

THE CRITICAL EYE: ALL REVIEW ISSUE  
FALL 1990

# EYE

INDEPENDENT



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## THE INDEPENDENT EYE

VOLUME 11, NUMBER 4, FALL 1990

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## THE CRITICAL EYE: ALL-REVIEW ISSUE

### INTRODUCTION

This issue of *The Independent Eye* brings together a diverse group of essays which utilize a variety of critical tactics to examine an eclectic group of experimental films and filmmakers. What unites these articles is their authors' concentration on a single body of textual material: from a single film and/or piece of writing to the sustained work of a given filmmaker. This concentration requires a certain dispassion (in its strictest sense). The rigour

demanding of the dispassionate reviewer generates, in turn, a different kind of insight than that afforded by, for example, artists' statements or interviews. Dispassion is not a claim to objectivity. It acknowledges, however, the attempt by the critic to remain open to the universe of the artwork, a universe which contains something not of the critic's universe.

Good criticism serves its subject. My goal in facilitating the publication of this all-review issue is to present writings which will instill in the reader the desire to *see* these films — and to raise the perceptual and intellectual stakes in the reader's own concentration upon the images on the screen.

This all-review issue fulfills one of the more practical goals of the EYE, i.e., the magazine's function as a resource for programmers, teachers, and other clients of the CFMDC. A new feature, book reviews, has been introduced, as well as a bibliography on experimental/avant-garde film that I hope will encourage more book reviews for the EYE. The films and filmmakers examined in the rest of the issue range from the established (e.g., Hoffman, Razutis) to the unknown (e.g., Sandmark, Parrell), encompassing a number of formal, political, and aesthetic motivations. The writers also come from disparate backgrounds: long-time observers like Camper and Shedden; artists like Hoolboom and Sujir; and young students like Dillane and Matussek.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due first and foremost to Mike Hoolboom, who suggested the idea of an all-review issue,

furnished several of the articles printed here, and invited me to guest-edit this transitional issue of the EYE. Future editors will be chosen by the Editorial Committee, a subcommittee of the Board of the CFMDC; the next issue will mark a shift from a strictly staff-run magazine to one which brings together staff, Board, and other members of the filmmaking community. Mike's remarkable energy in raising the EYE to its current girth and level of interest sets a standard with which future editors will have to contend.

Blaine Allan, Paddy Moore, and *Spleen* helped forward several articles for publication. Fred Camper/*The Chicago Reader* and Leila Sujir/Jill McGreal of Canada House gave permission to reprint material. Marnie Parrell, Craig Masterman, the Cinematheque Ontario Documentation Centre and the Art Gallery of Ontario Film Department all generously donated illustrations for the magazine. David Morris contributed his computer expertise. Finally, my personal thanks to Paul Couillard, Jim McSwain, Daria Stermac, and Krista Grevsted and the staff of the CFMDC for their patience, support, advice, and assistance.

### CALL FOR EDITORS AND SUBMISSIONS

Under the new editorial structure of *The Independent Eye*, issues will be edited by rotating guest editors, who may come from the staff, Board of the CFMDC, and/or members of the filmmaking community. Those interested in editing future issues of the EYE should contact the CFMDC with proposals or ideas about future content or directions for the magazine.

Submissions are also solicited for reviews, artist's statements, scripts, correspondence, interviews, histories, speculations, reports, and other documents relevant to independent film (and not just experimental film).

The EYE especially encourages the editorial involvement of and submissions by women, gay and lesbian writers, members of visible minorities like Aboriginal, African, or Asian writers, and any other new voices who wish to express their views on independent film.

I R E V I E W S

**CONTEMPLATING SUICIDE:**

BY FRED CAMPER

**DETERMINATIONS**

Reprinted with permission from *THE CHICAGO READER*, 8 September 1989

**BY OLIVER HOCKENHULL**



"Certain key words, "SCHIZO" and "DEAD", are privileged texts."

Not long into Oliver Hockenhull's film *Determinations*, following a dense collage of images and sounds, we see a woman in an empty room. She identifies herself as a prostitute, and describes how she has served time in jail for stabbing a man "in his privates." As the sequence progresses, she describes how her foster father had molested and raped her, beginning when she was seven; by the scene's end, we learn that the man she stabbed was her foster father, whom she had sought out for revenge when she was 18.

Although this story is spoken by an actress, it has the ring of truth, and in fact it was taken from the reminiscences of a French woman in the 1950s. Part of the scene's effectiveness comes from the nonlinear way in which it is ordered. We first hear of a repugnant act of violence, and then of another one that occurred years earlier, and only then do we understand that one caused the other. This pattern of seeking out causal and other connections between different forms of oppression, violence, and despair is the principle underlying this recent Canadian film.

Hockenhull bases his film on an actual series of bombings in the early 1980s, carried out by a Vancouver-area group called Direct Action. These five Canadians — two women, three men, all in their 20s — bombed a defense plant, a hydroelectric power substation, and three porno video stores, expressing their opposition to the war machine, to pornographic images of women, and to at least some instances of hydropower. (To many, hydropower is nonpolluting, "clean," but for an extreme environmentalist it is also oppressive — of the river that it dams, of the land that it floods.) The group, which had both leftist and anarchist ties, declared itself against "ecological destruction and human oppression," against "all repressive hierarchies of East and West." In early 1983 they were captured on an isolated wooded road that the police had sealed off in order to arrest them; they were later sentenced to long prison terms.

Not all of these facts are apparent on a first viewing of the film, because Hockenhull's method follows the rules of neither the documentary nor the political diatribe. He does not tell a linear story because to do so would be false to

the multiple connections between actions and events in the world. Nor does the film advocate any one method of thinking about causes; it is not pedantic. Instead, the viewer is flooded with a dense clutter of images and sound: scenes shot in a variety of cinematic styles, shots filmed off a television screen, rock and punk-rock music, diverse voices speaking and reading various texts. In one scene, footage of a street prostitute soliciting clients is accompanied by two texts read simultaneously. One describes violent acts against women, the other is a rather poetic and idealized text about love. The viewer is thus forced to make a decision about how to listen to the texts: Which one? Or both? Or as a weave of word-sounds without meaning? One is encouraged to arrive at an independent judgment about the relationships between the texts, even though Hockenhull's sympathy for one of the texts is clear.

It is characteristic of much of the best art of recent years that it contains multiple viewpoints, without necessarily arguing for one over the other. Throughout *Determinations*, the viewer

is asked to assume the active role that such works require. But there is another, almost contradictory effect. The viewer feels assaulted by the sounds and images, as if trapped in a collage-barrage from which there is no escape. Here the film tries to describe, even replicate, the aggressor-victim pattern that Hockenhull sees as informing the relationship between culture and the individual in society.

While some choices concerning right and wrong may be clear, the means for implementing one's ideals are far less obvious. That one of the group's bombings injured — to their professed regret — seven people is one indication of the perils of "direct action." What makes Hockenhull's film so extraordinarily rich is that it combines three different ideas, any one of which would be sufficient for a lesser film, into a richly intersecting weave. We feel the filmmaker's clear condemnation of what he regards as oppression and destruction; the film's editing patterns encourage the viewer to think about cause and effect and evaluate the material from an ethical perspective. And yet stylistically the work is a brooding, poetic meditation on its

maker's confusions and despair.

A large part of *Determinations* is spent recounting some of the ills of the world. The U.S. defense establishment's nuclear overkill and Canada's participation in that is a primary target (the bombed defense plant made cruise-missile parts). A viewer seeing a small portion of the film might be annoyed by its sometimes shrill tone. But as the work progresses, its repetition of facts combined with variations in form and style suggest a film that is far less sure of itself, or of any absolute answers, than one might think at first.

Indeed, at the heart of *Determinations* I see a despair so profound that I would not hesitate to call it a kind of suicide film, in the great tradition of Christopher MacLaine's *The End* (1953) and Stan Brakhage's *Anticipation of the Night* (1958). In these earlier works, the filmmaker looks at the external world and finds in that looking the reason to contemplate his own suicide. Hockenhull is not present in an autobiographical way in his film, but his cinematic style does have some of the tormented quality of the Brakhage and MacLaine works. In *The End*, which Hockenhull has not seen, we are struck by constant shifts in the film's representational mode. And in *Determinations*, written texts are presented in an almost bewildering variety of forms. We hear them spoken by a number of different voices, sometimes simultaneously; we also hear sound recorded from TV. We see printed words and sentences, made on a video-titling system and filmed off a video screen, in a variety of different formats. Certain key words, "schizo" and "dead," are privileged texts: they're scratched directly onto the film emulsion.

A similar variety can be found in image styles. Many shots are filmed from broadcast TV, at times presented in ultrarapid montage. The film often alternates between black and white and colour. In some scenes, carefully choreographed camera movements are used; others are shot in an improvisational, documentary fashion.

The juxtaposition of two sequences near the film's centre illustrates the effect and meaning of this stylistic variety. We first see a man on an aerial tram that bridges a wilderness river. He tells a story of an insomniac so tormented by

**"The centre is no longer occupied by a political power but a capacity for complete destruction."**



his condition that he kills himself, only to find that "he still cannot sleep .... Insomnia," he says, "persistent thing ...." At the beginning of this scene, the man is in long shot above the river amid the wooded landscape; at the end, repeated close-ups of his hand on the tram rope create a rhythmic, repetitive trap, also suggesting a possible reference to the suicide by rope at the end of *Anticipation of the Night*. The sequence that follows is an extremely rapid and assaultive video montage, synced to a loud rock song.

As in the scene of the woman describing her childhood rape, we move from effect — the description of a man in torment — to possible cause: it's suggested, indirectly, that the intrusive cultural noise that surrounds us denies not only a genuine appreciation of nature but any real inner peace. We are all like walking dead; we have killed ourselves, but animated by the endlessly self-duplicating cultural energy that surrounds us, we still cannot sleep.

However dense the skein of specific meanings that Hockenhull elicits from his material, what is most impressive about the film is its overall emotional impact. As in the films of Yvonne Rainer, which Hockenhull admires, personal and public issues are separated but are presented as inextricably linked. The aggressive collage form and the constant stylistic shifts of *Determinations* finally lead the viewer to experience a crushing despair. This is the case even when it seems as if those shifts are also producing clear meanings. In the juxtaposition cited above, for example, the viewer can't help but feel bombarded by the colour videomon-

tage and its loud music, which have the opposite effect of the black-and-white bridge scene with its quiet story telling. On one level, this difference supports the meaning cited — the noise of the world denies us rest — but on another level, it is just one of many moments in which the stylistic shifts prevent our feeling either a smooth flow or a clear contrast at the point of transition. Instead, the new images and sounds act as if to deny, even obliterate, the previous sequence, almost as if the film were destroying itself. The accretion of such shifts means that we're permitted no consistent sense of physical space. At such transition points, a void opens up; one feels oneself staring into a whirlpool, into which all of the material of world, now drained of its meaning, is being irretrievably drawn.

The constant shifts deny any feeling of consistency, undercut any possibility of belief. The film's inability to settle on a fixed mode or modes for representing the world evidences an inner nihilism beneath its fundamental and authentic commitments. The shifts begin to open, in the viewer's mind, a kind of vacuum in which nothing is possible, in which nothing can live — the vacuum, perhaps, of the world after the holocaust toward which Hockenhull believes we are headed. In the words of one of the film's texts, "At the end of the world ... figure becomes lost in ground," and fine art is rendered irrelevant.

Herein lies the film's central contradiction: that its dense sound-and image-filled surface, one that appears to be committed to specific beliefs, is really only a vision of a terrible spiritual emptiness, the emptiness of the prison of a



*"In this film's  
oppressive world,  
they can exist  
only as shadows."*

culture that seeks to deny all of us our fundamental humanity. But then, the real contemplation of apocalypse that the film attempts must lead in itself to a denial of belief. In the words of another of the film's texts, "The centre is no longer occupied by a political power but by a capacity for complete destruction."

Though Hockenull has expressed admiration for the natural beauties of British Columbia, where he lives, and though one of Direct Action's bombings was inspired by the notion of undammed, untamed wilderness, nature has only a marginal presence in the film. The wilderness images we do see are either brightly coloured, in postcard style, or pale black-and-white. In either

case, the viewer has no real sense of contact with the land. When such images appear, a voice on the sound track sometimes says such things as: "It's the whole political society that nauseates." The fact is that Hockenull has chosen to construct his argument largely in negative terms: he gives us hell, not paradise. The film's form represents the interlocking grids of oppression, the cycles of violence, that threaten in fact to turn our world into a kind of hell.

Among the few "beautiful" images Hockenull allows himself are shots, spread throughout the film, of women's shadows, often seen moving against a wall. These images are quiet, tender, evocative. They form an important contrast to the scenes of women exploited

— they offer a momentary alternative to the film's aggressive noise. Yet in this film's oppressive world, they can exist only as shadows. And in one scene, the shadow is seen against the wall of the U.S. consulate in Vancouver. Another of the film's 'beautiful' images is the view of an apparently pristine wilderness. Then we quickly pan down to an isolated road, which is soon followed by images of a map. It seems this road is far from 'innocent', and in fact it is the road on which the five activists were captured.

Near the film's end, in one of its more choreographed scenes, a woman reads a text about the history of the arms race. While the woman walks back and forth under a highway viaduct, the text ascribes all the initial arms escalations to the United States and identifies all the Soviet Union's actions as "responses." The camera follows her by moving repeatedly to the left, then right, and sometimes it continues these movements even when she can no longer be seen but is still heard offscreen. The camera's back-and-forth action and reaction are clearly intended as a metaphor for the escalations described in the text. If the film's poetic qualities come largely from the sense that its style generates a self-negating void, perhaps its strongest positive statement is achieved through the negative arguments — the analysis of what is wrong, rather than the construction of an ideal world — of this and other scenes. Hockenull protests the ways in which oppression and violence perpetuate themselves, in ever-widening spirals. Whether the camera moves to the left or right, whether the cause is the United States or the USSR, is really not the point. The point is that if humanity is to survive — "We will either survive or die as a species" is another text in the film — we must learn to escape the cyclical traps of action and reaction, of the industrial and cultural noise that is increasingly filling our planet, and denying us ourselves.

*DETERMINATIONS* Oliver Hockenull  
(1987, 16mm, colour, sound,  
82 min.)

