourself so that you can remember what the Mona Lisa looks like when she realizes Leonardo is just another leech. Outside again, amidst the shuffling feet



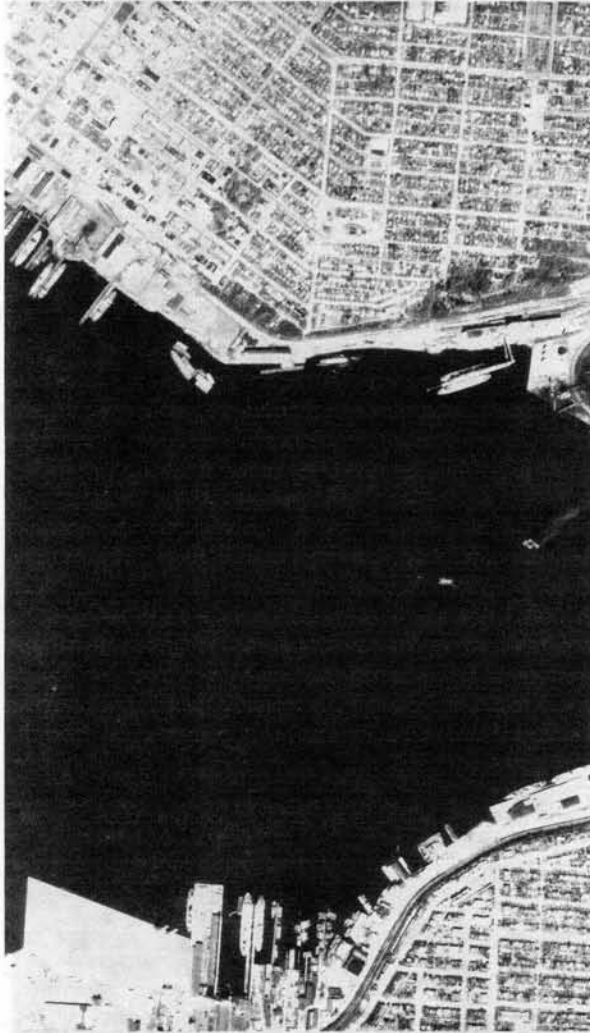
then you didn't get it. Except the award was your dignity, your sanity, your middle class inviolability. It was taken away and given to someone else who never made the mistake of going to a hotel room in a strange place with a strange man. And all you were worried about was how to get out of there with your luggage intact, how to avoid upsetting this man who not only had a black belt in Tai Kwon Do but also had your ticket for the boat out of that nightmare land, and how to get somewhere safe to sleep. God, you wanted to sleep, so bad. But he'd told you that you look just like the Giacuna, and she hasn't closed her eyes in over

of grapepickers, waiting for a job by the piazza fountain, you find yourself followed by a midget who tells you you look like Brooke Shields. All tall women probably look like Brooke Shields to a small man. You've already had your life's worth of trauma so you're not expecting it when he locks you in a small room and tires to push his tongue down your face. You don't throw him across the room, but push him gently under the rock where he came from and go out into the street with his tiny, offended ego following you, crying:

"Slut, bitch, not good enough for you, am

## D E S I R E I N R U I N S

I? Slut, bitch, poutaina. You don't think I know your type? Slut, bitch, hey, wait up? What's the matter? Wait up? Did I say something?"



Your friend from the train is there, and asks you how your day was? You say, "I had a really bad day," a really bad day? But then you look down at yourself, and you are all in one piece, and you think, at least I'm still okay.

## PART 2

This is the second part. It's January, it's cold out, it's dark, and it's just beginning to rain. You are just a few blocks away from your apartment, in Vancouver. You are with your boyfriend and you are crossing the street. The street looks like this:

*picture*

HE runs across the street before you, but you, being extra cautious, extra careful, wait for a better opportunity to cross. You wait for one side of the traffic to pass by, and then you walk out to the yellow line, to wait. Except you don't feel good. You start to panic. You think something is going to happen. Why didn't Ross wait? You start talking yourself out of it, "There are no cars coming that way,

they can see you, you're in the fucking street, there are lights, it's okay..."

Okay, you know what happens next. You feel this great black force hitting heavy against your hip, and you think "Omigod, I'm hit..." and you try not to fall. But you know you are falling. And then you hit the ground, on your face, looking up at a curb, which curb? And you think, "Oh, no". And that's all there is time for before a car runs over both your legs, and you're twisted up towards the sky, and you can hear brakes screeching and tires sliding and you think you are dead. And there are no flashbacks and you know

there is nothing more after this. And you think your face is going to be run over. And you start to scream.

But then, nothing happens. There are faces above you, and they are all helping. And you get angry, wanting to know where the driver is, and why didn't he stop? And they tell you that he did stop, and that there were two cars, and you think, "Yeah, I guess there must have been."

And when the ambulance attendants come to get you, you don't want to be touched. Something feels very very wrong, and you're not sure that you can move a thing, but there's this searing pain in your leg, and they put the oxygen mask over your face, and you decide to let it ride. And finally, Ross is there again, but he didn't see you hit. He thought you merely slipped on the yellow line. But it didn't help to hear him say, "Please don't die, please don't die", because that wasn't really the issue.

In the ambulance the attendant keeps repeating, after he threatens to tie you down if you don't stop jerking up with pain, "You know, you look really familiar? Do I know you from before?" And you say, "It must be the mask..." And they leave you in the hospital and say, "You take care, now". Like that wasn't what you'd been trying to do all along. And all you want to do is sleep but the pain won't stop, and it won't stop for months now. And you wonder what you ever did to get raped and run over in one lifetime. And you realize there is only one.

You go home, and get on your bed, and Ross takes a picture of you. You lie there, small and helpless and black and white. And it looks like this:

*picture*

And you think, wow, pictures don't tell you anything.

So you go back to your ticket taker, now your board of refuge, after all, what else can he do? And he gives you a lecture on how you're too trusting and you have to take better care of yourself, and to remember, that men here are assholes.

"Even I'm a little bit of an asshole. But then, you know that. He he he."

So, he buys you dinner, kisses you on the cheek and tells you to keep in touch, gives you his name and address. Oh, sure.

You take a taxi to the pier. It's dark out.

David Rimmer  
 Emily Carr College of Art & Design  
 1399 Johnston Street,  
 Granville Island  
 Vancouver, B.C. Canada,  
 V6H 3R9

Liu Zuofeng  
 BEIJING SCIENCE & EDUCATIONAL  
 FILM STUDIO  
 74 Xin Jie Kou Bei St.  
 Beijing 100035  
 P.R.China

May 4, 1989

Dear David Rimmer;

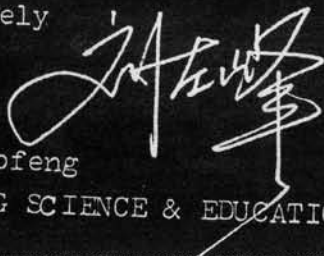
My name is Liu Zuofeng, graduated from Animation film Dept. of Beijing Film Academy in 1982. Since then I've been engaged in Beijing Science and Educational Film Studio as a scenarist-director and animation-designer. I got know you when I saw the compositions made by your students, but the first meeting is in the Shanghai International Animation Film Festival hold in China last November. In an interval during showing my classmate Mr. Zhang Xiaolan introduced our each other. I've remembered that we mentioned the works of your students, especially the film 'The Table of Content' which impressed me deeply. But the time is too short for me to ask more questions about what I saw in that big festival.

I feel, in brief, that studying from our own traditional style is necessary to produce some works for Chinese people who have been used to seeing the films in a certain style, but it's not enough. The more important thing, I think, is how to enlarge and enrich animation languages of our tradition for the interests of most people. Getting further study on what is called western style and broadening my professional knowledge is my thought after attending the festival. I eagerly hope that I could have an opportunity to realize my wish.

In this letter I'm trying to get some help on my studying plan and I wish you could kindly send me some information about your Department. Thank you.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely



Liu Zuofeng  
 BEIJING SCIENCE & EDUCATIONAL FILM STUDIO

D E S I R E F O R M I N G R E V O L U T I O N S

TYPEFACE: TYPEWRITER

# Voice From Inside China

Radio Beijing English Service-A Government Radio Station  
Announced the following:

CAPS  
↓

CRAWL TITLE  
← ACROSS SCREEN

Radio Beijing English Service (0400 GMT 11685 MHz):

"Please remember June the third, 1989! The most tragic event happened in the Chinese capital, Beijing. Thousands of people, most of them innocent civilians, were killed by fully-armed soldiers when they forced their way into city. Among the killed are our colleagues at Radio Beijing. The soldiers were riding on armored vehicles and used machine guns against thousands of local residents and students who tried to block their way. When the army conveys made the breakthrough, soldiers continued to spray their bullets indiscriminately at crowds in the street. Eyewitnesses say some armored vehicles even crushed foot soldiers who hesitated in front of the resisting civilians. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ Radio Beijing English Department deeply mourns those who died in the tragic incident and appeals to all its listeners to join our protest for the gross violation of human rights and the most barbarous suppression of the people. Because of the abnormal situation here in Beijing there is no other news ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ we could bring you. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

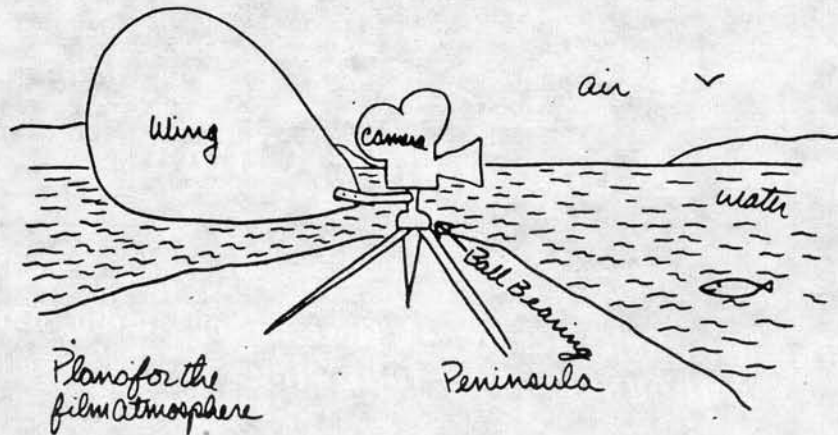
↑  
ROLL  
TEXT  
UP FROM  
BOTTOM  
TO TOP.  
(UNTIL  
SCREEN  
BLANK)

LETTERS: WHITE  
BACKGROUND: RED



Large stylized Chinese calligraphy characters in white on a black background, arranged in several lines.

DESIRE IN RUINS



CHRIS

GALLAGHER

INTERVIEW

atmosphere was made by mounting an ari flex on essentially a wind vane. constructed of bicycle parts the platform on which the camera is mounted rotates freely on a horizontal plane under the action of the wind. the camera is aimed at the horizon which divides the screen in the middle air in the top and water in the bottom with distant mountains on either side. Running at real time the camera records nine minutes of changing wind direction on Downes Point Hornby island B.C.

Chris Gallagher

1977

GEORG CSABA KOLLER

GK: So, we're talking to Chris Gallagher, and you have shown me a couple of films entitled *Plastic Surgery*, *Sideshow*, *Atmosphere* and *Eleven-Twelve*.

CG: They were made in the order of *Sideshow*, *Eleven-Twelve*, *Plastic Surgery* and *Atmosphere*.

GK: Is this your total film output to date?

CG: Everything I've done in 16mm so far.

GK: Why film for you? Why did you get involved with film?

CG: It's hard to say. I used to paint

awhile ago before I got into film, and at that time I thought that film had a lot more possibilities. You didn't have to worry about storing it and it was possible to show it to a lot of people. And I enjoy working with it too.

GK: Are you a student of Dave Rimmer's at the University of British Columbia?

CG: Yeah, I'm studying out there now part time. I graduated from UBC in '73 with a BFA so now I'm going for an MFA. I'm not sure exactly why, but I figured I might as well do it if I'm going to live in Vancouver. Also a good contact with Dave.

GK: Are you from here originally?

CG: Yeah.

CK: *Plastic Surgery* intrigued me. What were you trying to say with that film?

CG: What I was working with. The title is exactly what the whole thing is about:

*Plastic Surgery*, film being a plastic medium, etc. And it's structured around this operation that I had on my ankle where they removed a screw from each side of my ankle. I wanted to relate the

car to a garage, and a lot of fun. It seemed to be so surgical working on film and so plastic, cutting images up and splicing them in here and dissolving them there that the whole thing became a great operation.

GK: You used a lot of different techniques. Could you talk about what kind of techniques you used?

CG: I had access to an optical printer through the university and did some step printing on it. What really interested me was bipacking, making a high contrast positive and negative of an image and then sandwiching that in the printer.

Remember that shot with the TV sets which pulls back to show a couple fucking on the bed? That's a matte. And I like the idea of combining three images: one giving the whole thing a structure and then having two images working against or with each other. Something that really interested me was filming in real time on the printer. So instead of shooting one frame and then the next, I'd run the camera at 24 fps - like when the

biological and technological experience of the whole thing, together. So it was structured around those parts of the operation: the anaesthetic, the incision, then the operation and the sutures and I collected images for quite a while, some of them I photographed myself, some of them I just picked up or traded and then cut it all together according to the structures and feelings of the operation.

GK: That was an actual operation in there, that was your own ankle?

CG: Yeah, that was originally filmed in Super 8. And it was quite amusing when we filmed it because the doctors were having a big laugh. It was so mechanical, just like taking your

## DESIRE IN RUINS

knife comes in and cuts the image - that's just a still frame in the printer with the camera running at 24 fps and things were happening to that frame in real time.

**GK:** Isn't there any polarized colour?

**CG:** I don't think so. I think the mattes give that effect. Oh, you may be thinking of some stuff I shot off the TV. The particular shot is Evel Knievel's rocket launch which goes up and turns over and that was achieved by adjusting the colour on the TV set. And I imagine some of the colour was tinted somewhat in the prints.

**GK:** There were also some abstract patterns that looked like polarized colour, but I don't know...so what was the message of the film?

**CG:** Well, what I wanted people to do was to think of film or life or imagery in terms of surgery and the whole metaphor of the hospital: when you're sick, you go to the hospital and a surgeon works on you. And surgery to me seems like a combination of technology working through biology. You relate to the imagery of the people as biological, as a living with spirit. But the process is pure technology, synchronizers and tape splicers, hot splicers and cameras. And since I've gone through this operation the whole thing came together, and what I was working at was this connection between biology and technology and how it related to film and imagery.

**GK:** You juxtaposed a lot of different images: like the fish being cut up, what other kinds of images did you have in there?

**CG:** In that sequence first you come out of this tunnel and there's a sausage, I think, that's cut with a pair of scissors and I was getting into the idea of just cutting things apart, and then it goes to my ankle being cut and then it goes to the film being cut, the blade going through.

**GK:** How did you get funding for it?

**CG:** I got a Canada Council grant.

**GK:** How long is that film?

**CG:** Nineteen minutes.

**GK:** What was the budget?

**CG:** I spent about two thousand.

**GK:** Quite interesting. How did you make the soundtrack?

**CG:** Composed that on a Bukla synthesizer. I kept the sound and the picture completely separate in terms of composition. I had one space where I'd cut the picture and another where I'd sit down at

the synthesizer and work out sound textures I felt worked with the image and later I cut it to the picture. It's a traditional dramatic approach where the sound basically reinforces the picture.

**GK:** *Sideshow* is a different kind of film. It's a kind of black comedy.

**CG:** Yeah, that was the first film I made in school, in my last year at UBC. What interested me was the idea of having a puppet on your knee and making it talk and all that but the fact that it was a real baby kind of added the punch to it. And this baby has such funny...it looks like someone's torturing it but that's not really the case, she just looked like that on screen.

**GK:** You didn't actually put her into the attache case at the end, that must have been a cheat shot?

**CG:** Yeah, we couldn't do that to her because her mother was there. I've had really strange reactions. Some people think I'm a real jerk. They think it's goes a little too far but I didn't intend it that way, I thought of it as something light. I didn't realize it was going to come off with that black comedy effect.

**GK:** Now *Atmosphere* is something like Michael Snow's *Back and Forth* panning. What was the reason behind that?

**CG:** Well, you saw the still at the end, right? Well that gives the whole film away. The film's like a puzzle, it's going back and forth and you sit there and try to figure out why he's doing this and we see in the end it's the wind, you see it's just the currents of the atmosphere. The camera's mounted on a platform with a tail behind it, just like a weathervane and the direction of the wind makes the camera move, so I was interested in having as little to do with the film as possible, I just built a little contraption out of bicycle parts and set it

up in a landscape and turned on the camera when it felt like a good time and let it run.

**GK:** So the film basically made itself?

**CG:** Yeah. It was great cause you're standing there behind the camera and it really blew to one side and it looked like it was going to come right around and show the filmmaker standing there, but it never did. And it's such a simple film - just put the film in the camera and set up the situation. I didn't cut any of it, just presented it. The wind became the actual subject matter of the whole thing. And



the sound track is a cut off a record which I made a whole bunch of loops out of particular sections and built up layers of loops and cut back and forth from the loops.

**GK:** The soundtrack is really nice, it really works. Nice rhythm to it.

**CG:** It's great drumming.

# DESIRE IN RUINS

**GK:** Eleven Twelve - I liked it, it's got a great texture to it, all traffic signs superimposed.

**CG:** That was all done in the camera on one piece of film.

**GK:** Why did you show the boat? That intrigued me.

**CG:** Well, I'm not too sure about that myself. I was interested in the dynamic movement of it across the frame and all these signals are about movements or directions cause when you see a traffic light you're always going towards it or going under it and what interested me was just the movement there.

**GK:** What's in store for the future for you? What do you hope to do with your filmmaking?

**CG:** Keep making some films. I got a bunch of footage right now that's all in the can and I'm trying to get some money together to finish it off and make several films. I'm interested in working with sync sound, real time events. Setting up fairly simple situations, little segments similar to *Atmosphere* where I don't really have a great deal to do with it, where I don't take it back to the cutting room.

