

I N D E P E N D E N T

EYE

Reinventing the Wheel

*Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present
T.S. Eliot*

A Note from Editor Mike Hoolboom

The story of their life - which, as I saw them regularly, I began to reconstruct year by year - was the story of their means of transportation: first a motorbike, then a scooter, then a proper motorcycle, now their cheap car, and the years of the future were already there in the image or imagination of cars that would grow larger and faster.

Reinvent the wheel? It sounds as if we're starting over. Trying to begin, as Brecht enjoins, at the beginning. But as the oldest artist run centre in the country we know better than most that any ordinary return is impossible - that invention takes the place of memory, that history is another literary genre. Nabokov wrote that the future is the obsolete in reverse - and what more appropriate maxim for a medium facing immanent extinction? Lacking a future what else can we do but look back, to begin to find a way to speak of where we've been, and so to find out where we are. Anyone who does not take for granted the order of succession (of rulers, movies, ourselves), the motion of emotion, the way we say "I" - is also at the beginning. One hundred years ago, who could have guessed that the Lumiere's training of sight would father such an indomitable narrative consensus? Or that we should have come as far as we have without roads at all, on paths not taken, content in our travelling to reinvent the wheel.

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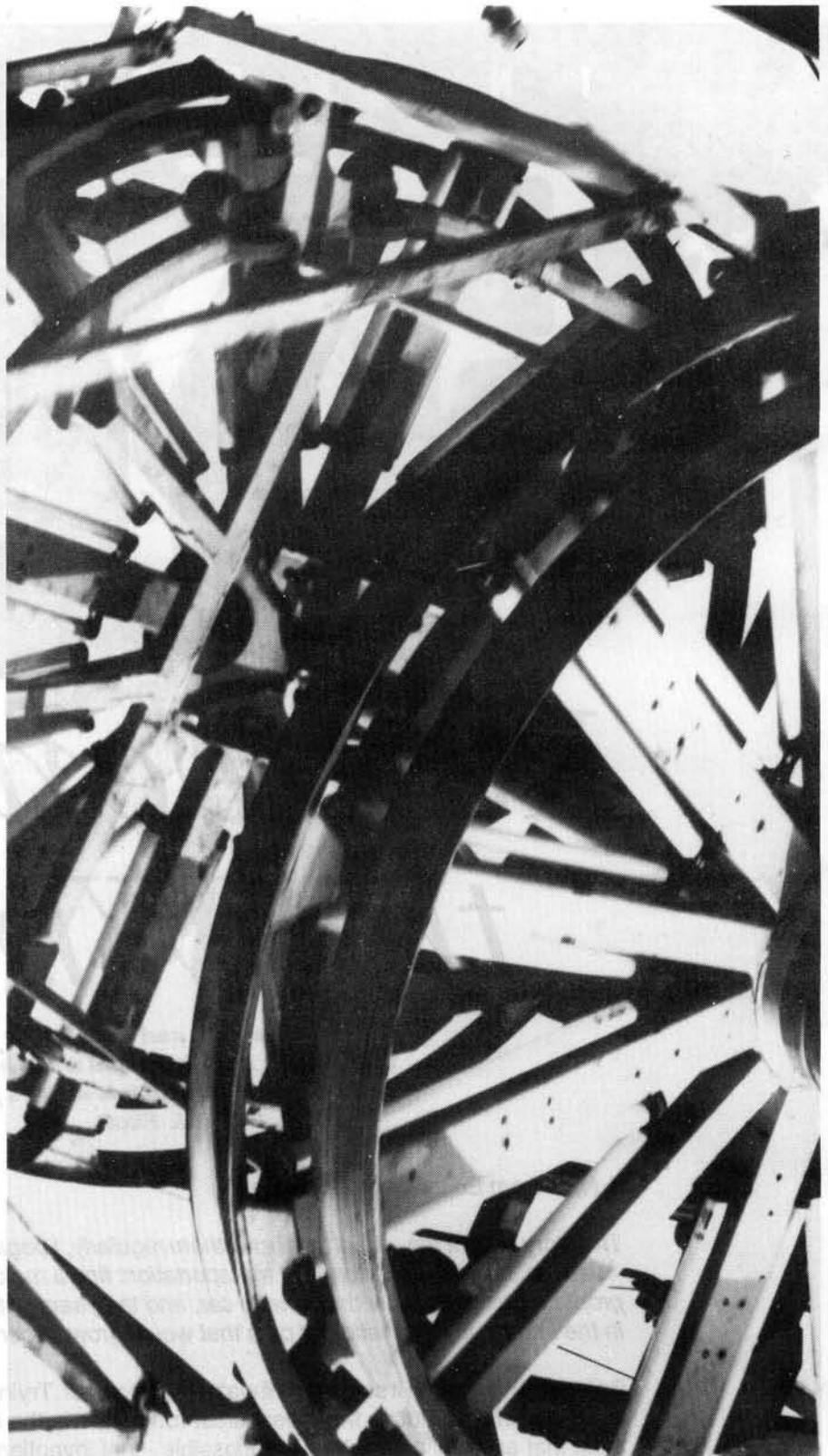
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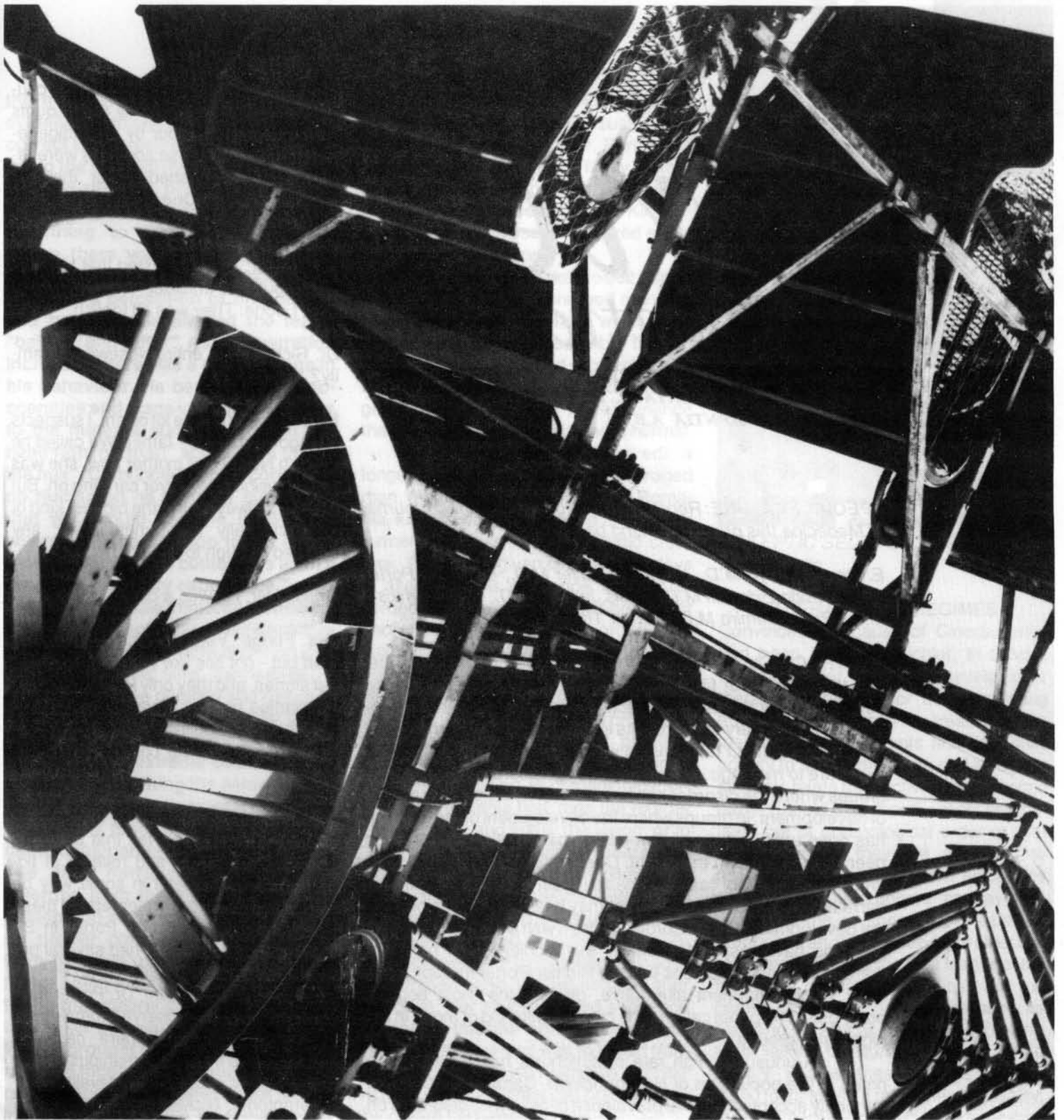
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Cine dementia

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOSIS AFTER CHRONIC
MOTION PICTURE MONTAGE, FILM EDITING AND MAD-
NESS - CINEDEMENTIA A,B,C6**

SPECIAL FEATURE: Reprinted here from the *El Dorado Journal of Medicine* this groundbreaking paper

E. Dermot Lloyd M.D., Heinrich Richler M.D., Cameron Porter M.D., Waldo Pidgeon M.D., Louis Jemeal M.D., Igor Norminski M.D., Paulo Damiro M.D., Turner Thompson M.D.

ABSTRACT. Observations by a number of psychiatrists suggest that the process of film montage or editing contributes to the development of psychosis in practitioners. The disorder is degenerative. Preliminary study results indicate that the severity of the disorder is in direct relationship with the duration and nature of exposure to montage. Recovery is as yet recorded only in those groups where the disorder has been detected in the early stages of development. In groups where the development of the disorder has gone unchecked and film editing has continued there has been no response to treatment. Observations of control groups and examinations of case histories suggest that factors related to narrative structure (or its absence) may bear full responsibility for the development of the disorder. Groups with limited exposure to montage have responded well to the Richler-Porter narrative therapy. A panel concludes that the Richler-Porter therapy is the most viable treatment alternative, offering the most hopeful prognosis. The panel calls for the close monitoring of those in the higher risk groups.

An unusually high rate of psychosis has always been noted in the population of Newfoundland, Canada. It has been generally accepted that the prevalence of psychotic disorders on the fog bound island was the result of readily identifiable environmental factors (poor diet, limited exposure to sunlight, isolation, chronic alcoholism) and hereditary factors (see *El Dorado Journal of Medicine*, June 12, 1979: **Family Swim at the Gene Pool**).

This first view came into question in 1982, when Dr. Heinrich Richler noted that societies with strong oral traditions had uncommonly high rates of psychotic disorder. Richler travelled to Newfoundland and undertook an exhaustive study of the

population in an attempt to establish causality. Richler relied heavily on accounts of psychotic behaviour by the indigenous population. These accounts were recorded and published under the title "**Lots of Foolish One 'Round Here**". An excerpt follows:

Dr. Richler: You suggested that Heber's behaviour was unusual.

Mrs. Fudge: They was all foolish.

Dr. Richler: The entire Noseworthy family?

Mrs. Fudge: Yes, the lot of 'em. I suspects they got it from their father. We called he Foolish Ned. Their mother now, she was right sensible like, never carrying on. But Ned was always tellin' the biggest kind of lies, 'specially to youngsters or any stunned enough to believe he.

Dr. Richler: He was a compulsive liar?

Mrs. Fudge: Voted for the Tories for a start but - not lies like you're sayin' now, but stories, and they only for badness like the parties he was always going to, he said they were political but we knew better, he'd stink home coming from corn liquor.

Only for badness or because of madness? Dr. Richler felt that the compulsive construction and relation of fictional narratives might in some way be linked to Dementia. Richler related these thoughts to Dr. Cameron Porter in St. John's who, at the time, had several patients in his care who shared an experience in the film medium. Dr. Porter suggested that Richler observe filmmakers in the editing process, where narrative structure was frequently manipulated, in the hope of identifying the development of symptoms. Richler's subsequent observations were the first step on the road to a clear understanding of the disorder.

He noted, "**Subject D.N. would quickly become agitated if he perceived even a minor flaw in the continuity of time and/or space in a motion picture sequence. The unedited film offered no promise of resolution for**

the material he required was not in evidence. Futilely, he would attempt to correct the perceived flaw by manipulating the order of the dialogue, inserting non-relevant photographic material (he called these "cut-aways"), planning to insert new dialogue where there was no record of that dialogue, and so on. The process disturbed his perception of chronology and he freely exchanged the terms "before" and "after". As his frustration increased there was a clear change in his behaviour. He began issuing obscenities and made violent references to the material such as "I'll cut the head right off that!" and "I'll kill that in the mix". Convinced that he could find no resolution he abruptly suggested that we should become intoxicated whereupon the solution to the narrative problem would come to us as in a dream or visionary experience."

Richler saw immediate evidence that prolonged episodes of motion picture montage resulted in more discontinuous narratives in the films themselves. It appeared that the duration and nature of exposure to montage had a direct link to the seriousness of the disorder.

"In one extreme case the subject had been editing the same film for almost ten years. His mental condition was widely reported to have deteriorated considerably over this period. The film narrative which finally emerged from this process was disjointed and absurd. The narrative had no proper chronology, with events from the past, present and probable future being fused into a singular time frame that clearly existed only in the filmmaker's greatly troubled mind. When I brought this to his attention he rambled incoherently about "levels of reality" and his own search for meaning. He said, "I have to prove that I exist". The filmmaker saw his ten year effort as a personal odyssey with himself as mythical hero. In as sad a case as I have ever studied the filmmaker had plainly mistaken chaos for order, order for chaos. He had abandoned reality and truly gone completely insane."

CONTROL GROUP RESULTS

After reviewing a number of such cases and working closely with Dr. Porter and his wards, Richler more firmly established the cause of the disorder (by this time termed Cinedementia or Kinodementia) through closely monitored exposure in control groups.

Group A were asked to edit a short sequence in which an enraged man kills his wife's pet ermine. They were given two working days to assemble the sequence. Richler recorded subtle changes in behaviour and moderate anxiety in this group. Three days after the experience the group's behaviour returned to normal.

Group B were asked to edit a longer sequence in which an enraged man, recalling his expulsion from Romania, kills his wife's pet ermine and is later tormented by visions of the dead creature. They were given five working days to assemble this sequence. Richler recorded considerable changed behaviour and extreme anxiety in this group. Violence was reported from one subject. The marked change in behaviour was attributed to the increased complexity of the narrative. The anxiety was the product of the difficult decision making process. Subjects had to decide whether to present the information in chronological order, with Romania first, then the murder of the ermine and finally the vision; or to "flash-back" to the Romanian past as the man killed the ermine (again followed by the vision); or to begin with the vision and then seek out its roots by returning to the ermine's death and Romania. One subject became so distressed that she had to be removed from the experiment after two days. Her roughly edited sequence suggested that the enraged man murdered the ermine and was expelled from Romania for having done so by the victim's gigantic parent (as presented in the dream sequence).

Group C was asked to edit a still longer sequence in which an enraged man, recalling his expulsion from Romania, kills his wife with her own pet ermine during the stage performance of the scenario edited by Group B. A medical ethics committee halted this experiment fearing the consequences for the subjects.



*EPILEPTIC SEIZURE COMPARISON
Paul Sharits*

THERAPEUTIC REGIMES

Convinced the cause of Cinedementia had been identified Richler, in concert with Dr. Porter, set about developing a therapeutic regime for those suffering from the disorder. The treatment demands that the patients first limit daily activity to a bare minimum and at regular intervals relate their activities to a second party. Should they report events or emotions out of chronological order or with embellishment, they are subjected to painful electric shocks from electrodes attached to their fingers and eyelids. Gradually, the environment of the patient is enriched and the demands for objective recall increased. In the final stages of the treatment patients are deliberately exposed to unlikely occurrences such as bleeding electrical outlets, exploding food, talking furniture and so on. If the patient relates these events without trying to establish a rationale or causality, the treatment is judged to have been successful and the patient is released from care. If three months after the termination of treatment the patients' imagination appears hopelessly stifled one can say, in all fairness, that he or she has been cured.

(Thanks to Ed Riche for reprint rights)

The Avant-garde into the Eighties

Steve Anker is Program Director of the San Francisco Cinematheque. He has written for Film Quarterly and Cinematograph and has taught film at the San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco State University, Tufts University and the Massachusetts College of Art. The following essay was first published in a catalogue published by the American Museum of the Moving Image on the occasion of their exhibition, Independent America. This 54 part exhibition included nearly 150 films by U.S. filmmakers in a ten year retrospective from 1978-1988.

THERE NOW EXISTS A BODY OF INDEPENDENT FILMS MADE IN THE LAST DECADE THAT EQUALS AND OFTEN EXCEEDS THE VITALITY OF WORKS FROM ANY COMPARABLE PERIOD in its diversity of concerns and radical expression. The ongoing originality of the American avant-garde stands in sharp contrast to claims that little of value has been produced during this time. That few of these films are familiar to a wider audience reflects both the cultural malaise of the times and the neglect by critics and curators who claim that they have fully represented the important cinematic art of this era. Despite its tarnished appeal, the idea of an 'avant-garde' is now more critical than ever. It functions as a continuous challenging and rupturing of complacent cultural attitudes and forms. The term itself is problematical because it has come to connote a specific set of assumptions, yet 'avant-garde' is a concept that refers to a relationship to mainstream culture, one not tied to any specific historical moment.

Independent America is a first effort to come to terms with this extraordinary body of work. By juxtaposing relatively accessible films that have had some critical and commercial success with more obscure and fundamentally more daring films this retrospective gives a sense of the depth of achievement by independent American filmmakers. In the brief remarks that follow, I will discuss qualities common to many of these films and the circumstances that determine their position in this culture.

1.

American avant-garde film, as a movement, had a brief and dramatic history. Jonas Mekas' seminal 1959 manifesto, 'A Call for a New Generation of Filmmakers' (see Film Culture Reader, ed. P. Adams Sitney p. 73, Praeger Press, NY, 1970) called upon all who were working against the sterile commercial industry to band together and revolt. Nothing of this kind had ever happened before in the history of America's most popular art form. All manner of filmmakers were linked together, the common denominator being that they 'all mistrust and loathe the official cinema and its thematic and formal stiffness' and 'seek to free themselves from the over-professionalism and over-technicality that handicap inspiration and spontaneity in the official cinema'.

Within two years, the New American Cinema group was established. Participants included such diverse filmmakers as Lionel Rogosin, Peter Bogdanovich, Robert Frank, Shirley Clarke, and Gregory Markopoulos. The structure of the group proved short-lived, but served as the impetus for the formation, in 1962, of the Filmmakers Cooperative (the first distribution company run by the filmmakers themselves), and the re-focusing of the journal Film Culture into the group's lively house organ. More importantly, it gave form and validity to the independent movement in American cinema.

Mekas, who wrote regularly for the Village Voice from 1959 through



1971, became the self-described 'raving maniac of the cinema'. Partially in response to the impassioned writings of Mekas, the writings of the young P. Adams Sitney, Ken Kelman and others, and partially in response to the radicalizing energies of the early sixties, this new underground gradually developed a focus and definition far removed from the original scope of the New American Cinema. More emphatic in their divergence from mainstream forms, a large and extraordinary group of filmmakers pushed as hard as they could at the edges of the medium's potential for pure expression. By the late sixties, in both the ethical and the aesthetic sense, an alternative cinema had blossomed which had seen the emergence of several mature artists who had contributed significant bodies of distinctive work.