**FRED CAMPER** is a writer and lecturer on cinema who lives in Chicago.

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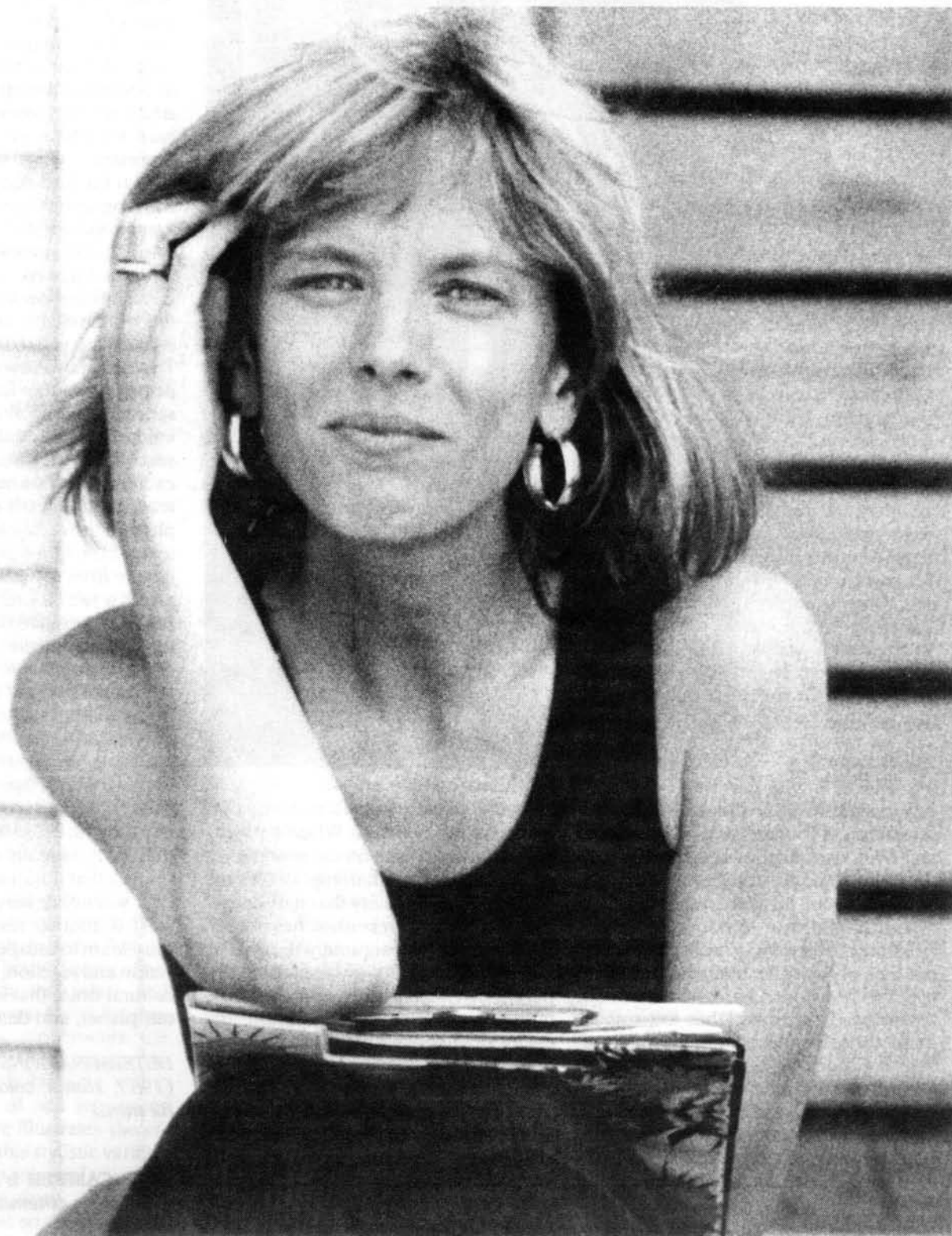
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**ANNA GRONAU on location during the shooting of MARY MARY Photo by Tom Urquhart**





## MARY, MARY, and A PENTAGRAM FOR CONJURING THE NARRATIVE

BY CHARLES DILLANE ■■■■■ There seems to be a shift taking place in experimental or alternative filmmaking practices, as well as in criticism: a skeptical return to narrative concerns, a questioning of the process of signification, of how meaning is produced and how it is interpreted. The relationship between signifier and signified is seen as unstable. In a sense this approach brings past concerns with the film-medium-as-material to bear on narrative; reference is recovered only to be complicated, and the referent is hidden behind the infinite possibilities of meaning and interpretation. Both Hollis Frampton's essay "A Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative" (1972) and Anna Gronau's *Mary, Mary* (1989) demonstrate this shift in approach to narrative and work to blur the distinctions between criticism and practice

I have chosen to examine these two pieces together precisely because they seem to embody fundamental issues involved in current cultural experience, issues which Frampton helped to introduce and which Gronau has inherited in a different historical framework. Both are concerned with their own processes of signification, illustrating the arbitrariness and instability of meaning involved in interpretation and practice. Language comes to overwhelm both authors such that any stable referent disappears behind an infinite regression of meaning. Frampton's

essay does exactly what its title indicates: it conjures the narrative, and it does so both in form and in content (concern with the inevitability of narrative). The essay itself duplicates the form of its subject matter in an effort to determine what narrative is, the one option that comes closest to finding stable meaning in origins and intent. As Frampton writes: "[W]e cannot know 'what' it is until we have met it face to face" (281). While duplicating the nature of narrative, however, the essay also duplicates the problems involved in such a quest for knowledge. The essay exists in five parts, each of which deals with narrative in one way or another — through the telling of stories and commentary. In so doing it organizes itself in the form of a sequential, linear narrative, with a recognizable beginning, middle and end (emphasized by Frampton's numbering of its different parts and approaches).

Frampton does not deny meaning altogether but suggests that meaning is dependent on an author who is present only in language. This problem of reference, one of the main concerns of the essay, is posed in the story that forms the first part: a woman has her entire life filmed and then bequeaths her huge fortune to a male child on the condition that he view the films of her life. The man never lives his own life; rather he lives the life of a woman he never met. The films fail to impart any useful, even understandable truth to him; even doubling cannot reveal 'truth'. And since the woman is herself a representation of a male dreamer, reference is even further complicated.

This problem of reference becomes clearer in the second section of Frampton's essay when he writes: "whatever is inevitable, however arbitrary its origins, acquires through custom something like a gravitational force" (282). The subject of inquiry is narrative, and this statement suggests that the origins of narrative are arbitrary though inevitable

(although the statement also suggests that custom determines the inevitable). That which is arbitrary is also unstable, meaning that it cannot guarantee the knowledge it offers. Frampton uses the metaphor of Mount Fujiyama, a landmark which dominates the Japanese landscape. Mount Fujiyama demands that every act of perception include contemplation of itself, and so narrative demands contemplation of a transcendent stable centre like Mount Fujiyama. But Frampton also writes that while desire for stability is always present in "every act of perception," that desire can ultimately never be satisfied. Thus: "Hokusai, in a magnificent inventory of the mind's ways of knowing through the eye, displays the whole compound of terror and humour: I refer to the 'Hundred Views'" (283).

Interpretation is as unavoidable as narrative, so that while Fujiyama might be immutable and visible from everywhere, there are innumerable perspectives which complicate the truth it might have to offer. The same can be said of Frampton's use of mathematical equations as literal narrative 'formulae', which seem to reduce narrative to a limited number of variations, stale and unrevealing: the same answer is possible from an infinite array of formulations. It is also unclear whether Frampton means to say that narrative is reducible to equations (the same hackneyed plot), or if he is engaging in ironic commentary. These equations are also known as identities, and identities can be extremely complex. Frampton: "One cannot escape the feeling that these mathematical formulae have an independent existence and an intelligence of their own, that they are wiser than we are, wiser even than their discoverers, that we get more out of them than was originally put into them." Heinrich Hertz" (287)

The same could be said of the narrative, and could be said of Frampton's own essay. Once it is written, it takes on a life of its own, subject to many uses and abuses by others. But what is interesting about Frampton's essay is that it seems to call itself into question, or complicate itself as it is being written — it is part of its own subject matter and verges on becoming an aesthetic object in itself.

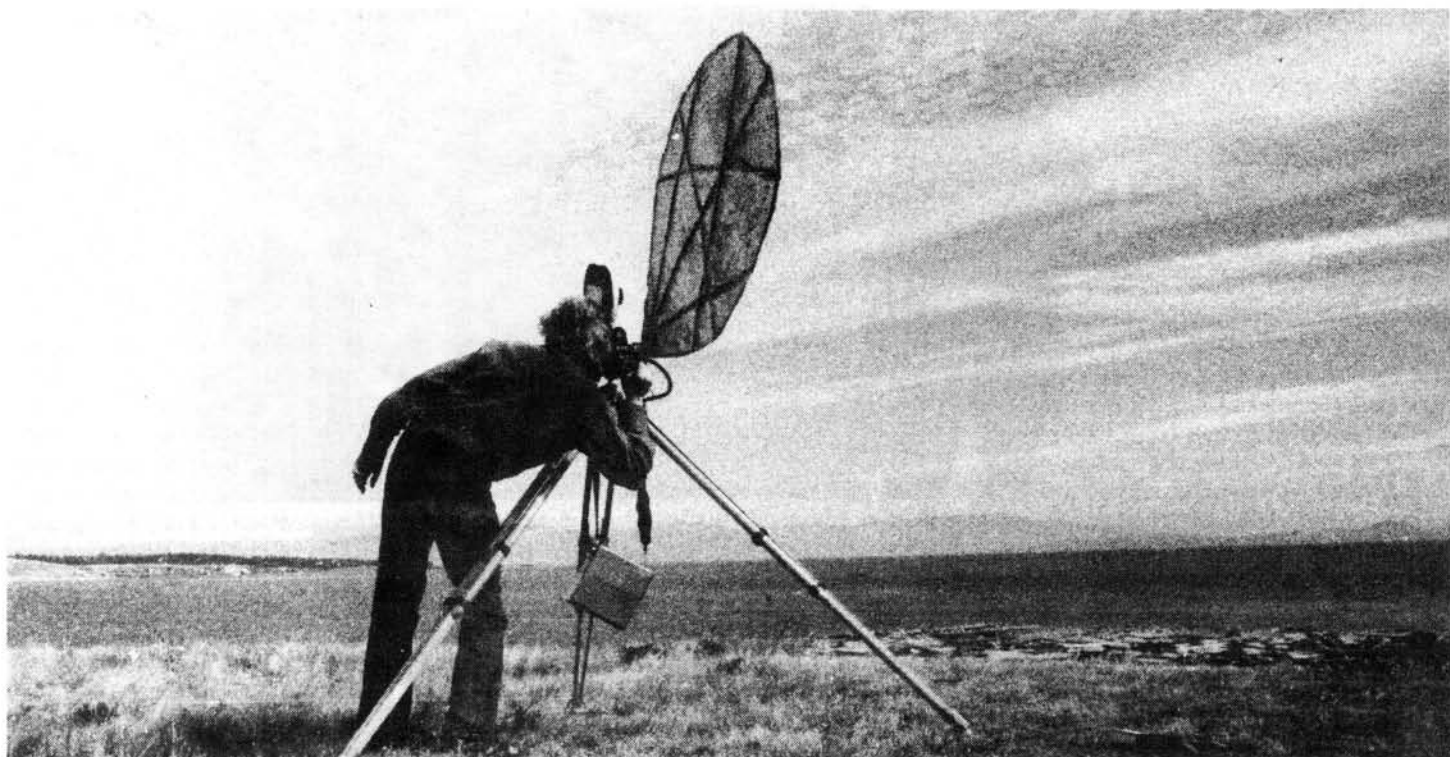
In a similar way, Anna Gronau's *Mary, Mary* borders on becoming a theorization or criticism of itself. Gronau's title points to the fragmentation and schizophrenic nature of the

subject. One of the primary concerns in this film is union, a desire to recover both authorship at the level of the construction of the narrative and a unified subject able to draw experience together into some kind of meaningful whole. The film considers the problems involved in trying to recover a clear vision of the self, to recover the ability for self-expression as personal and meaningful as, for example, Maya Deren had once presumed possible. This is the nature of the polar bear scene of the film, a symbol of sexual union. As the bear swims, however, Mary is shown talking to herself: a representation of herself, divided or doubled. As we are aware that this film is also about its own becoming, the problem of doubling, of representing the subject on film accurately, can be seen in the presence of these two figures in dialogue. As in Frampton's essay, we are faced with the anxiety of the filmmaker over losing control of her own work, surrendering it to the infinite interpretations possible in her absence — including that of the interpretation of the actress playing her role. This problem extends to the character's own experience, fragmented and unstable. Yet since the film is to be made (and Mary has trouble describing what it is that the film is about over the phone, trouble that stems from this sense of fragmentation), whatever order that results will occur randomly, complicating intent and purpose of meaning. Yet again, "Whatever is inevitable, however arbitrary its origins, acquires through custom something like gravitational mass." The filmmaker, like ourselves, is drawn towards finding purpose and intent, origins and stable meaning, a stable relationship between signifier and signified. That the film was to be titled *House of Cards* attests to this notion of fragile ordering; the eventual title, *Mary, Mary*, refers to a fragmented subject striving for order.

Where Frampton's essay borders on the aesthetic, Gronau's film borders on becoming text, or written language. The printed footnotes, references that ap-

pear on the screen, attest to the film's relationship with language, as do the books that appear on the floor of Mary's apartment. The numbered footnotes include reference to *Through the Looking Glass*, to events earlier in the film, and to native culture and problems. But such references multiply outwards as Mary attempts to derive meaning from them, stable meaning. *Through the Looking Glass* itself involves defamiliarizing experience, and it becomes a self-referential comment on the distortion of the film medium/language. The house, to Mary, appears unfamiliar and she can only manage to find a part of the house in which to feel comfortable. What at first appear as explanatory statements refer to elements outside the frames of reference established by the film. Native culture does have something to do with the film, insofar as it represents another marginalized group, or perhaps because the term itself suggests a sense of origins. But just as Frampton numbers the different sections of his essay, the amount and number of references seems arbitrary — they may be listed in order of importance, but of importance to whom and for what reasons?

Mary's act of tearing pages from books and placing them in envelopes is further indicative of the fragmentary nature of experience that Mary is trying to order and draw together. But the ordering is random and complicates desire for stable meaning, for union or origins. The pages are torn out of context, so that their original meaning is hidden and new meaning is created. And in the morning, when the scattered books are ordered neatly, they stand as a wall between the spectator and Mary talking on the phone. It is a wall of language and indeterminable context that separates the viewer from achieving stable knowledge from the film and Mary from herself. How these books come to be ordered, and why they are ordered the way they are is not made clear, and it seems as arbitrary as when the books are scattered on the floor. The tension in the film is between a desire



## CHRIS GALLAGHER: SHORT FILMS

BY JIM SHEDDEN AND MICHAEL ZRYD

The project of the same system of things

*while creating concretely*

*while giving form*

yields:

**ART**

In the realm of art this dialectic principle of dynamics is

embodied in

**CONFLICT**

*S. M. Eisenstein*

The novelty of our work derives from our having moved away

from simply private human concerns towards the world of

nature and society of which we all of us are a part. Our

intention is to affirm this life, which is so excellent once

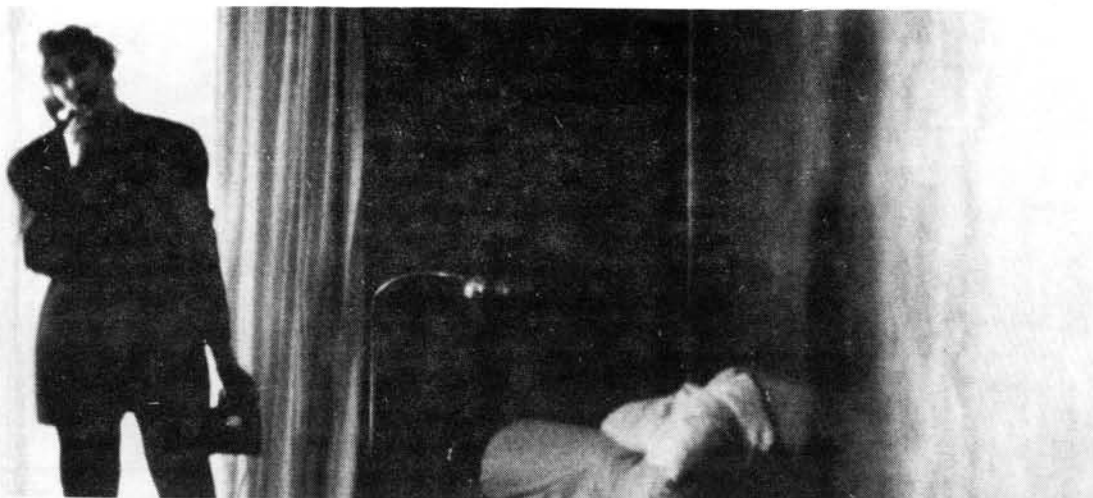
one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and

lets it act of its own accord.

*John Cage*

The films of Chris Gallagher can perhaps best be understood as lying between and generated by a tension between the two impulses above: that of Eisenstein calling for the active, intentional formation of artistic material, that of Cage seeing virtue in a kind of self-effacement of the artist in favour of letting "life [...] act of its own accord." Film, of course, stands as a paradigm of this tension as montage and composition, on one hand, call for the artist's sense of form, while, on the other, the mechanical and photographic *données* of the medium invite the aleatory. Like many Canadian experimental filmmakers, Gallagher shares a basic concern for issues of representation, for the relation between the film image and the world. In fact, Gallagher's best work is characterized by a restraint which evacuates his own mediation in order to forge a more 'direct' connection between the world represented and the viewer. Instead of assertive editing and image manipulation, many of Gallagher's films favour rigorous attention to *a priori* temporal and graphic structures which allow the camera to capture moments of intense beauty, and often, the grotesque.

His two earliest films, *Plastic Surgery*

**MARY MARY**

1989

**HOLLIS FRAMPTON**

from

**A & B IN ONTARIO**by **HOLLIS FRAMPTON**and **JOYCE WEILAND**

1966 / 1984-85

for a unified subject (union between the two Marys), and language which by its nature and through its use frustrates and complicates that desire. Fragments must be interpreted in relation to other fragments and to the self.

In concerning themselves with their processes of signification, the works of both Frampton and Gronau become as much about themselves in relation to the conditions which influence their reception as they are about relaying 'information' from their texts. Within the tradition of North American experimen-

tal film, the personal vision and subjectivity of Brakhage and Deren has given way and opened outwards, focusing on problems of interpretation as well as communication. The relationship between the filmmaker and the spectator is no longer straightforward, but subject to the complex of language. Films and essays offer themselves as critiques of themselves, self-aware and fragmented.

*MARY, MARY* Anna Gronau (1989, 16mm, colour, sound, 60 min.)

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**CHARLES DILLANE** recently graduated from Queen's University with a degree in Film Studies.