**GK:** It's very hard to survive making experimental films. How do you make a living?

**CG:** Well I've got some part time jobs here and there and basically do other things besides filmmaking. Sometimes I work in the industry as an assistant cameraperson or a gopher.

**GK:** Once you get your MFA what do you hope to do with it?

**CG:** Put it on the wall I guess. I don't know exactly what I'm going to do with it really. I just thought it would be a useful thing to have. It's kind of like registering with the academic community that you're



this serious about your work. I see it basically as a tool because I couldn't see myself committed to the academic life.

**GK:** Are you in touch with other experimental filmmakers in Vancouver?

**CG:** Yeah. Gordon (Kidd) and Dave (Rimmer) and Peter (Lipskis), Al Razutis a little bit here and there. It's funny, the people in Vancouver don't really...they're all independent, they all work at their own place and nobody really gets together and shows each other film clips or anything like that. It's all quite...there's a lot of boundaries it seems between filmmakers.

**GK:** Have you been influenced by anybody else's work?

**CG:** I guess it's obvious. I'm influenced by everything from *You Asked For It* to Pat O'Neill's work. You can see his influence in *Plastic Surgery*.

**GK:** I don't know him at all - who is Pat O'Neill?

**CG:** He's from Los Angeles and he's into optical printing. He uses a lot of rich

effects, really nice colours, extremely beautiful work. I like Dave Rimmer's work a lot. I used to work as a projectionist for the Pacific Cinematheque and I saw acres of films. We don't get that much experimental film out here anyways. But it's getting better.

**GK:** It's getting better?

**CG:** Well, you know Pumps, you spoke to Gordon well he's got a place where a bunch of other artists hang out and they're going to start putting on some films shows there if they get some financing from the Canada Council which would be nice, because the Cinematheque's more of a formal thing, more like a regular theatre where this would be nice because people could just bring films

down and show them.

**GK:** A lot of people are saying that experimental films belong to the sixties and they're a dying art in the seventies. You don't agree with that?

**CG:** No, I don't think so. Maybe the term is dying because 'experimental' is such a nebulous term no one knows what it means. Are these films experiments or are they real? I think we need a new term for our kind of filmmaking. People need to regard films with the same attitude they would approach a piece of sculpture or painting. Everyone seems to have these ideas when they go to see a film that it should conform to what they've seen in the past and it's hard to get people to think of movies outside of entertainment.

**GK:** What about money in the future - to continue to make work?

**CG:** I guess you have to simplify the filmmaking process so it doesn't cost so much - you don't have much choice.



## DESIRE IN RUINS

MARILYN JULL

SEEING

**AVANT GARDE FILMMAKERS HAVE OFTEN EMPHASIZED THE PARTICULAR SUITABILITY OF THE FILM MEDIUM FOR DEPICTING THE CONTENTS OF CONSCIOUSNESS, WITH ANALOGIES BEING MADE BETWEEN THE STRUCTURES OF FILM AND THE STRUCTURES OF THE HUMAN MIND. WITH *SEEING IN THE RAIN* (1981), GALLAGHER CONTINUES IN THIS TRADITION, PROVIDING AN EQUATION BETWEEN FILM AND CONSCIOUSNESS WHICH LEADS THE VIEWER TO INTERNALIZE THE EXPERIENCE OF THE FILM DURING THE COURSE OF ITS RUNNING, AND TO IDENTIFY WITH ITS RHYTHMS.** At the same time, he manages to evoke a very personal sense of place and time, as we share his journey through the streets of downtown Vancouver on one typically grey and rainy day.

The film is shot through the front window of a bus as it proceeds down Granville Street toward the city centre. The raindrops on its surface make us aware of this window as the foreground plane of the image, while emphasizing also the framing function of image-making and the idea of the photographic image as a 'window on the world'. At the same time, the movement of the windshield wiper from side to side marks out that space which is our field of view, moving back and forth from frame edge to frame

edge. The beat which is thus set up by this visual rhythm, accentuated by its corresponding sound on the soundtrack, becomes increasingly compelling as Gallagher begins to cut the film at precisely those points at which the wiper meets the edge of the frame. These visual cuts create a sense of jumping forward and backward as the bus proceeds down the street, jumping ahead, that is, to where the preceding shot indicated the bus was headed, and then back again to that point on the street where it had just been. As the film progresses, this technique also progresses in its effect, from, at first, giving a sense of physically moving forward and back, in and out of the illusory three-dimensional depth of the image, to becoming a parallel for, and creating in the viewer feelings of, anticipation and recollection, as if the jumps were taking place in one's mind - in the mind of the traveller, that is, as s/he becomes conscious of the duration of the bus trip, and an awareness of where s/he is becomes mixed with an awareness of where s/he was and soon will be.

As the bus progresses, haltingly, toward its destination, this destination becomes equated also with the destination of the film itself, foregrounding yet another essential aspect of the medium - that it is a medium of duration, leading to a conclusion. Thus, two of the

INTHE

film's essential qualities, space and time, interact with one another on multiple levels, with the back and forth movement of the windshield wipers marking out space, as well as establishing a metronome-like measuring of time (which establishes, in turn, a particular rhythm in our minds), and the cutting technique of the film creating a feeling of moving forward and backward in space (into the illusory depth and back again to the picture surface), while serving also as a demonstration of the anticipation and recollection of passing moments.

At several points in the film the bus pulls into a stop to let more passengers on, and the view in depth is replaced by a flatter image of the back of another bus. This temporary denial of space is accompanied by a slight sticking of the windshield wiper, an arresting measure akin to mental frustration so long as we continue to anticipate a smooth unbroken journey. These temporary delays and rhythmic instabilities add a tension to the work which heightens viewer identification and involvement, making it impossible to 'watch' the film passively. Rather, one experiences the film actively, experiencing film as film, while at the same time recognizing a familiar 'bus experience' and its attendant mood.

RAIN

As the bus draws nearer to its destination, and the film to its conclusion, the jumps in space and time become more pronounced. At one point, the bus is halted at an intersection and the sound of traffic and windshield wipers is temporarily eliminated. In silence, we resume our movement across the intersection and further down the street, this temporary absence of sound further intensifying the rhythms it previously helped to establish. The sound resumes as the cuts in space and time become more frequent and accentuated, while the other bus being, in turns, directly 'in front' of us and further down the street - and our sense of nearing our destination is heightened.

By this time we have entered the group of buildings we had previously viewed from a distance (and anticipated entering, through forward cuts). The streets are busier, and there is a feeling of having been taken in and 'enclosed' by the surrounding buildings, moving, as we have, from an 'open' to a more 'closed' space before reaching our final stop - and the closure of the film - with the final click of the metronome/windshield wiper, as the passengers disembark.

## A LETTER FROM BRUCE BAILLIE

One time, perhaps it was in 1963, Will Hindle and I went out to shoot an ice skating show for PM West, SF TV. I remember the cold, flashing, icy milieu and his sharp-edged 3" Kodak lens, the blue and yellow boxes of fresh 7252, the echoing auditorium from not long ago. Where has it gone? Almost nothing remains.

Will died for his art. I am exiled, Stan B. travels to Canada. Charles L. hanging on in the same old NY apt. of his dear mother, Jonas and Hollis continue the battle, Canyon reaches a mature 28 years - the (SF) Art Institute has become another 'school' staffed by the employed - nearly all the old friends disappeared like the trail we made then, from SF and NY through Ann Arbor, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, Houston -

The key was necessity. It was - we were needed. When this natural premise to life has had its time like the earth herself, all things will wither, waiting, on another season.

Carrying our giant banana leaves for umbrellas in a sudden December deluge. We have this (daily) urgency in my new home, Tohol, the Philippines. My sisters and I carry rice, fish, cocoa and pineapple up this new trail into the jungle, passing friendly neighbors. The old men and women wave from their yards with singing pigs, goats, dogs and children - inside, the shy unmarried women's eyes in the darkness - rooms behind blinking shutters sparkle like Will's lenses did shine for that short time in SF, now 25 years past. Not gone. My let up, old legs return to 20, my coast is clear - we press on up the trail to water and wash our sweating bodies.

The women bathe in thin cotton dresses, joking in their often vulgar Visayan. I smile at this blessing from Earth whom we have all exulted, all gone but never out of mind.

What to do, now isolated in

these peak years by the curious perfidities of modern society? Mere written notes by an illiterate in his small boat far from contact with listening ear and attentive eye? Film stock defunct - the last roll of Kodachrome buried with fallen warriors. Video, a pain to the soul. The new key is 'better business' already corrupt everywhere. Maudlin sexual politics and treacherous systems - taxes, investments, insurance, utilities, education, housing, courts, etc. deified mundanery.

My audience, dear ones, are the crow and seagull here, whose applause or need is for more bread. Or abroad, all those millions of wretchedly poor who likewise beg for more bread. Truly a fertile field.

I loved Will Hindle, though we were not like brothers. I only appeared now and then as a friendly body to listen and sometimes play assistant. Our paths were our own, though we were friends and compatriots. For Stan, Bruce C., Paul T., Scott, Charles, Gunvor, Jonas, Chicky, and the other few, our arguments are still vari-colored as those banners which once fluttered ostentatiously in the wind of another time. Those vagrant souls, still lights which see and are seen, like the ghostly night lights (eniniputs) above my father-in-law's rice fields - filled with mystery and tales of sun and sea, and the primordial minds and memory of Paradise forgotten by busily embodied commuters or employees of time and the short duration of an inescapably altered life which none of us ever described as having.

*Bruce Baillie with Lorie Baillie expecting  
a few notes on Feb. 12, 1989  
South South, Washington*

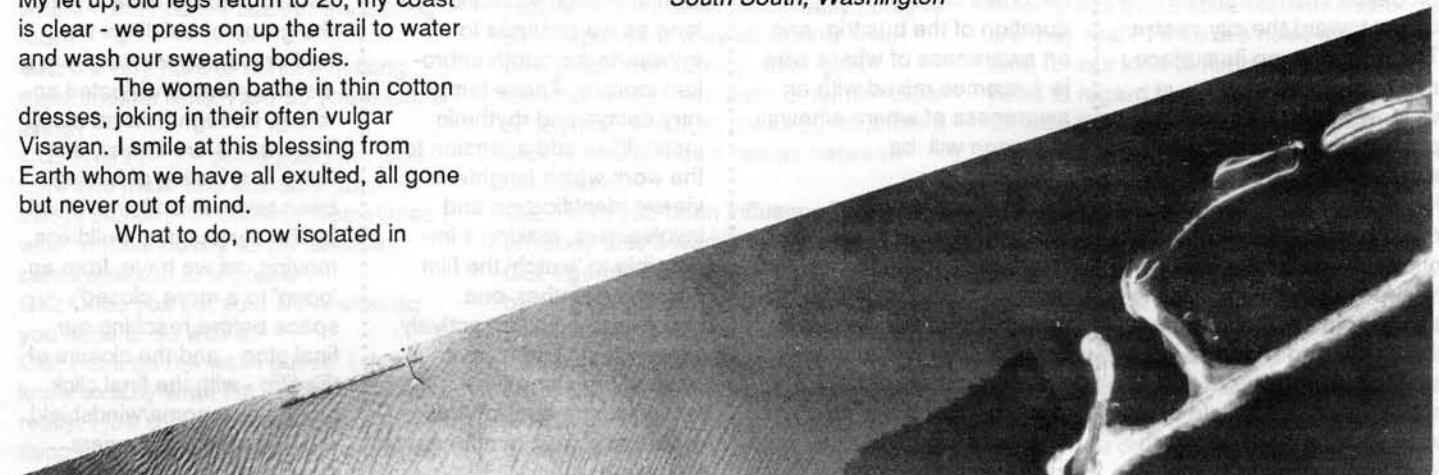
## LETTER FROM KIRK TOUGAS

Thanks for your letter of April 20. Though I think your idea for expanding the newsletter is great (certainly it keeps the lines of communication open), I considered your request for a contribution, and realized that I can't really help you. I basically belong to another school of thought, which says that the only way to critique a film is to make a better one. I prefer to find ways within the medium itself to address what interests me as an artist. Talk is cheap; more challenging is to find the solutions and the questions, within those images, those sounds, and the relationship between.

The appropriation of the film medium by theorists, critics, university professors, though intellectually fascinating, results in the devaluation of the film experience itself and subjugates film to written or spoken text. It is true that this writing can help us explore the areas evoked/invoked by the artist, and allow us to share more deeply the creative paradoxes, ironies, emotions and beauty therein.


Much more frequently however, most writing is a dilution of the experience, primarily, I guess, because the intellect, insecure before the aesthetic experience, must prove its ability to name, quantify, control and dominate. If an artist, through a film, has spoken to me, I know it. Additional comments by the artist are superfluous (or, if they're relevant and necessary, should be in the film).

Most of the chatter is worthy of only the most cursory attention.



DESIRE IN RUINS

JOANNE  
YAMAGUCHI



# THE PAINTED WORD

**KIRK TOUGAS' FILM ENTERS THE VIEWER'S CONSCIOUSNESS WITH A QUOTATION FROM TOM WOLFE'S  
*THE PAINTED WORD* :**

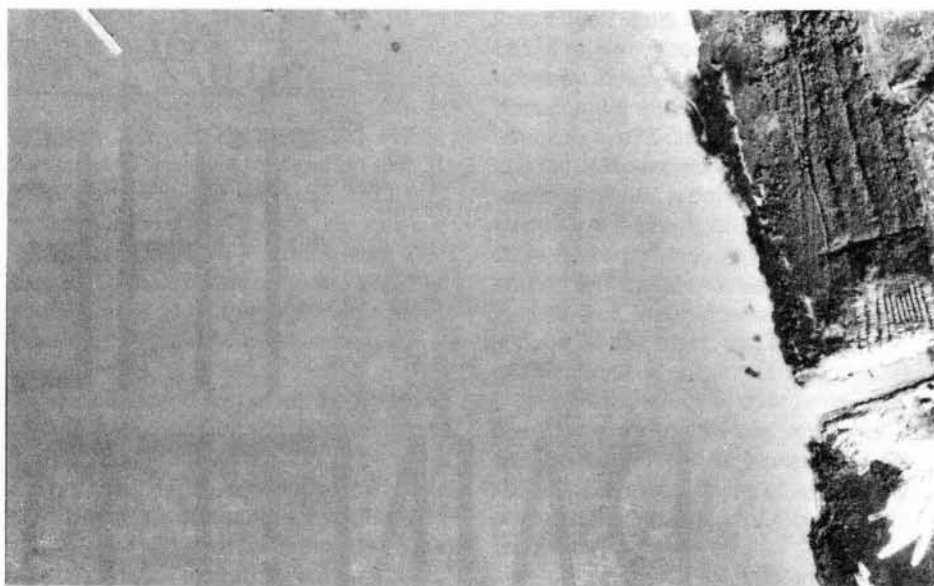
"FOR A FEW YEARS NOW, REALISTIC PAINTERS OF ALL SORTS, REAL NINETEENTH CENTURY TYPES INCLUDED, WITH 3-D AND ALL THE OTHER FORBIDDEN SWEETS, HAVE BEEN CREEPING OUT OF THE STALAGS, CRAWL SPACES, DP CAMPS, DESERTER COMMUNES, AND OTHER PLACES OF EXILE, OTHER CANADAS OF THE SOUL."

*RETURN TO DEPARTURE*, both the film and the painting, forms a different class. We might call it 'critical realism'. The film mirrors and manipulates the filmic sense data, consisting of pointillist brush strokes of painter Chi O'Farrell. Through optical printing and editing, Tougas performs montage magic, Tit-for-Tat, with O'Farrell's painting. The painting is half hyper-realist, half metaphysical, a 15.5" X 19.5" egg tempera piece.

Within the four walls of the painting, there is a sensuously real door knob, brass plate with keyhole, a shadowy hand that seems to reach tentatively toward the door knob. O'Farrell says, "You never know what's on the other side". With a realist attitude like this, who needs anti-realism?

But of course, O'Farrell's remark is the point of pointillist critical attack of certitude presupposed by realisms generally, especially the real 19th century type. The point of

## D E S I R E / I N R U I N S



*Return to Departure* is to show us the tricks of the illusion-makers, the realist magicians. You take dabs of colour, the yolk of an egg, let the albumin alchemically bond elements together like oil and water. Presto. You hold in your hands the prestidigitation of quantum leaps in nature and knowledge gaps in epistemology.

Paradoxically, it is through the everyday egg, the apparent continuity of the everyday, that we come to see discontinuity. The pragmatism of everyday life motivates a sense of continuity. (We do not have time to wonder whether the table is solid or not.) This pragmatism of perception carries over into art. The result is the view that mundane representation is "realistic". Critical realism does not accept this approach aesthetically, politically, or epistemologically.

Tougas says of the film that it is a fiction, a "fictional invocation or representation of a mind, the painter's mind, as he fell into a black hole". This refers to days of wasting plate after plate of pigment, in futile attempts to mix the right shadow colour, thinking all the while that the problem lay in not being able to mix the right colour. This is like supposing that the problem of life lies in not being able to make a cake or find an apartment.

O'Farrell does in fact make two moves during the six months filming period. The first move is mentioned on the sound track but not visually signalled; the

second is shown, but not mentioned. More pieces or points are thus thrown into the boiling montage, the tit-for-tat tournament between painter and filmmaker. As in any good tournament, the matches form an intriguing set of possible outcomes. Then suddenly there is an emergence or evolution of revelation. The painting is finished and is astonishingly beautiful. At the same time, one is amused, remembering constitutive particles of the now finished illusion, e.g. the "problem" of whether O'Farrell is going to reshape the fingertip of the hand. Will he take off a whole quarter inch? (He has, as he tells us at the end, with sandpaper. One of the subtitles of the film is "watching pigment dry and other realisms".)

Critical realism is a kind of commitment, like underpainting. O'Farrell labours long on underpainting. Tougas spends most of the film on a tandem commitment to the particle structure which will have subliminal effects. O'Farrell tells us that the underpaint provides tonal values and colouristic hues which will be subliminal. Seeing the illusion of realism is tantamount to seeing the subliminal.