In retrospect, it seems natural that in 1970 Mekas, Sitney, Kelman, Peter Kubelka and others defined the achievements of the movement through the creation of the Anthology Film Archives. In this collection, the films of Marie Menken, Michael Snow's *La Region Centrale* (1971) and Stan Brakhage's *The Art of Vision* (1965) stand side by side with Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), Buster Keaton's *The General* (1926), and films by Georges Melies, Yasujiro Ozu and Sergei Eisenstein. The formation of the Anthology Film Archives marked the canonization of what had begun as a loosely formed but fiercely determined movement of artists. Although some have lamented it as an entombment, the Anthology Film Archives represents the most significant recognition of the movement's achievement to date, and stands as an unsurpassed vision of the history of the medium as an art form.

No one foresaw the tightening of the culture and the conservative forces that would increasingly rise to dominance. The 'Movie Journal' column ceased to appear in the *Voice* in 1971, and reappeared only briefly in the *Soho Weekly News* during the mid-seventies. With cultural energies in retrenchment and the afterglow of the Anthology

achievement still being felt, no successor to Mekas arose to help promote interest in new work; in this vacuum the fragile sense of community that had given sustenance to many filmmakers during the sixties faded. The Filmmakers Cooperative's last catalogue was published in 1975, making it even more difficult for filmmakers who came after to make their work known. The movement was formally acknowledged within the cultural firmament as the avant-garde; however, along with this came an erroneous perception that the canon had been closed and no worthwhile new work was being made. This fallacy was reinforced by a tired establishment (exemplified by the travelling exhibition, 'A History of the American Avant-Garde', circulated by the American Federation of the Arts in 1976, but concluding its survey in 1972).

Nevertheless, although the movement itself may have come to an end, strong new work was still being made. While some of it was shown at such venues as the collective for Living Cinema or Millenium in New York, and was even occasionally presented in exhibitions at the Anthology Film Archives, none of this later work attained the widespread acceptance accorded to the films associated with the movement. In addition, many institutions that had previously been supportive ceased to promote these works, and critical writings on the subject vanished from the mainstream press. The superficial extent to which these films had opened the culture to new forms of film experience had become clear.

It is no surprise, then, that few of the avant-garde films that have been made over the last ten years have gained much attention, whether they are by recognized masters or relative newcomers. Yet while little of this work has penetrated the screen of silence that replaced the 'movement' by the early seventies, great numbers of filmmakers have continued to work in original ways.

2.

Nothing characterizes the last ten years more than the dissolution of the idealism and purpose behind individual action. The romance with self-exploration and actualization evidenced in the late fifties and sixties by various rebellious political and artistic movements has been replaced by a hardened resistance to those same ideals, a pragmatic toughness seemingly necessary simply to survive. Mass culture thus asserted a new control over individuals that has been realized with intimidating precision during the Reagan era. Faced with an ever more resilient popular culture that has gradually absorbed most of the individuals and ideas who had challenged it only years before, a culture promising financial reward and emotional reinforcement, it has become increasingly difficult to justify making art that doesn't have broad appeal and/or topical relevance. The conviction that what matters most is one's own 'vision' is gone, as is the sense that this vision can be genuinely transformative in relation to the world.

Filmmakers working privately whose aesthetic concerns remain peripheral to the mainstream, have had to accept many new hardships. The cost of materials has continued to escalate and the availability of film stocks has dwindled. Moreover, the medium has hardly established its artistic legitimacy apart from its commercial aspect, and now seems poised on the edge of extinction from the threat of video.

In an age when authenticity is in question in all fields of endeavor, filmmakers who are still attracted to the unique qualities of the medium have become cultural anachronisms. Film is a physical medium, a product of the Machine Age. Based on the mechanical projection of photographs it was conceived as a direct analogue to the visually experienced world. Film demands a total physical commitment on the part of the viewer to appreciate its riches. Projection in a darkened room with a centralized screen is critical, resulting in a concentrated (and in some respects disarming)

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sensual experience. By working in unfamiliar modes that test the openness of the audience, these filmmakers position the viewer as an active participant, countering the demoralization and alienation of a mass response. Both the beauty and difficulty of such an experience is that each viewer is confronted with themselves in darkness, sometimes in silence, in a public setting.

Despite pressures to conform or to give in to the futility of equaling past achievements, filmmakers continue to rely on their own resourcefulness and consciousness, developing their own social networks and apparatus for dissemination. The flamboyant public energy in the fifties and sixties of Mekas, Brakhage, Markopoulos, Jacobs, and others, has given way to more guarded and inner-directed uses of artistic will and determination - an appropriate response in a time when perhaps the most radical act may be to withdraw from cultural hyperbole and hard sell. And so it is that these filmmakers embody a paradox, using an outmoded technology for the creation of new forms reflecting individual consciousness. In a medium whose very nature is transient, these filmmakers work in opposition to values that are strictly temporal.

3.

Radical filmmaking, as with all art, cannot be categorized without simplifying the intentions of the filmmakers and the works themselves. With this in mind, the next section is an attempt to articulate some of the significant tendencies apparent in the work of many filmmakers during the past decade. What remains most important is the full experience of the individual works and the viewer's response to them. Focusing on filmmakers and films included within this exhibition, I will consider these currents evident in recent work:

1. Using the independent film medium to create intense modes of perception, to challenge or expand human consciousness.

2. Using film to explore memory and history, a subject particularly appropriate for a time-oriented medium.

3. A fascination with fragmentation through nonlinear and discontinuous form, frequently expressed by types of collage, or juxtaposing fragments from many sources and styles.

4. The creation of interior psychological landscapes, sometimes overtly as autobiographical portraits, sometimes as metaphors of emotional states.

5. The continued activity of super-8 filmmakers, whose desire for informality and immediacy counter the sterile codification of technique so dominant in American culture.

Many of the most significant avant-garde filmmakers of earlier decades not only have continued to be productive, but have gone well beyond their own past work and beyond the expectations and active engagement of past audiences. Because their work continues to break new ground, further challenging already familiar artistic voices, I would like to begin by describing the work of a few who have been most productive and who seem most emblematic of these tendencies.

In the past ten years, Stan Brakhage has produced an astonishing three dozen new films. With his final embrace of total abstraction in the **Roman Numeral Series**, the **Arabic Numeral Series**, **Unconscious London Strata** and the **Egyptian Series**, Brakhage has explored rhythmic imagery and tonal nuance in its most distilled state. In a sense, this is his most triumphant act. At his best, as in **Unconscious London Strata**, Brakhage creates a textured emotional and psychological experience comparable to his earlier 'psychodramas' or autobiographical masterpieces, and has indeed given pure cinematic form a meaning comparable to music. The

Dante Quartet is his most concentrated and complex hand-painted film to date, each frame exquisitely composed with several layers of different pigment. **Murder Psalm** represents a new direction for Brakhage, weaving pre-existing footage into a brooding meditation on childhood and death.

Ken Jacobs' art continues to expand in depth and range even as it remains stridently non-marketable. By devoting most of his creative energies to live performance since the early seventies and by resolutely refusing to compromise his own fascination for extending and distending time and focusing on minutiae and subtle detail, Jacobs has assured his own neglect in an era where attention span has shrunk. The maker of **Blonde Cobra** (1962) and **Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son** (1969) continues to tap the mystery behind moving picture images, whether through a re-examination of turn-of-the-century material as performance, by exposing a melodramatic formula (**The Doctor's Dream**, 1978), or by releasing a discarded reel of news footage as **Perfect Film**. With **The Nervous System** series Jacobs employed a 3-D process that works through pulsating alternation between two identical prints of the same found footage. The final installment of this series, **The Whole Shebang**, is a breathtaking display of control by Jacobs over his material - footage of death-defying acrobatic stunts. In each of his film works and in his improvisatory 3-D performances, Ken Jacobs responds to recorded images as a living tissue, at once historical yet also brimming with untapped meanings.

Yvonne Rainer's dance and choreography work during the 1960's startled the art world with its capacity to depict emotional states and complex character interactions. With **Lives of Performers** (1972) and **Film About A Woman Who** (1974) Rainer made the transition from live theater to the plastic world of film. **Journeys From Berlin/1971** (1980) continued her shift away from incorporated dance as a principal tool, to a fusion of different kinds of film material (including home-movie footage, dramatized theatrical scenes, stock foot-

age, and a sharply defined political metaphor) to construct a drama of an individual struggling to maintain identity and responsibility in an increasingly fragmented world. Fragmentation is also at the root of Rainer's most recent film, **The Man Who Envied Women** (1986), but here she directly addresses our responses to media and the classic film-viewing experience. In an age consumed by multiple possibilities of information and expression, Rainer finds levels upon levels of meaning in a collage of material from many different sources.

Ernie Gehr became known in the seventies for a group of meticulously realized films that explored the most fundamental components of cinematic perception. With several major films completed during the eighties, Gehr carried his fascination with pure film forms - color movement nuances of light and texture - into a new arena, integrating these concerns with issues of cultural dislocation. In **Untitled 1981**, Gehr carries his fascination with film forms - color, rhythm, changes in light and texture - into a new arena. Limiting himself to the gestures of old people filmed from the window of his Brooklyn apartment, Gehr orchestrates a swift montage of facial expressions, body movement and richly observed textural details. He thus creates a multi-dimensional flow articulating both the frailties and idiosyncracies of these people and the wonderous visual world their figures present on film. **Signal-Germany on the Air** is Gehr's vision of the culture his parents had been forced to leave during the Nazi regime. Through a heightened use of film's artificial colors, Gehr's Berlin is a depersonalized landscape divorced from its own history.

The early films of Gunvor Nelson did not suggest the astonishing growth in style and control that her recent work demonstrates. With the completion of **Red Shift** (1983) and the trio of **Frame Line** (1984), **Light Years** (1987) and **Light Years Expanding** (1988), Nelson's work has gained a new concentration and visual mastery in its exploration of autobiographical themes. **Red Shift** (1983) is a portrait of mother-daughter relationships, a tapestry of

memories and reflections that positions Nelson as the central figure between her daughter and her mother. Through a densely textured series of extreme close-ups of skin, fabrics, ornaments, and precious objects, Nelson weaves multiple strains of dramatized fantasies that elaborate upon these relationships. The complex sound-track is composed of folk

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sayings interspersed with narrated letters written by Calamity Jane to her daughter in the 1890's. **Frame Line** began a series of films, including **Light Years**, that mix collage and animation techniques with landscape imagery, and deal with Nelson's sense of displacement from her native Swedish culture. Nelson's recent films glimpse an interior world, inhabited by haunting memories and filled with richly expressive textures.

One of the most exciting developments in recent years has been the exploration of new work by George Kuchar. For more than thirty years, Kuchar has created his own brand of lurid and highly personalized B-movies, spoofing and de-

ranging such popular genres as the soap opera, science fiction, and the Western. Kuchar has also made more overtly personal portrait films, such as **Mongreloid**, a delightful home movie of and for his dog. It is this intimate form of portraiture to which Kuchar has increasingly turned during the last two years, working with a humble Sony 8mm video system. As the cost of filmmaking continues to climb, Kuchar has adapted consumer technology as a means of giving himself the greatest freedom to record and edit a stream-of-consciousness response to the flood of events in his life. In little more than two years he has completed thirty pieces, including portraits of friends and other filmmakers, and diaries of travels. Each tape is intricately edited in-camera and splendidly photographed, utilizing the video medium to its fullest while maintaining Kuchar's truthful, sharply humorous ability to react to the world around him.

For reasons described in the first two parts of this essay, it has been extremely difficult in the past decade for filmmakers little-known before this time to establish credibility. Although their names may be unfamiliar, they are making strong and original works that reflect a passionate involvement with the medium. The presence of younger filmmakers whose work is vital and challenging is as important to a living art form as are the continued efforts of established figures. Most exciting about this retrospective is its embrace of recent film history as a living and changing entity. The risks inherent in making choices within such a field are clear. Possibilities for emphases and inclusions may change even as the exhibition unfolds and we enter into critical dialogue with each of the works. With this in mind, I would like to point to several of the films I know best and how they reflect the directions I've described earlier.

A probing of history and the function of memory, often expressed through openly political themes, forms the underlying impulse for many of these films. In **The Ties That Bind**, Su Friedrich exam-

ines the relationship between her mother's subjugated childhood in Nazi Germany and her own perspective as daughter and political activist. Daniel Eisenberg's **Displaced Person** and **Cooperation of Parts** both deal with European uprooting, and through a distilled reshaping of images and narrated texts, raise questions about how knowledge and consciousness are transmitted. **Cooperation of Parts** is Eisenberg's reflection of his own voyage to his parents' former homeland. Comprised of

against stock combat images (themselves part of a universal memory bank), which are then ruptured and hypnotically repeated.

Filmmakers have increasingly turned to found footage (pre-existing images) as primary sources of material, drawing upon film history as well as their lifelong experiences as moviegoers (a continuity particular to the twentieth century). Morgan Fisher's **Standard Gauge** is a narrated autobiography of the filmmaker's love affair with the profes-

new movement. **Midweekend** employs a different kind of hand-manipulation, as short passages from found films are isolated and overwhelmed by a barrage of color blobs painted directly onto the film strip.

Breaking continuity has been a natural compulsion in an era preoccupied with fragmentation, especially as a means of revealing the illusions of narrative film conventions. Manuel DeLanda's films are assaults on the senses that jerk us into new relationships with narrative idioms. **Incontinence** is a manically fractured fragment from Albee's **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?**, and **Raw Nerves** is a hallucinogenic dramatization of psychoanalytic theory, in the form of a guttural recollection of film noir conventions. **Something is Seen But One Doesn't Know What** by Keith Sanborn condenses dozens of shots taken from Hollywood movies and science films into a disjointed narrative flow. Making ludicrous and sometimes painful new connections, Sanborn underscores the knee-jerk tendencies of narrative montage and the potential for any image to be made absurd.

Abigail Child has developed her own approach to fragmenting continuity. **Is This What You Were Born For?** is a series of films that link gestures and sounds into rapid-fire montages. Beginning with **Prefaces** (1980) and **Mutiny** (1983), Child constructs linear flows pieced together from truncated moments of people moving, reciting, or in some other way creating an action in both picture and sound. We are pulled in an almost infinite variety of directions, even as Child makes links from shot to shot based on simple rhyming technique. Changes of pitch, texture, location, activity and personality of subject all whiz by in a frenzy of alternating impulses. In **Perils**, Child links, in jolting succession, tableaux of stylized silent-movie characters threatening violent actions. **Mayhem** mixes a great variety of material, including stylized posturing (as in **Perils**), images suggestive of a noirish thriller, and pornographic footage from the '30s. Fusing metaphoric and suggestive imagery with blunt sado-sexual fantasies, **Mayhem** is



THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN Yvonne Rainer

footage shot on the trip, seen in counterpoint to spoken or printed proverbs, **Cooperation of Parts** suggests the ambiguous relationship between Eisenberg's own understanding of history, and his sense of the Europe he encounters as a culture frozen in time. Glimpses of concentration camps, defiled Jewish cemeteries, and children playing in decaying urban settings reappear as though in a dream, suggesting a searching consciousness stifled by forms that only vaguely represent the past. Memory also forms the jolting backdrop of Richard Levine's **War Stories**. Straightforward, horrifying recollections of Vietnam veterans are positioned

sional 35mm format. The film's only visuals are strips of saved or discarded film, which accompany Fisher's anecdotes. Phil Solomon's **The Secret Garden** is a dreamlike transformation of his childhood movie experiences. In it Solomon takes images from **The Wizard of Oz** (1939) and other film fantasies, and gives them new radiance while suggesting childlike fears of the unknown that lurk underneath. Caroline Avery's films create worlds of fragmentary moments in which pre-existing images are reduced to mysterious gestures. In **Big Brother**, Avery creates a startlingly sculptural effect as images of limbs and torsos are literally cut into the middle of other images and given

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a dark meditation on the evocative power images can gain when joined as part of a larger narrative flow.

Nina Fonoroff fractures her own footage in **Department of the Interior**, creating a palpable expression of the psychological terror latent in a world where even the most familiar and comforting objects have dual meanings. In harsh contrast black-and-white, Fonoroff's image form their own vocabulary of memory as shots of windows, trees, a watch, and even images of her mother, are wrenched from their original context.

One of the strongest currents in the work of many filmmakers during these years has been the exploration of feminist issues central to their lives. Gunvor Nelson, Yvonne Rainer, Su Friedrich and Leslie Thornton all have created highly individuated and private blends of fantasy and other kinds of material that deal with motherhood, love relations and the self-images of women. Marjorie Keller's **Daughter of Chaos** deftly juxtaposes footage of herself as a child, a pair of pre-teen girls' natural awkwardness, and images she recorded at her sister's wedding, to express her ambivalence towards social conventions. Janis Crystal Lipzin's **Other Reckless Things** is a disillusioned interpretation of a true case of self-inflicted Caesarean childbirth, mixing snatches of newspaper stories with graphic and de-romanticized footage of an actual childbirth. With this synthesis, Lipzin forces a new appreciation of the pain and isolation of childbirth. Peggy Ahwesh uses the informality of super-8 sound equipment to help women reveal their thoughts and sexual fantasies in **From Romance to Ritual**. Bluntly and effectively cutting between people speaking directly into the camera, Ahwesh questions attitudes about the mythology of romance, childhood innocence and experience.

Implicit in all of the film discussed so far is a challenging of filmmaking values and expectation. For some filmmakers it is the nature of perception itself that is probed and enlightened through the basic elements of cinema. Nathaniel Dorsky's recent films create a

visually intense meditative field in which the viewer is an active participant. **Pneuma** is a shimmering montage, whose imagery is limited to the endless flow of grain patterns created by different film stocks. **Alaya** captures granular movement in the 'real' world, filming infinitely luminous seas of sand from many vantage points.

Larry Gottheim's **Elective Affinities** tetralogy (begun with **Horizons**, (1973) and **Mouches Volantes** (1976)), concluded with **Four Shadows** (1978) and **Tree of Knowledge** (1980). In all of his films since 1973, Gottheim has expanded on his fascination with repetition, recombining the elements of each film in different ways so that each becomes an emotionally and perceptually complex experience.

Perhaps the simplest expression of the aesthetic values I've described can be found in the varied work produced by super-8 filmmakers during the past decade. Often relegated to curatorial and critical neglect, and faced with the shrinking availability of materials, super-8 filmmakers have embraced the medium's intimate scale of production and exhibition. A full range of the directions I've noted can be found within the super-8 work in this retrospective, but with a character specific to the medium.

Saul Levine has devoted more than twenty years to making 8mm and super-8 films that have the rough-hewn immediacy and vulnerability of home movies, but that are in fact expertly crafted. Levine's films are widely divergent expressions of a singular cinematic voice. **New Left Notes** is both a lyrical diary of a love affair and a record of radical political actions of the late-sixties. **A Few Tunes Going Out** zigzags with staccato precision between a flood of diaristic motifs, devilishly veering beyond the comfortable limits of sound and image cutting. Joe Gibbons, another devotee of Super-8, is the central character of his darkly comic and autobiographical films. In **Confidential**, Gibbons speaks directly

into the camera, tensely confronting the viewer, and through his perverse wit and anecdotal frankness keeps us riveted throughout each of the film's thirty-minute sections. Living in the world is a mock narrative charting Gibbons' inability to hold a job or find an avenue into social respectability.