(left)  
CHRIS  
GALLAGHER  
shooting  
ATMOSPHERE  
1979

(right)  
SEEING IN THE  
RAIN  
1981



(1975) and *Atmosphere* (1979), define the poles of Gallagher's relationship to film. *Plastic Surgery* is a hyperbolic tract on the exploitation of nature by man. Plastic surgery becomes a grand metaphor for filmmaking: degraded optically-printed images of actual surgery on the body 'cut' to a knife ripping celluloid. The soundtrack is composed of electronic pops and squeals which keep pace, step for step, with the exhausting procession of sometimes startling juxtapositions effected through editing and superimposition.

*Atmosphere*, in contrast, posits a radical draining of the artist's ego. The film, a single 10-minute irregular back and forth pan of coastal landscape, is directed by nature: the final shot reveals that the movement of the camera is controlled by a wind-vane. The film is obviously related to Michael Snow's *Back and Forth* (in its camera movement) and *La région centrale* (there is no one behind or in front of the camera) and can be thought of in terms of Bruce Elder's thesis on the centrality of the photographic to Canadian experimental film. Elder identifies a tendency for these film structures to lead "away from what is actually given towards that which is furnished only by reflexive acts of consciousness: away from presence toward

absence" (61). *Atmosphere*, as an occasion for this heightened "reflexive act of consciousness," differs from the systematic, assertive strategies of Snow by further stripping away the controlling presence of the artist. Where in *La région centrale* Snow predetermines camera movement by computer programming his Machine, and where in *Back and Forth* the panning motion is systematic — a total effect, as Elder says, of "a form that unfolds over an extended period in a nearly predictable manner" (61) — Gallagher retreats, leaving camera movement to the uncertainty of the wind. Thus, although the camera placement and direction are determined, the rhythm and pace of the panning is random and unpredictable. Gallagher also evacuates his compositional centre. The horizon of the seascape bisects the screen horizontally while the centre of the irregular panning (its median vertical axis) is a section of flat sea framed by mountains on either side. The point of intersection of these two axes is the point of maximum emptiness. In contrast to the hysterical rage of *Plastic Surgery*, there is a tone of sadness to *Atmosphere*.

Like *Atmosphere*, *The Nine O'Clock Gun* (1980) and *Terminal City* (1982) are structured around a single shot. This

focus is graphic as well as narrative. While in *Atmosphere* the centre is empty and the action is random, both later films 'centre' on sharply defined events. In *The Nine O'Clock Gun*, a scene in Vancouver's Stanley Park centres on an enigmatic device in the middle of the frame, the gun of the title, whose firing forms the central event of the film. *Terminal City* records the demolition of the Devonshire Hotel in Vancouver; through extreme slow-motion (200 frames per second) and symmetrical diagonal framing, Gallagher underscores the passage from order to chaos within the event. The spareness of this centring and the patience required of the viewer heightens the literally explosive climaxes of the films, and transforms the everyday violence of the events into moments of convulsive beauty.

The camera's discovery of the strange in the everyday, and the combination of discomfort and pleasure provoked by this discovery, is best exemplified by *Santa* (1979). Here the long look is applied to the convention of the still photograph, in the form of filming photo sessions with a department store Santa. By adding the element of time to the photographic 'moment', Gallagher restores what the still photograph excises — the nervous giggles, paralysed ges-

tures of posing, the surprising terror of the children — and makes strange the familiar holiday ritual. The soundtrack, a non-stop "Ho-Ho-Ho," in its irritating excess, caps this exercise in shopping mall surrealism.

*Seeing in the Rain* (1981) and *Mirage* (1983) synthesize the two tendencies in Gallagher's work of extended image manipulation by the filmmaker and a more passive approach to the camera's image creation. In *Seeing in the Rain*, a stationary camera looking out the front of a bus on Granville Street centres on

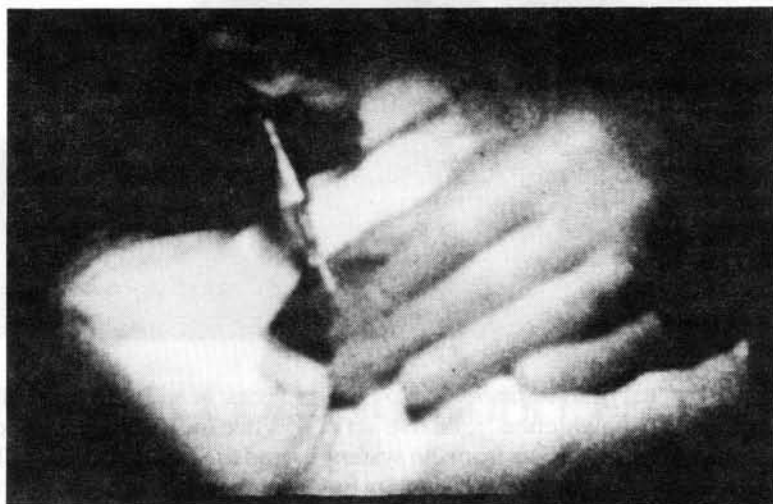
or when Gallagher slowly fades out wild sound leaving only the beat of the metronome. Gallagher's controlling presence is more apparent in this film but its tact achieves the same effect as the effacement crucial to films like *Atmosphere* and *The Nine O'Clock Gun*. Once more, the film analytically represents how phenomena come into consciousness.

*Mirage* is, next to *Plastic Surgery*, Gallagher's busiest film. The film is grounded in one visual loop (a native Hawaiian woman taking off her sarong

the native woman is both pleasurable and disturbing. The repetition is erotic and graceful, especially in relation to the mesmerizing sound loop; the obvious exploitation implicit in the Western appropriation of native Hawaiian ritual for pornographic ends engenders, however, a more critical meditation on the origins of the image. The sequence under the loop parallels and directs the viewer's ambivalence through stages of irony, sensation, violence, and, in the final image (the tourist on the balcony), banality.

*Mirage* is intricately crafted — this is by no means a hands-off film — but the manipulation is of found images. The work of the artist is displaced from omnipotent creator to analytical archaeologist. *Mirage* invites its meditation precisely by avoiding what in *Plastic Surgery* is an instruction on how to read the images: here, finally, the paradoxically extreme yet restrained combinations of the grotesque and the quotidian, of pleasure and sadness, are played off between the image and the viewer.

PLASTIC  
SURGERY  
1975



swinging windshield wipers. Like *Atmosphere*, the movement in the image is outside the control of the filmmaker: the bus, not the camera, moves. Gallagher intervenes, however, by disrupting the linear course of the bus ride, cutting on the end of the wiper stroke to moments prior to and following the apparent course of the ride. The rhythm created by this device is complex; Gallagher extends this single editing strategy into a "theme and variation" structure including jump cuts, flashbacks, repetition, varying stroke lengths and patterns, even parallel montage. This visual rhythm is further modulated by the sound mix, which combines a metronome synced to the wiper; wild sound of wind, rain, and the bus engine; and occasional voices of bus riders. This soundtrack, perhaps Gallagher's strongest, generates a powerful emotional undertone which dynamizes the serene image track as, for example, the whistling roar of a full speed bus on the highway alternates with the quiet hum of the bus snarled on downtown streets,

and dancing nude for the camera) and one sound loop (Elvis Presley singing "Dreams come true / in Blue Hawaii"). Superimposed over the central image is a sequence of ten different (apparently) found footage segments: goldfish under the reflective surface of water; surfers; a Hawaiian man digging out a canoe; a "Welcome to Hawaii" tableaux of hula dancers; black and white Pearl Harbour footage of Japanese bombers (intercut at one point by a colour aerial shot of the islands); a hand-held shot of totem poles; volcanic eruption; flowing lava; all ending with a man opening a hotel door and looking out over a balcony. The movement inscribed by this sequence is an obvious (and ironic) sexual metaphor replete with phallic imagery, 'climaxing' in the volcanic eruption (whose crevasses and spout resemble sexual organs).

The interplay between the two image tracks sets up a tension, organized on sexual and historical lines, which accounts for the ambivalent emotional effect of the film. The looped image of

**WORK CITED**

ELDER, BRUCE "The Photographic Image in Canadian Experimental Film," *Cinema Canada* 97 (special supplement June 1983) 61.

**CHRIS GALLAGHER FILMOGRAPHY**

- PLASTIC SURGERY (1975, 16mm, colour, sound, 19 min.)
- ATMOSPHERE (1979, 16mm, colour, sound, 10 min.)
- SANTA (1979, 16mm, colour, sound, 6 min.)
- THE NINE O'CLOCK GUN (1980, 16mm, colour, sound, 8 min.)
- SEEING IN THE RAIN (1981, 16mm, colour, sound, 10 min.)
- TERMINAL CITY (1982, 16mm, colour, sound, 8 min.)
- MIRAGE (1983, 16mm, colour, sound, 7 min.)
- UNDIVIDED ATTENTION (1983-87, 16mm, colour, sound, 107 min.)

**JIM SHEDDEN** is the Assistant Film Programmer at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

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PETER DUDAR in REHEARSAL at THE ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO 1985



***DEATH DANCES ON THE FILMS OF PETER DUDAR***

BY MIKE HOOLBOOM



**DAVID TIPE and  
PETER DUDAR in  
YOUR WORK  
MUST BE  
INTERESTING, IT  
DOESN'T LEND  
ITSELF TO SELF -  
EXPRESSION  
1973**

Peter Dudar is a longtime member of the Toronto arts community. He began his interdisciplinary work with Lily Eng under the name "Missing Associates" in 1972, participating in the first Canadian Performance Art Tour of Europe in the same year and following it with numerous performances around the world.

During the ten years of their collaboration, Eng and Dudar's performances moved from an examination of movement to an increasing concern with narrative framing, storytelling and history. While Eng was primarily a dancer, Dudar's initial contributions prescribed movements/situations in which the performers would be expected to improvise dialogue. These Cage-

inspired gestures of composition gave way in the ensuing years to a join between socialist movements and the movements of the body, an ideological revolution embodied in the gestures of dance. By the mid-seventies Eng and Dudar were heavily involved with CEAC, the Centre for Experimental Art and Communication, an intermedia organization which forged important links to conceptual art/left wing groups in Europe and North America. As part of their move towards an increasingly politicized performance context, film and video became increasingly important, working alternately to re-frame the live experience of the dance or to introduce extraneous elements. While Dudar's film work was initially deployed within performance, nine films remain today as a record of this period, as well as being fully accomplished films in their own right. These nine films made between 1974 and 1979 draft a line from structuralism to narrative, from silence to sound, focussing throughout on the movement of the human form through space. Of these nine films only the three listed below are presently in 'public' distribution.

*Running in O and R* (1976) features Dudar and Eng running along the perimeters of a room whose "fourth wall" is the camera itself. Attired in plain, proletarian garb, they are photographed in sync sound in a grainy black and white, their circling jog prefiguring the revolutionary concerns of their later work. This over-lapping race is part cinema verité, part performance document and part reflection on the turning loops of cinema itself. Photographed in five distinct sections, each broken by a hand-clapped sync mark at the head, the camera moves from a long static shot to a laterally panning close-up, and returns to the long static shot before closing again in a laterally panning close-up.

*The pans direct our attention which imperceptibly slips from one runner to the other, while the closer shots (3 and 5) give an abstraction to the moving forms which the long shots have grounded in full space. It is a movement from theatre to film. (DANCE AND FILM, Art Gallery of Ontario)*

*Running in O and R* is a structuralist version of *Rashoman*, the Kurosawa



film which obsessively re-enacts a single event through the eyes of its various protagonists, offering the viewer a multitude of perspectives. But here it is not the 'character's' perspectives which progress through a series of themes and variations, but the apparatus itself. Belying cinema vérité's notions of a neutral and passive recorder, Dudar's shifting frames of reference demand that we regard the join between observer and observed. Scarcely disinterested, this axis is one infested with questions of power and ideology, an ideology which typically takes shape as a frame. Indeed, the long running duet pictures in *Running in O and R* might be viewed as the orbiting of human concerns around a technology of reproduction — their rectilinear circuit underscoring the importance of the frame, the field in view, the eternal rectangle. Between an event and its record, between the present and its reproduction, there stands a frame, a point of view secured by the alternating current of power/knowledge. Dudar's later film work put an interesting focus on the enclosure of the pro-filmic — on the forces at work that frame our experience of the past.

Unabashedly structural, *Crash Points* (1977) describes two dancers running laps in a closed room whose very containment, isolation and demarcation are a metaphor for the structural enterprise. Raised, horizontal steel rods are repeatedly toppled to signal shifts in the direction of the two runners. The camera entertains six successive strategies/positions in showing the 'dance', each prefaced by Lily Eng's stern enumeration of roll and take. Even as these simple circuits emblemize the shape of desire, the dancers' mis-takes and increasing fatigue ensure that repetition is a form of change, that while the general precepts of the dance are fixed, each moment is different from the next.

*The Dogs of Dance* (1977) opens with a text by Martha Graham: "Movement is the most powerful and dangerous art medium known." A successive laying on of texts ensues. First, a photograph depicts an oriental woman determinedly straining at an off-screen figure; then a long typewritten account is laid overtop. It describes an encounter between a Chinese lord and a rebellious band. Their attitudes of rebellion are related to a vigorous morality, recast-

ing political attitudes according to an ethical code which underlines and sustains the inevitable conflict between ruler and ruled. In his insistent conflation of dancers and warriors, Dudar remarks the body as a site of political struggle, its every gesture an ideological one, demarking the bounds of state control and its opposition even as we cross the room. The film's title *The Dogs of Dance* rewrites the title of Frederic Forsythe's mercenary bestseller, *The Dogs of War*, even as Dudar rewrites Asian warrior tracts, substituting the word "dancer" for the word "warrior." It is now the dancer that must prepare for death, combat repressive regimes, because the gestures of art are the gestures of opposition, and this opposition must lead to war.

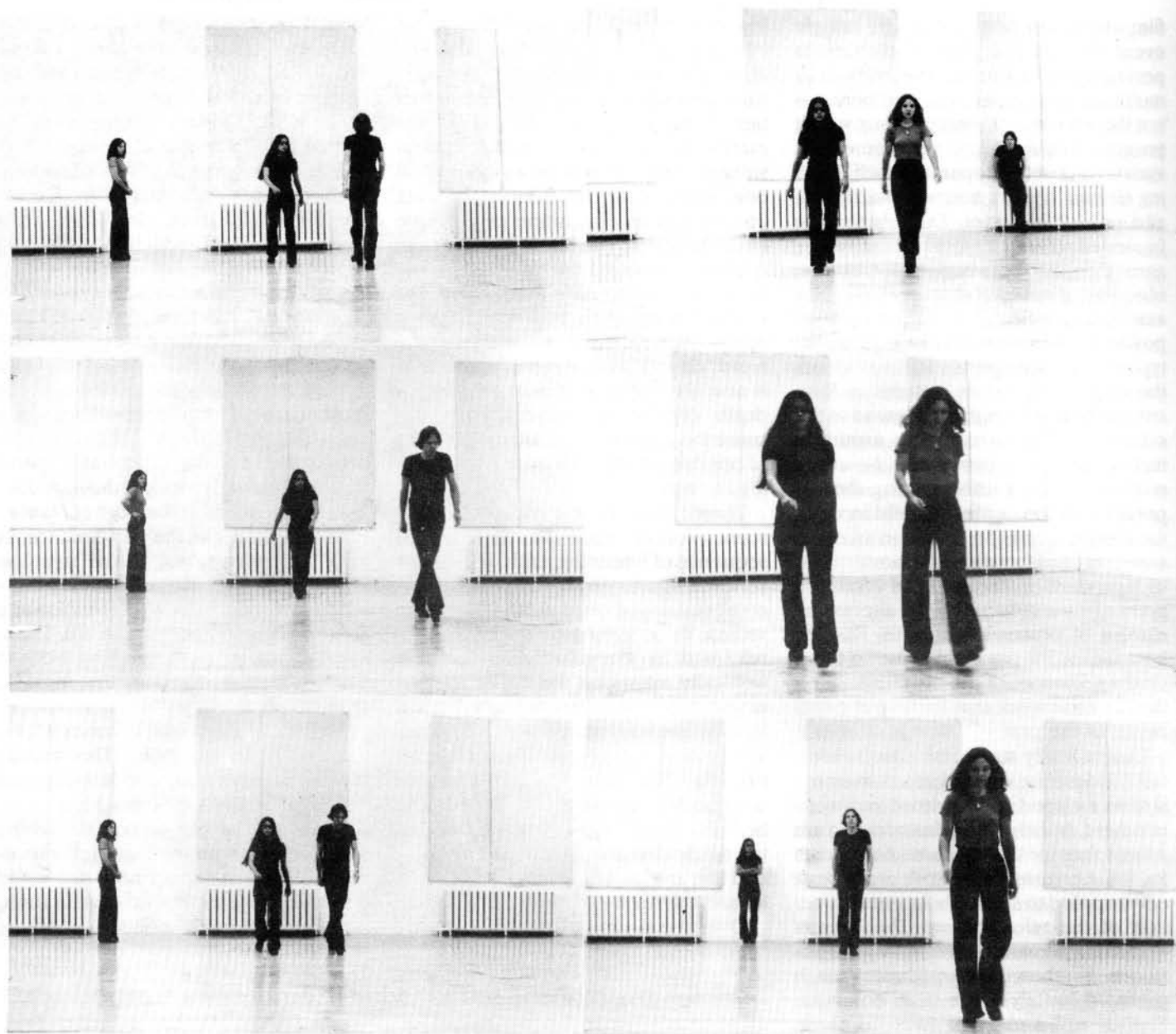
Three broadly allegorical 'dance' scenes follow, each interrupted by a sequence of intertitles, each depicting a series of figures engaged in martial arts combat. Lensed once again in a studio setting, these gymnastic enclosures are reframed by a revolutionary text that ironically insists on the importance of action over words. Photographed in real time without dialogue, this trio of martial arts boxers engages in simulated sparring that slips insistently into reality as unexpected blows draw blood and bruises. These 'slips' blur the line between dancing and fighting, between art and life, and between the model of reality and the reality of the model.