The painter mixes colours and speaks of relationships, aesthetic and personal. We hear a child ask how long until dinner, and hear him reply "I'm just trying to solve a problem here". Yeah, the problem of subliminality. How to bring that out of the penumbral mind. The brush strokes and problem-solving go on

seemingly forever, yet at a point, like a big bang, the muted, roundish under-painted shape, a sort of mandala of a mushroom, has become a profoundly seductive door knob, shining brightly, glamorously. He says "the brass plate is really consolidating". The brass plate that frames the keyhole is mirrored by a filmic gaze upon the reflecting lenses of the painter's eyeglasses. O'Farrell's life is "really consolidating". Particles consolidate into objects. Life events move quickly now. The shadowy hand transfixes us, thus consolidating us. The painter has said that he would "rather have the fingers relaxed; let the fear be secret". But we know by now that the secret is fear, fear of what may be on the other side of the locked door.

The paradox here is that we are being told that one can go home again, but that it must be a vertical rather than a horizontal return. You can go home if it means dragging yourself out of the exile of a black hole. You can get out of exile if you're willing to make the commitment to paint a structure that is (relatively) dependable. You can construct such a structure when you see that "natural" objects can take any colour and any shape. In expressing your version of the object, you create an illusion, but of a real thing, sort of. When you can create an illusion that looks like a natural object, then you can return to departure. You can build anything - paintings, relationships, politics.

The sounds and music in *Return to Departure* must be heard rather than described. These are also particles of data. They come from the real situation, but are then manipulated by the filmmaker in editing to formulate his interpretation. Lyrics of familiar melodies (from the radio, as they happened in the artist's apartment) which might have been nostalgic do not function nostalgically. Nostalgia belabours familiarity; but in *Return* the familiar is stripped, then amplified. What do lyrics from *Moon River* mean to you? "We're after the same...rainbow's end..." An interpersonal confession? In *Return to Departure* the lyrical is used technically, just as there is lyricism of technique. It is the painter and the filmmaker who are after the same rainbow's end: critical realism of the endlessly subliminal.

## DESIRE IN RUINS

1.

charm, value, ethic tactic & gender, in writing

ELLIE EPP

2.

what is always transmitted is the quality of a mind

precisely transmitted is the quality of the moment writing

revision mixes times revised writing is writing by more than one person

3.

reading scans through to the rules someone is writing by

the scanning isn't done in language, it's done in something like gesture, from a hovering behind, like 'noting'

what's noticed is experience (political, erotic, sensory), nerve, acuity, solitude

the rules i write by, those i'm in reference to now, those i remember struggling in, undiscussed: familiar unspoken suspension in a space of charges

rules keep up with ability so they're next to impossible that is tactical but not felt as tactical; it is felt as ethical/technical absolute other writers are judged by

4.

certain other peoples' work is there alongside like a terminal whose other pole is what i have to write, my own time

the unending tension in relation to home language and school language

5.

wanting everything to be what it is

anger to be anger given to the person desire to be desire given, seduction to be successful

memory to be precisely memory, fantasy to be precisely fantasy

the intuition in fantasy to be known for what it is

writing to be whatever it can be when it is no longer a displacement

6.

'built by the extremely delicate decisions of conscience'

the whole of the writer

'writing inside the hologram already formed'

'an embodiment of values &amp; responsiveness'

7.

structuring concerns having to do with the history of a genre are a death

8.

any phrase contexts itself

a phrase has a world implied

9.

if writing grips there is something real in it, but look carefully

the pleasure in attractive writing is information like the information

in sexual attraction it signals that something there is worth perpetuating; but it can be perpetuated without ever being recognized

10.

it is better for a meaning to be read than to passed on unread as a striking or 'beautiful' thing

11.

what attracts in writing is often an unconscious recognition unrecognized homology, underreference

to: body part or function, sexuality, the life span, undiscovered physical law, unarticulated experience structures (these may amount to the same thing)

imagination likes what refers to itself

12.

the sexuality writing works includes powerfully: birth and the

# DESIRE IN RUINS



long consciousness before birth, which was previous to language  
and now, stranded behind language, tries to make its way through  
into the sort of memory that is made in language

13.  
the personal body, the interpersonal network, the locale,  
maybe the larger bodies, whole earth, universe and  
further, seems to transmit in the writing of some who experi-  
ence  
themselves as persons, writing as persons

writers can write what they themselves don't know or misread

i want to know what is being said through me and by whom, for  
whose use

i also want the elation of writing beyond myself

14.  
the glammers possible in writing are used politically as  
seduction: to slip (unconsciously) the image of the self  
(unconsciously received) into the other to install one's own time  
in the other

the image and knowledge of oneself installed in the other is a  
transmitter, receiver vitality and information can pass  
through ie it can be used vampiristically or perhaps  
benevolently

15.  
those who are connected 'psychically' whether or not they know  
each other seem to work for or with each other and to have  
information about each other's work and state

the information may be oddly coded and is often misunderstood

16.  
there always has to be more precision in writing than i know  
the reason for, because another range of consciousness can  
see what i can't now see

there's no possibility of getting it all but if the few traces  
are accurate the rest will be accurately implied

17.  
the relation of hand and voice, voice and undervoice, when  
these separate: i know hardly anything about this except  
that there is a dialogue in writing where it happens

## DESIRE IN RUINS

FUMIKO KIYOOKA

## FINISHING SAYS

What can be a true expression of experience  
of a celluloid reality

The divided circularity of a mind's play  
against which convention dominates  
destruction  
and the seepage of laughable intrinsic/  
eases

plays out within formalities  
a pseudo undimensional play on troubles  
of female femininity pretty neurotic  
norms of prescribed witchiness/mother  
hood:

The forever fear of true fear  
the vastness of unknown experienced  
dimensions of existent  
within the order of the fighting bull  
eating it's own heart out.

Domineering the perception  
into depths which hold a childhood  
longing  
the neverending  
unfillfillment of the psycho logical  
escape from early twinges of  
emotional anger at the situation  
of tigers: presenting the present  
order of jungles sterility.

Undress the capacious disordered  
frustrations and dissatisfactions to find  
a soft belly hiding amidst a hard  
wall of reason

the play of light

if one can only grasp  
that balance  
then how much more tedious  
struggling  
would have to go on

DESIRE IN RUINS

OLIVER HOCKENHULL

TO BEGIN IS TO PROPOSE THE ARTIFICE OF MEANS. CINEMA IS DEATH AT WORK. SPEAKING I WHICH IS ANYWAYS A RELIANCE UPON THE INSIGHTS OF THE MECHANISM OF SIMULATION ITSELF AND INSPITE OF THE REIGN OF AN INFECTED SYSTEM OF MEDIOCRITY AND THE MYTHOLOGIES OF THE QUOTE AVANT-GARDE END-QUOTE. TO BEGIN: WE KNOW OF GRACE AS THE FLAYED BODY OF INTENTION, A STATE BEYOND NAKEDNESS, A LITERALLY HANGING IN AIR

MOVING

AN OBSESSION WITH THE NECESSARY SACRAMENT AND OBEISSANCE THAT PAYS BACK IN LUMINOUS SHADOWS THE HUMAN REMAINS OF A CAUSTIC VIOLENCE: LIFE; THE CITY OF GOD OR IN OTHER WORDS THE TEMPTING ILLUSION OF PROFOUND SATISFACTION DISPLAYED MOMENTARILY BY DOGS EATING DOGS

ZERO

THIS IS A THEME THAT HAS NO POINT, NO RESOLUTION, NO NARRATIVITY. THE UNADULTRATION OF THE ROPE, THE TREE, AND THE SUSPENSION BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH SURROUNDED BY THE CLUTTER OF MEMORY ...INEFFICIENT SOLUTIONS. INSUFFICIENT THEORIES. INSIPID ACTIONS...

(AND A RETCHING EXAMPLE OF INTERIORITY)

THE DISTANCE OF PROJECTION AND RECEPTION IN THE CATASTROPHIC AND NOSTALGIC DESIRES OF LOVER AND LOVE. THE WILL TO NOTHINGNESS EXPERIENCES ITS MOST PROFOUND EXPRESSION IN THIS COLLAPSE OF SELF. THINKING OF SCHROETER'S BLOOD ROSE SOUP, AND REPETITION. WE ARE NOT SELF POSSESSED, WE CAN ONLY BE POSSESSED BY OUR DESIRE, TO REPEAT, THIS DISASTER OF SELF INTO ANOTHER, OTHERS, THE WORLD. GRACE AS A DOCUMENT OF PERVERSION (THE WORTHLESSNESS OF YOUR FEAR AND DISEASE.)

POINT:

TO REPEAT, WE PUT OUT ALL OUR TEETH, OUR TONGUES FLAP IN THE WIND OF THE REEKING OPPORTUNISM OF A CARREER IN MARGINALITY PART OF THE GOVERNMENT BREAD-LINES—QUOTE AVANT-GARDE END QUOTE

OH CANADA!  
SUNG HERE

WE HOPE UPON NOTHINGNESS AS NOTHINGNESS DESTROYS OUR HOPELESS HOPE. BUT WE SEEK AN AFFIRMATION OF EXPERIENCE, OF A SORT OF UNEXPLAINABLE EXPERIENCE, IN OTHER WORDS. THE CONTINUING AND FINAL. THE NOISE OF OUR LABOUR FILLS THE AIR SO THAT IT HAS BECOME DIFFICULT TO HEAR. OUR ACCUMULATED FEAR THE WEIGHT OF INDIFFERENCE OR IN OTHER WORDS OUR ACCUMULATED FEAR THE WEIGHT OF A HISTORY, NOT OUR OWN, WE SWEAR—ALL OUR FATHERS ARE GRAVES.

THE HISTORY OF TRUTH IS THE HISTORY OF THE ECONOMY OF THE NEGATIVE. IT IS NECESSARY, AND IT IS PERHAPS TIME TO COME BACK TO THE AHISTORICAL IN A SENSE RADICALLY OPPOSED TO THAT OF CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY; NOT TO



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MISCONSTRUE NEGATIVITY, BUT THIS TIME TO AFFIRM IT-  
SILENTLY. IT IS NEGATIVITY AND NOT POSITIVE TRUTH THAT IS THE NONHISTORICAL  
CAPITAL OF HISTORY; IN QUESTION THEN WOULD BE A NEGATIVITY SO NEGATIVE  
THAT IT COULD NOT BE CALLED SUCH ANY LONGER. WHEN JOY IS FELT OUT  
OF A DOG'S WAGGING TAIL.—(NO WHIFF OF PESSIMISM HERE)

-A BERLIN PLAYGROUND-  
IN THE WEST COAST RAIN

IN THE IMMEDIATE BACKGROUND IMAGERY OF THE BOMBED AND REBUILT  
SPUN IN MONSTERS AND TOYS A REMINDER OF FUTILITY AND THE HYPNOTIC  
CIRCLE AS IF WE HAD DECIDED AND NOT MERELY ACCEPTED, OUR INHERITANCE  
OF DEPENDENCE, OUR COMPLIANCE WITH THE MERCHANTS OF SUBLIMATION  
AND THE IDIOTS OF CENTRAL CONTROL.

THE PROJECT TO REPLACE REASON, WHICH IS TO SAY MEMORY, WHICH IS TO SAY  
RUIN. TO REPLACE REASON AS REASON HAS REPLACED THE HUMAN BOTH  
DECIDABLE INEPTS WAITING FOR GODOT, OR ANOTHER SUITABLE NON-ENTITY - A  
FILM PERHAPS THEY HAVEN'T SEEN BEFORE. ANYWAYS, GONE, IMPATIENT, FOR A  
MORSEL OF INSIGHT INTO A MISERABLE PREDICAMENT, TO FIND SOLACE IN THE  
POETIC, IN THE PRETTILY COMPOSED, IN THE INTELLECTUALLY STIMULATING, IN THE  
SPIRITUALLY EDIFYING, ON AND ON...THIS LIFE ITSELF, IF LIFE IT IS TO BE CALLED,  
FROM WHICH NONE CAN BE DELIVERED FROM THE CONVENIENCE STORE OF  
INTERPRETATION TO THE PIZZA HUTS OF MODERNITY AND ITS VARIATIONS, VARIETIES,  
THE TASTE OF A GENERATION THE FREEDOM OF THE  
7/11 OF CHOICE.

SO TO FILM, THE PLASTERING OF IMAGES UPON IMAGES, INJECTIONS OF LOSS.  
THE PRINCIPLE OF THE FAT MAN.  
EVERYMAN.  
NEED.

AND THE INSATIABILITY OF THE EMPLOYED TO CONSUME. CONSUMED TO  
EMPLOY. FOLLOWED BY ROTE, FOLLOWED BY ROTE  
QUOTE, QUOTE, QUOTE, AND TO BE POLITE AND NOT THROW ROCKS  
(SHEEP AS FILM AS SHEEP AS POETRY OR HOW I WISH I WAS JAMES JOYCE.)

WOMB ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE  
IN THIS ABSENCE OF RESISTANCE. IN THIS CELEBRATED DARKNESS.

AND THE INCENSED OFFERINGS OF MIRRORED SELF PROCLAIMED IDIOMS,  
AMAZE YOU WITH SPECIAL EFFECTS, AND SUBJECTIVE EUTHANASIA - THE ELECTIVE  
EJACULATION

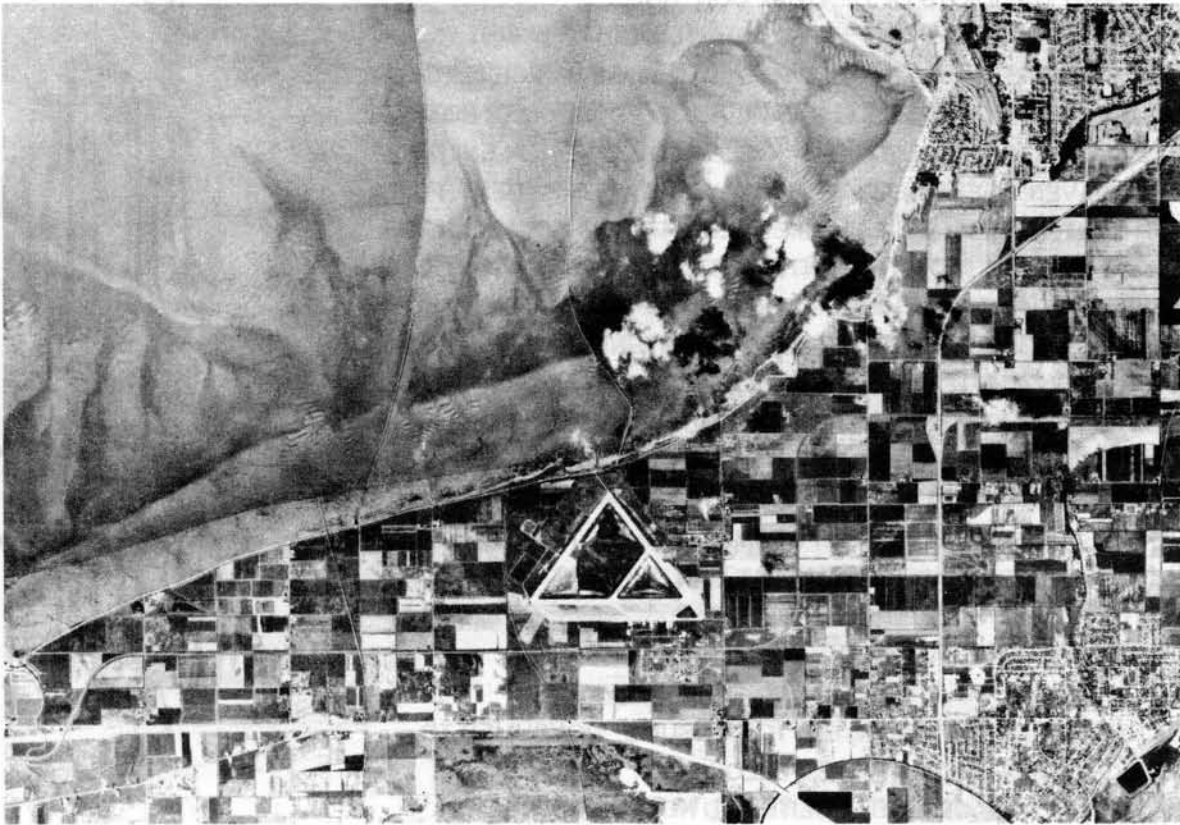
AND THEN NOSTALGICALLY LOOK WISTFULLY AWAY JUST TO THE RIGHT OF THE  
CAMERA LENS AND DROP THAT DESPERATE Demeanor ALL WHO ENTER HERE.

The grace  
of the  
sign of  
grace

THE INDEPENDENT EYE

DESIRE IN RUINS

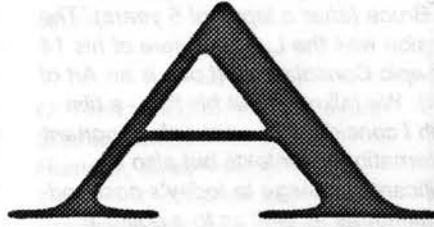
AL  
RAZUTIS:



UNDER THE SIGN OF THE

BEAST

## DESIRE IN RUINS



**WHAT FOLLOWS IS AN INTERVIEW COLLAGE.** ALL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN STANDARD TYPE ARE FROM A 1984 INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BRYANT. ALL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN *ITALICS* ARE FROM A 1989 INTERVIEW WITH MIKE HOOLBOOM AND INCLUDES FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON THE 1984 MATERIAL. IN ADDITION THERE IS A SMALL SECTION IN **BOLD** FROM A 1985 LETTER TO THE EDITORS OF CINEMA CANADA.

**Q:** How have you managed to make your films and how do you intend to continue in the future? Has all your work been produced in Canada? How has this affected your output?