Ellen Gaine creates a luminous granular universe in her **No. 3**. With jazz-like spontaneity, she hones in on fragments of home movie images through rephotography, isolating ghostlike and abstract patterns and rhythms. Peter Herwitz, in films such as **Mysterious Barricades** (1987) and **Roses of Ishfahan** (1984), has amplified the relative murkiness of the super-8 image to create a world of fleeting glimpses in which the world is apparently beyond reach. Herwitz uses an array of vivid hand-drawn colors directly applied to visual motifs that are broken in mid-stream and repeated (birds in flight, friends, and home life), creating an emotional landscape of longing and an ambiguity toward beauty. Lewis Klahr's super-8 universe collages figures cut from comic books, magazines, and old movies, into a mythological kingdom reminiscent of childhood fantasies. Like Phil Solomon, Klahr is interested in the strangeness revealed in these seemingly innocent images when stripped from their original contexts.

The wealth of exciting films included within this retrospective makes discussion of each impossible within a brief overview. Radically new approaches to ethnographic and political documentary (Daniel Barnett's **The Chinese Typewriter**, Trinh T. Minh-ha's **Reassemblage**, Mark Lapore's **Medina**, and Jeffrey Skoller's **Nicaragua: Hear-Say/See Here**), narrative fiction (Jon Jost's **Bell Diamond** and Vivienne Dick's **She Had Her Gun All Ready**), cultural portraits by Willie Varela (**Recuerdos de Flores Muertas**) and Ken Ross (**Blessed in Exile**), major new films by key figures such as Chick Strand, Robert Breer, Warren Sonbert, and many more attest to the remarkable fertility of the past ten years.

Gently Down the Stream



Su Friedrich was born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1954. After graduating from Oberlin College in 1974 she worked at a Women's Graphics Collective in Chicago, travelled in Africa and then moved to New York where she became a member of the Heresies Collective, writing fiction and criticism. She has made eight films since 1978 including Gently Down The Stream which was completed in 1981.

THE TEXT OF GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM IS A SUCCESSION OF FOURTEEN DREAMS taken from eight years of my journals. They were shuffled out of their original chronological order for the purpose of coherence and because often we know/dream something long after, or before, we can use it in our lives. The text is scratched onto the film (with approximately 18 frames per word) so that you hear any voice **but** that of a recorded narrator. The images were chosen for their indirect but potent correspondence to the dream content. I am not interested in recreating a 'dream sequence' on film: dreams do it infinitely better themselves.

I chose to work with dreams that were the most troubling to me, that expressed my deepest fears, anxieties and longings, or ones that had forced a sudden awareness about a nagging problem. Anything repeated often enough loses its mysterious ritual power, and so I hoped that I might exorcise certain personal obsessions while using a language

that was direct enough to allow others to recognize their own demons (assuming that our desire for attachment, and our fear of it, can be equally demonic).

I also respect those dreams that can create an uncanny confusion between what was dreamt and what was done 'in real life'. Some of the dreams seemed so plausible, but were physically impossible; somehow, these metaphors had more credibility than do many real experiences. In general, I am more concerned with finding ways to integrate the (harsh) wisdom of dreams into my life than I am in analyzing the structure and function of dreams through any given system (Freudian, Jungian, etc).

I go to the circus to watch the women fly through the air with the greatest of ease, but then I find myself staring at the many paths worn round...and round...and around in the sawdust by the clown's feet.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I would like to think that the films speak for themselves but it might be useful to explain how and why I choose to experiment so much with the form and structure. I studied art history and then worked for four years as a black-and-white photographer, which gave me a profound respect for the expressive power of static, single, and silent images. When I began making films, it was a thrill, and a great challenge, to record motion and to create unpredictable relations between images, but my eye for silent, singular images held sway, as did my love for the particu-

lar beauty of black and white. I certainly admire many narrative and documentary films, but instead of recreating or reproducing a familiar world, it's been more exciting to collect an odd assortment of images, both scripted and shot from real life, and to edit them so that unfamiliar environments, states of mind, and rhythms can emerge. Moreover, by using black and clear leader, by writing on the surface of the film, by reprinting and manipulating images, and by the disjunction of sound and image, one is never entirely seduced by 'the world within the film'; one is always reminded that each film is an artificial construction of a series of disparate images which are forced to peaceably coexist and communicate with each other. The artist as diplomat?

Despite my abiding interest in extending the language of film, I find that people tend to pay more attention to the content - perhaps out of a longstanding, misguided notion that women, unlike men, are more concerned with content than with form. In my case, each film does begin with an obsession about a particular issue (personal appearance, 'bad' dreams, political guilt, and sacriligious desires), and it's been a great relief to discover that one can become much stronger by articulating one's fears, anger, desires, or hope. But the challenge comes in trying to push film beyond its usual narrative capacities, so that those issues can be most precisely conveyed, so that the form takes as many risks as the content.

Experimental film is usually considered a poor cousin to 'real' filmmaking, and I'm often asked whether this work is just a prelude to making narrative features. Perhaps people aren't as eager to be challenged by experimental films as they are glad to be entertained by narratives, but each style has its limitations and its rewards, and each deserves respect as a separate but equal art form. I've certainly learned as much about the human mind and heart through seeing experimental films as I did growing up on features.

(written for the Whitney Museum of American Art 1987)

Body and Time: The Films of Barbara Sternberg

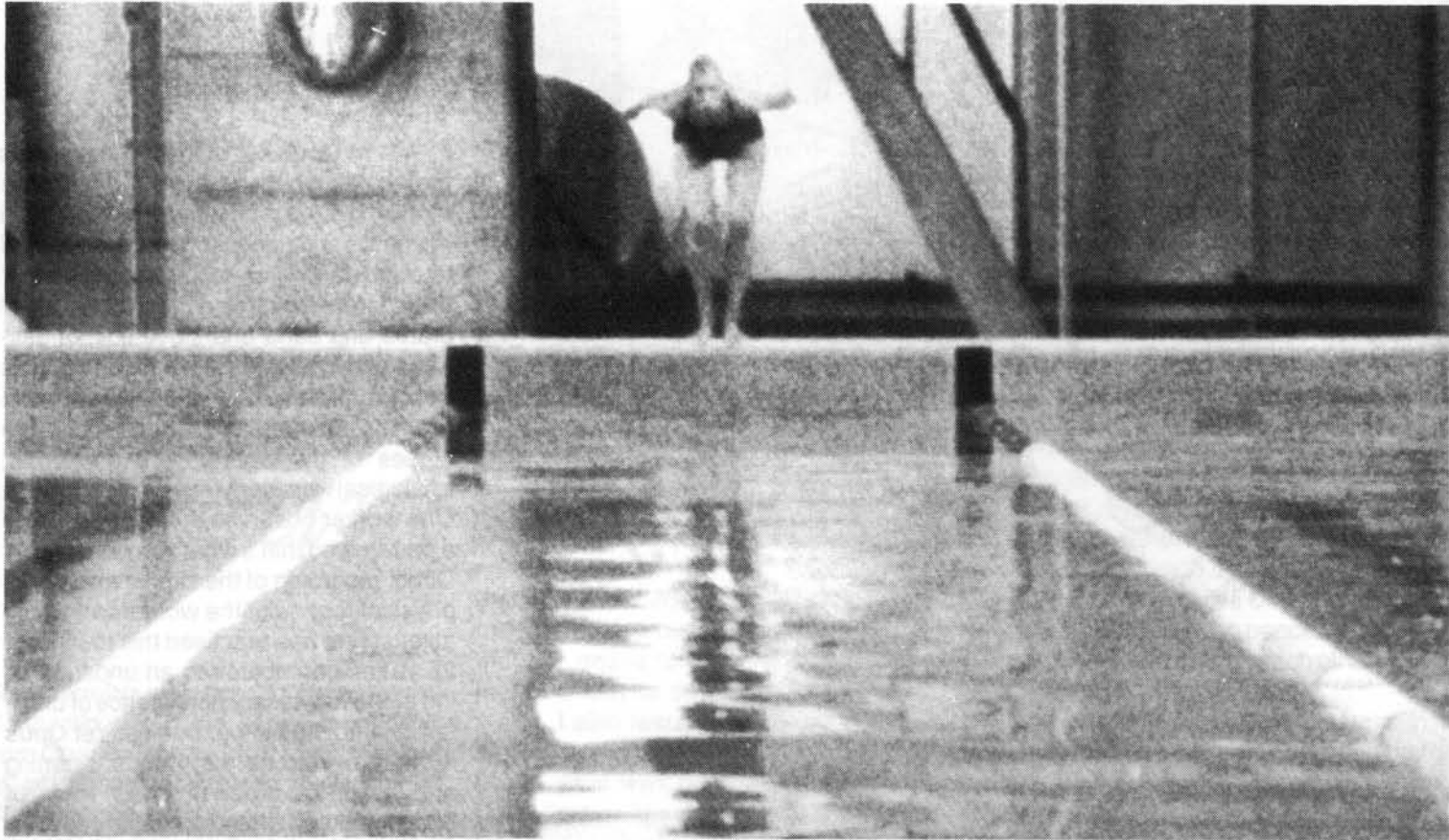
Vivian Darroch-Lozowski is an essayist and poet. Her books include Voice of Hearing and Notebook of Stone, and she has just composed and co-directed the film Black Earth. She teaches within an arts and media program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Her current project is out of Antarctica.

BARBARA STERNBERG DESCRIBES HER FILMS AS BEING ABOUT TIME. AND I HAVE FOUND THEM TO BE ABOUT TIME, TIME DEPICTED AS A FLUID MASS—that which is shifting, imposing and everywhere around us. Sternberg's films impress as a fluid mass. No images in them are without temporal and physical weight and this weight increases as they are viewed. *Opus 40*, the first film made, is a presentation of time in an old foundry and the time of this foundry's workers who mould parts of wood-burning stoves. Time in this film is pre-perspectival and repeating. In *Transitions*, the second film made, time is a zone of 'between awake and asleep' (= "purgatory", this film announces at its beginning). In this film a woman is entrapped in this time. In *A Trilogy*, the third film, time is our contemporary time, a time which in part is mental and which, potentially, is an a-perspectival time. In this film various dispersed others—a running man, an upwardly-mobile family, a boy, Sternberg herself, and so on—are attempting to change with time, and to become in relation with time, especially with time's promises from antiquity (= the past).

But Sternberg's films are also about body, body as the only place in which time can be lived. It is the relation of body with time which is the tacit contribution of her films: in her films, different qualities and intensities of time require her film's bodies to exhibit different capacities.

In *Opus 40*, both time and bodies are conditioned, are univalent. The moulding shop is described through plain images, and description is repeated through layers of metal machinery, of transparent squares of light, of piles of crates and sand and stove lids, of gestures of men. In this film time and bodies become pre-causally sedimented within me, the viewer, as I watch. And, the bodies of the workers are analogical, analogical with themselves and with time. One worker observes that "you start with a pattern and that's what you get out of it". Direct recording of the simple and strong physical routine of the workers, of whom at least one has practised this routine for 25 years, contributes to an understanding of the necessary persistence of undifferentiated time in our bodies. Yet *Opus 40* is designed so that the unassuming and aesthetic order of these kinds of bodies and this kind of time can only "almost" be accepted by me. What impedes my acceptance are long periods of silence in the film which are interrupted by a machine sound which has a bleating and needing quality. The one-dimensional time which is present in this film is echoed in this sound and locates itself through this sound in my viscera, in my ear. My body living then in this one-dimensional hearkening sound, like the bodies of the workers in the foundry/film, is efficiently spell-cast. As such images and this sound pile up together there becomes a faraway awareness that this film is hard on the body's back and hearing—not in a political "criticism of labour" sense, but in a felt sense that time is a heavy shadow which I am bearing. Gradually, I (as viewer) apprehend that I must go "somewhere else" if I wish to be responsible by answering to this burden. *Opus 40* is steadily and certainly resisting the organization of vital time and body which it portrays. This film ends.

Then I am viewing *Transitions*, and I am somewhere else. Immediately I am rushing down railroad tracks. There is wind and air. There are whispers and white. All the time which was so carefully measured and outer-related, which was exhaled through action in *Opus 40*, is passing. But it is not passing fluidly. I, as



A TRILOGY Barbara Sternberg

viewer, experience my body being unexpectedly twisted here, there, then, and "now" again. There are overlays of images (once or twice a man-figure, a child, waves, water, feet). And always the overlays of images appear on the image of a body of a woman who cannot sleep. The voice-track instructs me that these images are of "before", and of "forty years from now" and of "just now", and of "hundreds of years". In this film, psyche-in-the-body is inhaling time. If the foundry workers' bodies were shaped by the labour of their backs as their backs and ears lived in very direct contact with time, the woman's body in **Transitions** is shaped by the labour of her heart and her whispering mouth as she lives in direct contact with that "time can change"—disappear—the past is no longer." Rememberance is born. More than once, "I think I'll go to bed" whispers the soundtrack voice of the woman. But the voice continues an incessant, feverish, irrational uttering and will not let me (or herself) sleep = pause to dream on any of **Transition's** images. This film creates a duration of lived anxiety—anxiety different from activity, anxiety more like experience undergone. The woman's body in

this film shows that the valence of circular time which is affecting her requires her body's manifestation to one of ambivalence. Circular time itself is ambivalent. The voicetrack whispers again, "I want to go to bed". But she never can, for in the time she is living, body is continuously claimed by its internal and polar recollections of time.

And I want to rest from this filmic experience. I seek an image of cold snow which I remember was there on the screen seconds ago, but which has now passed. I want "it" (= former time) to return. Some images do return. But I don't want to see them again. I want the woman dressed in white to hold the foetal shape into which she sometimes shapes her body—this would allow me to pause, but she is too restless to wait in that position (= in that space of time). Her body movements precipitate a throwing of me into a space of collision between my activity of watching the film and my expectation of it. I have a sense of unperspectivity. This hurls me into understanding that I am not sure in which direction the woman's body (= I = my own body) is living. That **Transitions** represents that the bodily/temporal space of something unachieved

and unknown (e.g., wishes, dreams) is what leaves us open to all possible extensions of self. If in **Opus 40** time and bodies are conditioned, in **Transitions** time and bodies are temporally and psychically bound. In **Opus 40** time, the matter of the world is recognized for what it is. In the time of **Transitions**, the world is largely interpreted.

Many have written that the concern with time today is omnipresent. Jean Gebser suggested that such a concern is "an initial step toward a new, aperspectival world perception". It is "an effort to extricate ourselves from 'mentality' and a running start toward achieving diaphaneity". Gebser believed our task is to extricate time from its rational distortion. I find this to be the unconscious seeking in Sternberg's **A Trilogy**. Near the beginning of **A Trilogy** there are almost ten minutes of a man-figure running down a country road. While he runs, the landscape by his side changes little, and a male voice speaks "time never seemed to enter it". Then, the screen shows a brief printed history of the world. This print "about" time and bodies signals that in this film body is wakeful, is mental, and conscious ("By 1900 more than 4 million

Americans owned stock", "June 6, 1944, 3 million men began landing,...etc). Perhaps the body needs to be this way in this film because **A Trilogy** is grounded in the effort of surviving through time. While watching it, it calls me to attain for my body a reconciliation with time. As the film proceeds I am also being called to search for a way in which I/my body may become more intimate with time (all of history and all of futurity), intimate in a way which will allow more "whole", an affirmation of how I could (which may not be the same as how I want to) exist in time.

The images and sounds which represent time and body in **A Trilogy** are mixed. Many are mental, are drawn from the world-of-the-first-born, the time which demands of the body that it have a purpose and a goal (the voice of a news announcer as a radio shouts alarms, the breakfast scenes of a couple and, then, of their family, photographs from Sternberg's past, images of her son being socialized in school). Other images and sounds are from archaic-time, the body is pre-sentiment (an immense neolithic hill shrouded in fog). Some are abstractly temporal, the body is conceptual (print on the screen asks, "What is it that is imperative?", "Is the will of man free?"). But as the film proceeds, I experience a friction within me which is augmented by the increasing fragmenting of images and sounds which have such different forms of time and space relationship. Both, this friction (subjective) and this fragmenting (objective), begin to direct my attention to the fact that our bodies are only remnants of what they promised to be in relation with themselves and with time. For example, at one point on the screen there is a written description of a rite of manhood which lasts for weeks in which an initiate climbs into a forest and actually sees The Tree of the World. How are we to accomplish such an act today?

In **A Trilogy** this friction and fragmenting are unintentional, yet necessary. I offer it exists because, in **A Trilogy**, Sternberg is attempting a recording of a larger sphere of becoming in time than she marked in her earlier films. Time is erupting in our contemporary time, and time now is erupting in Sternberg's films.

The bodies in her **A Trilogy** are knowing and deducing. In effect, they say "I am...", "I belong to..." But the film closes with a scattering of them and time. They, the bodies and time, almost disappear. Yet this scattering is also necessary because it is scattering which must precede gathering together. And Sternberg is also beginning to gather in **A Trilogy**. The bleating sound of **Opus 40** is present again in **A Trilogy**: here is the body driven. The flashes of red and the fields of snow in **A Trilogy** recall the white sheets of the bed from **Transitions**: here is the body contemplative. In the time of **A Trilogy**, the body also imagines and conceives.

In **A Trilogy**, for the first time in Sternberg's work there are rare, isolated images of "the body - integrated" and of integrating time even though, sometimes, these images are accompanied by auditory signs of anxiety. One such image is singular, and repeats over and over again. It is an image which reflects the rolling from side to side which the sleepless woman performs on her bed as a physical act which precludes slipping into dark sleep. In **A Trilogy**, a boy (= the son) repeatedly climbs a green hill and rolls down it. Over and over he does this, while over and over (= repetition again) superimposed / or underlying his action are images of heat and dissonance and speed, and macro-views of others' bodies. Occasionally this boy rolls on snow or sand—but most often, he climbs up and rolls down the green hill. I experience this as an unceasing ritualistic attempt to stave off what being born into contemporary time can mean. But it also is a magical intention toward the future. Is it also an expression of a body being time-free? For if the body can become time-free, the body then is space-free. Rolling does keep the energy of the body from being locked into one pattern: body becomes an achronon. And in Sternberg's future films this act of rolling (= desire) may succeed, for often it is accompanied by the sound of waves and sounds of wind which were heard in **Transitions**. These sounds can soothe and allow us to fulfill in a different way (= not a nightmare) if we will so let them.

Sternberg's next film will be about houses and bodies and shadows. I do not know what she will do. But in attending to bodies directly she will be attending to what is tacit in her work—the "house" (our bodies = our ultimate place of refuge) where time is lived. For her, in this venture, the shadows may or may not be figurative representations of time. But, given what is present in her completed films, there is a chance the shadows will represent that and a trust of the dark of time, the dark in the body. Until now, Sternberg has been most sensitive to the fundamental discord between elements of time-quality and their records in our bodies. Given the vast problems she has posed for herself and us with respect to demonstrating that our bodies prefer to contain the past and the future but not the present, I anticipate that her work will need to turn in a direction of understanding our bodies' responses to time-quality itself. Her work's significance bears on the quest of how our bodies may have an ethical relationship with time.

Note: Extensive elaborations of the allusions to time as referred to here may be found in the work of Jean Gebser (**The Ever-Present Origin**, English tr. by Noel Barstad and Algis Mickunas, Ohio University Press, 1985). This book's centre addresses the aperspectival world as it manifests in the arts and literature.