Over the course of these nine early

films, Dudar's camera is rooted to the spot, able to move only about a fixed axis. This single vantage mimes the fixed point of view of their performance audience, while Dudar's studio interiors, unchanged lighting and interest in real time synchronous sound recording likewise restage performance concerns. The content of these nine films is the issue of a radical reduction. Typically, everyday movements are performed by a small cast in a nondescript space. As well, this space is typically imaged as a closed and unchanging arena. Both the geography and the movements that inhabit these films are closed systems recalling the controlled conditions of a scientific experiment. What finally breaks the looping, structuralist round dance of his early work is the introduction of the word in *The Dogs of Dance*. Photographed, like the performance, in long unbroken takes, Dudar lays one text over another in a sedimentary fashion that introduces new information as a continual amendment of the old. These overlapping layers of meaning work to produce a non-linear text that must be read associatively, as the simultaneous presence of fragmented histories left for the viewer to assemble. This mutual displacement of body and language led Dudar to begin a different kind of research for his new work, one which would begin with the historical movement of bodies subject now not to the constraints of a theoretical structuralism, but to a changing political wind; to



PETER DUDAR  
and LILY ENG in  
*VOCAL POINTS*  
1973



greed, death, nation building and war.

In 1980 Dudar began interviews with a series of people who had survived World War Two. Using the transcription of these tapes he worked with Lily Eng to stage performances mixing history, myth, dance and intertitles. These would eventually be integrated into a film entitled *DP* (1981).

Walter Benjamin wrote that there are two kinds of storytellers. The first, having lived their entire life in a single location, are privy to the myths, legends and history of their surround. The second, wandering from one place to the next, brings the stories of one region to an-

other. In *DP* Dudar himself appears as the storyteller, yet his narration falls between the two. His protagonist is neither Russian nor German, Allied nor Axis. Born a Ukrainian, his country is occupied first by the Russians, and subsequently by the Germans. Choosing between joining the German army, forced labour or death he volunteers to work in the German factories. After a brutal mid-winter, open air train ride, he arrives in Germany to work twelve hour days on starvation rations. After the workers petition their German rulers for more rations they are dispatched to the concentration camps. A year later he is

released, and works on a private German farm. Shortly afterwards the war ends, but he finds himself in a zone signed over to the Russians by the Allied powers at the Yalta Conference. Facing certain death at the hands of the Russians, he decides to walk to America, crossing borders in a starvation trek that lands him finally in a camp for displaced persons (DP). His closing speech details the fates of those left behind, slaughtered in a nameless struggle both sides of the war claim the other responsible for.

While history is conveniently remembered as a neatly scissored progression



**DIANE BOADWAY  
LILY ENG and  
PETER DUDAR in  
TWO RELATED  
PARALLEL LINES  
1975**

of oppositions, Dudar's narrative relates the forced travel of a man for whom no country is home, and for whom allegiance is a question of survival, not ideology. Whether as anti-Russian resistance worker in his native Ukraine, forced labourer/death camp prisoner in Germany, or ready to risk all in an attempt to gain the security of the Allied occupation (a power he despised and mistrusted as much as the Russians), he is in a state of perpetual exile. His westwards migration is a flight from the body's abuse made in the recognition that 'sanctuary' is a myth founded on the dissolution of individual cultures.

Breaking from the confines of a death inspired culture, his aim of survival is finally directed towards the act of representation itself, bearing witness to horrors too inhuman to imagine, save for those who were made to endure them.

*As soon after liberation as Yehuda Baka was strong enough to "hold a pencil in my hand," he made a series of drawings of everything he could remember of the gas chambers, the dressing rooms and the crematoria at Birkenau: the things he had seen, and the things he had asked the Jews of the Sonderkommando to describe to*

*him, so that if he survived he could record it. "I asked the Sonderkommando to tell me," he later explained, "so that if one day I came out I will tell the world." (THE HOLOCAUST by Martin Gilbert)*

But the telling of these stories follows an uneasy recollection, related in a tragic and extreme circumstance that beggars simple understanding. Even as he speaks, enormous "X"s appear over the image of the filmmaker, putting his speech under the sign of erasure, while a fragmented montage and intertitles elide any verité notions of real time documentary 'truth'. His insistence that, "You can't possibly understand how it was" is an irreconcilable paradox — if it is conceded, then we cannot know or understand the story he is telling us. If it is false then his story, or some part of it, may be false as well. In place of the seamless narrative closure afforded by reliable eyewitnesses and corroborated by historical evidence, Dudar stages this story as a mock interrogation, an off-screen voice raising intermittent questions put to his patently acted persona. He appears in a series of poses behind uniformly coloured backdrops that recall their use in Godard's *La Chinoise*, another neo-narrative in which lengthy monologues dominate the score. The brilliantly coloured titles that interrupt/underscore his speech likewise add to the foregrounding of artifice, a pointed reminder of *DP's* status as a re-staged document.

Problematizing narrative disclosure follows from the abuse of language endemic to any conflict, and nowhere was this abuse more pronounced than in the marriage of propaganda and mass media inaugurated by Goebbel's use of state radio. If it is by now a psycho-analytic commonplace that the unconscious is structured like a language, it was precisely these linguistic frames that racked a national language out of focus in the service of a cruel and unusual nationalism. Dudar's 'alienation' techniques show his speech as a subjectivity under intense historical pressure, a construction site.

*DP* is arranged across three lines of development. The first features the filmmaker himself, recounting the purportedly documentary circumstance of his own life. The second strand is held

by Lily Eng, a dancer moving through the hallways of a vast institution. Even as Dudar speaks of the inhuman conditions in the factory, Eng stabs fist into face, spins sneakers across the floor or sputters angry phonemes into the camera. The third line shows the printing of two photographs—the first an image of the narrator/filmmaker as a guard in the DP camp, the second an image of a baby. This child later appears crawling on the same institutional surround as the dancer, gazing in wonder at the camera. Later on, marker in hand, the child scribbles over its own photograph but without effect: the ink has already dried. This child is clearly figured as the ‘effect’ of a history which is given shape by its means of communication. The child’s dry markers suggest that some forms of re-membering are impervious to the remarks of others, that in spite of its contextual contingency, we continue to bear our history as a strain and seed, that we ourselves are the remains, the sign of all that is past. Dudar suggests that our understanding of ourselves, of the way we say “I,” is bound up with an extra-personal circumstance that relates one to another, even as words join to make sentences.

Three years later Dudar unwrapped

his last completed film to date, entitled *Transylvania 1917* (1985). Owing in part to the five year silence which has ensued, it is tempting to view *Transylvania* as a summary work, the culmination of a decade’s expression in film, dance and performance. While the use of dance, isolated protagonists speaking in tableaux settings, and the narratives of war are familiar from his earlier work, *Transylvania*’s aggressively synthetic montage and impassioned style mark it as a bold and impressive new work. Its strategies of historical simulation are well rehearsed in the Canadian avant-garde, most notably in the films of women filmmakers like Patricia Gruben, Martha Davis, Veronika Soul and Ann Marie Fleming. Many of these filmmakers have begun with ‘travelogues’ that have been restaged using patently non-realistic models. Eschewing any attempt at re-creating a consistent dramatic space, both past and present are accorded an equivalence that belies the dull focussed segues into flashback that remained a hallmark of mainstream film expression for over a decade. This equivalence between past and present focusses these ‘new’ narratives on the process of memory itself, on the acts of framing, selection and per-

spective.

Oscar Wilde wrote that actions were the first tragedy of our lives, words the second, and Dudar shuttles between the two with a convincing ease in *Transylvania 1917*. It relates the story of Denes, the eldest son of a Transylvanian family forced into a slave-like apprenticeship to an interior designer before beginning life again as a member of the union, a Marxist and would-be member of the Communist Party. After his return home to attend to his dying father war is declared and he is drafted into the Hungarian army. At Lemberg, on the Russian front, in the late august of 1914, he is shot and left for dead. He is found by Russians who are Jewish like himself, and moves through a series of state hospitals trying to recover from his punctured lung.

*Denes and I became friends at the asylum. We shared political interests, but arrived by different means. I took a reconnaissance patrol into the forest and walked into a Russian patrol right at the crossroads. Then I did the logical thing, I surrendered. But the Russian sergeant demanded that he surrender, even though his patrol outnumbered us two to*



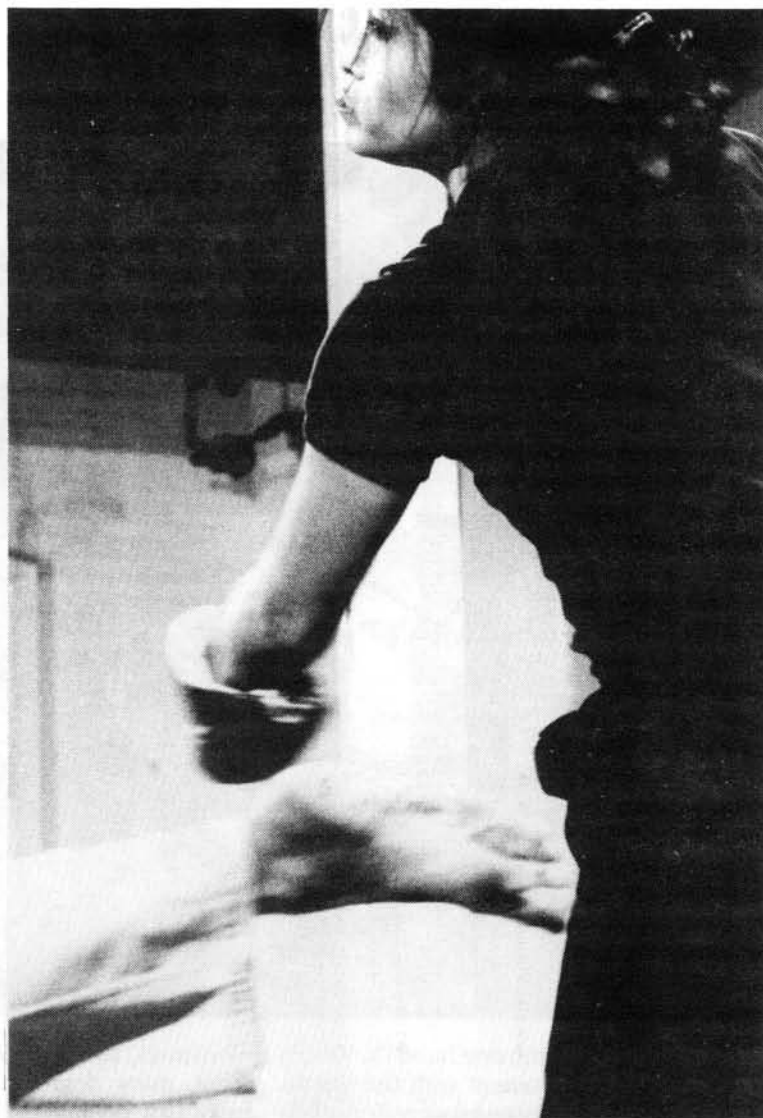
HENRY  
KRONOWETTER  
and PETER DUDAR  
in DANCE OF  
TERROR  
1978

one. I didn't want to argue all night, so I led the Russians back to our camp. My commander wanted to know how I'd overcome a superior force without a single casualty. I told him the enemy figured we were either the advance for the whole regiment, or just nuts, so they surrendered. I got a silver medal. First chance I got, I surrendered again. (from *TRANSYLVANIA 1917* by Peter Dudar)

In Elizabethan England, dramatic convention held that men were required to take on every role in the theatre, whether written for man or woman. In a frank reversal of these conventions, Denes's story is told by the female seers of Transylvanian folklore named halottlatos. These mediums of the past convene a trance-induced history that issues from two mouths in place of one. These women speak as if they were Denes, relating his story in the first person. So while their performances are dramatically credible, the insistent displacement of genders suggests that his story is a play of past and present, of historical fact and present day perspective. This is only the first of a series of multiplication effects deployed by Dudar throughout *Transylvania*, as he underlies the seer's talk with an uncanny series of slides. These images lie behind the seers like the video bytes that charge the evening news, and the newscasters' practice of "turning their backs" on the images behind them, led Jean-Luc Godard, for one, to insist that in order to be able to speak in the cinema, we need to turn around, to face the images.

*DP's* narrator was shown with single coloured backdrops, periodically interrupted by boldly coloured titles. While these backdrops are still in evidence in *Transylvania*, more often than not they have been replaced by a series of rear-screen slides. Never merely illustrative, they serve as a visual counterpoint to the seer's tales, who step into foreign architectures, gaze into horizons, or stand in the midst of street scenes speaking of a distant past. They stand in a non-hierarchical relation to the images that surround them, neither absorbed by them nor standing in their place, instead they are "standing by." This rare and delicate tension between speaker and image

DEBRA  
TOWNSEND and  
LILY ENG in  
TWO DEADLY  
WOMEN  
1978



fuels a reconsideration of documentary form even as it makes a place for the marginals of history.

*Caught in a system of representation which poses a static interpretation of the universe from the divine right of emperors, to a class system, to a perfect physical form, Denes's confrontations with the turbulence of Eastern Europe's political situation becomes the territory of a no man's land, where superstition counteracts the conflicts of ideology.* ("PETER DUDAR/ADRIENNE MITCHELL" by Dot Tuer, *VANGUARD March*, 1985)

Da Vinci's Vitruvian man is a recurring motif throughout *Transylvania* — his naked, outstretched limbs casting the body as measure and ideal of the

universe that surrounds it. But using a series of flip book overlays, Dudar transforms the Renaissance ideal into a series of mythological beasts. Adroitly adding overleaves to Da Vinci's original design, elephant heads, horse hooves and wolf tales rapidly dissemble the unifying vision of the past. This beastly preoccupation is rhymed in a series of texts that run parallel to Denes's tale, slowing the advance of his story to include a preoccupation with the animal world, the natural order. Laid between the ravages of war and revolution, this wild kingdom of mythological monsters, nightmare dread and insect fascination joins the bloodied warriors of Europe with their animal surround. Dudar works both sides of this street, crossing animal and human until they merge in a vanishing point at the film's horizon, in "no

PETER DUDAR and LINDA ENG in CRASH POINTS 1977



man's land." On the one hand Da Vinci's sketch fairly shimmers with the instrumental reason whose passion for utility has removed us from our ecological trappings. But the animal signatures that run the course of *Transylvania* remind us that we have not come so far after all, that the shape of our bones expresses a historical solidarity, that we continue to present ourselves in the guise of our ancestors. Against this emblem of continuity stands the martialled bodies of war, subject now to a triumph of the will, passing over the body in favour of alphabets, power and the law.

Recovered at last from his punctured lung, Denes boards a train to the front. In the Don Province the train stops for Russian inspection, and he fears their search will uncover the Hungarian uniform he wears beneath civilian clothes. As they draw nearer, a savage dog attacks one of the soldiers who are forced to shoot him. They wave the train on and Denes disembarks the day before

Christmas, twenty kilometres from the front, thirty degrees below zero. The next day he makes his way into the trenches wearing a Russian uniform. Most of the men are sleeping. The air is quiet. Suddenly, he leaps from the trench and bolts to the German side. Listening for the sound of gunfire he tears the Russian uniform away to reveal his Hungarian garb. Before him, an immense thicket of barbed wire rises skywards. He reaches towards the wire, feeling his feet leave the ground, as if he were flying, in his mind the patent refrain from the film's opening, "Ideology is not acquired by thought but by breathing haunted air."