**AR:** My earliest films were produced in California (1966-68) and afterwards I moved to Vancouver (and all of the subsequent work has been produced there). Living in Canada, first as an American expatriate, divorced from the 'American film scene' and not accepted by the 'Canadian film scene' presented a lot of problems initially. (I compounded these problems by withdrawing my films from US film co-ops in the 70's after I was disgusted by what happened in Chicago at the Democratic Convention). The Canadian arts scene in the early 70's was dominated by anti-American chauvinism (doubling as a kind of 'nationalism' and promoted by artists themselves who were trying to advance their own position in the arts) and this has continued in experimental film even into the 80's.

*In 1982, after 14 years of making films, teaching and participating in the creation of a number of Vancouver film organizations, I found myself "excommunicated" from the Canadian avant-garde by a person I had (foolishly) considered to be an ally: R. Bruce Elder. This arose on the occasion of his published essay (Parachute #27, Summer 1982), "Redefining Experimental Film: Postmodernist Practice in Canada", an essay which sought to create a theoretical paradigm (as invention) for Canadian avant-garde*

*cinema. In this essay, Bruce maintained that "Canadian avant-garde cinema is postmodernist cinema precisely because of its commitment to analyzing the nature of the photograph". Well, I thought, he (as anyone) is entitled to theorize and valorize...but it was only in the concluding paragraphs that I realized why my work had been excluded by Elder for so many years in national and international exhibitions. Elder offered: "The contrast between Rimmer's manner of reworking historical footage and that of Al Razutis is a measure of the distance separating Canadian avant-garde filmmaking from its American counterpart". His observations were that I was "American-born" (which is false) and share "with American Pop artists an interest in visual forms which lie outside the acknowledged Fine Art tradition" (Since when is "Pop Art" outside of Fine Art?) In sum, Elder sought to rationalize why my work should be excluded from "Canadian" context (to quote him earlier: "Many of our key experimental filmmakers - filmmakers belonging to our central tradition of filmmaking - have explored issues associated with photographic representation".) The films comprising Visual Essays, short films such as Portrait, and much of Amerika dealt precisely with photographic representation, media and interpretation (as history, as myth, as meaning and construction). Yet, here, and his views were, I believe, pivotal in my exclusion from future Canadian retrospectives, I was declared "un-Canadian" (once again)...*

*As for Bruce, his impact on creating a false view of the diversity of experimental work, work which included feminist,*

*political, media-oriented films has been considerable. I think, more than any other individual, he has strangled experimental film in Canada to the point that many filmmakers now will only imitate his call for 'landscape and alienation' films as true Canadian works. Byron Black, Peter Lipskis, and a number of other filmmakers have been 'sacrificed' (ignored) in favor of consolidating the 'official' Canadian version of history and film.*

**I FOUND MYSELF**  
**"EXCOMMUNICATED"**  
**FROM THE CANADIAN**  
**AVANT-GARDE BY A**  
**PERSON I HAD**  
**(FOOLISHLY)**  
**CONSIDERED TO BE**  
**AN ALLY**

(from a letter to the editors of Cinema Canada 1985):

Elder's cinematic pronouncements concerning the 'true Canadian cinema' are based on an ontological idealism rather than a practice as it exists in fact. He contends that 'the history of the avant-garde cinema reflects changes in the conception of the nature of self' as superceding other concerns (ie. the political, social, cultural contexts of the time) and by definition applies this to his

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select filmmakers. By definition he excludes the impact of technology, of media (surely he must have heard of McLuhan?), historical and socio-political determinants and contexts...Elder's 'post-modernism', if we wish to join the bandwagon, is ahistorical and apolitical - it resides with the muses, with Platonic ideals, with the immigrants and their identity crises, and is of the past. His theoretical writings have continually celebrated the cinema no longer in focus: Snow, Chambers, Wieland, Rimmer...a cinema that belongs either in the museums or in the academic old folks home at the college. Nowhere has Elder curated or supported anything resembling the plural cinemas that exist or the cinema that he proposes 'we need'. From Berlin to Canadian Images to Festival of Festivals, his programs are essentially the same one. The avant-garde of contemporary thinking is in fact completely deleted from his agenda, as is feminist cinema, as is any attempt at 'new narrative'.

**A) ARTIST'S WERE TOO****INSULAR TO CARE****B) THEY WERE TOO****POOR TO RESIST THE****TEMPTATION OF THE****MEAGER HANDOUT****AND MANY WERE HOR-****RIFIED BY BOYCOTT****STRATEGIES****C) MANY ARE GREEDY****FOR INDIVIDUAL FAME****AND FORTUNE AT THE****EXPENSE OF EVERYONE****ELSE**

*In April of 1989, in Los Angeles, I talked with Bruce (after a lapse of 5 years). The occasion was the L.A. premiere of his 14 hour epic Consolations (Love is an Art of Time). We talked about his film - a film which I consider to be not only important in international contexts but also a significant challenge to today's postmodern dilemmas as well as to a political avant-garde - the Catholic church, criticism and theory in Canada, Bruce's influence on what I maintained as 'singularizing' theory by the invention of 'strategic paradigms' (theories), and other topics. This was a warm and friendly conversation, in spite of our severe political and cultural differences. (I must resist the temptation to offer comments on his latest film, but will say that his filmmaking poses both a challenge to the 'left' and embraces some very important issues in terms of philosophy and culture.) I have a lot of respect for Elder's dedication to his 'mission' and I think that any criticisms of his position must engage with the scope of his accomplishments (both in film and writing). I also find his moral conceit, and what I term his fanaticism as evidenced in his filmic excesses, alarming. For example, consider this extract from his film program:*

*"Ours is a time that has experienced the darkening of the world, a spiritual decline that results from our having broken with both the earthly and the divine...The radical theology of the Enlightenment put us in the hands of the devil who has lured us with 'truths' that are utterly at odds with our own nature and the nature of the world. We did his bidding and became guilty of moral offenses against the Order of Things, and this has happened primarily because we lack the understanding that there is knowledge that we should not possess...We have been deformed by closing ourselves off from the Divine in existence." (Bruce Elder, exhibition notes for Anthology Film Archives 1988 'The Book of All The Dead')*

*Elder's mission is clearly to set the times right, to replace the immoral, the evil ('in the hands of the devil'), with the moral, righteous, good that is an aspect of what he terms "the Divine". And of course, Bart Testa, is always there to lend a helping hand, proclaiming Bruce (in the*

*very same publication) as "heir to the visionary film tradition" and "the leading theoretical writer on Canadian avant-garde film". What is alarming to me is precisely the extreme that Elder's moralizing has gone to, the extreme that his conception of good/evil, truth/lies, vulgar/divine has taken him, and by implication, the 'Canadian avant-garde'. (I need not worry about myself, I have been excommunicated long ago and condemned for 'evil knowledge'.)*

*Elder is, by his own admission, a 'modernist' and obviously disdainful of postmodernism (and its avant gardes). This point he made quite clearly during our last discussion and implicated Brakhage (not Snow) as one of his prime influences. Of course, Elder's position is somewhat contradicted by his obsessive use of quotation, stock footage (de-historicized atrocity footage), the collapsing of all discourse (and genres of discourse) into one philosophical (romantic) quest. He has skimmed the 'surface' along with the best of postmodernists. But if one is to take his assertions for the purpose of argument, then a question immediately arises: is not Elder's modernist disdain for postmodernism placing him directly in opposition to what he has valorized as Canada's only legitimate experimental cinema, the postmodern one? I think so. And my observations are supported in some of his 86/87 claims (including 'The Cinema We Need') that he does not consider himself part of what he has been supporting, or attacking.*

*So, all of the above reminds me of what happened in the 70's in terms of xenophobia, nationalism and the privileging of marginal talent. Canadians (and yes, I am still a Canadian citizen) tend to offer themselves up to what I term 'the cancer ward of suffering romanticism' where they wish to introject the 'good' and expel the 'bad' (usually American). This situation is completely in keeping with what Melanie Klein described as a 'paranoid-schizoid position' wherein the infant child introjects the 'good object' and projects 'the bad object', or vice versa, and keeps good and bad miles apart. (This of course is the foundation of Metz's 'Imaginary Signifier'). This is precisely what Elder and Bart Testa practice in their theorizing and attacks,*

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and this dilemma of the 'imaginary' is quite outside politics and social analysis. The mirror that Canadian culture, and in particular the experimental film culture in Canada, has held up to itself and promoted through curating and rationalized in anthologies, has been one of self-censorship. This is why it tolerates the hegemony of singularization (the myth of true Canada) and acts in complete denial of plurality, difference, digression and play...And this is one of the reasons that I can no longer work or live in a climate dominated by apologists and amnesiacs.

**Q:** What about alternative screenings, collective bargaining and especially, with the emergence of cable, the possibility of broadcast as a method of direct access to audiences?

**AR:** Alternative screenings are a necessity if the avant-garde is to resist being institutionalized by the government, grant agencies, commercial interests, etc...including the university! Collective bargaining at the level of an open shot (not closed, you're in you're out!) where boycott, if necessary, is implemented in the case of exhibition houses not paying artists...we tried this in Canada several years ago when I attempted to create a Canadian Film-Artists Association with members of the Funnel in Toronto. We discussed basic rates for screening, a pay scale similar to that of Canadian Artist's Representation which has succeeded in negotiating at least reasonable exhibiton fees for artists (the basic wage as it were). We discussed boycott, we discussed all kinds of political and economical things and the whole notion and organization collapsed because a) artist's were too insular to care, b) they were too poor to resist the temptation of the meager handout and many were horrified by boycott strategies, c) many are greedy for individual fame and fortune at the expense of everyone else...it was a sorry sight.

Cable and television (contrary to the paranoia exhibited by many experimental film purists) is a legitimate and important venue for experimental films...most distributors are slow in moving in to it and most artists are too obsessed with their own work to figure out a means of entry into this market that may be both

business-like and beneficial to others...

**Q(Hoolboom):** At the 1989 Film Studies Conference Martin Rumsby, an avant-garde film enthusiast, collector and curator, urged the collected membership to begin to buy artist's films. Many people are, at present, developing collections of videotapes because of cost and accessibility. He argued that similar collections should be developed in film. In the discussion that followed Seth Feldman, professor of film at York University, argued that the relation between distribution and production was not an innocent one. One need look no further than to those arts whose works are bought and sold (painting, print-making, etc.) to evidence this effect. The question of the relationship between distribution and production is especially apt given the North American avant-garde's dependence on universities/colleges. 90% of the avant-garde screenings in Canada are not held in the Cinematheques or film coops but universities like Concordia, Regina, Ryerson and Sheridan College. So you have to wonder: how is this effecting the kind of films made in Canada?

**A:** When I left Canada in 1977 and lived in Samoa, I thought that was the end for me as far as teaching and making film. Then, in the middle of the rains, a letter arrived from Simon Fraser University offering me a position to teach. I pondered the consequences for at least two weeks and decided to return to Vancouver. I have always (post 1977) argued for avant-gardes of disruption (of norm), ones that are dedicated to social and cultural change. So what the hell was I going to a university for? Well, I thought it would be possible to operate in this position from a university even if it meant that I had to play ball with the administration and assume the tasks of curriculum development, scheduling, grading and departmental politics. For a while it worked: I used university funds to bring in visitors, films, used university facilities



to make my own films (after the student work was completed), encouraged the production and study of experimental and avant-garde film and worked to increase faculty numbers. I also was there because I loved teaching and the kind of creative interaction that is possible between student and faculty. In the end, after nine years I gave up and the program was taken over by more shrewd political types. What did this mean for avant-garde film? During this time period (1978-1987), a marked increase in experimental and avant-garde filmmaking occurred in Vancouver, a number of screenings were held, graffiti everywhere, publications and debates, Cineworks was created, CFDW was created as a result of Toronto's centrist policies, and a lot of new ideas and expressions were seen. Before '78 a lot of experimental filmmakers stopped making film and a kind of vacuum was developing...after 1987 we have also had

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*a lull. I'm not taking credit for everything but in all honesty must say that my strategy of turning to a university (for all of its shortcomings and conservative attitudes it still has most of the \$\$) as a base of support was a necessary decision-move. As Gass noted in his article on avant-garde: 'every decision to prolong an avant-garde beyond a certain point becomes suspicious'.*

**Q:** Perhaps I am being idealistic but it seems to me that an increased reliance upon film and video institutions as a source of recognition for the artist has arisen (the syndrome of getting your work in the right places in order to be recognized by the right funding organizations, and thereby becoming a perpetuated artist). This situation leads to several problems, the most outstanding

in my opinion being the creation of an economical rift between filmmakers where everyone fights only for themselves. An additional problem has been described to me by a filmmaker as a closed ring, where National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funded institutions show and promote NEA funded films which creates a stasis of NEA funded artists. To further pinpoint the issue, it seems the 'end' could be described as a situation where national media arts centers assume their presence as essential, vital to the furtherance of the arts, to the point of becoming detrimental to the filmmaker and artist. Whereas in actuality, they increasingly play the role of middleman in an economic chain. The resulting effect is that the artist moves from producer to commodity. The film is no longer the sole commodity; now the filmmaker must be saleable as well.

**AR:** The NEA example is an excellent one, paralleled in Canada by our own Canada Council... CC funds films, funds exhibition houses, funds advertising for these films and may as well fund cab fare for people to go and see them...does this improve (aside from the simple economic matter of keeping some people from starving) the art or does it (as Mekas asserted in the recent Experimental Film Coalition newsletter) support trivialization and conformism...I think it does both, depending on many factors: who's picking the juries, who they are, what kind of grant funding is in place, how does the institution exert its influence (ideological and unconscious) on the art...In Canada in film and video we have seen during the 70's the erasure of videosynthesis by the regressive policies of video officers, a generation of 16mm film/craft/industry masquerading as 'art', the inability of the CC to support experimental film in spite of some good intentions, and generally a fiasco not conducive to 'develop and support' film as art. Political cinema has fared even worse, and the National Film Board in the seventies turned out to be a bureaucratic and overfed animal that benefited primarily the executive process and in-house people and stifled, frustrated and compromised any good works (with the exception of some feminist lobbies). Once again it killed the very offspring that it was mandated to support...and most people are so cowardly that no



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criticism of any public kind (a lot of apologists, waiting their next turn at the decision making level) was visible for years, only rumors, allegations, and silence... and this kind of crap has now made its way into the infrastructure of most bureaucracies and government agencies. This is where many artists are motivated (if they are going to survive) to play politics with these agencies...this is why a lot of people give up...this is why nothing changes...

**Q:** It has seemed to me that in the past several years a significant number of media institutions in the United States have avoided taking part in an organized (or even disorganized) investigation of film theory, history and/or practice (as opposed to a random sampling, or greatest hits approach to curation) which has resulted in a situation where no questions are being asked in an effective manner about what is being exhibited. How does this position bode for the future of any investigative or avant-garde approach to filmmaking, and what sort of strategies are available to a filmmaker (or group) confronted by such obstacles?

**AR:** Filmmakers and theorists have to communicate, not prescribe or hide and divide into their own cliques (as has happened with the theorists, all friends of a feather attending conferences on 'new narrative' and prescribing from this vantage point what is desirable, healthy, important and useful in cinema (i.e. films which illustrate their own points well eg. Bette Gordon etc.) Filmmakers have to read and write more...there is no profit in avoiding the curator, academic, critic and theorist - this is what happened in the underground cinema of the 60's and 70's: here we had people producing at a phenomenal level of energy, expanding the range of film and refusing to theorize about it or 'academicize' it or even 'read' (as if that were ever an impediment to vision!)...and across the Atlantic in France you had the development of the most reductive theories of 'the cinema' imaginable based on linguistics, semiotics, marxism and ultimately on theory itself. Like I said, theory and practice have to come together, to inform each other, and to get rid of the ridiculous and paranoid binarism that separates one from the other...

*The 60's (Vietnam, drugs, hippies, new philosophies, an explosion of experimental filmmaking, counter-culture in the true sense of the word) have been absorbed by TV, ad agencies, art curators and government grant agencies - not just absorbed, but TAKEN OVER AND INSTITUTIONALIZED, PUT TO A PURPOSE OF SELLING ENTERTAINMENT, DIVERSION, DISINFORMATION, A LIFESTYLE OF SENSUOUS HYSTERIA where even 'facts' are media contrivances...who's to know the difference?*

*This is why it is so DIFFICULT to say SOMETHING of SUBSTANCE and IMAGINATION...and to be POLITICALLY ACTIVE...in an age of simulation. This is why it is IMPORTANT for filmmakers (if they dare call themselves avant-garde) to strive for that which will amaze them and us, if not scare the hell out of them and us...*

*But TV and the postmod junkyard are not the only reasons why difficulty exists...there is also the 'church of the experimental cinema' of the kind found in most urban centres. These grant funded institutions are like passive prayer meeting halls where touring 'experimental filmmakers' show their work and answer a few questions (to demonstrate that they are in fact 'there')...like passive audiences attending a sermon on 'culture'...in these contexts even the most outrageous insults to intelligence go (usually) unchallenged...or conversely, even the most sensitive work can go unappreciated.*

*Example: Birgit and Wilhelm Hein, always on the Goethe hand-out tours, come to Los Angeles a few years ago to show their version of 'political avant-garde': porno home movies of Birgit and Wilhelm fucking, masturbating and trying to be 'outrageous' via obesity and genitalia. I'm sitting in the audience and I can't believe my ears: Birgit is actually saying that these home movies (un-watchable bullshit) is a 'political statement' directed at a culture which can't take eroticism and sexuality. I can't restrain myself and publicly protest calling this nothing but political bullshit, and suggest that they go down to Western Ave. in Hollywood and check out the porno scene there for 'political*

*content'. End of farce, until they take it to the next stop...one thing I know for sure: I'll never get invited to Germany.*

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'POLITICAL CONTENT'**

*Example: Chris Gallagher screens **Undivided Attention** in L.A. to a small audience. This film is impressive, formally eloquent and an amazing example of innovation in form induced content. Gallagher is relatively self-effacing and yet the film's impact is so strong that the filmmaker need not even be there. His film expresses imagination, it doesn't prescribe or preach to the viewer what the viewer 'ought to think', 'ought to do' and neither is he riding high on a nationalist (Canadian) banner...The questions are meaningless, the impact of the film lingers...however, there is no possibility of seeing it again. Filmmaker goes off to the next stop on the tour.*

*These churches of experimental film, these simulations of Platonic classrooms don't work and should be abandoned. They draw only a few people and are only 'precious' in the minds of a few. In the meantime, the postmod junkyard is filling up with more 'art'. And you know, it is really ok because in this 'junkyard' one can play. And then of course, there is the*

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*'avant-garde morality squad' telling everyone what they should see, who is important, what is good, what is evil, but we have already covered that ground...*

**Q:** How do you feel about the term 'avant-garde'? Where does it place the avant-garde filmmaker; why is there such a distinction and what purpose does it serve?