"Time is certain: already the man that I will be has the man that I am by the throat, but the man that I have been leaves me in peace. This is called my mystery, but I do not believe in (I do not prize) the impenetrability of this mystery, and no one wholly believes in it for himself. The great veil that falls over my childhood only half conceals the strange years that will precede my death. And I shall one day speak of my death. Inside myself I am several hours ahead of myself, the proof is that what happened to me surprises me only to the exact degree that I need not be surprised **any more**. I want to know everything..."

A Letter to Seers
Andre Breton

Her Soil is Gold *Iconography of* *Venus*

There is in *Power...* *seduction*

Annette Mangaard is a film/performance artist born in Denmark and raised in Toronto. A graduate from the Ontario College of Art she began making super eight films in 1984 (She Bit Me Seriously 18 min 1984, Nothing By Mouth 8 min 1984). In 1986 she began to optically reprint her super eight travel footage in a series of short films made over the next couple of years. Her Soil Is Gold (10 min col 1986) is an Egyptian travelogue that tracks from the banks of the Nile, the pyramids, the teeming streets of downtown Cairo to rest finally on a tourist boat in the Red Sea. The Iconography of Venus (5 min col 1987) juxtaposes art historical renderings of Venus with a collection of present day diary images of women: playing a piano, rowing a boat, walking veiled along a middle east wall, undressing. The soundtrack is an operetta composed by the filmmaker and sung by Suzanne Palmer. There Is In Power...Seduction (5 min b/w 1986) shows a woman in corporate dress holding forth behind a desk while the camera circles around her. These images are interwoven with b/w abstracts and the soundtrack is similarly composed of alternating texts. The Tyranny of Architecture (10 min b/w 1987) contrasts a group of Muslim women in the Sahara with the architecture of Venice as the voice over sounds out a personal history of dwellings. What follows below are transcripts from the last four films.

HER SOIL IS GOLD

cause and effect
cause and effect

Numerous foreign merchants traded in mummy for the profits were enormous. It was only the most determined of travellers who succeeded in reaching Egypt, the sea voyage across the Mediterranean might take weeks (perhaps in a Venetian or Turkish galley).

People dug everywhere, using secret magical incantations and techniques which, if effective, would be just the thing for a modern archaeologist to use in amplification of their electronic detection methods. In the fifteenth century it was so widely practised that treasure hunting was a taxed industry.

the deep burial chambers of the pharaohs quarried into the hills of the valleys were an exciting adventure, by the time the Romans came, many of the tombs had been opened and plundered. Dioceros complained, "We found nothing there except the results of pillage and destruction."

the Egyptians remained aloof, worshipping their age-old gods, cultivating their fields as they always had, perpetuating the mysterious hieroglyphs of earlier times.

many people travelled to the Nile, simply to enlarge their horizons, or out of curiosity.

a distinctive way of life, of tremendous antiquity continued to survive comparatively unscathed, surrounded by the lasting monuments of religious and political institutions that extended back into the distant past.

Egyptology became a fashionable subject for the wealthy and the curious.

ICONOGRAPHY OF VENUS

Rising from the sea, on the half shell
Rising, rising, rising, see her softly
rising.

Like a shadow through the mist,
You're symbolic with a twist
On the roundness of your hips,
There's no edge to score my lips.

My fair aphrodite, no god so glorified.

The graces of your body more revealed than veiled,
The softness of your charms more revered than hailed.

Like a shadow through the mist,
You're symbolic with a twist.
On the roundness of your hips,
There's no edge to score my lips.

Ensuring our conceptions that stem from our desires.

The greatest of all
passions...unterminating fires.
The pro-creation function, the female genders quo.
Lovely Venus you're the one, our populations foe.

Like a shadow through the mist,
You're symbolic with a twist
On the roundness of your hips,
There's no edge to score my lips.

Rising from the sea, on the half shell,
Rising, rising, rising, see her softly rising.

THERE IS IN POWER...seduction

In the level rays of the evening, the still damp and heavy hair shone like a shower luminous in the sun. The slave took it in handfuls and twisted it. She made it turn upon itself like a great serpent of metal which the straight pins of gold pierced like arrows.

Move slowly, act impeccably.
Perform every act as if it were the only thing in the world that mattered...

Chrysis held at arm's length her mirror polished copper. Idly she watched the dark hands of the slave move in the heavy hair, round the clusters, gather...

Never reveal all of yourself, always hold something back...something in reserve. But not secrecy, secrecy isn't the trick at all...

When all was done Djala went on her knees before her mistress and shaved closely the swell of the delta so that the young girl would have, in the eyes of her lovers, all the nudity of a statue.

Time is, in a very real sense, is power...it is important to have the visitor's chair facing towards you...

What was invented as a mundane and unattractive convenience we have made into a complex mark of status and power, as if by instinct. Keep right on talking, I'm listening, I just have to take this call.

Chrysis became more brave and said in a low voice: "Tint me." A little box of rosewood which came from the Isle of White contained tints of all colours. With a brush of camel hair the slave took a little black paste which she placed upon the finely curved lashes in order that the eyes should appear more blue.

An obvious attention to

mathematics seems small-minded and self-limiting...paperweights are definitely out, as are stuffed fish, family portraits and mezzotint engravings of Harvard yard in 1869.

With a soft feather dipped in white pigment she painted white streaks along the arms and on the neck, with a little brush full of white carmine she massaged the mouth and touched the points of the breasts.

Few people know what to do with them. Most people prefer to leave them on the floor where they belong.

Chrysis began to smile and said in a soft voice: "Sing to me". She sat with arched back in her marble chair. Her hands resting upon her breast, the red necklace of her painted nails and her white feet were reunited upon the stone.

It's better than drugs, better than alcohol, not only better than sex but a part of it.

The warm wind of the south penetrates it with the dew of the struggles of love and the damp perfume of the night flowers. Djala crouched near the wall, recalled love songs of India. "Chrysis", she sang.

"Thine eyes are like blue water lilies without stems, motionless on the ponds",

and they sang one after the other:

"Power is a technique...They control events. Events do not control them."

"Thy lips are like two delicate flowers where the blood of the hind has fallen."

"My lips are the edges of a burning wound."

"My tongue is encrusted with precious stones. It is red from mirroring my lips."

THE TYRANNY OF ARCHITECTURE

When I was four years old, my family, newly emigrated to Canada, found that the most economical mode of living was in a tent. Months of childhood were spent waking up to the natural splendour of the Canadian wilderness. I recall bright sunshine and walking through tall blades of grass.

We do not always choose to live where we do, and we are so lucky as to choose the locale, we cannot often choose the abode.

Standing on the edge of an oasis in Nefta and looking out onto the Sahara desert makes you feel as if you are on the rim of the world. You become the horizon.

I lie in an old brownstone on the third floor. My bedroom used to face out onto a busy main thoroughfare - the streetcars passed by day and night with unrelenting consistency. I moved my bed to the small room at the back. There is no window, but the door opens onto a tiny fire escape upon which I often stand and watch the factory behind me. Its yellow bricks are my landscape. There is no movement.

I went to the high arctic for a year. While not expecting to live in an igloo, I was still totally unprepared for the two-storey pre-fabricated unit which was provided complete with fake colonial-style furniture and two sets of dishes. Each of the 16 non-Inuit households were given exactly the same government issue supplies and furnishings. To visit one of the other white families was always, for me, to experience a strange sense of *deja vu*.

To go out on the land holds an-



ICONOGRAPHY OF VENUS

other place in the memory. Bumping along in a skidoo over endless rolling terrain of hard packed snow and ice. Cresting hills, like giant waves, my expectation was always to find a super-highway teeming with traffic on the other side. But the scene never changed. The land went forever. The sky went forever. There was no horizon. There were no walls.

I have a wonderful garden which I never visit. A green jungle of vines and trees, it lies far below my little fire escape. There is no lawn furniture here, there are no plastic chairs to lounge in. The mass of vegetation is banked on either side by the high walls of the factory. I know the man, who lives below me, often passes through in order to reach his car in the

garage at the back. Yet, there is no sign or evidence of human passage. The jungle remains untouched. I never go down there.

In Tunisia, my room was a small hole in the ground. One of a series of catacomb-like structures dug into the earth. Unexpectedly it was not damp here, but quite cool and with an unfamiliar odor, not unpleasant.

A claustrophobic tangle of narrow lanes and alleyways separated by pungent, still waterways, this was not the Venice which the picture books and films had prepared me for. High walls, overly decorative - like too much icing on the cake, too rich with little room left for the speculation of the brain or the eye.

Once, on a trip through Belize, we were lost in the jungle and wandered without landmarks for several miles.

Lost, and with dusk approaching, we came upon a small village. I was astonished to find in the 20th century a scene from a glossy nature magazine. The natives here lived in small one-room grass huts and wore simple clothing made from grass. The only stone building was the church on whose pews we slept. In the morning the children approached us and invited us into their homes. There were no furnishings, the people ate and slept on grass mats on the floor. Through sign language they explained to us that they did not care for the construction of the church whose benches were hard and uncomfortable to sit on and whose stone walls kept the air still and dead inside. In the grass huts we could feel the breeze on our skin.

Ville? Quelle Ville?

Midi Onodera was born in Toronto, 1961. She is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and former equipment manager of the Funnel. She has made nine films between 1981 and 1989. In 1984 she began a trilogy of three minute super eight films that includes: Ville? Quelle Ville? (1984), Dead Zone (1985) and Made in Japan (1985). Each of these films uses voice over to relate the displaced view of its narrator. In 1984, as part of its centennial celebrations, Toronto donated a dozen rolls of super eight film to the Funnel to make portraits of the city. What follows is the voice over for Midi's film Ville? Quelle Ville?

It was a city.
There were houses, families, colour television sets, unemployment, coffee makers, movie houses, hookers, Chinatown.

She was born there.

Her parents, mother and father, arrived in 19-
She had lived in the city all her life. She had friends, old lovers, acquaintances, people she only knew by name or face.
Tourist traps, bag ladies, bottled water, car washes, beauty parlors.
It was a city.

She went to the grade school her two older brothers went to and the one her younger brother would go to. She had the same teachers in the same classrooms.
She would become what they were and what her younger brother was going to be.
VCR's, seedy downtown nightclubs, Creeds, Shopper's Drug Mart, wall to wall carpeting, gay bars, grandfathers.
It was a city.

Enrollment, graduation, engagement, marriage, anniversaries, divorce, deaths, births.
Last week her life took a turn. She moved from one end of the city to the other.
Packing, moving, cleaning, unpacking, getting to know the neighbours, the neighbourhood, the bus schedule, the graffiti, the laneways, the cracks in the pavement, the drunks, and the abstainers.
She had two cats, two umbrellas, two charge accounts, two clocks, two chairs, two broken radios, two girlfriends and two boyfriends.
It was a city.

Commuters, consumers, collectives, co-ops, co-existing, community, communication, co-habitation.
She woke up, coffee, coffee, cigarettes, transit, punch in, lunch, coffee break, punch out, transit, dinner, a show, a play, drinks, bed.
She didn't understand the city, her city, the one she was born in, grew up in, lived in.
She didn't understand the systems, the people, the animals, the outpatients, registered mail, car rentals.
She read books but quickly forgot them, she saw plays but always dozed off, she saw movies but couldn't remember the endings. She rode her bicycle but didn't know where she was going.
She ate in restaurants, drank in taverns, danced in discos, met at meetings, swam in pools, shopped in malls, banked at banks, prayed in church, and read in bed.
It was a city.

She thought perhaps she should pay more attention to her surroundings, the construction, the opening and closing of different shops, new signs, planted trees, change of address.
She had to concentrate, to see, actually see, concentrate on what she was seeing.
Details, colour, form, outlines, to observe without prejudgement, without emotion.

Richard Raxlen: A Letter

*Richard Raxlen lives in Montreal and has been producing films, videotapes and installation art works for the past twenty years. He has recently completed a feature length film entitled **Horses in Winter**.*

letter from montreal;
jan. 30th

invited...to the Rendez-vous, an event now in its seventh year...the event, opening press conference, was held at Molson's on Notre Dame East. I went to O'keefe, on Notre Dame West... sort of knowing it was wrong but stubborn and maybe wanting to waste time...drove east after and arrived in time to wait to be admitted to the long room full of tables...Bachar Chbib sitting on the sidelines with a baby in his arms and three weeks growth on his face...'there are some many a-holes in the film world' we agreed, nodding. The baby slept...

I got my press kit and noted six features, including Bachar's CLAIR Obscure were nominated for a \$5000 cash reward while 18 other films feature length, could win 100,000 in provincial film grant money—only two could win that prize...

Tried to find friendly MAIN FILM faces in the crowd, succeeded...found co-director, co-editor Patrick Vallely saving me a seat at the far end of the hall...Rejean Houle, famous Hab-Hockey-Player and now Molson-Man, made an intro speech, he had a beard but still looked young...more speeches, some filmclips and free beer and rolls later...I was, had seated myself across from JOYCE BORENSTEIN, animator, teacher, filmmaker...saw the distributor I didn't sign with; my neighbor Mrs. Jean Chabot, was on the organizing committee. Jean Chabot was at home I guess...

we clapped after each filmclip and thought about church and how they make you wait for the grub—before they feed you, they talk you into submission; it felt like a bit of a mission event; everyone stampeded for the lines for the food event...lunch was being served...long lines...I waited a minute and decided the food wasn't worth it, I'm half-Hindu and we don't believe in lining up for food, if its to be dead cow or whatever so we got out of there with a poster, a schedule, and after touring the MOLSON Boutique (many sweaters, hats, jackets, glasses, saying COORS LIGHT, 50, Laurentide, etc.) we went home and had tea and biscuits like good anglophones from Toronto and Limerick should; showed Patrick my letter from Roy Rogers and Dale Evans' personal secretary—I had requested permission to shoot inside their museum and other things; showed him the review of HORSES IN WINTER from Variety and we tried to imagine how to pull some words to sing the praises. Not impossible. Continued to nurse and harbour resentments, unspecific, against the Establishment—always good to foster 'outsider' feelings within oneself; earlier in the year when Pierre-Marc Johnson had resigned from the P.Q. and no-one showed to run against Jacques Parizeau I fed fantasies of contesting the leadership: what Quebec needed was a quasi-Anglophone from Toronto's Jewish ghetto (Forest Hill) who lived a semi-yuppie existence in the Plateau between St. Lawrence and St. Denis. The woman-by-my-side did not encourage me even though I have an MFA in film...now look what happened don't blame me. Go Leafs go.

Peter Lipskis: A Letter

Peter Lipskis was born in Gottingen, Germany in 1954 and taken to Canada in the same year. He has lived in Vancouver since 1958, receiving a bachelor of fine arts degree from the University of British Columbia. in 1976. In high school he began working with super 8 and video and he continues to make work in both time based mediums.

In 'Avant Garde Cinema's Contemporary Paradox' Bart Testa repeatedly mentions 'the very purpose of experimental/avant garde cinema', as if such a single monolithic entity actually existed. In my opinion, one can identify some shared concerns and common denominators among various works and artists; but there are almost as many 'purposes' as there are filmmakers, and each work by an individual creator could have a different 'purpose'. I don't have any problem accepting the multi-faceted nature of experimental/avant garde cinema, and do not see a contradiction between 'liberating cinema from industrial and cultural restraints' and 'reflecting on the cinema's fundamental conditions and possibilities', which Mr. Testa considers a paradox. The polarization between 'freedom and self-reflexivity' seems to be a rhetorical/conceptual construction, a basis for commentary and further generalizations that I find questionable. There have certainly been dominant styles emphasizing particular concerns during different periods, but I don't see the history and evolution of experimental/avant garde cinema in quite the same term as he does.

Anna Gronau

Anna Gronau is a Toronto filmmaker born in Montreal in 1951. She has been an active member of the Toronto arts community for a number of years. Between 1980 and 1982 Anna was Director/Programmer of the Funnel Experimental Film Theatre, and from 1983 to 1985 worked as Video Distribution Manager at Art Metropole. She has written and lectured on feminism and experimental film and engaged in related curatorial and organizational activities. Since the beginning of the decade she has been centrally involved in the fight against film and video censorship in Ontario.

THE OCCASION FOR THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEW BETWEEN ANNA GRONAU AND MIKE HOOLBOOM IS THE ARRIVAL OF ANNA'S FIRST FILM IN FIVE YEARS CALLED MARY MARY. Because Anna is a longtime member of the artist's film community we spent a few hours going over Rochdale, CEAC, The Funnel, CFMDC etc. and then began a talk about her own filmwork. As these two discussions seemed separate the latter's been included below, a wandering tale of seven films made over an eleven year period. The 'historical' material is being gathered for a special issue on forgotten histories.

AG: You asked me about my reservations regarding the term 'experimental' film. I'm not a theorist or anything like that, but I think when people talk about 'experimental' or 'avant garde' film, they're usually making some association with the American avant garde of the 1960's, and the films that grew out of that movement into the seventies. There are still a lot of people making films that are informed by that kind of tradition, but in the last two or three years these films have come to represent such a wide variety of kinds of influences and concerns that just to call them 'experimental' might be misleading.

MH: Your first film, **Maple Leaf Understory** (10 min. col/silent 1978), was made in 1978, the year the Funnel took up residence at their King Street address in Toronto. Your film was also made in an east end warehouse and has a very strong sense of place, of home.

AG: I think that a sense of place, and also a sense of space are important in my work. Space is often defined in terms of the division of inside and out and the surfaces that create that division.

MH: Yeah, that division is the most obvious one in **Maple Leaf Understory** yet it isn't visible because the boundary is the window, it's all shot through these windows. It's only at the end where you attach objects to the windows - your photographs, personal objects that the surface becomes real. The verification comes from outside. When you begin a film - you start with an image, a sound, an idea?

AG: I don't have a real conscious worked out rationale. I've often used spatial models for the expression of experience, of myself, as I relate to being in a body and a body relating to the world. I made **Maple Leaf Understory** a long time ago. It was the first film I made after going to the Ontario College of Art. Oddly enough it has similarities to the one I had so much trouble with in third year. I should tell you about it, it's funny. It was called **Inside Out**. I was living in this old farmhouse with

a lot of trees outside a big picture window in the kitchen. So I set the camera up on a tripod about half an hour before sunset and I turned on all the lights in the kitchen and shot out the window. I'd shoot off 30 seconds every minute or couple of minutes. So what you get is the sun going down and the window becomes black and what's revealed is a reflection of the camera and me. The film's about ten minutes long, y'know I was only twenty-one give me a break (laughing) But inside/outside was an interest even way back then.

MH: In **Maple Leaf Understory** you close with your own name which is then zoomed out of to show the apparatus - the front screen projection device that allows us to see at all - making your name visible to us - constructing you but also showing what it takes to 'make a name for yourself'.

AG: Well that comes out of ideas of reflexivity. I was looking at **Wavelength** a lot then (laughing)

MH: **In-Camera Sessions**. (5 min. col/sd super eight 1979) came after that. It's a home movie in the same way as **Maple Leaf Understory** - it shows you and (filmmaker) Ross McLaren eating breakfast and making a film, setting up lights and microphones...

AG: We're actually fooling around with this camera that was broken - just shooting stuff off in a very off-handed way. But one of the things that was coming through at the same time was the power dynamics. That's why I added the intertitle: 'Whoever has their finger on the trigger makes the decisions' which is a pretty interesting analogy between filmmaking and violence.