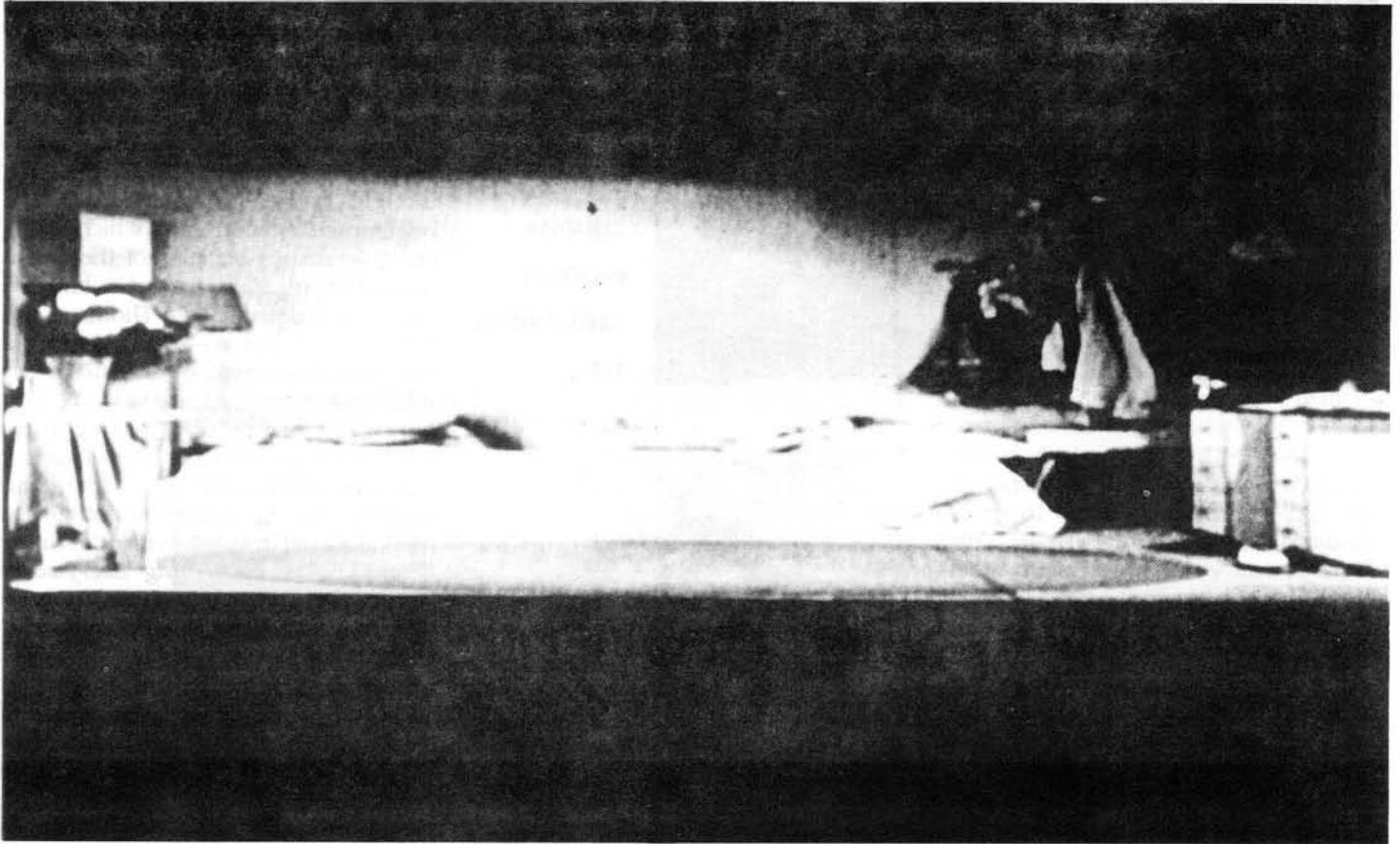
**PETER DUDAR  
FILMOGRAPHY**

*WALKING AWAY* (1974, 16mm, colour, silent, 1 min.)  
*TWO PASSERSBY ON FOOT* (1975, 16mm, b/w, silent, 28 min.)

*RUNNING IN O AND R* (1975, 16mm, b/w, sound, 20 min.)  
*EDITING ON THE RUN* (1976, 16mm, colour, [sound], 26 min.)  
*CRASH POINTS* (1976, 16mm, b/w, [sound], 19 min.)  
*CRASH POINTS 2* (1977, 16mm, b/w, [sound], 11 min.)  
*PENETRATED* (1977, 16mm, colour, [sound], 13.5 min.)  
*TWO DEADLY WOMEN* (1978, 16mm, colour, [sound] 15 min.)  
*THE DOGS OF DANCE* (1979, 16mm, colour, sound, 19 min.)  
*DP* (1982, 16mm, colour, sound, 17 min.)  
*TRANSYLVANIA 1917* (1985, 16mm, colour, sound, 30 min.)

**MIKE HOOLBOOM** is a filmmaker and writer who recently served as Experimental Film Officer for the CFMDC and Editor of *THE INDEPENDENT EYE*.

PRESENTS by MICHAEL SNOW 1980-81

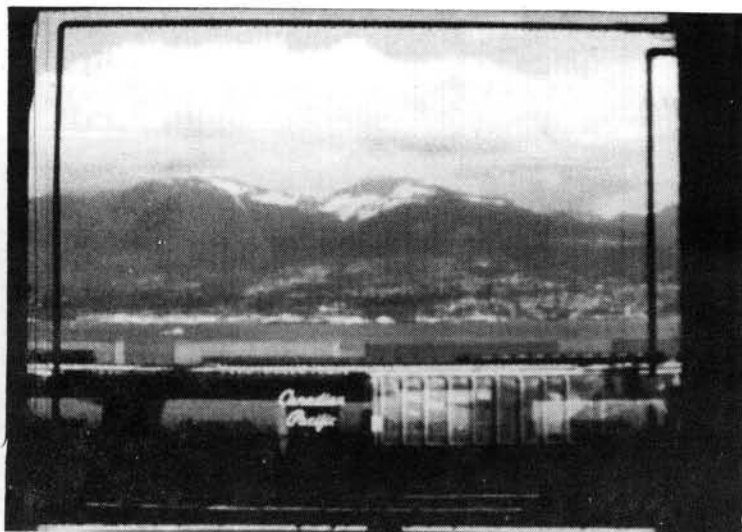


**BOOK REVIEW**

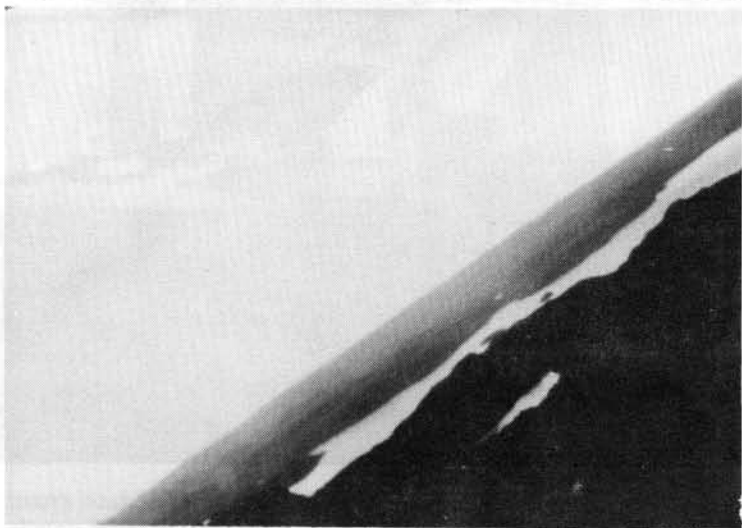
## IMAGE AND IDENTITY: REFLECTIONS ON CANADIAN FILM AND CULTURE

**BY R. BRUCE ELDER**

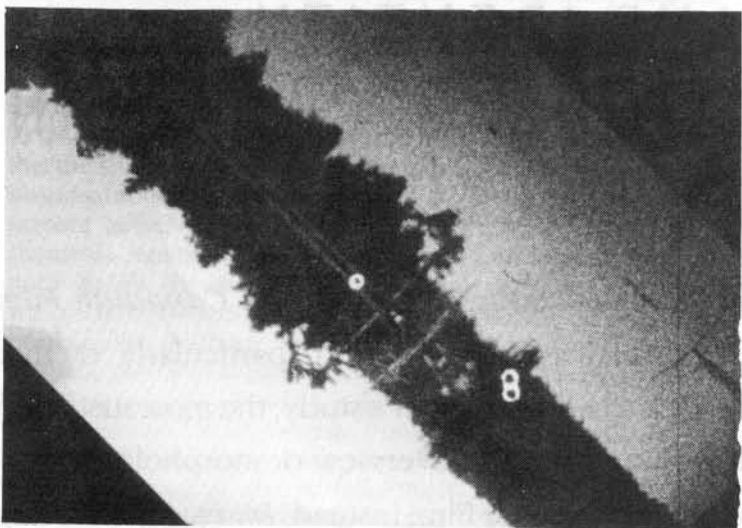
**BY JIM SHEDDEN** Bruce Elder's *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture* is a remarkable account of Canadian avant-garde film, particularly of that movement's strongest artists, Michael Snow and Jack Chambers. Elder's study, the most sustained on the topic thus far, does not provide an overarching historical overview or morphology, as P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film* does for American avant-garde film; instead, *Image and Identity* places what are, for Elder, "key moments in the history of Canadian films" within the context of Canadian art and philosophy. At the same time, *Image and Identity* may be read as an attempt to champion Canada's avant-garde by way of a critical comparison with English-Canadian



**CANADIAN  
PACIFIC** by  
**DAVID RIMMER**  
1974



**LA REGION  
CENTRALE** by  
**MICHAEL SNOW**  
1970-71



**EVERYTHING  
EVERYWHERE** by  
**KEITH LOCK**  
1974

documentary and feature filmmaking, and with American avant-garde film.

Part One of the book outlines Canada's philosophical and artistic heritage and the political and intellectual context in which it devel-

oped, drawing on such painters and writers as Cornelius Krieghoff and John Richardson, and philosophers John Watson and George Grant. Elder argues that there is a tragic vision in much Canadian art which simultaneously acknowledges nature's both horrifyingly cruel and redemptive character. In fact, the possibility of establishing a proper relationship to nature is acknowledged in much Canadian art and thought as being threatened by the hegemony of technology which, ironically, flourishes because of the harshness of nature. Canadian art — and one only need consider Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven — "is devoted to a last-ditch effort to establish a satisfactory relationship with nature, a force that humanizes people by making them aware of their mortality, their brutality and their tenderness" (35). Elder demonstrates that this tendency continues to manifest itself in avant-garde film, citing Keith Lock's *Everything Everywhere Again Alive*, whose very title "suggests that all things share in a common life" (32).

Elder develops this theme in Chapter 2, which outlines the "Two Schools of Thought" which have dominated Canadian philosophy — the Common Sense school and Absolute Idealism. The Common Sense school has its roots in liberal political philosophy, the empiricism of Locke, Berkeley and Hume, and Calvinist theology. While it is true that American political and social culture shares this root, two different interpretations of Calvin have had a decisive effect on the relative differences between the United States and Canada. In the United States, Puritanism developed and "joined with the humanist, rationalist and liberal" tendencies. America's political and social culture became based on contractualism inherited from Hobbes and Locke, where "avoidance of violent death is our highest end" (George Grant, quoted in Elder, 51) and the notion of a higher good or a "source of justice and virtue" is absent. American Puritanism, for this reason and others that Elder sketches, "weakened into a secular devotionalism" and "creative freedom" with no external restraints (no higher purpose), and became the "*imago hominis*" (52).

This notion of freedom, which paves the way for unbridled technology, is at



REASON OVER  
PASSION by  
JOYCE  
WEILAND  
1973



FRONT AND  
BACK by  
ANDREW LUGG  
1972



MOSAIC by  
JACK  
CHAMBERS  
1965-67



the heart of modernity. In Canada this world-view has not been as dominant as in the United States. Instead, there has been a moderating influence of philosophies which assert that "there are limits to what a person may rightly will [...that...] a human being must submit to something beyond himself or herself, something that declares the unlimited

use of human and non-human nature in making is simply wrong" (54).

Despite the appeal and influence of Calvinism and Common Sense philosophy, Elder argues that its emphasis on human depravity, its austerity, and its image of the solitary individual, were counterbalanced by the more communitarian philosophical influence of Abso-

lute Idealism, i.e., Hegelianism. This influence can be seen in many Canadian thinkers, but especially in the work of John Watson, a turn-of-the-century philosopher who argued vehemently against contractarianism and "atomistic" conceptions of the individual. While maintaining the "spirituality that constituted one of the valuable features of Calvinism," Watson adopted Hegel's dialectical notion of history as progress (i.e., the progressive realization of Spirit), refuting Calvinism's rejection of the possibility of human reconciliation with God. Watson, in Hegelian fashion, immanentized the *eschaton*, i.e., brought "the future world of goodness and justice that has been promised down to the level of mundane reality" (70).

From the discussion of the "Two Schools of Thought," Elder develops an outline of Hegel's aesthetics, which he calls "an aesthetic of reconciliation." This outline is especially instrumental for Elder's later analysis of the films of Michael Snow and Jack Chambers, whose art practices, more than any other discussed in the book, come closest to effecting this "aesthetic reconciliation" — reconciliation, that is, between subject and object, spirit and matter. This Hegel takes to be the form of history, the increasing realization of human self-consciousness, or freedom. Art, for Hegel, is the "sensuous embodiment of freedom" (73), a unity of Spirit and matter, "composed of a rational idea (the content of the work) and its vesture (the form of the work)" (74). Art, for Hegel, acts "as a model of how the Spirit comes to be embodied in matter," an embodiment where neither aspect of the dialectic limits the other. Unlike Plato (at least in *The Republic*), Hegel does not see art as an imitation of nature, and therefore less valuable; instead, art is more valuable than natural objects, since it reveals "the spiritual reality within the sensuous form" (74).

Hegelian aesthetics, Elder argues, have figured more prominently in Canada than in the US because "the strongest [...] thinkers and artists have been committed to the idea that particulars, and especially works of art, possess what in Hegelian terms would be understood as a universal aspect" (78). Conversely, American art in this century has been dominated by aesthetics which

presuppose irreconcilable particulars, notably the dualism of mind and nature. On the one hand, there has been a formalist tendency which attempts to order the chaos of nature through the will of the human subject. On the other hand, there is a tradition of immanentism which believes that "art's redemptory power derives from its capacity to present...the unadorned particular as it is in itself" (78) (consider the work of Pound, Williams, Olson and Duncan, for example). In the former tradition, consciousness's power is valued over the chaos of nature; in the latter, "the order of material beings is beneficent" while "consciousness is a domain of either ensnaring confusions or inert abstractions" (79). The former is the position of the modernists (Pollock, for example); the latter represents the "fundamental beliefs of postmodernism, American-style" (80), which, as Elder points out, still maintains a dualism, a conviction that there is "a primal self (even if that self is understood merely as the focal point of an ever-changing field of energy)" (80). Postmodern poetics in the United States remain within the domain of modernity because of the valuation of the individual, the particular against the universal.

In Canada, on the other hand, perhaps because the "opposition of human and nature is so very extreme," we have needed a philosophy and an art which serves to reconcile, not accentuate, particularity. To some extent, then (and Elder is cautious to point out that we have not been wholly successful), Canada has avoided "the telos of the modern conception of the world" because of our culture's grounding of the individual whereby "the particular is valued as the embodiment of the universal," as it is for Hegel (83). Our strong art-making has tended to avoid formalism — just contrast the Group of Seven and Abstract Expressionism — because of that movement's tendency to impose mind on nature. Our art has tended to see mind meeting nature in harmony. In this way, the Canadian postmodern, more than that of the US, has premodern, non-dualistic roots.