**AR:** I use the term avant-garde instead of experimental because I think it better identifies the kind of cinema that I refer to (the political, the transformational, the artistic, and those historically linked to the other avant-gardes); I don't believe it is 'dead' (Kramer) or has outlived its usefulness in shaking up the status quo. If ever there was a time where shaking up is necessary it is now, in the age of mass communication, mass propaganda, mass conformist lifestyles, an age that is dangerously close to a holocaust...An art for this age is an art that responds, in part or in toto, or is at least conscious of the context, to these world-wide issues. 'Experimental' to me connotes apolitical isolation, applied work.

*Peter Lipskis, some time ago, sent me a xerox of an article on the avant-garde, titled 'Vicissitudes of the Avant-Garde' by William Gass. It provoked more than a few thoughts, memories and more than idle curiosity on my part as I thought once again about the 'experimental film scene' in search of its 'avant-garde' be it in Canada or elsewhere.*

*'Avant-gardes are fragile affairs', he writes. 'The moment they become established, they cease to be - success as well as failure finishes them off'. I have said many times that there are MANY avant-gardes in film, and all have been specific to a particular epoch whether it be the 20's in France or Russia or the 60's in the US, Canada, etc. The 60's avant-gardes are largely dead, exhausted and the various perpetrators have either abandoned film, settled into university teaching positions or changed over to other filmic endeavours (commercial, documentary, video or new avant-gardes). Those that hang on to the past must necessarily do*

*so in a CONSERVATIVE environment (the art gallery, museum, university, library); it is rare to see someone from the 60's still practising their avant-gardism intact today. Rare, but not impossible, as Brakhage and others of his ilk will remind us. To succeed in maintaining a backward looking view on culture (a romanticism of past dimensions), requires a legion of like-minded and reactionary critics, historians to constantly reinsert this past into the present with a force that many of us would rightly identify with academia and its 'conserving' interests. This is why historicizing arguments which proceed from a paradigm (modernism, post-modernism, structuralism, idealism, etc.) occur in tandem with the re-presentation of the old, the dead, the expired. Even the speculators (of \$) in art require a 'handle' on which to hang their inflated valuations of artists and art.*

*More Gass: 'every effort to prolong an avant-garde beyond a certain point becomes suspicious' and he further states that with regards an avant-garde which is anti-establishment (the avant-garde of refusal, the 'no'), 'society's methods of cooptation and disarmament will, in general, be effective; their (the artists') anger will be softened by success and their aims divided, their attentions distracted; the institutions set up by most Establishments, even if assaulted, will take longer dying than most avant-gardes can expect to live...' I agree with these points, points which should be driven home, and hard, to the 'avant-garde panelists' which, by way of success, university appointments or by virtue of having been 'around the scene long enough to be successful name-droppers', arrogantly make pronouncements as to their 'present tense' views of 'what is happening now' in avant-garde cinema. As for those of us previously involved in refusal and counter-culture the options are clear: give up the past (the battles have been waged, whether they were won or lost!), be honest about the present...and let us worry less about how the future will treat us, after all we know what happened to Vincent Van Gogh and our many friends...*

*(INSERT: I turn on the tube: Brian Wilson, burned out Beachboy mumbles*

*something and calls himself an 'artist'; cut to his drugged-out producer who calls Brian a 'great artist'; cut to a blonde beachgirl agent who describes Brian as a 'unique artist'; switch channels to MTV: the words 'artist', 'avant-garde', 'postmodern' ooze out from trendy British dj's...isn't culture anything you wanna call it? Make it up. Borrow, mix it all, genre after genre...everyone's doing 'it' and the terms are meaningless, blurred, trendy sales slips, and even academic conferences are organized around 'it' and 'what is happening now'...only now they term it 'the play of surfaces...in an endless propagation of texts...discourses...simulations...blurred...empty'...here comes the avant garde?)*

*Gass' final challenge to the avant-garde is interesting. In today's postmodern cultural circus he says "at the present time one can only practice silence, exile, and cunning" and concludes "that now there is nothing that a group once honestly did...nevertheless, there is one thing...that throughout all common connivances cannot hang its head...if painters refused to show, composers and poets to publish, and every dance were danced in the dark. That would be a worthy 'no'."*

As far as my work is concerned, there is an early interest in pop-culture and political agitation (late 60's), non-oriental mysticism (alchemy) in the early 70's, hybrid media in the mid-70's, openly political and anarchist strategems in the late-70's and early 80's, with a heightened dedication to political avant-garde practice in the current phase...I think it is important to see avant-garde film generally as occupying a relationship to the era and culture within which it exists and that each form of the 'avant-garde' is but a moment in a larger process of perceptual change and perpetual revolution which derives its legitimacy from engagement rather than fixity and essential qualities.



DESIRE MINER UINS



ECHOES  
IN  
THE  
MUSEUM  
OF  
AN  
OFFICIAL  
CANADIAN  
AVANT-  
GARDE

EN GARDE

CINEWORKS CO-SPONSORED THE PACIFIC CINECENTRE FILM WEEK IN MARCH 1986 TO INAUGURATE THE OPENING OF OUR HOWE STREET LOCATION. ONE OF THE MOST HEATED FILM WEEK EVENTS WAS 'AVANT-GARDE FILM PRACTISE - SIX VIEWS',

DESIRE IN RUINS

AVANT-GARDE

A SEMINAR ORGANIZED AND MODERATED BY MARIA INSELL WITH SPEAKERS MICHAEL SNOW, PATRICIA GRUBEN, DAVID RIMMER, JOYCE WIELAND, ROSS MCLAREN AND AL RAZUTIS. THE FOLLOWING EXCERPTS HAVE BEEN TAKEN FROM THE FIRST ISSUE OF SPEED, A MAGAZINE PUT OUT BY CINEWORKS IN VANCOUVER. THEY ALSO FORM THE NARRATIVE SPINE OF 'ON THE PROBLEM OF THE AUTONOMY OF ART IN BOURGEOIS SOCIETY, OR SPLICE' BY CHOMYN/HAYNES/RAZUTIS.

**MARIA INSELL**

THE PURPOSE OF THIS DISCUSSION IS TO TALK ABOUT THE IDEA OF THE AVANT-GARDE IN CANADA...HENRI DE ST. SIMONE FIRST USED THE TERM AVANT-GARDE AT A TIME WHEN THERE WAS A DESIRE AMONG ARTISTS TO BRING ART AND LIFE TOGETHER AND TO MAKE THE ARTS SEEM RELEVANT TO SOCIETY. Simone said, "It is we artists who will serve you as the avant-garde. The power of the arts is, in fact, most immediate and most rapid when we wish to spread new ideas among men we inscribe them on marble and on canvas and in that way, above all, we exact an electric and victorious influence. We address ourselves to the imagination and to the sentiments of mankind. We should therefore always exercise the liveliest and most decisive action."

Some historians believe that the etymological roots of the avant-garde as the vanguard or an army have been overstressed since it really should be understood in metaphorical terms rather than emphasizing the militaristic connotations. The avant-garde primarily has to refer to new and original ideas and works which are temporally and intellectually ahead of their time.

The cultural historian Donald Drew Eckbert, characterizes the avant-garde in this way: "Traditionally the idea of the avant-garde has connoted rebellion by relatively small progressive groups

against established authority whether absolutist or bourgeoisie. To the avant-garde such authority has been responsible for injustices, especially class imposed injustices which have prevented social progress and the development of individual persons, particularly the individual artist or the individual working man. The reaction of the avant-garde has been to express in outrage at the rules imposed by authority...whether the rules of the academic tradition in art developed under absolutism and taken over by a philistine bourgeoisie or the rules determining the economic development of society under the control of bourgeois capitalism since the industrial revolution."

Most historians agree that the classical manifestation of the avant-garde was during the twenties with the Russian constructivists, the surrealists, and the dadaists, and that the avant-garde movements criticize the institution of art and examined how art functioned within society. Of course, in terms of film, many people have interpreted the avant-garde in various ways. Peter Wollen will say there are two avant-gardes, the first of Godard and Gorin represents a kind of narrative approach, and then the other a more formalist-structuralist approach. Of course critics have at various times stated that the avant-garde is dead or that it is in decay or decline, and so the purpose of this discussion is to feel its pulse, to see whether it exists or not. To quote Walter Benjamin from his thesis on history: "In every era an attempt must be made to wrest tradition away from a conformism which is about to overpower us."

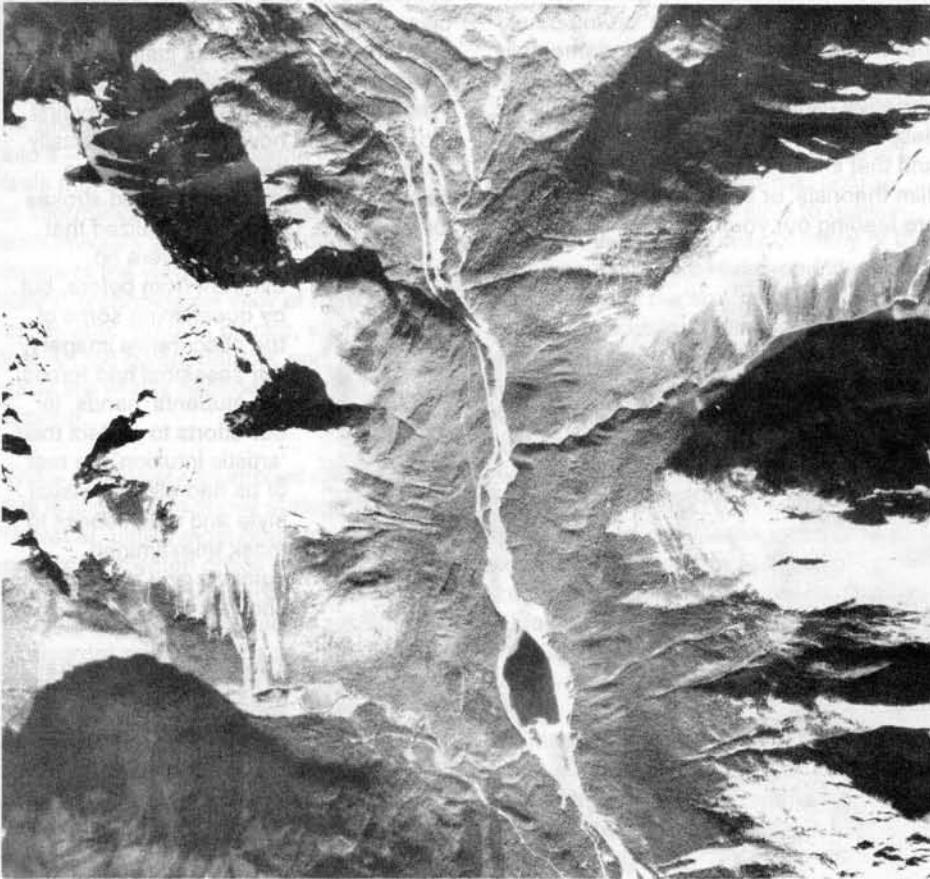
**MICHAEL SNOW**

I WOULD NOW LIKE TO CONSIDER WHETHER MY OR OUR 'FILM PRACTISE(S) ARE 'AVANT' OR BEFORE ANY OTHERS, THAT IS, WHETHER I OR WE ARE LEADING IN ANY WAY...I COULD SAY THAT THE INFLUENCE OF MY 'FILM PRACTICE' SEEMS OCCASIONALLY TO BE DISCERNIBLE. I COULD EVEN SAY THAT THE EXISTENCE OF MY 'FILM PRACTICE' APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED BY SOME REFERENCES IN SOME OF WHAT I'LL CALL COMMERCIAL FICTION FILM. Avant-garde implies explorative hence at some point new. I have been interested in making an addition to what exists in trying to do something new and apparently have done that. Influence seems to support the argument that at some stage of its reception some aspect of the work was different enough to be thought of as new. Avant-garde seems to apply to my work in some respects but I'm uncomfortable with it in others. Creative activity exists in so many areas of so many fields and in context makes something more or less new, whether what can be said to be new in my work, or in that of the other members of the panel can be said to lead or go before the others, the rest of the army, is extremely questionable. I don't think that it does. I believe that what I am doing and have done is distinctive, original, and has value and values, but I would never claim that it leads. There is some risk and danger involved in going ahead, in discovering in any area of the arts or of scientific

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research, but using a still somewhat military term which furthermore implies a group move is inapplicable to my practice. If the artists themselves don't make the claim that they are avant-garde, which of course happens but is rare, who or what does?

To sum up, I'm a bit wary of the term avant-garde and some of the kind of claims it seems to make, although there



are some aspects of its meaning that seem applicable to my own 'film practices'. I don't claim to be avant-garde but to make the films of Michael Snow, of having made films which can be said with some justification to be different enough from the mass of mechanical applications of the by now well established, learnable repertoire of cinematic conventions. To be noticeable and memorable, is what distinguishes the filmmakers on this panel. "Six Views": distinction, distinctiveness, creativity, originality, are their characteristics. But are those characteristics avant-garde? I think not. I see some strong individuals, a situation more anarchical than hierarchical.

## PATRICIA GRUBEN

I want to talk about the relationship of narrative to the avant-garde. This is a debate that is becoming obsessive in North America, where we have so little tradition of an art cinema and where consequently until recently there seems

to have been an almost total polarity between dominant and experimental cinema in people's minds.

The avant-garde in visual arts has often been characterized as a division from the mainstream that is determined historically rather more than economically and formally, as in film. In visual arts, the avant-garde may eventually be incorporated into the cultural mainstream of art practice; whereas in film the avant-garde is constructed often in terms of its opposition to dominant cinema, which has different values and audiences and does not 'catch up' to experimental film in the same way. This is not to deny that

in visual arts the historical avant-garde has typically defined itself in opposition to mass culture and to art institutions, or that many formal innovations of the modernist period have never become 'traditional'; but in comparison to film, the avant-garde has functioned in the visual arts within the larger sphere of 'fine art', whereas in North American film practice the values of the avant-garde are not perceived as relevant to the makers or the popular critics of dominant cinema. In mass film culture there has been some small acknowledgement of the avant-garde; for instance Scorsese has cited the influence of *Wavelength* on *Taxi Driver*, and more recently, rock videos have begun to exploit some of the techniques of underground cinema of the sixties, like scratching and painting on film, use of hand-held out of focus camera, etc. But experimental film has been defined by many of its practitioners in terms of its opposition to the mainstream, rather than its position in the vanguard. That stance is at various times and by various people accepted as the political mission of experimental film.

Certainly there have been many avant-garde filmmakers working in the great anti-imperialist days of the seventies who did not reference mass culture at all — with narrative or without. Even among this group however there has been an increasing borrowing of the formal elements of other media, particularly television — with narrative or without. I am thinking off the top of my head of David Rimmer, James Benning, Peter Rose. This does not necessarily imply an oppositional stance, as in the old modernist use of elements from mass media to comment on 'alienation', 'imperialism', 'materialism', etc.; but if any analysis is built in to the work (as in Rose's 'linguistic' films and tapes) it tends to be simultaneously cooler, more formal, less judgmental.

Now, along comes 'new narrative', whatever that is, to confuse the issue. It's been used to describe everything from *Stranger Than Paradise* to *Adynata*. If it is simply defined as reflexive narrative then it isn't new at all. This 'new narrative' is typically characterized by experimental filmmakers of the modernist school as some gigantic

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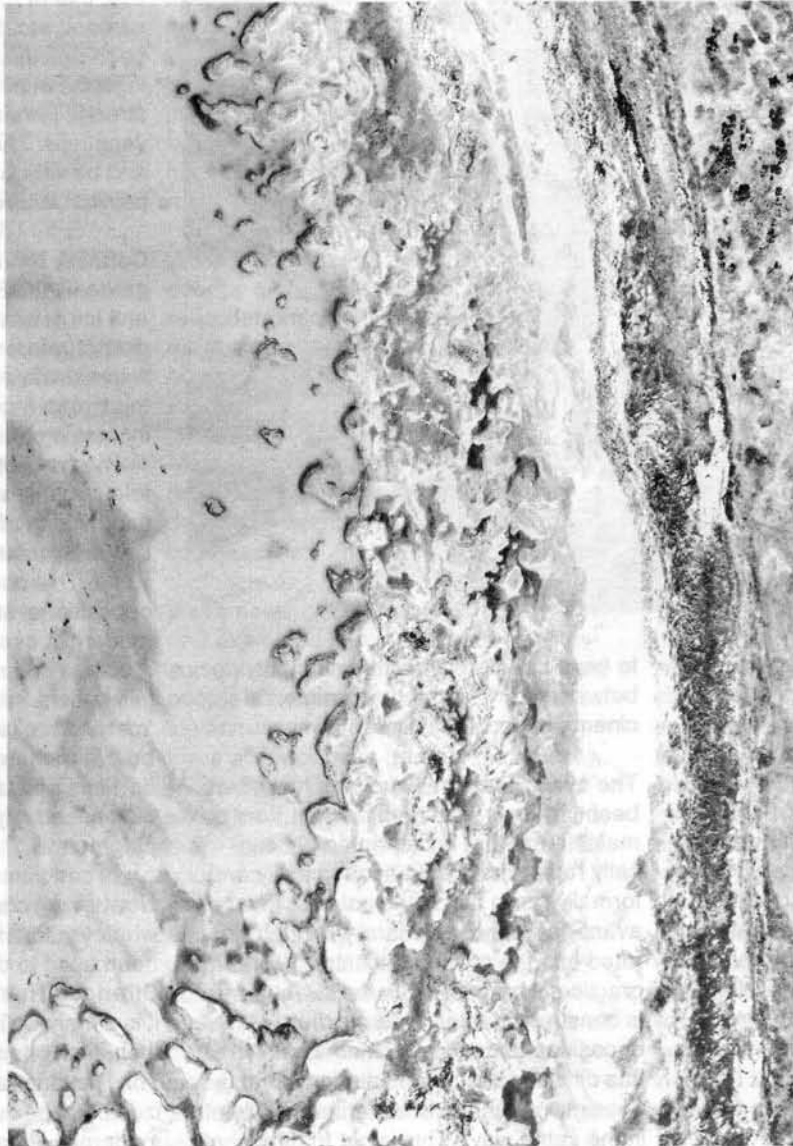
conspiracy that steals the soul of the avant-garde and uses its hard-won techniques as gimmicks to spruce up conventional little story films in order to win attention from novelty-hungry academics and journalists. So to add to the basic nightmare of Hollywood pop culture and shrinking audiences, now we have the little magpies of new narrative, running off with all the best ideas and leaving the real experimental filmmakers pillaged and abandoned.