MH: I presumed when we're seeing you Ross is shooting and when we're seeing Ross you're shooting...

AG: Yeah it's always going back and forth. I never wanted to represent power as flowing in one direction.

MH: I thought the title alluded to a film made entirely in camera.

AG: No, it wasn't edited in camera but because it was single system some of the sound and image came out distorted because that's what happened in the camera. A lot of the time the camera's just completely fucking up or it's on its side, because we weren't really thinking we were making a film although we sort of were - you always think you're making a film (laughs). I took bits of it and put it together in a way that seemed right. But it's hard to speak about it as if it were really intentional. The apparatus was definitely playing a part in the whole construction of the sound and image.

MH: The sense of power relations was most obvious for me in the film's intertitles like: 'Whoever has their finger on the trigger makes the decisions.' I never made it out in the images themselves. What's the relation between the images you make of your relationships and the relationships themselves? Wanting to make images of your life - why? How does that impact on your relationship? Do they get further apart as the film takes on its own life with its own demands and life goes on or...

AG: For me the funny thing about working on a film is that there are long periods where you don't have access to the piece you're working on. It's really different from painting or writing. So I think that at the point where you're actually working on the film, when you have it in your hands or on the screen, everything in your life becomes part of the consideration that you make. I don't know if that really answers your question.

MH: Sort of. You're in all of your films - for different reasons at different times. Why?

AG: I don't know probably some kind of narcissistic problem. (laughs) I make films about the self and my self is the premiere model I have to use. I'm interested in identity and how the self and the world interact.

MH: Is making a film a way to construct that relation?

AG: It could be. Yet the idea that a film represents any reality is always a question - perhaps a film is just another instance of representation systems representing themselves - a closed system. So while I'm trying to see what relationships can be constructed, the role of the film itself can't be taken for granted.

MH: But you must feel that film represents reality when your own image is in the film?

AG: I find it really hard to talk about this stuff.

MH: Over the course of your work do you see it change - how you're representing yourself?

AG: Well, yeah, I think I've always been trying to understand something about the way I relate to the world, but it becomes much clearer in the most recent film. That's not to say I've resolved it, only represented the questions more clearly. I think it's less confused and less uncertain. Especially in my super eight films there's a real sense of tentativeness. I think that represents my own growth as a person and as an artist and getting older. (laughs)

MH: What came after **In-Camera Sessions**?

AG: **Wound Close**. (8 min col sd super 8, 1982)

MH: Can you talk about how that started?

AG: My best friend gave birth to twin girls as a single mother. The babies were born prematurely and I was there at the birth. The soundtrack was a conversation between Eleanor and me that I recorded just after the delivery. One of them died shortly after that. I'd originally planned to make a film about the birth and that's why I made the recording. I didn't photograph the birth, I photographed one of the little girls in the incubator in the hospital and



MARY MARY

that was all. It was really hard to bring myself to do anything about it because the children were so sick and it was really a tragedy and I felt like it would have been intruding on Eleanor even though she said I could film whatever I wanted.

Several years later the other little girl died. The bond that was set up between me and my best friend during the birth is something that still exists and when both of her children died I felt incredibly moved. I wanted to make some kind of memorial to them and a tribute to my friend. I'm not all that sure it's a very successful film. And the film itself is falling apart, the soundtrack is really mutilated, I don't think you can hear most of it anymore.

MH: There's alternating shots between you and your friend, shot close up and lit

in such a way to expose half your faces, as if you're complementary halves - it reminded me of Bergman's *Persona*, this marriage of incompleteness.

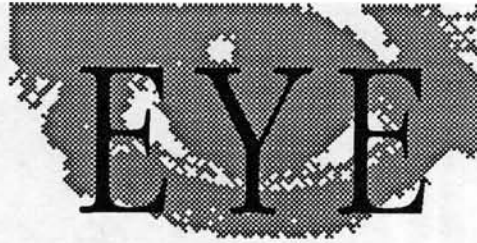
AG: It was about the idea of an almost symbiotic relationship between my friend and me, but also the two of us doubled the two children.

MH: In the film you say: 'You can't make rules.' 'A moral system is a very tentative structure'. It's so personal, the film, but what do these things mean so far as male/female relations go - many feminists would say of course there are rules, it's obvious where the oppression lies. On the other hand - the way the film's structured pulls me out of the sense of intimacy that's there in the soundtrack. It's so structural: the snake, the title, the close up... it's somewhat like a machine work-

ing out its rhythms.

AG: I think when it's a matter of life and death, you realize that rules often aren't a big help. I also think a lot of other feminists would agree that oppression is pretty arbitrary and the control it has over both men and women seems especially pointless when you're faced with such situations.

As for the structure of the film, I edited the film so it's a palindrome, it's symmetrical. You wouldn't know to look at it necessarily. It's structured from a central image, with the same sorts of images on either side of that center, all the same length. They differ in that if, for instance, you see just the left half of my face in the first part of the film then you only see the right half in the last part of the film...



MH: And the snakes are still at the beginning and moving at the end.

AG: I think the structure was an attempt to deal with beginnings and endings and bonds between people in more structured ways, because the film was so intensely personal. For instance, the center section was made from short takes of a drawing done by the little girl only a few days before she died very suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of four. The drawing is just a child's kind of scribbling. It's not a picture of anything, but for me and for Eleanor the film has meaning because of them. It's very powerful knowing that information but no one else could ever know the story just by looking at it.

MH: So it was never your intention to try to induce that in the viewer somehow?

AG: I didn't really expect viewers to know what it meant to me. But I hoped maybe there would be a trace of those feelings that came through. I think that some of the images might be unsettling like the snakes and even the shots of the drawing, the way they're shot they're very violent. And then there's shots of an island in the distance across the water in the winter so that too would have some kind of emotional reading but I don't know if another person would feel about it the same way I do.

MH: There's an openness - like an open text - in all of your work. Most of your films don't demand to be read in a single way, they're not didactic like many documentaries or closed in the way narratives often are. Why is this openness important to you?

AG: It's important to try not to set up hierarchies where some people's understanding is the law, the only truth, because if you can keep it open there's a possibility for something else to exist between people, a place where you can talk about things, where you're not just isolated in an understanding of the world.

MH: Usually in a theatre the darkness works to unify the audience through iden-

tification. But in artists' films often the reverse happens - some hate it while others rave on - so there's an ambiguity. There's a large part the viewer plays with the construction of the meaning but that also alienates a lot of people from artists' work. There doesn't seem enough to be able to grasp or hang onto because the terms of the usual theatre experience, the terms that unify the whole body of the audience is no longer there.

AG: I think that's true. One of the things I've tried to do with **Mary Mary** is find ways to get beyond the alienating aspect (laughs) because you want people to watch your film. I have to go to the washroom.

MH: Tell me about the title of **Aradia** (2.5 min col/sd super 8, 1982)

AG: **Aradia** is the name of a goddess who's the daughter of Dianna. **Aradia** supposedly came to earth as the messiah of the Witches and taught Witchcraft to the oppressed people of the earth. The poem on the soundtrack was taken from the book **Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches**, by Charles G. Leland which was published in 1889.

MH: Like **Wound Close** you appear in the film. You're painted with leaves in your hair. Again you're shot in a dark space without context, speaking in a theatrical setting as if the distance between your feelings and their expression was so large you could only appear in these glimpses of artifice. The outside world is never pictured here, everything around you is dark or missing.

AG: The film's really a toss-off in a lot of ways, so it shouldn't be taken too seriously. I think it was for a halloween series the Funnel was doing, called **Scary Movies**. But I was thinking of the female figures that appear in them not being human but supernatural beings. So to represent them in undefined spaces seemed to

make sense.

MH: The film conjures up a return to something primal, it begins with a natural landscape, then you appear as if part of nature or coming out of nature. Then your face changes, you look very angry. I took that anger to mean that this kind of simple return is impossible, that there's something lost now that can't be simply regained - that those sources of power are used up now or exhausted.

AG: That's certainly one interpretation, although the opening shot also contains an image of a bridge, so that has implications of connection as well as disconnection. The film is about witchcraft, whether it is used up or not is hard to say. I was really fascinated to read accounts of a time when women supposedly enjoyed a much different position in society. Some women were healers and apparently, when the church became involved in medicine in the middle ages the priesthood was very disturbed that these women were getting results using herbal remedies. All healing was supposed to be achieved through God and the physical world was considered to be debased and suspect. In the power struggle that took place, the negative and destructive qualities of life were attributed to certain women who threatened the power of church and state. They were called witches and the burnings followed.

Some writings by French feminists were just starting to appear in translation in North America in the early '80's and seemed to tie in. They were writing about a kind of femininity which had its own power - sometimes as a separatist view of feminism, and sometimes it had to do with embracing an illogical, irrational side of things. One writer, **Xaviere Gauthier**, actually wrote an essay called "Why Witches?" But mostly I was reading French feminism and the history of witchcraft separately and making connections. Both offered a kind of empowerment but ultimately, both had the same shortcomings: a tendency to lapse into essentialism - believing there's an essence of what a woman is. Any such construction has a

tendency to further the ideas of gender that break the whole world up into male and female aspects. For instance, the anger you mentioned seeing in **Aradia**, in a sense it can be empowering for women to realize that the goddess has a horrifying aspect as well. But the fact that the primal mother is in some ways the most terrifying figure of all ends up being part of the mythology that casts women as pure negativity, to be controlled at all costs. It's very hard to avoid the terms of misogynistic structures, but I think we have to look for ways to get beyond just reiterating them.

MH: And how do your films function in an economy that will relieve women of that role - that negativity?

AG: That film? Well, I suppose the reason I wouldn't make a film like that now is that I don't think the film is helpful. The film was an off-the-cuff thing. I wanted to make images that were exciting and powerful to me and put them with words that would be evocative even if you don't really know what they're about - it would give you a feeling of a kind of power. I guess now I want to try to find ways of making films that are exciting and powerful but don't simply rely on that alienated Otherness.

MH: In 1984 the city of Toronto was celebrating its centenary and the Funnel, which had for the past few years opened its season with a number of super eight shorts made by its members, received a number of free 2.5 minute rolls in order to make films about the city. Those rolls were distributed to the membership and that's when you made **Toto** (2.5 min col/sd super 8, 1984), right?

AG: Yeah, again it was sort of a joke film. I ripped off little bits of the soundtrack of the Wizard of Oz, and I filmed the skyline of Toronto with a green filter and used it as the Emerald City. (laughs) 'Toto' is from the Wizard of Oz but it's also T.O., T.O. - Toronto, Toronto. I was fooling around with issues of representation, feminism, place, all that kind of stuff, but more than anything it was just fun. One of

the lines I really liked was: 'Pay no attention to that little man behind the curtain' and I also showed a curtain filling the frame which opens to reveal another curtain. There's just a few images. One is a pair of red shoes that glow in the dark. I was wearing black stockings against a black velvet background so all you see - I put fluorescent paint on them and used black lights so they really glowed when I tapped my heels together three times. (laughs) So the green skyline, the shoes and the curtain. And the soundtrack consists of just bits of lines like 'Are you a good witch or a bad witch?' (laughs) Things like that.

MH: How did **Regards** (31 min col/sd 1983) start? It seems different than a lot of the super eight work which look like parts of something, although **Regards** also seems made up of fragments.

AG: Well, **Regards** was a more serious project, a bigger commitment. It was made in 16mm and I planned it all before I shot, which makes a difference.

MH: So it was a different way of working for you, why did you do that?

AG: I just thought it would last longer in 16mm because super eight is so fragile. **Regards** was meant to deal with perception, particularly vision, and other systems of knowing that would go to such extremes they would fall apart and reveal a kind of fluid, unstructured middle place.

MH: For example?

AG: There's a sentence in the film that appears as a subtitle: "What is it that makes breakfast so different from other meals?" Then I got five different people who didn't speak French to translate the sentence. So what you get is this awkward translation. I was trying to ask: what is that middle point between these two systems? There's a way to say it in English and there's a way to say it in French but there's also this in-between place where you're not really saying it in either language. That area involves translation.

MH: And this place between, is that the image?

AG: I wouldn't identify it solely with image either, although it arises in relation to certain images as well. At one point we see a woman eating an egg, it's a looped shot in super eight, and there's an arrow following her hand movements. The sign beneath the arrow asks: 'What is it?' But after a certain point the arrow begins to move randomly around the screen so that again creates this middle place of understanding between having a totally unified sense of what the question is and having to re-evaluate.

The fact that the primal mother is in some ways the most terrifying figure of all ends up being part of the mythology that casts women as pure negativity, to be controlled at all costs. It's very hard to avoid the terms of misogynistic structures

MH: Because the egg eating is a loop, it's as if the arrow grows bored with this movement and takes up the whole field instead of focussing to identify the figure. What's the sequence that follows that - is that the old woman reading from Bataille's **Story of the Eye**?

AG: Yes. What the elderly woman does initially is read to herself. You only see her face, she has this object called an occluder which is used by opticians and she's covered one of her eyes with it, it's

like a spoon with a long handle. So you see her other eye moving. Then she covers the other eye and reads aloud.

The passage I used had a lot more to do with memory than eggs and eyes though there's plenty of that in the book. I wanted again to play in this middle ground, to evoke connections without cementing them. The passage is about how keeping certain objects is the only way the author can remember what happened on a particular day. His other attempts to remember get blinded out by the sun, his memory turns into a 'vision of solar deliquescence'. I thought that was interesting about light obscuring rather than helping vision.

You see the text after, but it's upside down. It takes up the whole frame and the woman's hand appears from the top of the frame and starts tracing lines through the words. Then the text goes out of focus and her hand comes in again and traces these spaces in between the words, these little rivers in the print. It's the difference between looking at a text as something you can read or seeing it as an object. The next image is a blank screen, just white, and my hand comes in from the top of the screen and begins to draw an image of this thing, you can't tell what it is for awhile, it gradually begins to take form and becomes a theatre. Then suddenly the whole image starts to move up even though the drawing's upside down, the camera makes a complete 90 degree tilt, backwards and upwards, it comes across a little girl playing cards, playing solitaire on the floor, then travels up the wall and then you see there's a model of the theatre on the wall but because of the way the



ARADIA

camera's moved you see it upside down too.

MH: I thought the camera moved all the way around its axis, a full 360 degree circle.

AG: No, it doesn't go all the way around but people often remember it that way. It holds on the theatre, then tilts down to the completed drawing of the theatre which is then superimposed, then you go through the whole rotation again until you come back to the theatre - the two images of the theatre fuse and then the titles roll.

MH: How are sequences connected?

AG: In many ways they work separately. They relate thematically by the repetition of the idea of the egg. Over the theatre section you hear bits of the preceding soundtrack. I took a few lines of the French sentence in translation and one of the sentences from the end of the Bataille piece and made a montage of them. Then re-recorded the sound in the theatre at the Funnel over and over so that the acoustics of the room built up until the words weren't distinguishable any longer, and it's just this strange bell-like sound. There are things that connect all the different sections but there's no logi-

cal relationship among them.

MH: A little like the reader who moves her finger through the text in the middle section. (pause) So let's talk about **Mary Mary** (60 min col/sd 1989).

AG: This is going to be the hard one.

MH: Could you describe what happens in the film?

AG: On the most obvious level you'd say that it's about a filmmaker 'M.' who goes from a period of intense withdrawal inside her home and gradually lets the outside world in.

MH: In work like Lori Spring's **Inside/Out**, Kim Derko's **Scientific Girl**, Alexandra Gill's **Harriet Loves** - all of these new films by women in Toronto all picture women protagonists who have isolated themselves and your film takes up the same theme. Why this isolation? Why now?

AG: Well I can't really speak for these other people. I suspect for most women it's an experience we go through. In isolation there's a combination of freedom and safety that can't be found in the social world, and that allows a certain kind of growth and discovery to take place. And I guess this is such an important experience that it moves people to make films about it.

MH: Does it relate at all to living in Toronto or what's happening now?

AG: That theme is pretty common in a lot of women's literature. I can think of **The Four-Gated City** by Doris Lessing where Martha Quest locks herself up in her room and goes through this

EYE

incredible metamorphosis in which she confronts all her devils and she comes out of it a renewed person. Margaret Atwood's **Surfacing** is also about retreating from civilization for awhile. I don't think it's an uncommon theme for women.

MH: You've been working on this film since...

AG: I started working on it in 1985. It's been awhile.

MH: Did it start with a script?

AG: Yeah, but it really started with images and stories that were in my mind that seemed evocative. For instance I dreamt this image of swimming polar bears. Then there was the story of **The Secret Garden**. I heard it on the radio and it gave me shivers remembering reading it as a kid. So writing the script had a lot to do with encountering these materials and working through them. The writing process is reflected in the film itself. The sequence where M. discovers the home movie footage became a really central part in the film's construction. Also the dream she tells into the tape recorder...

MH: The dream of floating down stairs. What's **The Secret Garden** about?

AG: It's about a little girl who is orphaned and goes to live in her uncle's manor on the Yorkshire heath. There's something mysterious about the house. She discovers that her uncle's son, her cousin, has been crippled from birth. He's been locked away and no one wants to talk about him. The uncle apparently lost his wife when the child was born and was so grief stricken that he took off and didn't want to have anything to do with the kid. So Mary comes in and teaches the little boy to walk and discovers the key to the secret garden that was locked up when the mother died. Mary becomes this revitalizing force in the life of the house-

hold. There's elements of this story similar to many other children's tales. One was **Sleeping Beauty** because the whole castle had gone dormant after the mother's death and then there's this re-birth. So it relates to Demeter and Persephone. There's also **Beauty and the Beast** because the mother who died was a beautiful young girl who married an ugly old hunchback. This relates to lots of other ancient myths about marriages between human women and a male who's not quite human. The earliest versions are pre-Greek, and isolated parts of Europe still have rituals where the beast marries the woman and is killed after. This is one of those myths that seems universal, very prevalent among North American native societies. It's called the story of the Bear Mother and it occurs all throughout Canada and the US. So there's this incredible swirl that ties things together. As I was working on this stuff I would get so far and then it wouldn't fit, it wouldn't make any sense at all. I was really struggling with it because I was trying to make this nice seamless film. But I realized the only way to deal with it was to put it in and allow it to reach those points of contradiction. So the film is structured in alternation between things that have a sense of continuity and wholeness and then there's a sense of fragmentation, breaking down - a paradox really. In the opening scene of the film you see this approach to the house and the voice over is talking about an approach but as you get closer the voice is describing a different house than the one you're seeing. There's always this association of similarity but at the same time this slippage and difference.

MH: What's your position in the film - you're cast in the opening sequence as 'director' with the crew milling about, but also later on talking with M. in the aquarium with bears floating behind.

AG: I've tried to put that into question to a

certain extent. I call that character A. and she gets a credit. A. is played by Anna Catherine Welbanks

MH: Who's that?

AG: Exactly. The name Welbanks is referred to in the film but she says, 'No, it's not my name, it's not my mother's name, names aren't passed down that way.' But then she says her grandmother 'took back that name' and went to live in the house by the bay, so there's an ambiguity about identity. I suppose I could have used another actress to play the part of A. but there were enough complications. I wanted M's identity as the director or the origin of the film to be somewhat in doubt.