Part Two of *Image and Identity* examines the key moments in Canadian filmmaking outside of the experimental tradition, primarily NFB documentary filmmaking but also Don Shebib's *Goin'*

*Down the Road*. The problems inherent in what Elder describes as this "artistically deleterious" work are analyzed in order to better understand how Canadian avant-garde film has been a more successful practice. Elder faults what he calls "naïve realism" — referring to much of Canadian cinema from Grierson to Shebib, Unit B to Studio D — on three counts: 1) the concealment of "absences on which an image *qua* image is inevitably based" (e.g., the two-dimensionality of the image); 2) the metaphysically shaky "particularist ontology" implied in realism, where the sensible is equated with the real; and 3) the artistic strait-jacket of naïve realism, which "excessively limits the variability of elements of the work of art" (87). Elder articulates the differences between naïve realism and Canadian avant-garde film (which can also be seen as "realist") via a discussion of three film modes: the cinema of presentation, the cinema of illustration, and the cinema of construction. The illustrative mode is characteristic of Hollywood cinema, where cutting between a variety of types of shots illustrates, for example, some connection between "will and human behaviour" (158). Whereas the illustrative mode analyzes actions and events, the cinema of presentation (e.g., cinema-*vérité*, Candid-Eye cinema) attempts to show only "the immediately observable" (158); "we simply observe characters' behaviour; we are not presented with suggestions about why they behave as they do" (158-9). The cinema of presentation rests on an empirical certainty which is not an issue for the cinema of illustration. Elder observes, somewhat dismayed, that the cinema of presentation is severely limited because of its failure to bring "under formal control" the features of the art-work. Naïve realism has been unable to elaborate "formal relations that are disengaged from the world outside the work and determined only by the features internal to the work itself" (182).

Because in Part Two Elder has been dealing with filmmakers for whom he has little regard, it is the most difficult section to work through (indeed, the most interesting passages in this section are excursions on such filmmakers as Syberberg, Snow, Frampton and Eisenstein!). Good criticism is rarely rendered from bad art, so it is mainly because of Elder's

interest in the avant-garde and his commitment to grounding the avant-garde by contrasting it with naïve realism that Part Two of *Image and Identity* is of interest. Canadian avant-garde film, which Elder says participates in the cinema of construction, based as it is on issues of photography — as is the cinema of Low, Shebib, Macartney-Filgate, *et al* — nonetheless avoids the epistemological and aesthetic strait-jacket of naïve realism. Instead, the Canadian cinema of construction "attempts to inquire into the conditions of [its] realism rather than merely [using] them for effective ends" (183).

Elder is at his finest in Part Three of the book. Here he develops his thesis that a postmodern cinema emerged in Canada. This cinema is neither the cinema of naïve realism, as in Canada's documentaries and narrative features, nor is it the modernist cinema Sitney maps out in *Visionary Film*, and which Elder says runs the risk of "solipsism, paranoia and nihilism" (185). Instead, Elder argues that the Canadian postmodern works within an aesthetic of reconciliation, "a way between the Scylla of naïve realism and the Charybdis of solipsistic spirituality" (186). Canadian avant-garde cinema has been one of "metaleptical" realism, which recognizes that while cinema is a product of the world, its images cannot correspond exactly to things-in-the-world. Like Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Canadian avant-garde cinema expresses profound doubts about there being a "necessary and certain correspondence between the human cognitive faculties and the constitution of the world" (186). Here is a cinema that escapes the sophistry of naïve realism and which is, at the same time, not as aesthetically strait-jacketed, "since it does not so severely limit the variability of elements of the image" (186).

Elder proceeds to discuss the specific instances of metaleptical realism in Canadian avant-garde cinema, mainly in the films of Snow and Chambers, but also the works of Ellie Epp, David Rimmer, Joyce Wieland, Andrew Lugg, Chris Gallagher, and Vincent Grenier (who Elder sees as being on the margin between modernism and postmodernism).

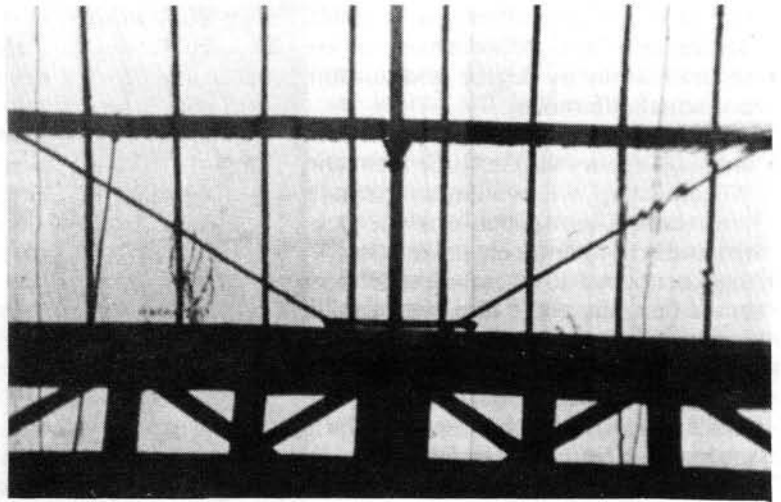
Particularly strong works are singled out for extended consideration. Snow's

*Wavelength* is cited as a demonstration of the similarity of cinema and the contents of consciousness, since “both are amalgams of presence and absence” (212). Likewise, *Wavelength* underscores the connection between the real and the transcendental which is central to the Idealist philosophers. *Wavelength* is contrasted with Brakhage’s use of camera for expressionist and mimetic purposes; Snow’s camera movement serves as “a formal principle for the organization of the film and, extending this process, makes one simple operation the principle of the formal organization of the entire work” (213).

↔ is discussed, like most of Snow’s oeuvre, as being at the “breaking point” between modernism and postmodernism. While maintaining some of the formal strategies of modernism, Snow’s work is part of the shift in art from ontology to epistemology. At the same time, in Snow’s film two notions of the subject — “a subject engrossed in the act of perception and the subject revealed through self-reflection” — and two “objects of awareness,” those of the film itself “and its hypostatized relative” (256) are operative. The influence of the film and its theoretical underpinnings on Canadian avant-garde film are significant, argues Elder, so, consequently, he outlines the work of two of “Snow’s Postmodernist Associates,” David Rimmer and Joyce Wieland, in Chapter 10.

The critical tour-de-force of *Image and Identity* is in chapter 12, “Michael Snow Presents *Presents*,” which also reflects on *So Is This*. *Presents* is interpreted as a “challenge to the metaphysics of presence,” i.e., the system of Western metaphysics from Plato to Hegel, wherein “the supreme metaphysical moment is when Being reveals itself, presents itself as Being-in-the-mode-of-presence” (Fuchs, quoted in Elder, 298). This metaphysics is challenged in the 19th and 20th century, most notably in the work of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger, in the work of the positivists, and most recently and perhaps most trenchantly by Jacques Derrida. Art, in the face of this crisis, “was called again to its usual conservative role — in this matter, of lodging a defence of the metaphysics of presence” (298); Elder cites the art of Gertrude Stein and Stan Brakhage, who attempted to “convert an artwork into a

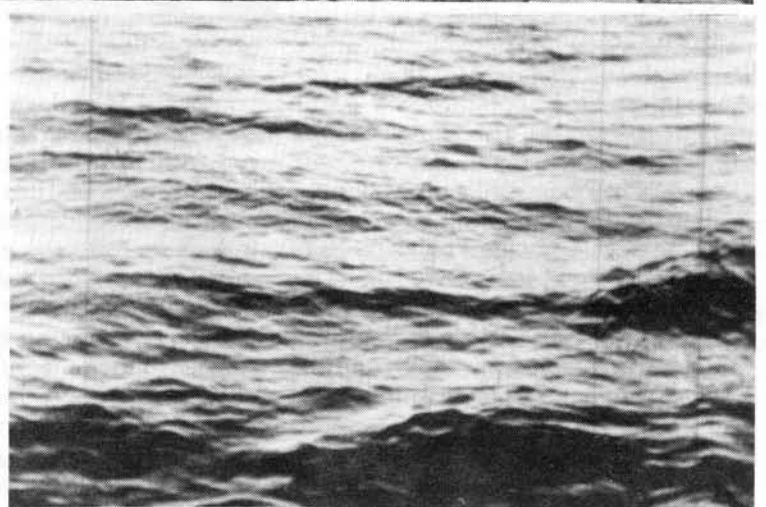
**TRAPLINE** by  
**ELLIE EPP**  
1976



**SEASHORE** by  
**DAVID RIMMER**  
1971



**WAVELENGTH**  
by **MICHAEL**  
**SNOW**  
1966-67



‘wholly-presented present’” (299), as did André Bazin and the neo-Realists.

*Presents* effects its challenge by calling into question the notion that the photograph can re-present “reality” (which is also called into question, given that even consciousness’s ability to provide a “picture” of reality is doubted), by

distorting cinema and video images with the very apparatus and methods that “capture” the picture in the first place. In this way, Snow challenges the dichotomy between abstraction and representation: “non-illusionistic forms of construction [...] can be produced from ‘illusionistic’ forms [...] merely by varying the

rate at which the camera pans" (302). Abstraction and representation are separated only by degree of distortion, not actual difference.

*Presents* is also discussed in terms of language theory via Gertrude Stein and William James, followed by an excursus on Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theories and how they are elucidated (knowingly or not by Snow) in the film. The set in the first part of the film, we are told, can be taken as representing the feminine body — "or, rather, considering its obviously artificial character" (35), the child's fantasy of the mother (the child is represented by the I/eye of the camera). Where we imagine the camera to be moving (but subsequently discover it to be the set) "alludes to the infantile feelings of omnipotence" (315). In the second section of the film, the set/mother's body is destroyed by the camera/child in light of the realization of its non-omnipotence. Section three "represents the child's reaction to this fantasy," a combination of retreat and "the offering of presents" (315). I have only cartooned the critic's efforts here — the point is to emphasize the manifest ways *Presents*, according to Elder, effects a synthesis, a meeting of subject and object, and how the "lost object" (mother) of childhood as elaborated in Klein might be seen as a further motivation for that synthesis.

Jack Chambers, like Snow, is also held up as an artist who attempts to reconcile the real and the transcendental (although, as Elder points out, a useful comparison might also be made with Brakhage, which is not the case with Snow). Chambers's films are situated within his previous work as a painter and the development of his theories of "perceptual realism." Over time his paintings increasingly adopted properties of both cinema and photography so, as Elder points out, his shift from the "silver paintings" to film was not all that surprising.

Elder documents how Chambers, through the development of an aesthetic which sought to rid art of egoistic intervention, developed work which shared with Charles Olson a disdain for the flight into inwardness; "for them, perception [...] results from a dynamic union of subject and world, a union so complete that each shapes the other's being" (229). For Chambers, film was the per-

fect medium in which to achieve this aesthetic of reconciliation. *Circle* is a particularly strong example, especially in its middle section, where the 365 four-second shots of the same yard, with only minor variations between shots, "serves to induce a self-reflexive state of consciousness [...]. At the same time, the similarity of the images prompts viewers to make comparisons between them and to construct coherent patterns from them" (239). In other words, the film, like perception itself, serves to unify particularities — to establish "a condition of harmony and peace" (239).

Elder summarizes and concludes the book with a discussion of two masterworks of Canadian avant-garde film — Chambers's *Hart of London* and Snow's *La région centrale*. But before proceeding with that, he outlines two important aesthetic impulses that shaped avant-garde film up until the late sixties: "graphic cinema" from Eggeling to Sharits, and "phenomenological cinema" from Peterson to Brakhage. The discussion of "graphic cinema" focuses on the theories of Peter Kubelka and Sergei Eisenstein, to whom Elder attributes the argument "that the only relations that can have aesthetic value are relations either among parts of the work or between a part of the work and the whole" (336). The "realism" of the photographic image itself, for the extreme adherents of this school of thought, is "aesthetically irrelevant" (336). The phenomenological school, on the other hand, "relied on photographic illusionism to provide a likeness — or at least an analogue — of mental imagery" (338), even if that involved "distorting" the image, as it does for Peterson and Brakhage, in order to more accurately capture true personal vision. The phenomenological tradition, which can be seen as more subjective than that of the graphic cinema, placed more importance in the photographic image, but mainly as raw material to be shaped in order to document consciousness. Canadian avant-garde film, on the other hand, has had a more profound interest in the photographic image *qua* image. Like the great film theorist André Bazin, Chambers, for one, expresses in his work the idea that the "energy" that makes possible the photographic image is "the same energy that produces both the objects of nature

and the contents of consciousness" (366). The photograph seems to share properties of both nature and consciousness and, in this sense, can be seen to be a mediation between the two. This very view suggests that the dualism of spirit and matter, consciousness and nature, can be transcended, a possibility not tenable in the modernist aesthetic theories held by the adherents of graphic and phenomenological cinema.

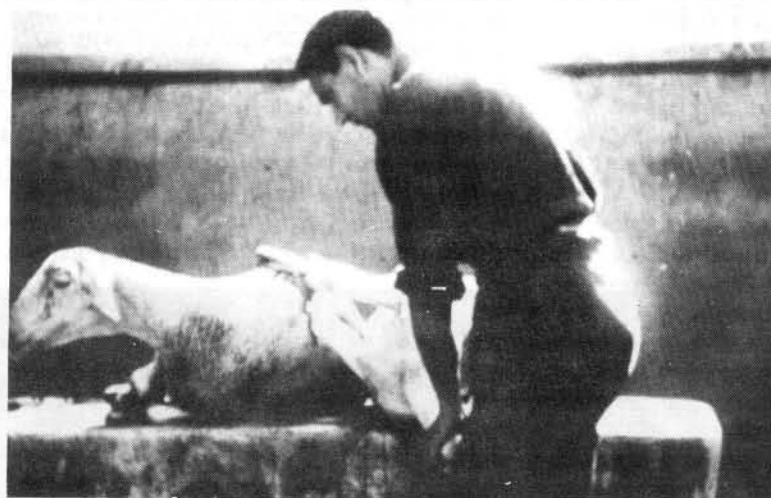
Elder argues that each movement in avant-garde cinema has corresponded to a "different view of how the self was formed and how it operated" (368), and has therefore appropriately titled his closing chapter "Forms of Cinema: Models of Self." Most of the twenties avant-garde, from Man Ray to Jean Vigo, for example, held a somewhat Freudian view of the self. Brakhage's cinema, while still Freudian to a degree, shares with existential phenomenology (e.g., Maurice Merleau-Ponty) the view that "seeing is an act of the whole body" (369). His films, in refusing the notion of a stable, "immutable and transcendental self," knowable outside of its experiences, have a harrowing, intense effect on the viewer; one feels one's self "in constant jeopardy of dissolving into fragments in the flux of experience" (369). The filmmaking that flourished after the period of structural film adopted a view of the self-as-nothingness. The "subject" is constantly constructed by the social situations within which it finds itself. This notion, which owes much to the thought of Saussure and Lacan, can be seen in the films of, for example, Yvonne Rainer.

Jack Chambers' model of self in *Hart of London* is scrutinized by Elder by way of another psychoanalytic theorist, D.W. Winnicott, and a consideration of Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art." Heidegger postulates a theory of World and Earth which correspond respectively to "all conscious beings and all those beings manipulated by consciousness for its own purpose," and "the ensemble of material beings" (380). In some sense (though it is by no means this simple) World would seem to comprise civilization and consciousness, whereas Earth comprises nature and the unconscious, though "everything belongs simultaneously to both domains"

RAT LIFE AND  
DIET IN NORTH  
AMERICA by  
JOYCE  
WEILAND  
1973



HART OF  
LONDON by  
JACK  
CHAMBERS  
1970



(380). These domains are "at odds with one another [...] world seeks to assimilate Earth and Earth seeks to assimilate world" (381). In a rather extensive analysis of *Hart of London*, Elder applies these ideas in order to trace how the harmony Chambers suggested in *Circle* gives way in *Hart of London* to a tragic, inevitably violent struggle of life and death, nature and civilization, spirit and matter. Elder observes that *Hart of London*, in its use of photography and newsreel footage, is similar to *Presents* because of its "realization that life-sustaining and life-denying forces, creative and destructive forces, are intimately interrelated, even in artmaking" (389). Photography, like the memories of consciousness, triumphs "over time only by rendering its model unreal" (389).

Elder also traces the film's oscillation between images of particularity and universality, individual and community, and how the dialectic of these two poles

is constantly resolving and dissolving. Juxtapositions of birth and death simultaneously signal both separation and merger; perhaps the most eloquent moment of this in the film is the burning of the Christmas tree, the tree itself symbolizing Christ, and therefore the universality of humanity, and the burning itself the dissolution into particularity. In *Hart of London*, the individual and community cannot be conceived of without one another; at the same time, they each threaten the other's existence.