Here's an example of this attitude, which I quote from the short-lived American experimental film journal *Spiral*. In every issue they invited their readers to comment on topics of interest; in Spring of 1986, the question to be addressed was framed like this:

"There is the perception that at this point in time it is very fashionable to be considered a 'narrative' filmmaker; in fact, entire conferences and academic journals have addressed these narrative directions, and how many filmmakers today seem intent on working a narrative structure, no matter how obscure, into their films simply because it's the thing to do? Some people have asserted that this dramatic shift away from modest, personal visions (made on small budgets, but allowing for more improvisation, more freedom to take chances, and the opportunity to develop a visual aesthetic) toward the narrative form (which usually involves a larger budget, more fundraising, and less risk taking) to be a reactionary movement, and have pointed to a plethora of poorly made, misguided and thoroughly unaccomplished 'narrative' films to illustrate their argument. It might be stated that the narrative film is alluring because it

is popular now in academic circles; it is also 'safe' and more accessible to contemporary audiences of avant-garde film, which seem to exhibit less interest in and tolerance for the visual, abstract, and reflexive forms of cinema."

Implicit in this request for readers' opinions on the subject is the implication that people working in narrative are positioning themselves in the middle of a continuum that has 'avant garde' on one end and 'dominant cinema' on the other; that working in narrative is fundamentally a compromise between the two; that narrative filmmakers are selling out in a desperate quest for a popular audience; and that it is the dangerous incursions of 'film theorists' or at least 'academics' that are leading our youth astray.



I question this assumption that narrative filmmaking is 'safe' and automatically involves 'less risk-taking'. If one accepts the debatable argument that narrative is more accessible than non-narrative film, it remains true that the more accessible a film is, the more vulnerable to criticism from its audience. My film students at Simon Fraser University, for example, have always tended toward the formally adventurous and the politically left-wing in their work. This year one production class was taught by a sessional who insisted that his students justify their film ideas with more discipline than usual. When I saw their finished work, my first thought was of how unusually politically naive they seemed to be — blaming 'television' or 'Amerika' in broad strokes for all our ills. Gradually I realized that

the ideas were no different from before, but by questioning some of the obscure imagery, our sessional had forced the students' hands. In our efforts to protect their 'artistic intuition' the rest of us had allowed visual style and obliqueness to mask unexamined opinions and aesthetic choices.

The devaluing of narrative cinema on the grounds of its 'popularity' is rampant in Canada as well as the U.S. avant-garde. Bart Testa in *Cinema Canada* claims that, as a result of all this interest in "new narrative", the films of Snow, Rimmer, Razutis, Hancox, Wieland, Hoffman and Elder will "appear to be an irrelevance of dubious political significance." Elder has taken it upon himself as we all know to define for us the cinema we need, and it is definitely not narrative. He conflates all contemporary narrative film together, calling it in *Cinema Canada* and elsewhere, "the artistic structure of technocracy."

# DESIRE IN RUINS

In an interview in the above-mentioned issue of *Spiral*, he describes narrative film's ability to elicit desire and then satisfy it, both intellectually and emotionally. He goes on to say, "That the film satisfies the viewer's demands makes the viewer feel that he is in control. Furthermore, that viewer is safely positioned outside the narrative —

he looks in on it but never really enters into it — and yet at the same time he feels that he actually regulates the flow of information that it provides. So he is both inviolate and powerful. Now this image of the viewer is consistent with the liberal, technological view of the individual as autonomous, private, with a being that is God-given, natural, and whose parts are wholly harmonious with one another."

There is certainly an implied criticism of this illusion in the above statement. However, unlike most other formally- or politically-oriented critics of narrative, he doesn't seem to be attacking it for its unifying quality, its simulated resolution of disorder and imposition of normative social values. In another article, he states that in ancient times, stories reinforced the cultural belief in the Absolute, the Holy; but that narratives now "have lost their roots in the realm of the transcendent. Their telling has become a ritual that has entirely lost its inner meaning....Now....they reinforce the liberal world view."

He goes on to denounce contemporary narrative for addressing problems of personal psychology. "Consider how often our narratives depict the individual as the maker of his own destiny, and how rarely the hero of the psychological narrative is depicted as answering the call of the Divine or as responding to the mystery of the Holy.... Consider how often it is the quest for the healing of wounds. Consider how rarely it concerns the Good....Our narratives — narrative itself — have become as worthless as emptied-out rituals are. They further the disenchantment of the world."

**THE TWO ARGUMENTS AGAINST NEW NARRATIVE: THAT IT "CONSPIRES", AS IF MOUNTING A CONCERTED ATTACK ON THE AVANT-GARDE IN ORDER TO UNDERMINE IT FROM WITHIN; AND THAT IT COMPROMISES IN A "SIDEWAYS MOTION", AS IF THE DECONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVE WERE MERELY A COMPROMISE ON THE PART OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE AVANT-GARDE WHO SECRETLY WANT TO BE SPIELBERG BUT KNOW**

**IT ISN'T COOL.**

Thus Elder's complaint is not that narrative sucks us in, but that it doesn't. He claims it is akin to scientific positivism. He reduces all narrative to realism, ignoring the mythic quality of many of the most popular recent Hollywood films; and never explains the source of its ongoing attraction for us in the face of its lack of meaning, its emptiness. He certainly does not address all the multiple forms of narrative, either the art cinema of Europe, third world films, or this pesky 'new narrative' except for a few insults in passing, to the effect that as mentioned above it merely steals the ideas of real experimental filmmakers: "Such breaches of convention have little lasting value, for what seems unconventional one day often becomes a cliché the next."

We must turn again to his Boswell, Bart Testa, for further illumination. "I also think there are reasons to take his warnings seriously, if not whole hog. The critical confusions that attend 'new narrative' films and the foolish try at moving Canadian art film from its shrunken domain to the tiny island of experimental cinema probably do conspire to damage the further possibilities of the best avant-garde cinema being done in Canada. This will benefit no one, least of all the feckless filmmakers who want to make movies like *Low Visibility*, a perfect and sad example of what comes of such ill-considered sideways motion, as Elder fears and predicts." Again in a nutshell, the two arguments against new narrative: that it "conspires", as if mounting a concerted attack on the avant-garde in order to undermine it from within; and that it compromises in a "sideways motion", as if the deconstruction of

narrative were merely a compromise on the part of former members of the avant-garde who secretly want to be Spielberg but know it isn't cool.

I don't want to spend too much time on Elder's argument because I believe it's pretty aberrant from the mainstream of anti-narrative criticism in its relentless Romanticism. I want instead to propose what is possible in working within narrative forms if one does not use the non-narrative avant-garde as the moral delineator of what is properly Cinema.

Peter Wollen, in *The Two Avant Gardes*, uses (like many theorists) structural materialism as a convenient synecdoche to represent all experimental film of the seventies, and then opposes it to a practice that he characterizes as more directly political and relevant to a larger audience, for which he takes Godard as a paradigm. I don't want to get into the whole argument about this article right now; I just want to use his description of Godard's work after May '68 to begin dealing with the question of narrative as a political form: "We glimpse something of an alternative route between contentism and formalism, a recognition that it is possible to work within the space opened up by the disjunction and dislocation of signifier and signified....Godard's view of bourgeois communication is one of a discourse gaining its power from its apparent naturalness, the impression of necessity that seems to bind a signifier to a signified, a sound to an image, in order to provide a convincing representation of the world. He wants not simply to represent an alternative 'world' or alternative 'world-view', but to investigate the whole process of signification out of

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which a world view or an ideology is constructed."

For another approach to a description of 'new narrative': Stephen Heath, in his article **Narrative Space** contrasts deconstructive narrative with the deconstructionism of structural materialism. And again I don't at this point want to address the conflation of avant-garde practice into the historical blip of structural materialism. (You see, theorists do it to everyone, not just the story-tellers.) Heath says, "Deconstruction is quickly the impasse of formal actuality, an aesthetics of transgression when the need is an activity of transformation, and a politically consequent materialism in film is not to be expressed as veering contact past internal content in order to proceed with 'film as film' but rather as a work on the constructions and relations of meaning and subject in a specific signifying practice in a given socio-historical situation, a work that is then much less on 'codes' than on the operation of narrativization. At its most effectively critical, moreover, that work may well bear little resemblance to what in the given situation is officially acknowledged and defined as 'avant-garde,' in particular, and in the context of the whole

Thus new narrative is definable in terms of — although not reducible to — an opposition to dominant cinema. Why then do many filmmakers and critics within the avant-garde find it so threatening to their own interests?

The most obvious reason is the one referred to above — some filmmakers feel that because their work cannot do fit into a currently fashionable theoretical model, it will be ignored. And yet I think the backlash against theory in this country is far stronger than the support for it ever was. My own defense is really a plea for heterogeneity more than it is a theoretical presentation in itself.

The claim is often made that new narrative has been invented by theorists for their own benefit, and that it is constructed by theorist-filmmakers according to prescriptive recipes. Of course that is true in some instances — notably Mulvey and Wollen, Bette Gordon, Joanna Kiernan. However there have always been filmmaker-theoreticians, and some of them have been among our most inspired and radical filmmakers: Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Richter, Godard, Pasolini, Brakhage, and

is reduced to a very few academics.

Part of the artist's resistance to psychoanalysis, to semiotics, to all forms of structuralism is that they posit paradigms of any kind, not entirely because those paradigms are inappropriate for dealing with some issues about all films or many issues related to some films. It is the task of theorists to look for and to invent categories; otherwise they are only critics, dealing with individual works on their own merits. When Razutis writes his polemics against psychoanalysis and structuralism, he never proposes an alternate theory; when he writes about not only his own work but the work of other avant-garde filmmakers, his whole thrust is to describe the ways in which they don't fit into categories; and of course that's his prerogative and I think a necessary one for all of us as filmmakers and as critics of each other's work.

But what underlies this is an opposition to structural theory because it is not something that it doesn't claim to be — an aesthetic principle. As we all know, it's based on a non-valuation approach derived from linguistics and social sciences, not a Platonic or Aristotelian concept of Beauty and Harmony. Thus it's fundamentally not prescriptive in terms of formal issues. It is sometimes prescriptive in suggesting what is always characterized as areas of research. And I agree, I find it personally annoying to hear theorists calling for certain types of films to be made. But I don't think that invalidates the theory, or the value of working from a theoretical perspective — within a personal aesthetic.

a personal aesthetic.

But as I said, I'm not really here to defend theory; I'm not a theoretical filmmaker myself. I simply want to find a place for narrative in its heterogeneity, its radical possibilities. I think that to use narrative to critique itself is no more questionable than to use images from the mass media or 19th century Romanticism in ones' films in order to critique mass culture or to invoke historical

**I BELIEVE THAT IN DEFINING CANADIAN AVANT-GARDE, TOO OFTEN WE'RE BEING TOLD WHAT IT IS NOT OR WHAT IT SHOULD BE RATHER THAN WHAT IT MIGHT BE, OR BEST OF ALL, WHAT IT IS. I BELIEVE THAT THE WAY THE AVANT-GARDE IS CURRENTLY BEING DEFINED IN THIS COUNTRY IS AN EXCLUSIONARY, ELITIST, AND FUNDAMENTALLY BOURGEOIS EFFORT TO ELIMINATE EVERYONE BUT ONE'S OWN PERSONAL FOLLOWERS OR ROLE MODELS FROM MORE AND MORE EXCLUSIVE ARMED ENCAMPMENTS.**

account offered here of film and space, it may well involve an action at the limits of narrative within the narrative film, at the limits of its fictions of unity." (Questions of Cinema).

So here is suggested the possibility of using familiar forms to critique themselves. This is more than simple reflexivity, this is a fundamental reordering of structure in an attempt to deconstruct it and open up our ability to perceive it.

many others have published manifestoes and schemata to contextualize their work.

And yet at the same time it is the job of the filmmaker to resist categorization and reduction into a school, a theory, a linguistic analysis. We all resist, we all attempt to redefine ourselves and our work out of the structures into which we're put. This includes new narrative filmmakers as well, unless that category

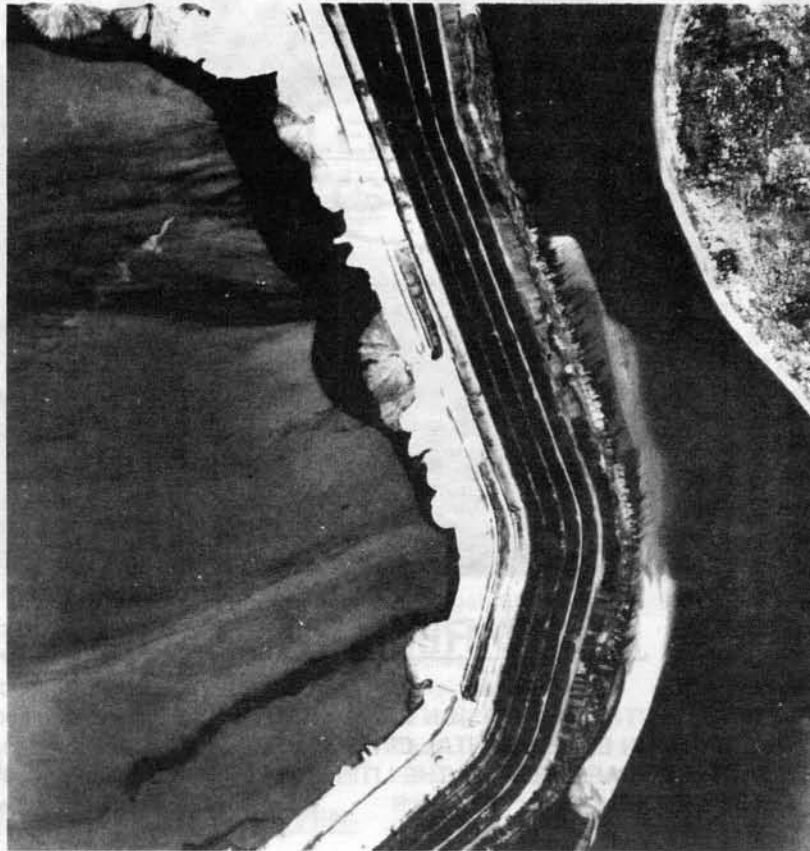
## DESIRE IN RUINS

nostalgia.

I believe that in defining Canadian avant-garde, too often we're being told what it is not or what it should be rather than what it might be, or best of all, what it is. I believe that the way the avant-garde is currently being defined in this country is an exclusionary, elitist, and fundamentally bourgeois effort to eliminate everyone but one's own personal followers or role models from more and more exclusive armed encampments.

I think part of the threat of new narrative is that it is associated with feminism, and it deploys feminist concerns into areas which have within Romanticism as well as modernism and the avant-garde been roles for men — specifically, opposition to bourgeois culture. Andreas Huyssen in a recent lecture in Vancouver developed an interesting analysis of this role-playing in a lecture on the male mystique in art history that characterizes the Artist as outside of culture.

In the eighteenth century, the artist emerged from a system of patronage into the Industrial Revolution as visionary, one who is privy to non-verbal states of being, and defined in terms of opposition to mass culture. This trend continued into modernism, so that Huyssen could say about Flaubert, who is considered one of the fathers of modernism: "Such imaginary femininity in the male writer...has a lot to do with the increasingly marginal position of literature and the arts in a society in which masculinity is identified with action, enterprise, and progress, with the realms of business, industry, science and law. At the same time, it has also become clear that the imaginary femininity of male authors, which often grounds their oppositional stance vis-a-vis bourgeois society, can easily go hand in hand with the exclusion



of real women from the literary enterprise and with the misogyny of bourgeois patriarchy itself."

However, as modernism developed in the twentieth century, it came to embrace the opposite values of the post-industrial revolution: action, enterprise and progress, as Huyssen says. Modernism, which found its end-point in the minimalist painting and sculpture of the sixties and in the structural-materialist film of the early seventies — separates itself from mass culture through a process of reduction which Huyssen describes as: "...self-referential and self-conscious, frequently ironic, ambiguous, and rigorously experimental...the expression of a purely individual consciousness rather than of a Zeitgeist or a collective state of mind...Its experimental nature makes it analogous to science, and like science it produces and carries knowledge."