MH: Yeah, well it did that for me cuz M. is your double, your fictional double as director but you're also in the same scene with her. You're introduced in the film in this documentary coded bit at the beginning with the crew setting up and all, you're introduced as 'director'. But then you appear in the fiction confronting your double and yet she's the only one who's talking in that scene...

AG: Well it's only her voice that's true... but both our lips are moving.

MH: Then she starts reciting from Lewis Carroll...

AG: Well, the whole idea of **The Looking Glass** is about doubling and the relation between image and identity. That particular quote is about Alice's identity being put under incredible pressure because Tweedledum and Tweedledee say 'If that there king was to wake you go out, bang, just like a candle.' And she's contesting that and says, 'Well if I'm only a thing in his dream what are you I should like to know?' And one says 'Ditto' and the other says 'Ditto Ditto'. All this doubling up of identities, adds to the threat of solipsistic non-existence. It's a very terrifying prospect.

MH: The film feels like a psychodrama in its use of surreal imagery, M. always in

bed, filled with dreams.

AG: As I understand it, psychodrama begins with a premise about what it means to be a subject, a subject is someone who has dreams. There's always a centre to which you can return. I've really tried to skew those things and question them. It's never quite clear who the subject of the film is, although there's enough of an implication that you could follow it on the level of a story...

MH: But because we're given irresistably the image of this one woman M. throughout the film I ended up tying the various strands of the film to her.

AG: But there's also the story of *The REGARDS Secret Garden*...

MH: But that could be her story.

AG: I think there is always a tendency to try to construct that kind of a subject. If you saw the film a few more times, though, you'd probably find it really hard to do that because there's so many loose ends. I'm not trying to say there's no such thing as subjectivity, I think there is. I think one of its foremost features may be the tendency to make different stories fit together.

MH: Can you talk about the telephone calls - they run throughout the film as a recurring motif that disturb her sleeping solitary. The first one is a guy, the second from an arts council, the third for a censor-



ship rally and then you call as director, or friend...
AG: Or who knows because she turns me off, you don't get to hear me. Well they serve a lot of functions. They give you a sense of her identity but they allow you to understand that this identity is being formed somewhat outside of herself. And they refer to another space - a place which is neither on the screen nor in 'reality'. In a lot of cases it's not quite clear whether she hears it or not. The first time you hear one of these voices it seems to have woken her up so you don't know whether she's heard it, but later you see the same scene again and this time she wakes up possibly in response to a dream. When she's in the house she behaves as if she has no interior. You never see her eat anything you only see dishes. It seems as if nothing ever penetrates her. That's another way of showing her withdrawal from the world. In one scene she looks at her body in a hand mirror as if she can't look directly at it, there's this sense of removal. The phone calls are a way of setting up a relation with the world but keeping it distant at the same time. So when she finally does pick up the phone, that's the first time the curtains are open and you can see something outside. That becomes a significant gesture because she hasn't responded prior to that. It provides a kind of narrative that moves her from inside to outside.

AG: Well, she turns on the TV but she's looking at the floor. We can't see the screen and she's not looking at it. So it's like an empty space.

MH: The scene where she's watching television is strange because we're

hearing the music again that started the film. It's as if the film is starting all over again - and we'll see again all of the events leading up to this place on the couch where film becomes television and then it would start over and over. What is it that she's watching exactly?

AG: Well, she turns on the TV but she's looking at the floor. We can't see the screen and she's not looking at it. So it's like an empty space.

MH: And then she picks up the SX70 camera and begins taking pictures of

herself...

AG: But again she's photographing herself in the dark, she can't see the pictures and she can't see what she's photographing. We see it, we see her holding the camera...

MH: ...and she sees the apparatus when the flash goes off.

AG: We see an approximation of the picture because of the flash. It's a reminder that our place as viewers entails certain privileges but also certain limitations.

MH: So you're suggesting that her identity is coming from somewhere else?

AG: Yeah. In the sense that she and we are created by the social world, as in the phone calls. But also, we're actively creating it as an audience. She's in a film, she doesn't really exist.

MH: So what does it mean 'Never dabble in autobiography unless you want to live in a perfect world that perfectly excludes you'.

AG: One of the things the film tries to deal with is an urge to find perfection, the original truth, the first and authentic instance of something, where it all started and so forth. M. says that, I think, because she's making a film about herself, presumably to find or show the truth about herself, but the more detailed and realistic or 'perfect' any story becomes, the more it hides the mess and truth of its making. When you make a story about yourself, in a way it's your self, your entry point into the story that gets obliterated in the end. But I think that urge toward the perfect truth is really hard to avoid. We think that way.

MH: In different parts of the film there's sequences of titles superimposed on the image, numbered lists. They reminded me of the way they used to write history, not as a sequential narrative but in annals form. They'd write: 1391 crop failure, 1398 King Henry is crowned. Skipping

years sometimes and others with one-liners beside, history as gagline. Sometimes the reported event is very local, sometimes a birth or marriage because the production of facts is a disparate fashion.

AG: There's four sections where that happens. And there are 13 items in each one and that adds up to 52, which is an arcane numerical grouping. Weeks in a year, cards in a deck. I was interested in the persistence of arcane structures long past their reference point, their context. It was also a way of structuring the film, I think of it as kind of grid or map. It helps explain the way some of the stories fit together. For instance in the drama M. relates, she sees a book with the letters s-t-a-t in the title and there's no explanation given. But throughout the four columns of 13 titles I used different words that incorporate 'stat'. They have to do with being, with image, with the body, photography, with inheritance, and so on. The titles aren't exactly poetry or theory but a structuring device.

MH: In several titles there's reference made to Indian mythologies and their relation to the land - and this seems to connect to the landscapes we see in the film, that surrounds the house by the bay. The setting of the film. It also speaks of a relationship that is finished in a way, that's related to the mourning in **The Secret Garden** story now the mother is gone. The Indians have also left their home, torn away from this land.

AG: So much of this film is about place and space. It's southern Ontario, and my history is there. M's great great great grandfather was a settler and she mentions family stories about Indians being in that place too. I felt I couldn't discuss this specific place without talking about that history. But it's interesting you say that the Indians have left their home. Because M. quotes this Indian chief, Chief Seattle from 1885, saying that the Indians will never leave this land they love, even if the white man thinks they are all dead and gone. It's an idea of place that is very different than the one you and I grew up

with. And it was interesting for me to consider that these different understandings of space contributed to an alienation between two cultures. I wanted to suggest the value of recognizing a sense of space that is different from one's own without trying to speak for them. So mostly I've used quotations from native spokespeople. And even these represent different opinions, and not a homogeneous viewpoint at all. I wanted that part of the film to remain unresolved, and very open. I wanted that to stick out a bit because if it can get people to talk about things that's important, more important than me claiming to have an answer to the problems of Native people or anyone else.

MH: In a way M. is moving forward, I mean that's the direction you look for when you're headed down a narrative road, for coming attractions. And you take us from inside to outside with a kind of resolution at the end. At the same time the film seems taken up with an attempt to recover things that have been lost - responding to a sense that something's missing without knowing exactly what isn't there anymore.

AG: Yeah, so it's a movement backwards and forwards at the same time. That's one of the paradoxes I wanted to leave as a paradox. It's like the difference between inside and out, it's not a fixed relation, it goes back and forth so sometimes inside is out and outside in. It's a situation of opposites that change all the time. I guess I wanted to make the opposites seem less opposed and more fluid so an alternation between the two becomes possible.

Anna Gronau Filmography

Maple Leaf Understory 10 min. col/silent (1978)

In-Camera Sessions 5 min col/sd s8 (1979)

Wound Close 8 min col/sd s8 (1982)

Aradia 2.5 min col/sd s8 (1982)

Regards 31 min col/sd (1983)

Toto 2.5 min col/sd s8 (1984)

Mary Mary 60 min col/sd (1989)

Female Spectatorship

Camera Obscura, a California-based journal of feminist film theory, recently sent out a questionnaire on female spectatorship, asking how the question of female spectatorship has been addressed in Canada. The questionnaire read, "In your home country: How has the question of female spectatorship been addressed? From what kinds of theoretical or practical frames of reference? Has there been a sense of an evolving exchange of opinions? Where would such issues be made public? To what extent is this question linked to a university setting? To contemporary efforts of feminist filmmakers? To what extent is the "female spectator" seen as an international question? Are there regional differences that are especially important? To what extent has your work on female spectatorship been informed by American feminist film theory and criticism, French feminist theory, British feminism, etc. and to what extent has it been informed by your own particular cultural context? Is there a tension between the Canadian context and the international context regarding the issue of female spectatorship? Any additional issues which you would like to address would be more than welcome".

Overviews from various countries will be published in the next issue. The following represents a synthesis of a lengthy conversation held by *W5*, a group composed of women in Toronto who teach, pursue graduate studies, and/or are involved in the exhibition, distribution, or production of feminist film.

FIRST OF ALL, EVERYONE FELT THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT (IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO GIVE UP A FRIDAY NIGHT) to respond to the *Camera Obscura* questionnaire. Particularly, this opportunity would provide a means to remind our American colleagues that there is a difference between Canada and the U.S. Despite Free Trade, we have not succumbed to assimilation yet.

Our discussion of the issue of female spectatorship very quickly became bound up with a discussion and evaluation of the journal, *Camera Obscura*. While recognizing the relative contribution of *Screen*, *Wide Angle*, etc. to the development of issues of female spectatorship, for all of us, *Camera Obscura* had been far more central in the elaboration of that issue and, in many ways, epitomized a certain brand of feminist film theory (Lacanian, French/Linguistic poststructuralism) with all its attendant strengths and drawbacks.

We were all agreed on the critical breakthrough that the emergence of this paradigm represented and remembered our

excitement at first discovering this work. Coming out of practical engagements with the women's movement and the left and an academic tradition dominated by empiricism, the paradigm represented an extremely seductive invitation to enter the heady world of contemporary theory. Our own writing, research and film and video work was strongly influenced by a working through of this post-Mulvian inheritance. I would personally strongly emphasize this aspect of "working through". Because of the conceptual difficulty of the theory, (partly due to the institutionalization of film studies in the academy), and because film theory demanded a working familiarity with the "background" disciplines of psychoanalysis, linguistic theory, etc., a lot of the early critical writing on feminist film theory in Canada tended to adopt the model (of the look, voyeurism, subject/object relations, woman as "lack"...) uncritically. I think this was entirely in line with what many of our American colleagues were doing in the same period, ie. filtering different textual objects through an increasingly standardized model of spectatorship. One of the major criticisms raised by our group, in fact, was that this theoretical model could only produce textual criticism to the exclusion of any other form of critical engagement with cinema. "Too much text-rubbing", as one of the participants put it.

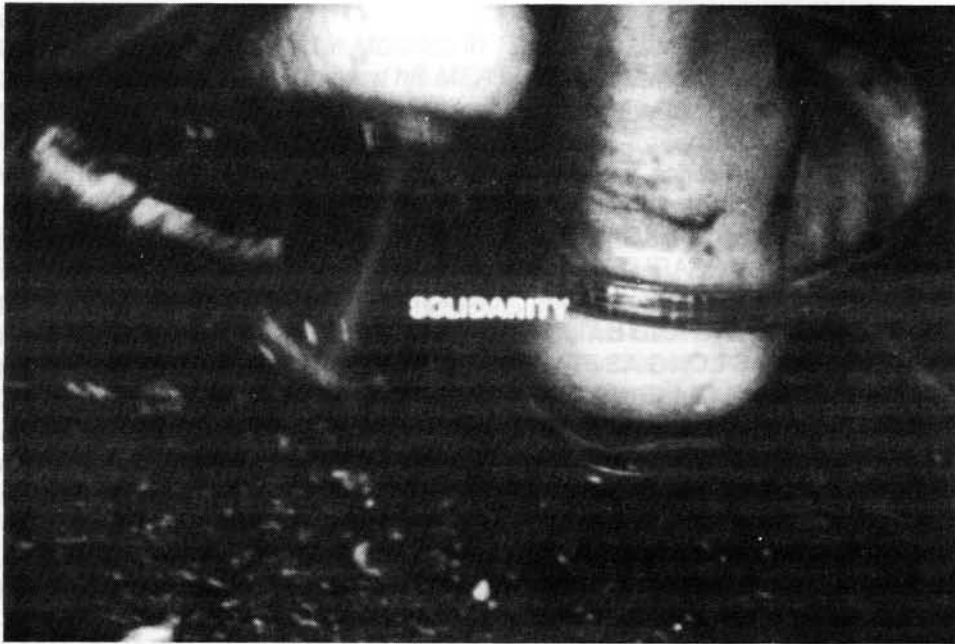
What was different about our appropriation, however, was that the texts that we chose to work with were predominantly Canadian (ie. the extensive work done on Wieland by Armatage, Banning, Marchessault, the work on Quebec feminist film Longfellow, Pelouse, reviews of Canadian feminist video by Dot Tuer). Apart from Florence Jacobowitz at *cineACTION!* very little work was ever done here on the Hollywood text. In a doubly colonized country such as our own where 99% of shows on TV are American, where 90% of our exhibition spaces are owned by American chains with the kind of political clout that has historically inhibited Canadian governments from taking any kind of affirmative action, we have always felt that our responsibility as critics has been to

support, introduce and create a critical discourse around the feminist work that miraculously gets produced in this country. The notion of an abstract female spectator is not very useful in this context, given that the intended spectator of feminist film and video practice in Canada is rarely provided with the opportunity of viewing indigenous production.

Our collective critical work has thus been less involved in the peculiar love/hate relationship to the Hollywood text which has marked the work of our American colleagues and which, in mysterious ways, continues to reproduce its enduring hegemony. This hegemony is only too apparent in film studies courses in Canada, where the majority of films studied (and available through university libraries) are American. Our work was never locked into the paradox of negativity which accompanied so much of the textual work on the Hollywood film (relegating "woman" to silence and absence, to the position of object, to positions of exteriority where her subjectivity and desire could only exist as negation or subversive undertow).

Because we were dealing with texts by feminists, our concern was less with the intricacies of domination than with the possibility of actual transgression and the representation of women's experience from a feminist perspective. Which is not to say that this kind of textual criticism was informed by essentialism, the assumption of a natural homogeneous feminine identity which lent certain common characteristics to texts by women (although there were strains of this present). Most of this work, however, discusses textual subversion as a relation of difference to the codes and conventions of Hollywood film.

We all felt that, currently, feminist film theory is in a state of crisis and transformation and that this has been brought on specifically by the growing disenchantment with the psychoanalytic model. Our criticisms of this model (and its attendant model of the female spectator) were directed at the theory's exclusion of any consideration of the social, of its monolithic reduction of difference to sexual difference (to the exclusion of class, race, and sexual orientation) and of its reluctance to develop (more Marxist inspired) analyses of institutional determinations which act on the cinema. This last point is particularly important in a



SOLIDARITY Joyce Weiland

country like ours where a national cinema can only exist as a state supported cinema. We were uncomfortable with the way in which the theorization of the female spectator implied a dangerous reduction of identity and felt that this homogenizing tendency ignored the heterogeneity of feminist communities and women's lived historicity. This homogenizing tendency was also responsible for the fact that until recently, very little has been written in *Camera Obscura* about national cinemas.

Nothing has ever been written about Canadian or Quebec feminist cinema though many of our film have been

critically acclaimed in international festivals.

We believe that this criticism of the psychoanalytic model of the spectator is neither new or original but, in fact, has been a recurring theme in the evolution of feminist film theory for the last five or so years. Thus we were perplexed about the purpose of the questionnaire and surprised at the implicit assumptions which seemed to inform the prioritization and phrasing of the questions. In short, the impression we got was that the hegemony of the model of the female spectator remained indisputable and the margins (we place Canada in this position) were simply being asked to provide another mirror for the centre. Perhaps, as cultural workers sensitive to all variants of cultural imperialism, we overreact.

We do not suffer under the delusion that we are creating a completely original paradigm of feminist film theory in this country. Every theory, as we all know, represents a hybridization of others, a combined formation (we all have, at varying times, been very interested in French Feminisms, Althusser, Innis, McLuhan, Arthur Kroker, George Grant and Quebecois lesbian theory/fiction). We can say, however, that we are **Interested** (in the strong sense of the word, as an emotional and intellectual commitment) in a theory that could begin to approach other categories of difference without abandoning the theoretical advances that have been made and in critical analyses of texts that are framed by a self conscious awareness of contextual specificity. We like, in short, theories and texts that are dialogical, aware of the hypothetical nature of any model of spectatorship, open and, god forbid, even playful.



NICARAGUA. SANDINISTA. REAGAN.

Mediashun

Media-Counter, the producers of a documentary on media representation of Nicaragua, Mediashun, was involved in a seminar entitled "Art, Politics, and the New Documentary" organized by DEC and held at A Space in 1987. What follows is an updated and edited version of the written accompaniment to the screening of their film.

THE LISTS OF TRUTHS AND HALF-TRUTHS RECYCLED BY THE PRESS ARE AS LONG AS FAWN HALL'S EYELASHES, AS BOUNDLESS AS OLLIE NORTH'S "PATRIOTISM" AND FREQUENTLY AS INACCURATE AS NANCY REAGAN'S ASTROLOGY. The question is no longer "Which side are you on?" but "Which side are you seeing?"

In North America, our news of the world is mediated by our consumer society; we are literally consumers of the world events reported by an authoritative media which survives on our consumption. We consume the news with our daily meals, we buy it with coffee, it comes to our doorstep and is disposed of with the weekly garbage. The most horrendous events become commonplace, familiar, and are mellowed to make them palatable.

True to consumer tenets, the events are described in terms that try to relate them directly to the buyers' mythology. Maintain that mythology, the buyer remains secure and stable; threaten it, the buyer is forced to reassess or reaffirm the myths in question. It might be said that the media represents a concern for the ego of the consumer at the expense of the subject represented. **Mediashun** takes up this issue with specific reference to Nicaragua, questioning the codified authority evoked by media appropriation of traditional forms of documentary.

Traditional documentary works to validate whatever it represents by using forms which give its representation authority: talking heads or on-the-spot reporting, for instance. **Medi-**

ashun refuses to exploit these techniques. Consequently, **Mediashun** refuses to assume the traditional documentary authority. Whispered narration is laid over a black screen, serving to undercut the authority usually evoked by voice-over narration. There is more here than can ever 'meet the eye'. The words of the whispering narrator relay historical notes which expose the United States' inverted morality. Usually history is lost in the media's concern with how pertinent the event is to our distant and different mythologies. The whisper of **Mediashun** is embedded in the other voices of the film, decentralizing and dispersing authority in a collective of different voices.

To subvert a code one must indulge in that code to some degree. Reading the paper or watching the news we are distanced from the events in Nicaragua. We read one column or see a minute long story; the experience is a fragmented one, followed by another story or another article. **Mediashun** employs fragmentation, but in a way that tries to call attention to itself, foregrounding the abstraction that takes place when dealing with cultural and historical difference. We must recognize the difference and distance—to deny this is to assume common values and mythologies across cultural and historical boundaries.

Mediashun has no one argument serving as a guide to take the viewer by the hand, weave through the points and come up with a "proof" of what the situation is "really" like in Nicaragua. The film employs a sort of fragmented argument that calls attention to the gaps, like the black screen, recognizing the fallacy of the common claims of objectivity. **Mediashun** foregrounds the media in order to destabilize the secure position which the "tell-it-like-it-is" myth of journalism employs. Contrary to the ads for **The National**, media is not a window on the world. Its more opaque and reflective, and we see more of ourselves in it, than we like to think. Bazin, eat your heart out!