With *La région centrale*, Snow posits "a somewhat more stable sense of identity than Chambers does" (390). In designing an apparatus intended to embody the various possibilities of camera movement, but by ensuring in its design that it was not dependent on human will, that it could not be taken to be expressive of an individual consciousness (as camera movement is for Braakhage, for example), *La région centrale*

implies that there can be a model of self that "is unaffected by the experience it undergoes" (394). This suggests a "transcendental self that lies outside of experience and reflects upon it" (394). The viewer of *La région centrale* is not experiencing Snow's 'vision', but the camera's, which acts, as Elder says, as a transcendental self in the Husserlian sense, which synthesizes particular and "discontinuous fragments of lived experience" into a meaningful continuum (395). Here, Elder points out, bringing the book full circle, that Snow's film has affinities with Hegelian Absolute Idealism by presenting consciousness as merging "with the totality of matter" (398). It cannot be an individual subjective consciousness which represents beings; instead it is consciousness in process, "consciousness as forming — and formed in — Being" (398).

Elder situates Snow "at the cusp of the change from the modern to the postmodern paradigm" (399). The postmodern aspect of his work is the transcendence of duality and the emergence, instead, of harmony. Yet Elder points out, somewhat dismayed, that this transcendence appears to come at the cost of the self. A paradox is set up: while the self may be "a fiction which we adopt at the standpoint of the finite" (399), the photographic element of Snow's work implies a remembrance of this self. Snow's films oscillate "from one paradigm to the other," from the memory of a finite moment, a particularity graspable only by the individual subject (the modern), to a transcendence of time, the overcoming of the "isolation of the modern subject" (399) (the postmodern). Nonetheless, Snow "believes (as the forms of his work demonstrate) that this can be done only by converting reality and the subject into phantasms. Transcendence is loss, according to Snow" (399).

#### ELDER, R. BRUCE

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**A 25****DRY PROPOSITIONS****AND ON****MOVING CHANTAL****INTENSITY: AKERMAN**

**A**kerman's work is inscribed at the intersection of the European cinematic tradition informed by the denaturalizing strategies of Bresson, Dreyer and Godard, among others, and the "liberating" (in Akerman's words) aspirations of American and Canadian structural filmmaking of the 1970s. Snow's work in particular is influential, and Akerman's initial work pays homage to Snow in both *Hotel Monterey* (1972) and *La Chambre* (1972), as well as to Godard in her short first film, *Saute Ma Ville* (1968).



JETU IL ELLE 1974

BY IVONE MARGULIES

**ONE** An analysis of Akerman's work calls for the tracing of the articulation of the minor with the minimal in contemporary cinema. By "minor," I mean to suggest a thematic concern with the singular, banal, quotidian aspects of everyday life.<sup>1</sup> And by minimal, I refer to the deployment of a set of durational strategies — repetition, literal time, compressions and extensions. These strategies, in combination with an extreme sobriety in camera movement and an economy in performance style, effect a defamiliarizing concreteness.

**TWO** Stationed in passageways and public vehicles, the camera in *Hotel Monterey* and *News from Home* (1977), represents a shift from both the 'window-filming' characteristic of a similarly mediated interest in the real (as in Ernie Gehr's *Untitled Part I: 1981* (1981)) and the filming of interior spaces that guarantees, either through the absence of human presence (as in Gehr's *Serene Velocity*) or through its choreography and *mise-en-scène* (as in Snow's *Wavelength* and *Back and Forth*), complete control in relation to the pro-filmic.

**THREE** Placed in the elevator, the camera in *Hotel Monterey* assumes an arbitrariness of movement in relation to the filmed event that is characteristic of the autonomy of camera and event in structural filmmaking. A particular version of the primitive ghost rides is re-transformed in Gehr's *Eureka* through the use of the strategy of rephotography dear to structural minimalist filmmaking (as seen in the work of Ken Jacobs, Gehr, and others).

In *Hotel Monterey*, the long sequences inside the elevator, with its opening and closing of doors, work as an image of a camera shutter. The dichotomy between the two spaces — the elevator and the different floors — is acknowledged only when the shutter — that is, the elevator door, opens. It is at this point as well that the viewer/object dichotomy is activated in a mirroring effect. Akerman 'invites' a controlled contact of her camera with passers-by while granting them, at least theoretically, the choice of avoidance. This possibility of freedom on the part of the subject of the gaze is exemplified in innumerable instances: the refusal to get into the elevator (*Hotel Monterey*); the fascinated engagement of a subway rider with the fixed camera stare in *News from Home* (after sizing up its power he vanishes from our sight into the deep perspective of two entire subway cars). The encounter of camera and subject in these minimalist 'documentaries' often provokes some sort of unexpected bit of performance.

Along with other structural films, *La Chambre* and *Hotel Monterey* constitute exercises in the autonomy of the camera as it encounters and generates friction from its contact with the pro-filmic. Akerman's presence in her films links, in a push/pull dynamic, the spaces behind and

in front of the camera. As the camera brushes past her in *La Chambre*, Akerman assumes different forms of address *vis-à-vis* the apparatus — from posed indifference to resolute confrontation. In engaging the camera's seemingly mechanical trajectory (a 360 degree pan that from time to time shifts its direction) Akerman creates momentary interlockings between her gaze and that of the camera. These instances of short-circuitry in the distinction between the pro-filmic and the cinematic are enhanced by the adoption of a structural vocabulary whose main prescription is the alienation between these two levels. The structured progression of the camera — its panning movement — is divorced from a narrative, or even an informative function. It is defined prior to the seen as well as to the scene.

*Hotel Monterey* and *News from Home* are films whose structure consists basically in the articulations of the cinematic: framing, editing, camera movement. Both films foreground aspects of the documentary, given their lack of *mise-en-scène*, as well as the shaping of thematic consistency in their image choice. They share, however, a trait with other Akerman films that include her presence and her eschewal of frontal address. They activate, in the camera/subject encounter, an acknowledgement of the simultaneous separateness and interdependence of the cinematic and pro-filmic. These films participate in the same dynamic of activation that is exemplified in the forms of address and transitory connections present in *Je Tu Il Elle* (1974), and *La Chambre*. The performance aspect of these four films refers to the definition of a place for the spectator coextensive with the camera's gaze. This gaze might seem impassive, but its relation with the pro-filmic event is intensely provocative and the forms of address solicited through this set-up delineate the dialogue, through structural film, between Godard and Warhol.

**FOUR** There is a way in which Akerman films seem to alternate between exercises in containment, order and symmetry (whose minimalism extends from sets to performance) and expressions of a dry intensity as the reverse of containment: as obsession and explosive jerkiness. This latter quality distinguishes Akerman's first film, the short *Saute Ma Ville*, made in 1968.

In *Saute Ma Ville* we see Akerman as actress perform a series of actions that alternate between clearly focused projects (cleaning, cooking, eating, committing suicide) and a residual excess — an uncontrolled mess. *Saute Ma Ville* is indeed *Jeanne Dielman 23 Quai de Commerce 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) run amok from the start. Order and chaos are not, as in *Jeanne Dielman*, superimposed on one another but coexist as strobic intermittencies in a kind of jerky performance. Polishing her shoes, Akerman's character continues the same obsessive gesture until she has brushed her legs black. The film fades to black as she commits suicide. *Pierrot le fou*, the film that Akerman says originally inspired her to make films, is here acknowledged

in the explosion that ends *Saute Ma Ville*.

**FIVE** The concentration on the singular trajectories of protagonists such as Jeanne Dielman, Julie in *Je Tu Il Elle* or Anna in *Meetings with Anna* (1978), is part of a dramatic sparseness that assigns aspects of plot such as the characters' background — and information about family or other social links — to the off-screen space. The omission of subsidiary plots is an integral part of the film's economy; for example, in an earlier version of the script of *Je Tu Il Elle*, the character of the neighbour offered such a possibility for sociological and narrative expansion. In the film, the neighbour's presence is relegated to off-frame space. Yet the socio-economic picture of Jeanne is amplified by the need for exchange in the form of baby-sitting and by aural intrusions such as the detailed monologue (voiced by Akerman herself) about the hesitations at the butcher. These quasi-plots, along with Jeanne's verbal digressions, give weight to the mundane that shapes women's time. The narrative structure is such that the concentration on a set of spaces or on singular characters becomes coextensive with the reduction of framing alternatives. This minimalist reduction of traditional dramatic structure is part of Akerman's skewed bow to narrative conventions. From within a narrative frame, Akerman performs a radical division of labour: plot information is relegated to the verbal track while single characters, in stark images, are set free from the burden of symbolic meaning to perform/represent more mundane tasks in real time.

**SIX** When asked about the use of monologues in *Jeanne Dielman* and *Meetings with Anna*, Akerman stated her interest in transforming dialogue into a psalmody, a "blah blah blah," into part of the rhythmic structuring of the film.<sup>2</sup> This interest in the spoken text as a block of discourse brings forth both its attribute of textuality, and its rhythmic functions for the film — the aphasic alternation of silence and monotone speech in *Jeanne Dielman* exemplifies Akerman's approach to the text as expressive sound element while simultaneously using it to advance narrative information.

Akerman's 'dialogues' affect most immediately the timing of the action-reaction trope of conventional dialogue, transforming the regular back and forth movement into a spaced, delayed exchange, an almost discontinuous sequence of 'monologues'. These extended addresses reinforce the denial of suture operative in the extended takes of *Jeanne Dielman* and *Meetings with Anna*. Although they impart at times extremely prosaic information (as in Jeanne's talk with the woman trying to buy the exact button for her son's coat), the monologue's extension takes on an abstract and expressive value of its own, becoming progressively more detached from its putative content. The question becomes one of intensification: the "blah, blah, blah" of tone and rhythm foregrounding the material expressivity of the address at the expense of 'making sense'.

**SEVEN** The affectless reading of the sister's letter in *Jeanne Dielman* encapsulates some of the strategies

concerning the displacements of naturalistic representation at work in Akerman. In anchoring this monotone delivery to the act of doubling which any reading is, Akerman signals, from within a diegetically justifiable frame (that of the character's compulsiveness), the iterative, citational quality of discourse and representation.

**EIGHT** In *Jeanne Dielman* and *Je Tu Il Elle*, the use of extended time and even radical play with the conception of literal or real time is related to the strategy of "making strange" described in Victor Shklovsky's *Art as Technique*. The refusal to name an object or action can be seen as a strategy of defamiliarization.

In Akerman's work the idea of repetition is not subsumed in a summary labelling that abstracts the notion of repetition in, for example, allowing the actions in *Jeanne Dielman* to be called "housekeeping." On the contrary, Akerman insists on a concrete description that actualizes what Rosalind Krauss has called the "refusal to use the single example that would imply the whole, in accounts of events composed by a string of almost identical details connected by 'and'."<sup>3</sup>

Akerman's work is informed by what Krauss has called, in her analysis of Sol Le Witt, an "absurd nominalism." Krauss links this "absurd nominalism," present in Beckett, the New Novel, and the minimalism of the early 1960s, with a system of compulsions that addresses "itself to the 'purposelessness of purpose,' to the spinning gears of a machine disconnected from reason."<sup>4</sup> This is related to Akerman's use of description in an intensive and intensifying way. Repetition as well as extreme ellipsis provide the films' dry rhythms.

**NINE** While a critical model for the appraisal of Akerman's minimalism has already been recognized in the works of Andy Warhol and Michael Snow, the connection between detailed description and hyperrealism in her work warrants attention. Hyperrealism is here understood as a translation in cinematic terms of the distance operating in the pictorial or plastic reproduction of an image already submitted to representation (e.g., a painting having a photograph as referent). What is implied in this process is an effect of doubling that includes an intermediary, frozen stage of reproduction that subtly undoes referentiality by presenting it at a second degree of removal. One of our questions, therefore, concerns the specific terms of this transference from plastic to cinematic representation. How is this distance, that seems to pierce the referent, construed in cinema?

Extended duration seems to constitute a main factor in the passage from the untroubled realist image to the uncanny hyperrealist one. The hesitation between a literal and a symbolic register, exemplified in the radicality achieved, for instance, in Warhol's early films, lies at the core of the defamiliarizing effect of the hyperrealist image, its simulacral effect. Akerman's use of extended real-time shots depicting everyday actions, in addition to repetitive shot compositions, raises questions related to the destabilizing, supplementary effect of the detailed description.<sup>5</sup>



**TEN** Akerman admits that Godard's *Pierrot le fou* was her first major cinematic experience. This film starts with a quote by Elie Faure paraphrased by Godard in an interview: "Velasquez at the end of his life no longer painted precise forms."<sup>6</sup> "No longer write about peoples lives," says Godard through Belmondo, "but only what goes on between people in space . . . like colours and sounds." Snow's work offers another register to Godard's phenomenological approach.<sup>7</sup> What goes on between people in space — colours and sounds — is indeed one of the major events of Snow's 'narrative'.

It is precisely this borderline between constituting and representing, in Snow's words, "the fluctuation of emphasis from the concrete/materialist to the naturalist/realist,"<sup>9</sup> that is worked through in Akerman's films.

**ELEVEN** Speaking about *Jeanne Dielman* Akerman says she was interested in showing what is usually reserved for the ellipsis in conventional narrative. She was interested in the "images between the images." When the ellipses — the images between images — are in Akerman's case made visible, constituting a sophisticated "McGuffin" (Hitchcock's snare), suspense is displaced. One then wants to ask what connection this particular unsettling of suspense has to do with Akerman's formal politics.<sup>9</sup>

**TWELVE** Akerman's work lends itself to a reading in which dichotomies are drawn between a dry, minimal background — the withholding of gestures and camera

movements — and a disturbance in the expression of compulsion which is then privileged as a surfacing repressed.

This structural dichotomy is read as conscious/unconscious where the 'out of scene' represents the 'repressed'. One should, however, be careful not to reduce Akerman's work to a highly sophisticated structure that 'frames' or makes visible the disruptive element — be it a gesture, a sound, or a drive. Through such a reductive reading the eruption of the 'repressed pleasure' (the *act manqué*, as Akerman calls the orgasm along with the murder) is understood as *the* event of the film. This reductive reading is interested in a single cause-effect masterplot: "the murder of the man as elimination of patriarchal repression." This phrase encapsulates most of the feminist readings of *Jeanne Dielman*.<sup>10</sup> While several of the analyses are formally accurate, these essays seem unable to lay aside a rhetoric that is clearly available independent from the watching of the film. *Jeanne Dielman* perverts this reading. As Akerman says, simultaneously reinforcing and deflecting the causality implied in her plot, "There are seven very strong minutes after that"<sup>11</sup> — "that" being the murder, the seven minutes being the long take that reinstates the death that the film has been referring to all along in the repetition/compulsion of the character's gestures. The death drive is stated in the automatism of the compulsive repetition that informs both the orderliness and sameness of the character's routine and Akerman's minimalist filmic strategies.

**THIRTEEN** Both *Jeanne Dielman* and *Meetings with*



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*Anna* invite a spectator response in which the affectlessness and opacity of Jeanne and Anna as pathology. It is in fact the slightly 'off' or unconventional nature of the characters that brings to the films a resistance to accepted codes of normality. In refusing a fixed register — diegetic or cinematic — to fully account for the compulsive repetition in Jeanne's case, or the vague alienation in Anna's, Akerman's flirtation with pathology is better understood as an assertion of difference, a resolute option for another rhythm.

The lack of psychological motivation, translated into a non-naturalistic performance, is given (*à la* Bresson) an external motor, which resonates in Akerman's films with the energy and randomness of obsessive compulsion proper.

While this argument avoids any direct analogy between the fragmentary nature of subjectivity as expressed in Lacanian psychoanalysis and modernist practices of fragmentation, it does recognise the need for investigation of Akerman's unique transfigurations of obsession at the above mentioned juncture. "Inexplicable" paranoia (*The Man with the Suit Case* (1983)) and "inescapable" desire (*Toute Une Nuit* (1982), *J'ai Faim J'ai Froid* (1984)) are denaturalized into unmotivated rhythmic structures that maintain, nonetheless, the force of a particular and unsettling logic, that of a *minor expression*.<sup>12</sup>

**FOURTEEN** The relation of Akerman's work to a politics of the singular and the minor is established by means of her feminist concerns, *Jeanne Dielman* being the major, exemplary text. The context for a discussion of Akerman's

assertion of the singular as political lies in the debate on micropolitics generated by Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva and, in another way, by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* is mentioned by Akerman as the theoretical work that best reflects her cinematic concerns — namely, the articulation of the minor with the minimal.<sup>13</sup> Deleuze and Guattari define the characteristics of a minor expression as that in which all is political. In "major" as opposed to "minor" expression, the individual matters (familial and conjugal) tend to join other, less personal matters, with the social milieu serving as background. The question of the mundane and banal as thematic choices becomes extremely relevant in the context of a politicization of the singular, of the minor. A minor expression in a Deleuzian/Guattarian sense, however, does not necessarily follow from a mere thematization of the minor.<sup>14</sup>

In Chantal Akerman's work the notion of "minor" carries the added significance of an interest in the expression of minorities which goes beyond thematization (films about women, Jews, or other spottable 'Others'). Her work promotes the formal politics potentially contained in such expressions of "one's own patois." Akerman's "dry sobriety" — her minimalist strategies of duration and repetition — creates both the proper span of attention for a "minor expression" and amplifies its intensity.