Throughout the history of modernism, from its development out of the Romantic tradition of the artist as suffering Other in the nineteenth century, to its culmination in the late Sixties with the model of the

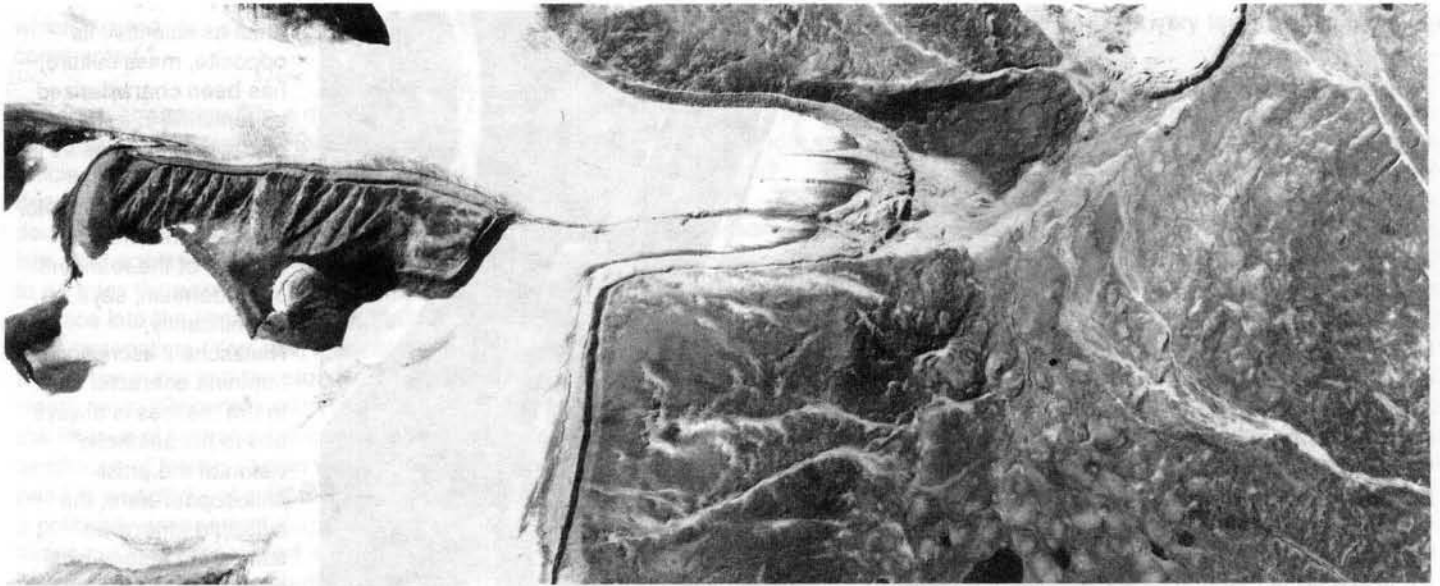
artist as scientist, its opposite, mass culture, has been characterized as feminine in its seeking of cheap pleasures as typified by women's novels, soap operas, etc. Huyssen, referring to another of the founders of modernism, says, "Significantly, Nietzsche's ascription of feminine characteristics to the masses is always tied to his aesthetic vision of the artist-philosopher-hero, the suffering loner who stands in irreconcilable opposition to modern democracy and its inauthentic culture."

I think the feminist interest in narrative and in theory threatens both those positions of male superiority, in three ways. First, because feminists are taking

control of some of the stereotypes that associate us with the non-verbal, the Absolute, the mystique of femininity — now that we are re-claiming and radicalizing that typage, taking back the position of Other from romantic male filmmakers, we are a threat to that model of 'suffering loner' that they would prefer to occupy in exclusion. We can no longer be contained within the manageable roles of Muse, or object of desire. Women and third world filmmakers have a claim to that role outside of the bourgeoisie which is obviously more fundamentally grounded in real social exclusion than that of the self-imposed Otherness of the bourgeois male artist.

Second, because narrative is associated with mass culture and cheap pleasures, women who work within it for political and/or aesthetic reasons are suspected of (as usual!) ingratiating ourselves to get what we want in devious ways, of lacking the 'irreconcilable opposition' of the modernist male artist and thus of somehow being morally compromised, as women are so often seen to be. This I think is the origin of the paranoia that people working in 'new narrative' are

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pillaging the avant garde to popularize what should be reserved for the Illuminati.

And third, at the same time as narrative evokes pleasure in the audience and seems to threaten the position of the avant-garde by contaminating it with popular forms, a theoretical analysis of narrative usurps the traditional position of the male, especially the modernist male artist, as purveyor of scientific rationality that I think is expressed in the structural filmmaking of the Seventies.

So both as scientists and as visionaries men are displaced by new narrative and its association with both theoretical and popular feminism. Just as the heterogeneity of women's natures has always been reduced into a few clichés whose contradiction of each other does not invalidate them in the minds of those who apply them selectively, the work of women filmmakers in its heterogeneity, especially in its use of narrative as instrument of pleasure, political tool, and auto-critique — sometimes all at once — is reduced again into a few paradoxical and threatening contradictions which modernist filmmakers use to dismiss the work by reductive operations. It's too bad, because as Huyssen remarks, feminist artists have done quite a bit to bring us out of modernism's dead end. But in film, a medium that still seems to attract megalomaniacs, we are still fighting the old prejudice and paranoia as they stagger back for yet another battle.

## DAVID RIMMER

### 'THE REPRESSION OF THE EROTIC IN EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA' OR 'SAFE SEX FOR THE LITERALLY MINDED'.

For me cinema begins with the image, and one of the problems, I think, with cinema today, with experimental cinema, is that it is starting with the word rather than the image. This is a problem in experimental film but even more so, I think, a problem in video. I think we've all seen, or been forced to sit through long video tapes with a lot of indecipherable text rolling over the top without any visual appeal at all.

So somehow the image has lost out to the word and the image has become something that accompanies the word, a kind of a visual aid, almost a slide show to go along with a lecture. This kind of filmmaking has been bothering me for a long time. I see a lot of these illustrated lectures masquerading as films whereas I don't think these should be films at all. I think they should be lectures or talks, or books, or something in a different form. They really don't have a place up there on the screen. And this problem is compounded even further: we have the word being translated into the image which is bad enough, but then, at the end of the film, they want to translate it back to the word again. There are a number of reasons for this. There seems to be a

fear amongst people of the naked image: a fear of the erotic power of the visual image, an inability to deal with this image on a direct level, a need to neutralize the image, perhaps, to translate the image to another medium, the convenient one of course being words; to analyze, to interrogate, to investigate, to demystify, and ultimately to sanitize the image; in an attempt to reduce the erotic power of the image to a more manageable form.

This then, to me, is a refusal of people to accept the image for what it is, a refusal to accept the direct experience of looking at an image. It's actually a puritanical response and it comes up in all sorts of strange ways with the sort of writing that goes on about film these days. A need somehow by a number of analysts and writers to repress what's really happening up there, and, as I say, to neutralize that image, and rob it of its energy - a denial then of the pleasure of the image. For me, why I like cinema so much is because it gives me pleasure. There is a certain sensuous quality of light and dark and colour and shade up there on the screen. It doesn't really matter too much what's being said. If that quality, that sensuous erotic quality of the image is not there I'm not interested.

So I see a need, an erotic need, to strip the image of its mystery, of its ambiguity, of its soul, its spirit, and to classify, categorize it as something which is easier to digest. Perhaps it's that way with a lot of things in society today, that



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desire not to confront reality or anything directly. We want to mediate it, we want a lesser version of it, almost a Reader's Digest version of reality. I think that as filmmakers we must look at our images. I feel a lot of filmmakers don't see. They can't see their image at all. They've no idea of what they're putting up there. It's in their head and not in their eyes.

Filmmakers must look at their images, listen to their images. Audience must listen to the images, and try to experience those images in a much more direct way. Resist the temptation to explain

**THERE SEEMS TO BE A FEAR AMONGST PEOPLE OF THE NAKED IMAGE: A FEAR OF THE EROTIC POWER OF THE VISUAL IMAGE. AN INABILITY TO DEAL WITH THIS IMAGE ON A DIRECT LEVEL, A NEED TO NEUTRALIZE THE IMAGE, PERHAPS, TO TRANSLATE THE IMAGE TO ANOTHER MEDIUM, THE CONVENTION ONE OF COURSE BEING WORDS: TO ANALYZE, TO INTERROGATE, TO INVESTIGATE, TO DEMYSTIFY, AND ULTIMATELY TO SANTITIZE THE IMAGE; IN AN ATTEMPT TO REDUCE THE EROTIC POWER OF THE IMAGE TO A MORE MANAGEABLE FORM.**

them away. As soon as you've explained an image away it's forgotten. Dead. That's the end of it. The beauty of an image is that it cannot be explained or that it's ambiguous, or that it's maybe this or maybe that, and it sits and it revolves and goes 'round and 'round in your head for quite awhile after you've seen the movie.

Cinema then must be freed with the obsession of words and their meaning. Not that cinema can't mean anything. That's all I'm going to say in terms of words because I think if I talk anymore I'm going to defeat what I'm saying. So I want to show a film, and after it I'm not going to talk about it.

**JOYCE WIELAND,**  
**ROSS MCLAREN**  
**AND LENORE**  
**COUTTS**

**RM:** I thought it was pretty smart of David to show his film in the context of a prospective talk...

**JW:** It's an excellent context.

**RM:** ...an excellent idea because you get so many more people when you speak than when you show your films.

**JW:** But it could be wonderful, you know, if we get out of our heads and into our bodies. I mean people think that their hearts are in their head...I think it's really sad, like about the whole Freudian psychological whatever-it-is semiological scene in that it's created by men and I thought that women were going to create the next stage of evolution, which I think they are doing anyway, and I'm disappointed and so I feel like breaking out and I feel a lot of

things...very strongly about a kind of freedom and a sense of liberty to be involved with passion and my soul and humour and poetry and to relate to other people in a way that I feel that I've been gyped out of by looking a lot at certain kinds of film. What do you think, Ross?

**RM:** Well I think that ideally there would be some balance between theoretical response and the filmmaker's creation. What disturbs me, it's down to earth, but, I have to talk about funding structures. I have to talk about them because it's part of the means of production, etcetera, and the fact that it seems that more and more of the funding structures are relying on the authority figures who are working on a binary system.

**JW:** The binary?

**RM:** You're either a one or a zero. It's fun being a zero. It gives you a lot of room to move around.

**LC:** Do you feel you have to produce government art in order to be paid by the government?

**RM:** Well I don't. It's a very tricky thing. I think that a lot of artists refuse to look at the ramifications of that kind of state control of their work...I see all of these friends of mine who are doing...hmm, friends of mine, you get money for friends of yours, of course...the objective arms length...anyway, I see all these great films being made and all that, so I say, "Go for it. Apply for it, apply for it." And, rejection after rejection of all this great work. I mean it's ridiculous that the kind of people you have to submit to get...

**JW:** Submission isn't really the answer. Submission is really hard.

**RM:** Submission is what it's all about. It's really, completely...

**JW:** When you put your front paws out, you know, and you lie down like a wolf.

**RM:** Yeah.

**JW:** That's when you're loved, though. When wolves are in love they do that, actually.

**RM:** I showed a film in the Funnel program last week, probably half of you weren't there. It was just a three minute tilt over a decaying dead animal, and to me that was my policy position on the state of the avant-garde, whatever that means.

**JW:** I'm just worried about the commercial cinema and the Freudian-Marxist-semiological-cinema and in between being this creative fountain. That's really hard. It's wonderful to have that fountain and it's unique because you struggle to open the fountain, it takes a long time, and the fountain is flowing and it nourished other people. It's hard to make a paper about protecting that fountain and to communicate with others with your fountain of creativity.

**RM:** But I don't think it's the semiological Freudian misogynists, or whatever, and the commercial cinema. It seems to me it's the avant-garde traditionalist protectionist group that is trying turn off the tap of the fountain. It seems to me that the strategy is like cultural necrophilia. There are certain elements that are trying to position themselves in the American avant-garde of 1969 and plagiarize all

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the stuff that Brakhage was writing about in the 60's.

**JW:** But I don't think there's any problem about any cinema if you can make something that's very much to do with knowing yourself as a human being and giving that to other people. It doesn't matter whether you make a commercial film or whether you make this and that and the other, binary weaving of your brain. I mean, you're free to do it if you can get a hold of the money, either way, or no money. There's nothing to stop you to communicate with other people. There

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is nothing in the world that can stop it. Maybe it's only to communicate with a small group, or a big group, what does it matter. Right?

**LC:** The lights are very hot.

**RM:** It is a very nice theatre, though. I wonder if the filmmakers will get to show their own work here. I certainly hope so. I saw the floorplans and things before I came and I thought, 'this is fantastic...a temple'.

**JW:** It is though, isn't it? A temple. It's wonderful here.

**RM:** But I sincerely hope there will be the possibility for artist filmmakers to show their work here...Fellini is good too...

**JW:** And Jean Vigo. That's the total cinema. But maybe the disaffected children of Ontario will be able to come here for film studies. there's a camp of disaffected close to Lake Ontario...Escapes from theory. Well, have we had our half hour?

## AL RAZUTIS

I am tired of mystification, of repetition. The avant-garde does not repeat itself. I am tired of stolen speeches, of political masquerades. So I have invited a guest...to speak with authority. Speaking about you and I and the cinema...

The material fact is a film that will self destruct upon the occasion of illumination/projection. The film will run continuously and in the open, and be processed by the projector, erased in a bleach bath - all save the frames covered by tape splices. The title of the film is also Splice. Like the splice of then and now, the material fact is both real and a memory. It cannot be repeated, there are no other copies. That which will remain will be a record of erasure and absence. This is not Freud. This is avant-garde. The avant-garde is not repeatable. It does not trade on the art commodity market, plugging one's curriculum vitae, hoarding the past and faking the present...

The Social is you and I...usually docile, stupefied, indifferent. From my guest's perspective, it may be that you and I are asleep, sitting in a state of constant denial of ourselves, watching but not acting. The film that is shot and reconstructed will reconstruct you and I...and this is open to interpretation.

The Institution is the Cine-Centre. It is accountable to the prospects of the avant-garde, the mere thought of it (!) existing even for a moment within its otherwise clinical, curated and institutionalized walls - like a cage for animals to perform in, for fifteen minutes.

(Bringing ventriloquist's dummy 'The Professor' out of case and onto knee)

**Dummy:** Did you mention my books and my love of cinema?

**Razutis:** I mentioned the apparatus.

**Dummy:** It is all the same. One big

illness. One big problem.

**Razutis:** The topic I believe is the avant-garde.

**Dummy:** That's what I said...A place of infinite regression, mirrors, scopophilia, voyeurism, and you castrated artists. Fetishists!

**Razutis:** What do you see in all of this? I mean, imaginary Canadian...

**Dummy:** Well, what I look at is never what I wish to see...

**Razutis:** Do you see that you're talking to me?

**Dummy:** Well, you never look at me from the place I see you...Everything emerges from the structure of the signifier.

**Razutis:** So how does subjectivity figure into this? How is it structured?

**Dummy:** Alienation, gap, castration, the whole ball of wax...

**Razutis:** What do you see when you look at a movie, a screen...

**Dummy:** The imaginary signifier, don't you?

**Razutis (Dummy has nodded off):** Now that he's asleep, I can offer my perspective free from the chain of institutional discourse, free from the leash of having to prop it up, play the music, arrange travel and accommodations. I can offer a perspective on direct action and the avant-garde. Sitting here, you and I, somnambulists, easy targets for the business of the unconscious and analysis in neat rows...The avant-garde does not ingratiate itself to an audience or an institution. It kicks ass...Avant-garde does not wait for the Canada Council to confirm its practice...Avant-Garde does not subordinate itself to collectivism, but is a dialectic between individuality and group...It is not elitist, academic, politically correct...This institution has invited avant-garde, and it will be baptized in writing, if it can stomach it, if the yuppie clean-up squads don't freak out...some things require direct action so that something other than memory remains. A trace of the avant-garde if nothing else. (Shaking spray bomb). The academics don't like rude and impertinent behaviour because academia has a sort of code of etiquette: things that are shit are called problematical. One doesn't get up and do demonstrable things.

DESIRE IN RUINS

LULLABY

Lay your sleeping head, my love,  
 Human on my faithless arm;  
 Time and fevers burn away  
 Individual beauty from  
 Thoughtful children, and the grave  
 Proves the child ephemeral:  
 But in my arms till break of day  
 Let the living creature lie,  
 Mortal, guilty, but to me  
 The entirely beautiful...

HUMAN  
 ON MY  
 FAITHLESS  
 ARM

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
VALERIE TERESZKO

CHRISTINE SWIDERSKI

*The following interview was conducted on the occasion of Valerie Tereszko's exhibition of Human on My Faithless Arm at YYZ, an artist's run gallery in Toronto. In conversation with the artist is Christine Swiderski, arts reporter for CKLN FM 88.1.*



CS: That's an excerpt from W.H. Auden's poem 'Lullaby', a line from entitles Vancouver filmmaker Valerie Tereszko's film 'Human on My Faithless Arm'. The main subject of the film is a woman who is both poor and deaf. She is on the verge of losing her daughter to the authorities because of her sexual preference

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- she's a lesbian. She's also not well educated and all these factors play against her. As the film progresses a variety of visual and audio techniques are used to heighten her alienation. Parts of the soundtrack seem muffled and you strain to hear what's happening. At first you think it's a technical problem with the projector or the sound on the film and then it hits you that it's intentional, and that the confusion and irritation you're experiencing is part of everyday life for a deaf person. Watching the film and talking to Valerie dusted off some stereotypical notions I had about deaf people. I talked to Valerie about why she turned to film to express her ideas about her disability, beginning by asking her what she did to the soundtrack to distort it and why.

**VT:** We wanted to use a computer that would automatically remove all the T's and P's and L's and B's from the actor's speaking but I didn't have the money for it so we had to do it manually and it took six months. Why did I do this? To increase the degree of alienation through sound displacement and make people feel like an outsider - that's how I feel most of the time. I hear mostly vowels, not many consonants.

**CS:** In the sequences with the street kids on the corner, the muffled sound becomes these druggies hanging out. You make some interesting discoveries there, could you talk about how you came across these scenes and how you

recreated them?