R. Lines, P. Moore,
M. Rudden

On Becoming a Resident Alien:

MEMORY AS HISTORY

Raphael Bendahan was born in Morocco in 1949 and came to Canada at the age of 7. He received his MFA in photography at Concordia University where he taught film for a number of years. He has made many films since 1970, often dealing with 'marginal' people or marginal points of view.

1) I'VE BEEN LIVING IN QUEBEC FOR THE LAST TEN YEARS. IT'S GIVEN ME A GLIMPSE INTO A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ETHOS THAT IS DISTINCT. In comparison, the dominant Anglo-Saxon one in which most of Canada and the United States is entrenched seems static and dull. As a filmmaker and immigrant to Canada, this sojourn has heightened my own self perceptions and creative point of view. I often ask myself whether it is merely coincidence that my family's history and my own personal journey should be shaped by a series of uprootings dating back to the Sephardic Jews who fled the Spanish Inquisition in the fifteenth century. Or is it a wish to share the fate of the outcast anew, a sign of solidarity with those that have come before me and perished under the stigma of the Wandering Jew? Recognizing the fact that history as memory plays a role in my life whether I wish it or not has brought me insights that I could not have imagined possible. All that I am or will ever be has been shaped by a countless succession of displacements and relocations.

2) As a filmmaker I see my work as an attempt to bear witness to history and memory, my own and others, in order to deny the duplicity of our times. In this context, one's expression becomes essential, a way of voicing passionately what is otherwise hidden and dismissed as irrelevant data, the unofficial version of events if you like. This is not an attempt to reclaim the past or wallow in the nostalgic's afterglow of how wonderful it might have been - neither I fear propels us forward into the action of our own lives. Rather it is a way of seeing and acknowledging the past in new ways, as a living history made up of memory, longing and people's dreams for us. By personalizing that history we make it

human, a link to others we do not know but whose history we have come to share as its witness.

3) Events and facts do not in themselves constitute a history. It is the fabric which links often disparate events and facts into a patchwork quilt of time that can best be described as the shape of history. History, like memory, is charged with significance, each patch comes from another garment, while its construction is selective. Some histories never get written because they do not enhance the pattern that the historian is trying to quilt for us. History is shaped by events and the absence of events, a document of the few that excludes most. However it is arrived at, history inevitably flows through us and if we cannot swim we are drowned in it unknowingly. In time, only a few lie snugly under its cover.

4) But if history is understood as memory, like the selective memory each of us will take to our grave, then in one sense all histories and lives are equally true, like films. The question is how illusions of objective reality are used, whether to prepare us for the wear and tear of our lives or for the control and denial of them by historians more expert than ourselves. Perhaps too, one would realize to what extent one's passivity to history and one's personal memory of it is shaped by the perceptions of others. The ability to forget one's point of view, one's sense of history and place in it has slowly become the cultural imperative of our times. The quest for anonymity and all that entails has become more needful than all the dangers and benefits of sustaining one's voice. Displacement from the self has become a way of life.

5) That is the historical and social context in which I produce and see my role as a filmmaker. The dead have no need of speech or explanations so my concerns rest with the living. This is the loaded monologue which listens to its own speech and speaks through me.

6) It is fitting that the voice in which I speak

is absent, because it is absent from historical, personal and newspaper accounts. I use this metaphor of voice to explain how language both contains and excludes simultaneously like a code. To speak in an absent voice is to question accepted speech and find meaning beyond what is expected and contained. It is also an act of re-appropriation, or reasserting by using the colonizing tongue to voice the unspoken, the language that discounts meaning unless adhered to. Each language both in cinema and speech contain the incriminating nuance, the subtle rub, the offending and condescending lie of an oppressed and an oppressor, a boss and a worker, a colonizer and the colonized. Many speakers unknowingly comply and take sides with the oppressor. But to be white or black is to acquire speech differently. Quebec's speech and voice for instance is uniquely different than the rest of Canada. Its history is now being re-written, its absence from the official history of Canada can no longer be ignored. That is the stake in history which English Canada cannot abide in others but which it grants itself easily. Absence here has become presence. N'est-ce-pas? There are some languages one cannot speak but at the very least one can come to understand.

7) But even the victims can become fascists given half a chance, workers can become bosses and repetition is the fate of ignorance. Much of what is taught rarely addresses questions that pertain to the creative process. Here are some scattered thoughts on the subject as they relate to my films, to the way I approach, perceive and execute my job as a filmmaker with 'a certain point of view, in this uncertain country'. (1)

8) In many of my films I stress the importance and evocative use of everyday speech and occurrence as the locus for vision. By vision I mean insight, catharsis leading inevitably to a personal re-evaluation and possibly a state of sublime epiphany. I believe that the everyday, as the basis of our experience, contains unknown wealth for insight and enlightenment. It deserves our attention and



LE JARDIN (DU PARADIS)

observance. True seeing entails a dual or multi-leveled attention to detail as symbol or symbolic structure. The object is more than what we see before us. How one perceives a detail is synonymous with the way one sees oneself and the world around us. But to see clearly is to see in a detached way. To question what one sees requires a trust in our intuition.

9) Meaning is arrived at through a dispassionate regard for our attachment to life. In order to cultivate meaning one must first cultivate a sublime indifference to life, that is, as if one were already dead.

10) Absence connotes presence just as indifference connotes meaning. The unstated thought, because of its continued power over us as fear and doubt, invokes a level of charged complicity which explicit speech normally denies. That is how one touches the essence of meaningful truths, with silent observance, intuitively sensing when one is near what has been discarded, unspoken and true. This is the playful and provocative game that both the heart and mind engages easily for a purpose greater than reward.

11) If the work you are committed to does not change you then it is unlikely to move

others. Try again. You must learn to use your own product as a step into your own enlightenment.

12) Put aside all thoughts of praise or reward, concentrate on the one job before you, make that your one driving aim, as if your life depended on it because it does.

13) Subject matter is everywhere and nowhere. The real realm of your subject is how you see it with your own vision, insights, sense of history and place. The immediacy with which you can charge every moment with life, the expectancy and the exhilaration, or the obsessive and destructive dangers which it contains will be the way in which your work is judged to be true or false, successful or dull. A work without the tension of the everyday is a work without life.

14) Forget all judgements while working, you must learn to be your own best friend. Criticism can come after the work is finished not before. Take no one's word for what you must know yourself and do. Listen only for the confirmation of your own observations on the work before you. Advice is useful if the person giving you advice can actually understand what you are trying to do and say. Their opinion of you is secondary to the fact of the work and its importance to you as a statement of your personal vision. Be in keeping with that vision because it is all that you have. All the rest is mere technique designed to transform your personal vision according to what your work requires.

15) Mental, emotional or intellectual laziness leads to creative self-indulgence or egotism. TRUST YOUR OWN CREATIVE INTUITION TO GUIDE YOU ABOVE REASONED ARGUMENT. But educate yourself so that reason, intelligence and your critical faculties are finely tuned. Intuition alone is a blind alley if nothing has come before it. Like other speech, intuition can know more than you can fathom. Perhaps it will teach you what you need to learn too.

(From the film *Le Jardin*)

The Forer Structured Sentence Completion Test

WHAT TO DO

The following sentences are not complete. You are to finish them.

Work as fast as you can. Write

what first comes to mind. You

will have all the time you need to

finish. You may now begin.

1. When he was completely on his own, he
2. He often wished he could
3. It looked impossible, so he
4. He felt to blame when
5. When she refused him, he
6. I use to feel I was being held back by
7. She felt proud that she
8. As a child my greatest fear was
9. My father always
10. The ideal man
11. A man who falls in love
12. I was most depressed when
13. My first reaction to him was
14. When she turned me down I
15. His new neighbors were
16. Most mothers
17. Sometimes she wished she
18. Usually he felt that sex
19. I could hate a person who
20. His earliest memory of his mother was
21. The ideal woman
22. When people made fun of him, he
23. When I met my boss I
24. When I think back I am ashamed that
25. If I think the job is too hard for me I
26. A relationship with a sister
27. He felt that his lack of success was due to
28. When they talked about sex, I
29. I used to daydream about
30. Most women
31. When I have to make a decision I
32. Love is
32. My earliest memory of my father
34. I was most annoyed when
35. When he thought of his mother, he
36. Taking orders
37. I dislike to
38. When someone looks at me, I
39. Most women
40. After she made love to him she
41. If I can't get what I want I
42. When I am criticized I
43. He felt he had done wrong when he
44. She knew she couldn't succeed unless
45. I used to feel 'down in the dumps' when
46. When they didn't invite me, I
47. Most people are
48. Most men act as though
49. I am afraid of

Stan Douglas

YYZ LECTURE JAN. 9, 1989

Stan Douglas is a visual artist living in Vancouver who has been working with cinematographic media for a number of years. He has recently produced a body of work for commercial slots on broadcast television, and curated a touring exhibition of Samuel Beckett's video and film work. The following is an excerpt from a talk given on the occasion of his exhibition at YYZ (an artist run centre committed to showing time based work) in January of this year.

TWO HANGERS AT THE JERICHO BEACH AIR STATION WAS A PIECE I DID QUITE AWHILE AGO WHEN I WAS STILL IN ART SCHOOL. I'M ONLY TALKING ABOUT IT NOW BECAUSE IT RELATES TO WORK THAT WE'LL BE TALKING ABOUT AT THE END - in that it uses a public place, and involves a certain kind of anonymity which is becoming more and more interesting to me. In Vancouver there's a (rendered inaudible) ...possible development happening on the site but all of that was lost and all that's left are the foundations of the buildings and rubble around them. They were burned one night under mysterious circumstances because there was some controversy as to whether they would be continued to be used for artist's studios and public theatres or if it would be used for commercial parkland. What I did was collect rubble from the site of the original buildings and make cement casts from plans of the buildings, then set my maquettes in the centres each foundation. It's like a memorial to the buildings, a memory of what the place once was. And they're still there, it's been seven years I guess, and one of the models is still there growing moss along one of its sides. So they've been

integrated into that landscape. I wonder about the relation of people to that site - if they can remember what the place was because of these things.

Before I get on to the other work I should mention a small polemic which will direct my arguments. I prefer to talk about my work in terms of its specific historical allusions or subject matter or material as opposed to using art historical arguments. Art historical arguments are very common these days and use a very particular kind of art history which is derived from Greenberg's teleology and which is constantly being reified by art magazines. People seem to think that they can plug into this art history and produce the next phase of a certain trajectory of art and become validated etc. solely based on the terms of what they're doing becoming art or not becoming art. This seems very strange to me since the importance of much of the work of modernism in Europe and North America has come as a result of artists including extra-artistic materials and subject matter. But especially in postmodernist tendencies like Neo-geo you're seeing people who depend on a very reified notion of what art history is in order for their work to exist.

Shortly after I made the Hangars I began documenting it and my intention was just to document - that's what I thought I was doing. But I was shooting so much film and doing so much printing I realized I was starting to make photography. Eventually I started making black and white transparencies and arranging the slides into sequences that would mimic cinematic gestures such as tracking, panning, and cinematic kinds of montage.

This is a still from a piece called **Jazz** which had a jazz soundtrack and had Vancouver sitting in for...well, I should describe the technique itself which is a dissolve technique. You have one slide up and another one dissolves on top of that, one slide fading out while another fades in overtop. This can allow simple montage or the appearance of motion as one picture dissolves into the next. In a way it's slowing down the persistence of vision effect that allows film to produce a consistent or coherent image



that appears to be moving. In this piece I was using the backalleys of downtown Vancouver as a mise-en-scene for a non-existent film noir, trying to make it look as much as possible like the setting of that movie genre. The soundtrack uses the same type of music to represent the use that any site or location can have through the manipulation of photographic means. I did a whole series of work of this sort which developed into this very very long 22 minute piece shot in a brewery which was an attempt at making some kind of masterpiece which became an awesome failure and I don't want to talk about it... (laughter)

The very last fairly straight forward slide projection piece that I made which would just be shown in a theatre on a screen was called **Two Devises** or **Deux Devises**. It was in two parts. This is a slide from part one called **Breath**. There was a 19th century art song by Charles Gounod called "O ma belle rebelle": you have a baritone singing a very sentimental, very emotional song about unrequited love and this very straightforward and cool English translation of the French lyric (subtitles) on the screen dissolving like subtitles do, line for line. Part two, called **Mime**, consisted of close ups of my mouth in the shape of different phonemes like: ah, ee, oo and then recombining those in a sequence to make them sync up and on occasion not sync up to a blues song called **Preachin' Blues** by Robert Johnson. As I watch the piece I can see the technique get very much in the way of transparency but on occasion the cut or dissolve would work in such a way that it seems as if the sound is coming out of that mouth. The identification that's become habitual through film and television is constantly shifting back and forth, sometimes it would work very well and sometimes it would disappear. The choice of the blues song is a fairly personal one, derived in a way from my experience of being black in a predominantly white culture, having very little contact with black American culture, but at the same time being expected to represent that to people - both to people who were antagonistically racist and to liberal types. So what you have is my image not

quite synching up or relating to a very archetypal black figure, Robert Johnson. The song itself is about paranoia. The first line is 'I woke up this morning, all my blues were walking like a man'. It's about fears or paranoias being realized in some way or other. That subject matter combined with images synching up and not synching up was a fairly personal emblem for me, hence the title '**Deux Devises**', which is from the Renaissance emblems worn by noble men or soldiers to represent aspiration or desire which they would put on their clothing or on banners that they would take to war or keep in their homes.

When I made that piece I didn't know at the time but it has a very similar image to that of a video piece by Samuel Beckett called '**Not I**' in which a mouth disembodied in space on a tv screen fades up from black speaks for fifteen minutes then disappears back into black, speaking incredibly quickly, telling stories of a life that is apparently her own but which she is constantly denying. She stops when she's about to admit the first person singular, about to admit that they are **her** stories but she stops and says, "What? Who? No. She!" and returns to the third person as a means to avoid speaking in a language that identifies her and at the same time excludes her.

After I made that slide piece, which was half made in art school and half made out of art school, I took a break for about a year and read because I was supposed to be doing. At the time I read quite a bit of literature. Novels, poetry and critical theory, read a lot of Beckett's work which fascinated me because what I found there was not what I'd been taught to expect when I was in high school, etc. This piece (**Panoramic Rotunda**) in a way came from misremembering a line from a Beckett piece called **Fizzle No. 7** which went: "Eyes in their orbits silent..." no wait "Eyes in their orbits, Blue unlike the dolls, The fall not closed nor the dust yet stopped up" which I somehow misre-

membered as "Soundless eyes in their orbits" for some reason. The word orbit fascinated me. It indicates the bone in the skull that holds eyes in their place - it's like the material support for vision. Through various associations I came up with this image of a swamp which mimics the form of 19th century panoramas. From the centre of a swamp I made a series of photographs to make this 360 degree image which could potentially wrap around the viewer. I chose a swamp

*I chose a swamp
because it can be taken
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for the various phenom-
ena in the wooded area
around it.*

because it can be taken as a metaphor for an eye, it's circular, wet, like an aqueous humour, it's the centre, a collection point for the various phenomena in the wooded area around it. It relates to the original panoramas in that they were always representing exotic or foreign landscapes which were brought to the cities to be shown for amusement. Part of this amusement was that the viewer was situated in the centre of the perspective field. In a way the perspective system developed in the Renaissance was taken to its limit in the panorama, which closed the subject of the vanishing point into a very precise and static central position. In this piece, which is displayed flayed out on a wall, the subject or central position has

been broken open and its individuality has been displaced to the rotunda periphery, broken into three. The sense I wanted this to produce theatrically was one of inertia, the rotunda hangs like an artifact in a museum.

This is a book of music, Liszt's transcriptions of Beethoven's sonatas open to passage in his last piano sonata Opus 111. I began this work **Onomatopoeia** with its soundtrack. In the centre of that sonata there's a weird historical phantom - you hear what sounds like ragtime even though there's no possibility Beethoven could have been writing ragtime in the 19th century. What interested me about this was how the experience of the music is now so different from what it could have been to Beethoven's contemporaries, thanks to our experience of ragtime. The effect of the music is one of historical distance. I took this fragment of music and framed it with some episodes that follow and had my new score cut into a player piano roll. This eventually became the soundtrack for a piece which combines slide projections and the performance of a player piano. The player piano heightens the ragtime effect to a great degree. It has very even dynamics, is very loud, which was characteristic of the performance styles of juke joint piano players.

Above the piano almost like a large thought balloon or more to the point mimicing the accompaniment of silent films by pianists, were images of looms in the workshop of a woolen mill. In the first section, you see the various devices and tools and workspaces of people who work in the mill, but only their traces you don't see the people themselves. There are pieces of clothing, cups, tools, calendars, personal artifacts in spaces that show traces of use in some way or other. Again using the same slide technique I described earlier which would effect pans, tracking shots and montage. The central section showed various close ups of the looms themselves working without operators and very much like **Mime**, the piece with my mouth, animating somewhat convincingly and somewhat unconvincingly, so for awhile it would appear to

be working and then all of a sudden it would break down and the screen would go black as the music proceeded. This animation of the looms only happened in the ragtime sequence, then after that you would hear the other music and the other spatial representation. I was interested here too in the actual technological connection between the loom and the player piano because the device or the rolls which are pictured in the earlier sections which give coding to the machine to tell it what patterns to make is exactly the same technological process that controls a player piano. They both take events in time and spatialize them in order to make them exactly repeatable, to produce identities that can be manipulated in various ways. I was interested here in connecting up human absence in the dropping keys of the player piano which appears to have a phantom performer and these automatic looms. It's interesting too that the automatic loom is one of the very first industrialized human activities, one of the oldest human activities but one of the first to be industrialized in a large way and the one that caused Ned Lud to inspire riots in England that had factories building fortresses and hiring armies to protect themselves from workers who had lost their jobs and wanted to destroy the machinery.

This is a piece from 1986. My first actual film piece, **Overture**. The image consists of archival footage shot by the Edison Film Company between 1899-1901 of a train's eye view of a trip through the Rocky Mountains. You see the train come out of a tunnel, go down a section of track and go back into a tunnel in three different views - repeated twice with six pieces of text spoken ovetop. The text was derived from Marcel Proust's "Overture" to **Remembrance of Things Past**. A very huge novel, but the first ten pages in a way condense the remaining three thousand. They talk about notions of voluntary and involuntary memory. The former conjures up a memory so you can make it useful while involuntary memory is when something just comes to you. Proust valorizes involuntary memory because it can't be put to use for methods

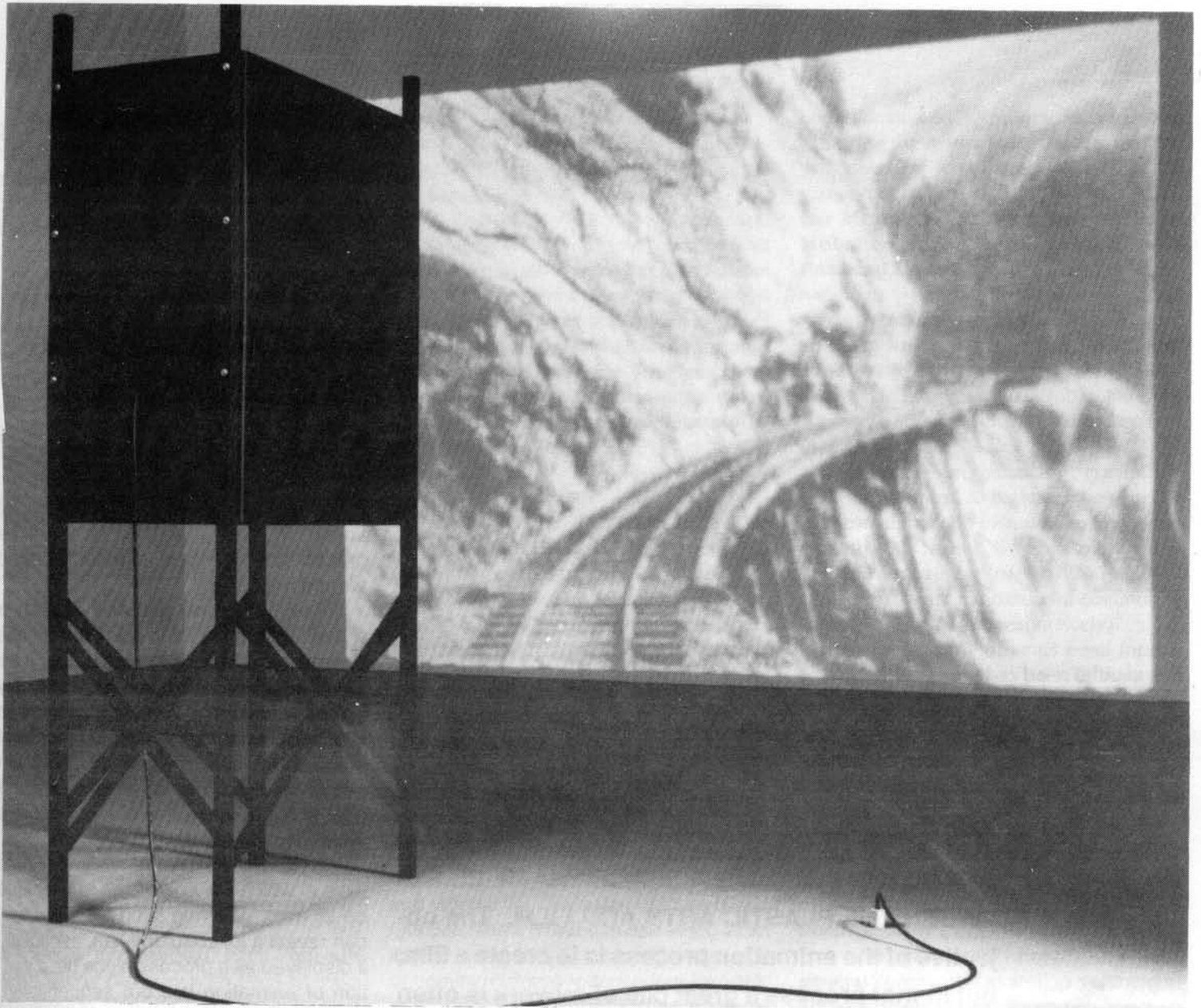
of war for the industrial relations that was destroying the class that the novel depicts.

I recombined Proust's sentences or sentence fragments in such a way that I could have a very non-linear text that wouldn't have the specifics of his situation but still have his syntax. One important concept in Proust is habit which he says is the cognitive activity that allows one to deal with new experiences. And the condition which the speaker is undergoing in the overture is being unable to find the habit which will allow him to deal with a new situation it is one of strangeness. In Proust's language he is confronted with reality: that which is indifferent to human will, mortality.

Overture is a film loop that just goes on and on and on, it doesn't strictly have a beginning or an end. It's the condition of that language and this imagery never quite arriving in the new world. It's all shot in the Rocky Mountains on the first CPR line going into British Columbia. In a way my intention was to show European culture arriving in North America but not being able to deal with this new situation.

When installed there's a quite large eight and a half foot high projection box - vaguely anthropomorphic with the lens for an eye and the speaker for a mouth and I guess the fan for an ear - talking at the projection trying to understand its condition but never being able to leave this fascinating specular image. When you see it installed, the blackouts aren't as strictly codified as they are on the videotape. On tape it appears that the blackouts signify lapses of consciousness and that going along the train tracks and seeing the landscape represents consciousness. In the gallery, however, one is returned to the space in which one is standing staring at a blank wall beside this whirring machine producing the image...

...the filmloop next door (**Subject to a Film**) is based on the film **Marnie** by Alfred Hitchcock. I'll leave that to the end, I've just finished the piece, I've quite a lot of difficulty talking about things I've just done and I've only seen the piece a few times. I do know however that it's based

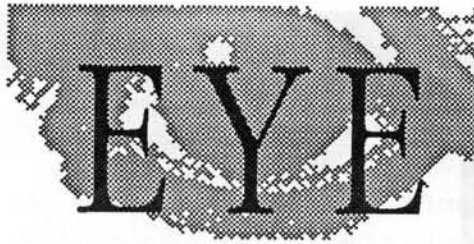


OVERTURE

on a minor Hitchcock film made in 1964 with Tippi Hedron and Sean Connery. In it there's a woman who travels from city to city stealing, until she is set up and then trapped by the Sean Connery character Mark Rutland. He's her boss and in a way makes it possible for her to rob the company and then uses the threat of jail to make her marry him. Then he's very surprised when she doesn't want to sleep in the same room as him and refuses to be touched by him. So he decides that Marnie is sick and that there's some psychological trauma that she has to discover. Eventually they uncover a "primal scene" involving her mother who was then a prostitute and a sailor who's killed

by the young Marnie who has since repressed the whole scenario. But even with that memory returned to her the relation to her mother and her new husband doesn't really change. That's because her mother's still reminded of the murder. After all this Marnie's last lines of the film are: "Oh Mark, I don't want to go to jail, I'd rather stay here with you." (laughter) In a way it's similar to the Lulu plays in that its original scenario could make real sense to a contemporary audience but seeing it now, it seems extremely strange. What I was trying to do with the film loop is to suspend the closure the film makes. To take that one scene, all the shots you see are based on the pivotal

robbery sequence in which she's going to be captured, and suspend its closure because that robbery was the last robbery after which she could not go on to another or find some other subterranean economy. For people who don't know the movie I hope there is some sense of the suspense continuing but on a more formal level. In the position of the camera tracking her, the camera flickering between being her point of view and being a very present character following her and also the notion of wage labour and someone having to work in an office and the necessity of finding some other means of supporting herself.



The Art of Animation in Toronto

Ellen Besen

ANIMATION INHABITS A SPACE THAT LIES BETWEEN THE PLASTIC ARTS AND FILM. The objective of the animation process is to create a film, but in that process a great pile of artwork is often created as well. This artwork exists in a kind of netherworld: essential to the creation of the film, executed with a great deal of care, and yet lacking any real purpose once the film is completed. The filmmaker is left with the dilemma of what to do with this artwork—stack it in the basement or use it to wallpaper the living room? There is a frustration in looking at this mountain of cels, backgrounds, drawings on paper. So much work went into producing it, yet it will probably never again see the light of day.

In the interest of exploring the relationship between this artwork, and the films created with it, the Toronto Animated

Image society is presenting a month-long show called "Art in Animation" at the John Black Aird Gallery. The show will focus on non-commercial animation produced in the Toronto area. Many of Toronto's independents will be represented, as well as Nelvana, with its new festival film, the Ontario Regional Centre of the NFB, which in recent years has become active in animation production, and Sheridan College, which will provide a display that demonstrates the process of cel animation. Final and rough artwork from many films will be presented along with special displays which shed light on such animation techniques as sand and plastercene animation. The films themselves will be presented on video monitors placed around the gallery.

What is the purpose of such a show? It's legitimate to ask if this art has a reason to hang on the wall. Can it be viewed as artwork in its own right, or only in the context of the film it comes from, as an illustration that reveals the process of making that film? TAIS hopes the art in this show will do both, but the ultimate goal is to increase the general public's awareness of animation.

There are some very effective films in which the artwork does very little on its own. Viewing such art, however, can reveal a lot about the film, especially if displayed as a process piece (ie. a section of animation laid out sequentially). Other films produce final artwork of real beauty, full of fine detail which can only be partially appreciated by simply viewing the films.

The general public has some difficulty taking animation seriously. This is partly because it looks easy: just cute little drawings whipped off in a few weeks. Perhaps catching a glimpse of just how much work goes into the making of a film will begin to encourage the public to view this art form in a new light.

The show runs from March 2 to April 1, 1989, at the John Black Aird Gallery, MacDonald Block, 900 Bay St. (at Wellesly). The show is sponsored by the Ontario Regional Centre of the NFB, CFMDC, Sheridan College, Nelvana, and Filmclips.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

In the better late than never dep't: After twenty years the Centre has decided to take on **super eight films**. Feeling it is unfair to accept or reject films because of guage we have purchased a super eight projector, rewinds and splicer. As the film practises we represent are already marginal there seems no reason to create an underground's underground. As usual we'll only take prints, not originals. This policy does not represent any kind of major change in the Centre's operation - it's simply a response to a couple of filmmakers who submitted work in 8mm. Feeling there was no particular reason to reject them we didn't - hence the new policy.

CONGRATULATIONS

To **Al Razutis** for winning the 1988 Los Angeles Film Critics Award for best experimental film for *Amerika*, his three hour experimental feature. To **Bruce Elder** for his retrospective at the Anthology Film Archives in New York and Innis College/Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. To **Richard Kerr** for winning first prize in the San Francisco's International Film Festival's 'New Visions' category with *The Last Days of Contrition*. *Contrition* also took the Best Experimental Production Award at the 5th annual Saskatchewan Film and Video Showcase.

NEWS

Gillian Morton, who worked at CFMDC when Ross Turnbull was on leave, has been hired to promote our documentaries, dramas, and animated films. Gillian has studied film at college and worked previously as the administrator for *Images '88/Northern Visions*. She is also currently a member of The Euclid programming committee.

Statistics Canada says VCRs and pay-TV are taking their toll on movie houses. Attendance between 1980 and 1986 is down an average 20% across the country (27% in Quebec). While the number of screens and employees is down, profits are stable thanks to regularly escalating ticket prices and multi-screened theatres that need fewer employees per screen. On average, Canadians went to films 18 times a year in 1952. In 1987 Canadians went just three times a year. No figures yet on video rentals but in 1986 42% of homes had VCRs and the numbers have grown since.

COMING SOON: THE EUCLID. The **Development Education Centre (DEC)** is building a theatre with a mandate to show Canadian and Quebecois, Third World, and multi-cultural film and video. The Euclid, which is scheduled to open at the beginning of May, will be equipped with top quality 16mm film projection and high resolution large screen video. The wheel-chair-accessible space will also be available for other cultural activities such as small concerts, meetings and readings.

The Euclid will show experimental, documentary, animated and dramatic works. The programming will include film and video from all regions of Canada and Quebec, Third world film and video as an art and community/grassroots level as well as commercial and independent features, and European, American and international film and video, both commercial and independent. Children's film and video programming for seniors will also be shown. Current tentative programmes include (among others) a series showing film and video made by Torontonians, a Native issues programme, a Gay and Lesbian programme, a retrospective of Quebec work, and the programming of films from other festivals, such as the Festival of Black Cinema in Boston.

Previously called the Community Visual Arts Theatre, the new name is a result of DEC Film's relocation to the corner of College and Euclid. The concept of community remains the emphasis, however. DEC will ensure accountability through community and programming

committees and a programming policy reflecting the mandate for the theatre. The programming committee members are **Cameron Bailey, Gillian Morton, Marian McMahon, Andrew Lee, Michelle Mohabere** and **Ferne Cristall**, with **Ramabai Espinet** hired as programme co-ordinator. The Euclid's advisory board is made up of individuals such as performer and playwright **Salome Bey**, video/film curator **Sue Ditta**, the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women's **Carmencita Hernandez** and video artist **Lisa Steele**.

DEC's programming committee will programme 120 nights of the year (20 of these nights will include film and video from the DEC film collection) and the theatre will be available for rental 200 nights of the year at both standard and community rates (\$400 and \$200 respectively).

Despite the obvious need for this theatre, fundraising has been difficult and DEC still has another \$50,000 to raise. Most of the money has come from the Department of Communications and the Ontario Ministry of Culture with some operating funds promised by the City Council of Toronto. Small amounts have been donated by individuals and organizations. Volunteers for fundraising and other tasks related to running the theatre are also needed.

Programming suggestions and general comments (as well as volunteers) are welcomed by DEC. To make a donation or obtain further information, write **The Euclid, 394 Euclid Avenue, Toronto M6G 2S9, or call Debbie Field at (416) 925-8104.**

Isabelle Rousset will be undertaking a tour of Ontario this summer with Canadian artist's films. It's called *Film Trek*. She plans to travel in a film truck and set up screenings in over fifty open air venues around the province. Hoping to attach herself to summer fairs, unsuspecting beach bathers, lawn bowlers, astronauts and the great inhuman more the tour's intention is to bring films where few have gone before. To this end she'll be purchasing prints of artists works. Stay tuned for further details.

NEW FILMS

JONATHAN AMITAY

Oh Dad II 6 min animated 1988

In this continuation of **Oh Dad**, a young boy expresses his deep concerns about environmental issues in his diary.

CRAIG CONDY-BERGGOLD

Up To Scratch 7 min 1987

A re-vision of the popular escapist art-form, rock video, this film is an exuberant collage celebrating community cultural groups set against a backdrop of unemployment.

STAN BRAKHAGE

Tortured Dust 94 min silent 1984

A feature length film made in four parts (each of which is available separately) entirely in the Brakhage home.

The Loom 43.5 min silent 1986

Edited on four different picture rolls printed together, the movement of this quartet drafts the mind motion of animal life through the seasons.

CARL BROWN

Mine's Bedlam 8 min b/w s8 1980

Brown's first film is a darkly lit expressionistic fantasy detailing the escapades of its three depraved protagonists. Original score by Rik Dekker.

COLIN BRUNTON

The Mysterious Moon Men of Canada 28 min 1988

In this send-up of the investigative reporter genre and romantic road films, disgruntled industrial filmmaker Brownie McFadden rebels against his boss, taking off to search for two people who he believes may have flown to the moon in a home-made rocketship in 1959 (trust Canadians to be modest about their own moon launch).

SHERRY COMAN

Friend, Go Up Higher 20 min 1988

A young girl copes with surviving her parents' death and learns to meet her own needs to heal.

KIM DERKO

The Scientific Girl 18 min 1988

The Scientific Girl explores the connections between the 'outbreak' of 1940's Hollywood films featuring mentally ill heroines and the photographic documentation of Charcot's hysterics in the 1890's.

ELLIE EPP

Current 2.5 min silent 1982

Epp's second and shortest film features alternating blue bars coursing through the frame.

notes in origin 15 min silent 1987

Epp's third and latest film features a series of ten static tableaux shot in Northern Alberta and separated one from another by black leader. This film was originally presented as part of an autobiographical performance.

RICHARD KERR

Dogs Have Tails 9 min 1979

Kerr's first film moves from a series of animated tableaux to verite documentary of a drunken birthday bash for dog to walks along the escarpment with a filmmaker's best friend.

PETER LIPSKIS

It's a Mixed Up World 8 min 1982

A found footage montage of war, science, travel and progress. This film resembles (and includes footage from) News of the World style newsreels.

Crystals 4 min 1983-5

A montage of snowflakes.

MEDIA-COUNTER (MARTHA RUDDEN, PADDY MOORE, AND RICK LINES)

Mediashun 13 min 1986

Mediashun is a montage of television, newspapers and archival images which explores the representation of Nicaragua in the mainstream North American press.

KALLI PAAKSPUU

Goodbye Two Day Weekends 25 min 1987

A film about three diverse family-run businesses which shows how parents relate to their kids and to each other under the pressure of living and working together.

GARY POPOVICH

Caress 1.5 min silent 1989

A brief and sublime sojourn through the treeline

AL RAZUTIS

The Tilted "X" (Essay on Postmodernism) 30 min 1986

A performance kit including Frederic Jameson's "Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", art history slides, a film loop containing an image of a static 'X', dildo and condom. Originally presented as part of "Kalling All Kanadian Critics".

MIKE J. SHIELL

Catch-Up 2.5 min animated 1989

A lively film about a solitary man's relationship to his pet cat, whose special powers transport them from the boredom of their living room to different times and places.

GAYLE HAYES SNEDDEN

My Shadow 3 min animated 1988

A little girl's attempt at recital is disrupted by her rebellious shadow's behaviour in this humourous adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's poem.

BARBARA STERNBERG

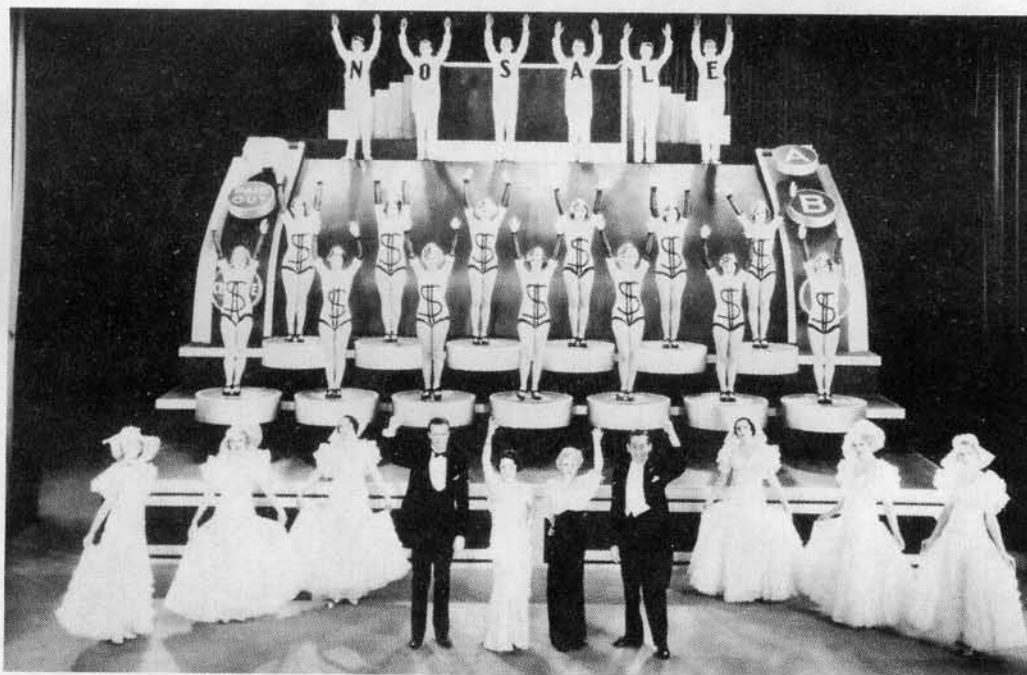
Tending Towards the Horizontal 32 min 1988

A passing glimpse at homes as movies. The divisions here between inside and out, between the gestures of work and the gestures of love are overlaid by a four part text read in voice over.

JOHN WALKER

Tracks and Gestures 56 min 1983

An intimate portrait of Jack Chambers which includes the full range of Chambers' work, from the age of 13 until his death; over seventy paintings and drawings as well as clips from Chamber's experimental films are featured in the context of his life story.



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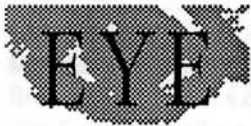
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