**VT:** I remember walking alone at night very frightened without responding to what people were saying to me on the street. Are they asking me: am I for a dime - or are they trying to hurt me? I couldn't hear them and I would have to ask them to repeat repeat. It's a very scary feeling. This is why I made one scene very dark. This is to help the spectator understand that I'm deliberately preparing them to hear the kind of soundscape I live in, that's also a possibility.

**CS:** The main character who appears in the opening scene - she's poor and about to lose her daughter because she's gay and possibly because she's deaf. In one scene she's in a pool hall, telling her lover she has to get her daughter back - and it breaks this misconception that if you're deaf you'd be well educated and taught how to deal with this disability. But I'm sure there are many deaf people who are illiterate, who can't sign their own name, so it's incredibly alienating because you can't even make contact. Is that what you were trying to bring out with that scene or why was that character in the story?

**VT:** I was trying to break down the stereotyping of the deaf people. In Canada they raise money to help them, I think they're overhelping them, their ability to learn and live independently, they rely on charity. A lot of people I

know are taken up with this kind of treatment. They want more respect not more help, and be given the right to develop their own philosophy of education rather than the way people try to do everything for them. For many years, deaf people were not allowed to become teachers, but there are some today. There's a lot of political debate on the education of the deaf and it's been going on for over 400 years.

**CS:** You've living now in Vancouver but you were raised here in Toronto. In a sense you were a guinea pig - you were brought into an integrated school where you were with students who could hear and there's one scene I remember - where a man is saying 'Listen to this noise' and you hear a beep. And then I realized he's doing a hearing test. I started thinking about what you must have gone through in your childhood, a million hearing tests, and how this must be frightening, shuffled around from one place to another. Your experience as a child - is that why you turned to film? Why do you make films?

**VT:** I always wanted to work on films, to be a film actor. I ended up being a filmmaker because there's more power in making films you have to make. As an actor you have to rely on the director to give you work. I thought the film medium was more powerful in expressing the way of a person's perception. Often people ask me 'What do you hear?' 'How much do you hear?' I couldn't answer the question, it would be better to make a film.

**CS:** It's an experimental film but it's very socially based - you're dealing with the disability of deafness and how it affects people. Other projects you mentioned are very personal - looking after your Ukrainian grandmother, etc. Will deafness be a part of those films? What kind of films are you planning to do?

**VT:** I'm more of an emigre focussing on the authority of language - how language influences people like a landscape. I think the Ukrainian/Russian language is very interesting, it creates a very different perception of what it means to live, even among Russian-Canadians, about 'God', about political processes. People are conjugative.





## DIRECTOR'S REPORT: JUNE 24, 1989 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

With 1988/89, the **CFMDC** experienced a year notable for its continued stability, increased revenue and staff commitment. For me this has been perhaps the most relaxed and pleasurable year since coming to the Centre in 1985. Administratively, there were few critical problems: staff turn over affected us once again this year, although we avoided a major upheaval by hiring 'internally'; our relationship to the granting agencies, as outlined below, remains extremely favorable; our ability to pay our bills has been maintained; our awareness of the problems and opportunities facing independent filmmakers is increasing; our lobbying voice, primarily through participating in the **Independent Film and Video Alliance**, is starting to be heard.

Fiscal 1988/89 saw a dramatic increase in our ability to pay (something approaching) reasonable salaries and maintain our operating capabilities at a consistent level. It is the first year in which the **Toronto Arts Council** allocated the **CFMDC** an operating grant, rather than stipulating that our monies had to be directed towards a special project. Moreover all the granting agencies have acknowledged the excellent job the **CFMDC** is doing and, with the exception of the **Canada Council**, have continued to augment their support. In April of this year for example, we were awarded an **Ontario Arts Council** operating grant for the first time since being designated an 'arts service organization' in the late seventies. This means that we are probably unique as an artist-run centre: we receive operating funds not only from the **OAC** but directly from the provincial **Ministry of**

### Culture and Communications.

We also experienced another increase in our self generated revenue, for this thanks and congratulations to all the staff are due and particularly to the two film officers, **Mike Hoolboom** and **Gillian Morton**. This figure represents the greatest sales and rental amounts since 1983. I would like to point up what I feel are some of the factors contributing to this situation and perhaps formulate some ideas which may help the **CFMDC's** ability to realize its financial goals.

First of all, with regards to experimental film, the art market remains an essentially untapped one. The **CFMDC** must start to emphasize its place as a cultural institution while the trends we are seeing (purchases by the Art Bank, on-going exhibitions and acquisitions by the **AGO**, exhibition initiatives at the **National Gallery**) need to be capitalized on for the sake of the experimental film artists. Experimental film has to move into the mainstream art world or face an inevitable decline in its public acceptance and in its ability to generate for filmmakers either a financial or an 'artistic reputation' return. A substantial lobbying effort by the **CFMDC** should be formulated and mounted to increase the awareness of the public galleries regarding experimental film. This is not a short term goal: I would expect results of such a campaign to be noticeable after five years.

All sales to public institutions such as art galleries should be by contract only, stipulating the terms of their public exhibition of the work and limiting their ability to, say, tour the work without further compensating the artists.

For the 'other' films, the documentaries, dramas and animated films, there will inevitably be some cross over,

some films which can legitimately claim a place in the art world alongside the experimental work. And for these films, the struggle to have them accepted in the art world should be as vigorous. For other independent films which are not as concerned with formalist issues or which are more 'mainstream', the **CFMDC** must continue to address the traditional library and school library and school board markets. Our ability to realize our goals in this market can be much more systematic than in years past. It seems to me that **Gillian Morton** is on the right track. We have to know who has purchased what and what their current budget is. We have to address those who have not seen their way clear to purchasing from the **CFMDC** and find out why. We have to make certain that they know that we are reliable to deal with and handle strong films. The compiling and analysis of this type of information will be much faster and more rigorous with the imminent implementation of the computerized booking system.

A great problem with the distribution of the 'other' films is our ability to attract new, strong titles. On one hand, our strength in our eclecticism yet we lose some films to more commercial distributors who may not be able to do anything more for the film than we are able to. The **CFMDC** must reach out to the production community, potentially through organizations such as the **Canadian Independent Film Caucus**, and attract strong documentaries to our collection. We must also position ourselves so that filmmakers can see that we are speaking on their behalf. For example, I would suggest recommending to the federal and provincial arts councils that mastering to videotape be allowed as a legitimate expense following the release

print and that this is extremely important for us as distributors. The changing 'delivery systems' in the non-theatrical market indicate that tape is increasingly important.

Finally we must keep abreast of developments in the 'industry' and tap into new sources of revenue. To confine ourselves to arts funding will limit our ability to help independent filmmakers. The new non-theatrical funds should be utilized as well as the major funders such as **Telefilm** and the **OFDC**. Obviously, this is not simply a matter of sending in a request letter. It is a matter of working with these agencies to apprise them of the service we provide and to find a way in which the **CFMDC** can tap into their programs.

Other developments may arise with the new **Broadcast Act** to be introduced by the federal **Minister of Communications**. There is language in the proposed bill which suggests the importance and necessity of 'independent' and 'alternative' programming. We have to make certain that as representatives of the independent filmmaking community, the legislators hear from what independent and alternative mean. If not, they will apply their own definition and we can be certain that it will not resemble ours.

I have confined myself to general remarks in this report and to comments about upcoming trends. This is partially because I believe **CFMDC** now has an excellent staff and so can build on the stability this represents. I have left the **CFMDC** with some ambivalence, as I indicated to the Chair. It has been a demanding and rewarding four years and I wish the organization and its member filmmakers all the best for the future.

Ross Turnbull



## TALKING ABOUT ANIMATION, DOCUMENTARIES, DRAMAS: EDITED ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING REPORT

Since starting at the **CFMDC** in January, I have been familiarizing myself with the workings of the educational market: who buys and rents from us, which films, etc. I am currently completing an overview of our sales and rentals of animated, documentary, and dramatic films; I'm inputting this information on the computer and hope that it will allow me to be more systematic in my approach to the market. Figuring out who is likely to purchase less predictable, eclectic "product" - ie. innovative and challenging work- is my task for the next year or two.

1988 marked a high water point for the **Association of Media Literacy**. For years they'd been lobbying the **Ministry of Education, Secondary School Boards** and the like to augment the existing curriculums with a media literacy component. Last year came the breakthrough. New **Ministry** guidelines will make it mandatory for 10% of each English course, as well as a full course in the final year of every high school in Ontario to be devoted to 'media literacy'. So for the past couple of years the **Association** has been hosting a series of seminars and workshops to suggest just how this new time might be filled, what material might be included and how that material might be presented. The **CFMDC** applied for and received a one-time special projects grant to undertake a media literacy tour - a trip that will send our work into high schools across the province. We have hired **Krista Grevstad** to co-ordinate the tour. **Krista** has a combined honors BA from Windsor in film, theatre and business

communication, has worked on many independent film productions and has high school teaching experience. The tour will develop new contacts for us in the educational sector, and will hopefully be a preliminary effort that gauges the feasibility of an ongoing tour produced by the independent film and video community.

In terms of active promotion, the **CFMDC** continues to preview films with individual school boards and libraries, as well as attending the major buyer's market, **Showcase**. We have been advertising in educational and arts publications, and are developing a series of mini-catalogues which list our most recent films by subject area. If anyone has any brilliant profile/publicity ideas, give me a call...

General goals for this year, time permitting: 1) more personal contact with our major buyers (ongoing friendliness and consistent representation sells films), 2) actively pursuing specific films for the collection, especially documentaries, 3) developing a uniform graphic/format for one sheets, so I am not at the mercy of the filmmaker to provide one (this is probably dependent upon the **CFMDC** getting a job development person for publicity).

Other general issues for **ADD** filmmakers & the **Centre**: the new copyright legislation, expanding the **Independent Eye** into a more magazine-like format (please write something and send it in), investigating more broadcast and theatrical venues... Anyone with an ounce of spare time and interest should contact me.

*Gillian Morton*

## TALKING X FILM BLUES: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING REPORT

Some of the past two years have been spent putting paper in order - throwing out shit, reorganizing and clarifying filmmaker files and one-sheets, adding innumerable clippings, instituting a comprehensive X film bbl., starting a library, inputting all X films into the computer and filing seven years of invoices.

Big new last year? Well we took super-eight and have added 17 S8 titles and counting. We made the director and administrator the same and levelled out all the salaries so everybody makes the same (\$20,000). And the staff goes to board meetings now, not like the old days when the only staff/board interaction took the form of death threats, legal action and invective. So things are quieter. **Tom** and **Gillian** are great to work with - both very bright and committed and the **Centre's** lucky to have 'em. What else? We put on a lot of screenings last year - seven in **Regina**, three in **Calgary**, six in **Halifax**, one in **Charlottetown**, a few in **Toronto** and **Kingston**. Put out a couple of issues of the **Eye** along the way which is beginning to look a little like **Elvis** in his declining years - so swollen you can hardly recognize it, reaching for one kind of medicine after another.

A word about the collection. The **1988 catalogue** listed 500 X films. We've received 120 since and counting (a whopping increase) and hope to be putting out a **catalogue supplement** in the fall. Since the **catalogue** we've lost the following filmmakers: **Ernie Gehr, Dana Hodgson, Gordon Kidd, Marie Menken, Micheline Noel, Arvind Narale, Linda Outcult, Keith Rodan, Joel Singer** and **Lois Tupper**.

We've added: **Dmitry Belopolsky, Stephen Butson, William English, Ann Marie Fleming, Jane Evans, Marsha Herle, Peter Lipskis, Elisabeth Miles, Dominic Menegon, Deanna Morse, Tim Rivers** and **Isabelle Rousset**.

The bottom line: X film grossed about \$60,000 last year, up again from last year and the highest recorded figure since **CFDW** split from **CFMDC** in 1983. In 1988 we had 140 X filmmakers. Ten made more than \$1000, six made between \$500-\$1000 and eight between \$200-\$500. 50 received no income.

After the bottom line: I wrote over 200 letters last year and have entered post burn out mode - **Ross** beat me to the exit door this spring. Here's to next year.

*mike boolboom*

## ROSS TURNBULL

**Ross Turnbull**, our fearless leader for four years, has finally thrown in the towel. He's going off to make his own work. During his four years he raised the granting levels, brought in computers, air conditioning and a fridge, served as the head of the **Film and Video Alliance** for a year and exerted a tremendously calming influence. He'll be badly missed and we wish him all the best.

## NEW CLEANING/INSPECTION MACHINE

It finally arrived! After seven years we've traded our old warhorse of a cleaning/inspection machine in for a brand new old reconditioned model. It has liquid and dry cleaning gates as well as an inspection viewer. So prints will be going out looking better than ever.



### CATALOGUE SUPPLEMENT

We are poised on the brink of yet another catalogue - this one a supplement to the twentieth anniversary issue. So if you've got a film you'd like to see listed, or stills and info still missing for what you do

have here, now's the time to get it in.

### MEMBERSHIP RATES

At the recent Annual General Meeting it was resolved that the membership rate should be

raised to \$25 per year to help defray increased operating expenses. The proposal generated a heated discussion: come to next year's AGM if you want to participate in such controversial decisions!

### VIDEO PREVIEW

Given the number of requests for video for preview, the cost of the VHS tapes made from the master will be charged back to the filmmakers.

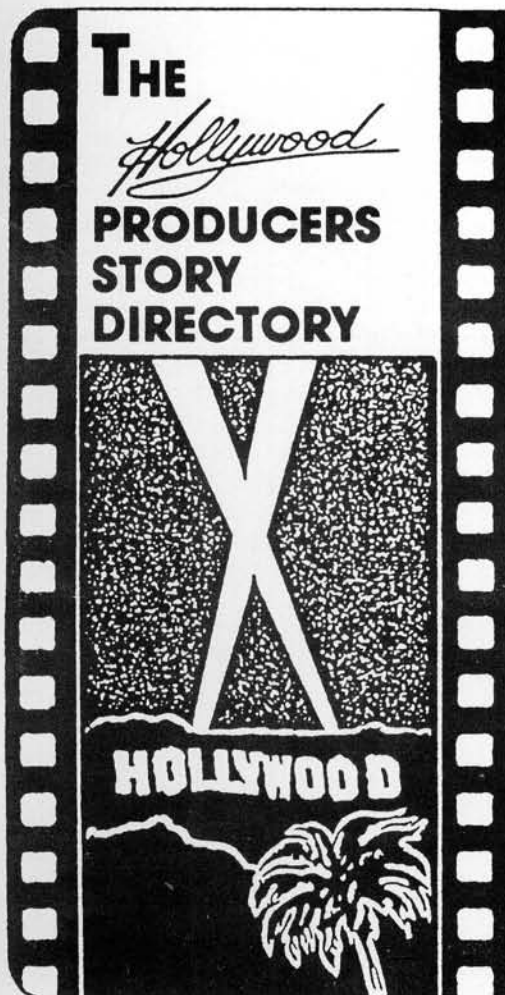
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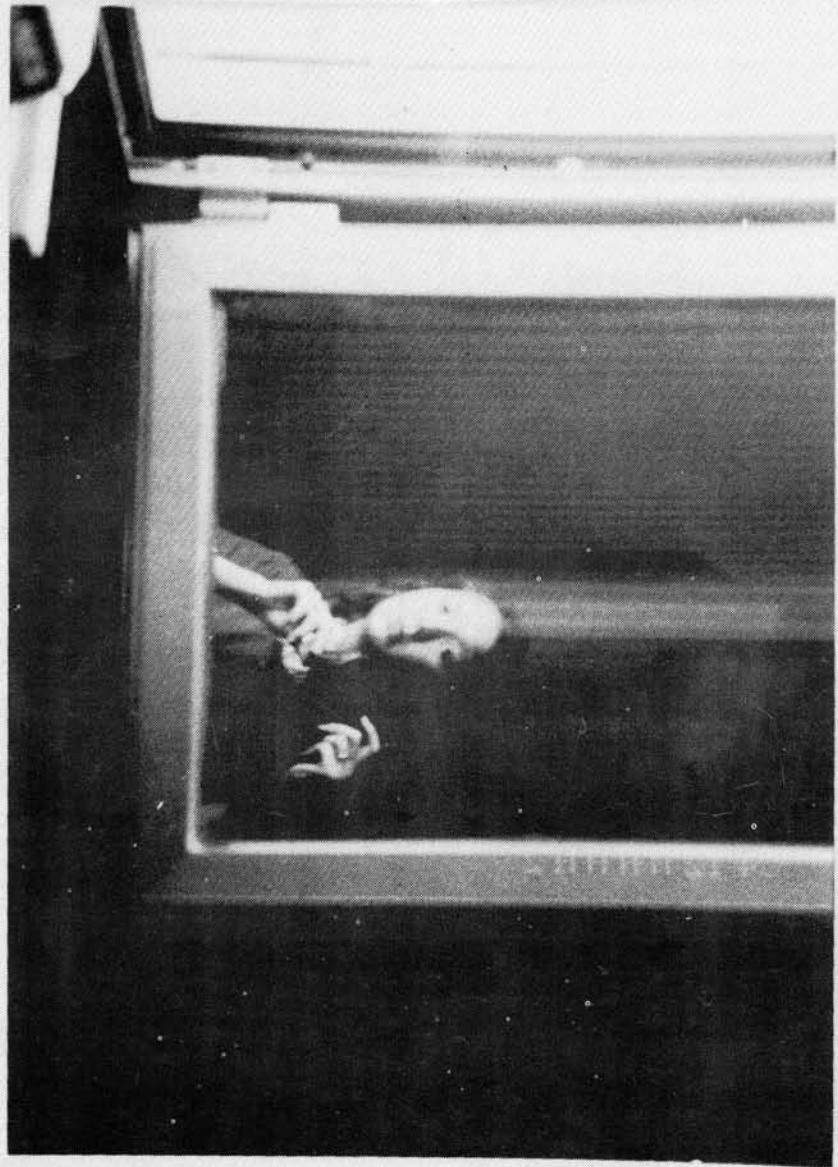
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