**FIFTEEN** In *The Man with the Suit Case* Akerman mocks the fictions of autobiography in starting the film at the point where *Meetings with Anna* ends — the moment

in which the filmmaker played by Aurore Clement (and supposedly referring to Akerman) enters the empty apartment after a few months of absence. An active, comic, and fast-paced Akerman substitutes for the ethereal and opaque Clement.

The question here, as in *Meetings with Anna*, is one of deterritorialization, nomadism, and celibacy. In analyzing Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari establish the meaning of this nomadism (present in both Kafka and Akerman) in terms of a complex relation of food (with its connotation of territorialization) to writing, in which the use of language and the creative act results in exile, a deterritorialization from social conventions. This voyage, say Deleuze and Guattari, can take place in a single place, in "one's bedroom" and is all the more intense for that:

*now you lie against this, now against that wall, so that the window keeps moving around you. . . . I must take my walks and that must be sufficient but in compensation there is no place in all the world where I could not take my walks.*<sup>15</sup>

*Je Tu Il Elle* starts off in this "room," while *The Man with the Suit Case* thematizes the exile as a woman's radical aversion to a male presence (as well as to the image of couple domesticity).

In *The Man with the Suit Case* Akerman acknowledges her authorial control while, as the character, she seems subjected to the intricacies of avoiding domestic entrapment. At a certain point (at the apex of her exile inside her room) Akerman develops a system of visual control by following, through a video monitor, the man who has invaded her space. She does not so much follow him as point him out to us in the monitor of the TV, in which she is supposedly interested. Akerman the writer carries, in a sense, her story on a tray — food and time. She thematizes her exile by wandering through the apartment with a tray of food and a clock; at the same time, she refers to the ultimate mastery of the wandering by means of the creative acts of writing and filming.

**SIXTEEN** In *Je Tu Il Elle* Akerman/Julie says: "I was breathing, and then I played with my breathing, and then I waited." If the *breathing* signals the wave oscillation of a minimalist intention (as, most explicitly, in Warhol's *Sleep*) the *waiting* inscribes narrative into Akerman's work — a time with a projected closure. The narrative of a woman waiting has a history within feminist discourse. The feminist appropriation of Akerman's work as a model narrative becomes significant in itself. Akerman deterritorializes this waiting (there are no fixed positions for a she or a he) through a wandering whose intensity is akin to Kafka's as described in his diaries.

**SEVENTEEN** Akerman uses the image of a continuous nomadism in *Meetings with Anna* to portray the political dimension of a mutant being who is also an artist. In *The Man with the Suit Case*, she limits her protagonist's wandering spatially. Inside and only inside the apartment Akerman fast-forwards her obsessional tics in a diegetic structuring that replicates, in a comic register, the ideas that inform her films in general.

One formal concern of Akerman's revolves around the idea of control and mastery. Akerman mentions that she makes use of a variety of acting styles and personas in order to break the structural mastery that obtains with her role as filmmaker. These different rhythms (including her own as a performer) counterpoint her minimalist, dry sobriety.

One could say, therefore, that the creation of an obsessional system of control is diegetically as well as formally related to the definition of a character's or actor's rhythm. This is equally true in Jeanne Dielman's case as it is of Akerman/'the woman with the tray'.

**EIGHTEEN** In the literature on structural film there is a constant reference to external contingency as the other in relation to the impassive camera. P. Adams Sitney points to dawn as the event that "sneaks in" to Gehr's *Serene Velocity*,<sup>16</sup> Stephen Koch points to the easy-to-miss event in Warhol's *Empire*, the moment at dusk when the lights of the last thirty floors of the building are turned on. At a certain moment what is seen as natural progression breaks into a sign, a difference. The affinity of this difference with drama, a climactic moment, has to be considered within the context of the minimalist sensibility. Snow's brilliance lies in (among other things) staging these instances of contingency as fragments of a 'would-be-plot'.

What has to be considered in view of Akerman's work is the concomitant insistence on the contingent and episodic as the 'event' of the film and/or the event viewed as insistence and intensification over a single direction (as in *Wavelength*) or subject (in *Empire*).

From *Hotel Monterey* to *Jeanne Dielman* these two narratives (one made up of the episodic, or discrete event, the other based on accumulation, or structural intensification) are articulated as equivalent in Akerman's work. The episodic is staged and given all of its non-dramatic resonances; expectation is built along with distancing in the extended duration of real-time shots. Illusion and fact are indeed, as Snow wanted, equivalent. They are, however, redirected with a different sort of macro-'under'-narrative.<sup>17</sup>

**NINETEEN** Akerman's work proposes a mode of blocking identification (and the consequent fiction of the unified subject) that differs from the modes of juxtaposition, collage, or interruption (the Brechtian and Godardian models). Her films operate through duration, accumulation, sobriety, and sameness, most distinctly through *textual homogeneity*. Akerman's films propose a disjunction which is displaced onto the experiencing of image through time and repetition. While this experiencing of the film through duration is most evident in films like *Jeanne Dielman* and *Je Tu Il Elle*, other Akerman films such as *Tout Une Nuit*, *The Golden Eighties* (1983), and *J'ai Faim, J'ai Froid* also operate through accumulation, although in compressed rather than extended time.

**TWENTY** In *Je Tu Il Elle* Akerman embodies the "je" of the film. The pronominal abstraction of the title announces the strategy of displacement operative in the film. Akerman subverts the autobiographical fallacy, not

through a negation, but through intelligent confrontational tactics — those of the pseudo-evidence of visibility. Akerman's presence as the "I" of the film creates an internal tension that indicates a voided function of subjectivity. The psychological sobriety of her minimalist style only intensifies the multiple registrations of this tensile persona.

**TWENTY-ONE** If Cesare Zavattini's wish to film ninety minutes of the life of a man to whom nothing happens is given its ultimate fulfilment in Warhol's deathly literalization of time, Akerman's work reinstates this question by undoing the humanist subjective register characteristic of neorealism, its notion of type.

In *Jeanne Dielman*, Akerman imbues her realist strategies with a definite estrangement, not only through durational techniques, but also in the avoidance of a representative type (projected by relatively anonymous actors standing for universal types). The presence of an actress such as Delphine Seyrig, plus a highly stylized performance, adds another level of complexity to Akerman's notion of type. Although exceptionally typical, Jeanne is more than anything else, exceptional. "If I choose my mother," said Akerman, "it would only be my mother." In choosing Seyrig, Akerman exposes her desire to transcend typicality — a paradigmatic "authenticity" — through a stylized, doubly removed characterization.

Jeanne Dielman can be viewed through Neorealism, Godard, and Warhol. What is involved here is more than a substitution of psychological representation for a denaturalized, opaque representation. A voided subjectivity is replaced by an obsessive display of singularities closer in mode to task performance. We are miles away from Umberto D's singularities as well as from Louis XIV's detailed eccentricities, and we have to account for Jeanne Dielman's exceptional typicality, bound as it is to Akerman's minimal hyperrealism.

**TWENTY-TWO** The notion of type as an index of the "natural" is one of the themes of *The Golden Eighties* in its experimentation with possible relations between performers and text. Deconstruction operates at the juncture at which the natural is repeatedly experienced as 'almost' successful — the synchronization of text and body, of character and actor, being on constant trial in this film. *Window Shopping* (1986), the musical drawing from the same script and material as *The Golden Eighties*, operates in a slightly more complex register once the recourse to a paradigmatic presentation of alternative performers is excluded. The question involved here is the difference in the strategies of deconstruction and of perversion. While deconstruction could be aligned with a more classically reflexive trajectory, whereby a correction is formally enacted or displayed, perversion refers to strategies akin to those performed by Warhol: the refusal to present alternatives or analysis, while continuously blurring distinctions (reality/representation; pro-filmic/cinematic as locus of discourse; etc.).

The distinction between deconstruction as a strategy that proceeds through analysis — the juxtaposition of alternate perspectives as a break from transparency (e.g., *The*

*Golden Eighties*) — and perversion is pertinent to Akerman's work. This distinction is connected to the differences between a distancing strategy that proceeds through collage and textual heterogeneity, and one that uses the cumulative effect of material homogeneity and repetition to pervert the basis of naturalistic representation.

**TWENTY-THREE** *Toute Une Nuit* (In One Night) experiments with the effervescent multiplication of climactic moments related to passion and desire. Depicting couples, the visual succession of "I/you" fragments echoes spectatorial *déjà-vu*. While each fragment avoids the anecdotal, it simultaneously assumes the aspect of cliché. *Toute Une Nuit* is particularly interesting for its conflation of the unique — the singular moment of desire and passion — with the cliché — the reproducible that intensifies the singular. *Toute Une Nuit* dismisses the idea of an ethnological, representative approach to the unique and singular, while at the same time it thematizes precisely the uniqueness (of passion) in which stereotype is heavily invested.

**TWENTY-FOUR** *Toute Une Nuit*, *The Golden Eighties*, *J'ai Faim*, *J'ai Froid* propose an entirely different conception of narrative than the one advanced in Akerman's early films. These films defamiliarize by their peculiar use of cliché narrative conventions and themes (melodrama, soap opera, and slapstick comedy).

**TWENTY-FIVE** Different notions of repetition are operative in Akerman's work. The main experience of *Jeanne Dielman* and *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* is the perception of micro-differences within the repetitions (of gestures, framings and performances) that structure the films. Something else operates in *Toute Une Nuit* and *The Golden Eighties*. In these films repetition is experienced as a conceptual residue of multiple and cumulative differences. The interplay between a conceptual repetition and an experiential repetition might explain the way Akerman's work constantly undermines the general in favour of the singular, by making us hyper-attentive to difference. Her use of stereotype, cliché, rhyming and simultaneous denial of statistics and sociology constitutes a proposal of intensification as against that of inane generality.

*I would like to thank Paul Arthur, Anne Glusker, Mary Lawlor, Robert Stam, and Michael Zryd for their comments along the writing of these notes.*

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>In the work of Deleuze and Guattari, "minor" refers to the subversive use in language and art effected by a minority within a major expression. Kafka's German in Czechoslovakia, for instance, is inflected by his Yiddish, a cut-out language which assumes intensive value: a verb like "Giben" assumes in Yiddish multiple meanings — to take, to give, to put — as opposed to a univocal one. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16-27.

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<sup>2</sup>"Rencontre avec Chantal Akerman," *Cahiers du Cinema* 288 (May 1987): 54.

<sup>3</sup>Rosalind Krauss, "Le Witt in Progress," in *The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1985), 253.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>5</sup>Naomi Schor's *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Methuen, 1987) discusses the connections between the notions of type, hyperrealism, and descriptive detail, providing analyses of literature and sculpture that are extremely provocative in thinking about cinematic hyperrealism.

<sup>6</sup>Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Albatros, 1980), 145.

<sup>7</sup>See Annette Michelson's analysis of *Wavelength* in "Toward Snow," in *The Avant-Garde Cinema: A Reader of Theory and Criticism* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1978), 172-183.

<sup>8</sup>Bruce Elder, "A Conversation with Michael Snow," *Ciné-Tracts*, vol. 5 no. 17 (Summer/Fall 1982), 13-23.

<sup>9</sup>Mary Ann Doane privileges this aspect of suspension of suspense in the filmic structures of *Jeanne Dielman* and Sally Potter's *Thriller* in her article "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body," in *October* 17 (Summer 1981).

<sup>10</sup>See Jayne Loader, "Jeanne Dielman: Death in Instalments"; B. Ruby Rich, "In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism"; and Claire Johnston, "Towards a Feminist Film Practice: Some Theses," all reprinted in *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols, Vol. 2 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985); and Ruth Perlmutter, "Femi-

nine Absence: A Political Aesthetic in Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai de Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*," in *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Spring 1971).

<sup>11</sup>"Chantal Akerman on *Jeanne Dielman*," excerpts from an interview with *Camera Obscura*, November 1976, in *Camera Obscura* 12 (Fall 1977), 118-21.

<sup>12</sup>Deleuze and Guattari.

<sup>13</sup>This connection between Kafka and Akerman was established in an essay, "Du côté chez Kafka," by Michele LeVieux, as well as in statements by Akerman herself. *Ecran 78*, no. 75 (December 1975).

<sup>14</sup>"A minor expression doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs with a major language." It perverts the hegemony of conventional narrative through an extreme economy of means, a dry sobriety. Deleuze and Guattari, 16-27.

<sup>15</sup>Franz Kafka, *Diaries*, 19 July 1910 (New York: Schocken, 1948), 27-28.

<sup>16</sup>P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), 438.

<sup>17</sup>The notion of the undernarrative is pertinent to Akerman's work — a "highly elliptical narrative style, a blackhole narrative that separates and recomposes elements of traditional narrative." Ruth Perlmutter, "Visible Woman, Visible Narrative" *Millennium Film Journal* 6 (Spring 1980), 19.

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BY MICHAEL ZRYD

**M**arnie Parrell is a young and very promising imagemaker whose work is probably unknown to most readers, for a number of reasons. First, she has been working for only three years. Second, her work has been little screened outside informal exhibition circumstances, almost exclusively at the Hart House Film Board open screenings at the University of Toronto where I first saw Parrell's work in October 1989. Finally, Parrell works deliberately in

## A LYRIC SPLIT:

anachronistic media: "standard" 8mm film and Fisher Price 1/4" video. 8mm is almost extinct:

## THE 8MM FILMS OF MARNIE PARRELL

Kodak produces very little stock, it takes weeks to process, and no film theatre in Toronto has an 8mm projector (Parrell carries her own to each screening). Fisher Price video is an explicitly "toy" medium, outside adult, let alone respectable, art contexts. [1]

NONETHELESS, QUALITIES OF HER work prompt our attention to it: a formal eloquence of rhythm, colour, and camera movement; a continuity and coherence of theme; and, crucially, evidence of a mature sensibility at work. Especially seen against the mass of work produced by what can be kindly called "student filmmaking," her films stand out for their sureness of conception and execution, and lack of self-consciousness and pretension. What makes her work all the more remarkable is that Parrell works in a lyrical mode; lyricism,

a loose poetic form usually lacking a rhetorical structure (depending instead on the power of the consciousness of the artist for its unity) too often, in the hands of young filmmakers, merely generates sloppy solipsism.

ALL OF PARRELL'S FILMS ARE MADE in-camera; instead of constructing the film by editing, she chooses a formal technique to pre-structure the film. Thus, in *Beachsplit* (1988), a matte creates a rough split-screen effect. In *Dinner* (1989), superimposition juxtaposes three layers of imagery. *E. Clips* (1989) presents two window-like frames of action at the top and bottom of the screen which cut into an otherwise abstract field of refractions. Parrell describes the making of the film:

*I TOOK A CREDIT CARD (SENT TO ME*

*from Zellers) and cut holes in it w/ a round paper punch as well as poking in it with a straight pin. Then I fastened it to the lens. When shooting I put the film through twice, then rotated the credit card mask and ran the film through again. The bouncing moon-like light is just that. I took the mask off and shot the lunar eclipse of last summer (hence the title *E. Clips*). The other lights are caused by the pin holes. Actually this film has multiple masks: the mask on the lens and the mask on the moon (caused by the earth's shadow).*

IN ALL HER FILMS, THE IMAGERY IS generally captured in long takes with a hand-held camera almost always in movement, though rarely so rapid that the image becomes unrecognizable. Despite the violation of the realistic, unified frame, the space being photo-

MEMORY LANE 1989 (Image transcribed from video with a Panasonic WV1410 camera, an Amiga-DigiView 4.0 and a dot matrix printer.)



graphed is strongly evoked, in part by the intimacy of the imagery. In some ways, the films seem like eccentric home movies; there is a diary feel to the form (evoked by loose composition, in-camera shooting, and lack of editing guaranteeing a kind of authentic sequence to events) and subject (mostly exteriors, as if the films were records of field trips).

THE SPACE WE ENTER IS THAT OF A natural landscape (in *Beachsplit*, the seashore; in *E. Clips*, a garden; in *Dinner*, a park trail). But Parrell stops short of any typical lyrical celebration of Nature. These are domesticated landscapes, less awe-inspiring than quotidian; the approach is more ironic than ecstatic. Even the body is demythologized. A *lietmotif* that appears in every Parrell film is a shot of a foot. In the lyrical film tradition epitomized by

someone like Brakhage, the full body appears as a questing sexual force in the world. Here the body is ironically reduced to an Oedipal relic, the foot, here a woman's, casually and sometimes humorously proffered to our glance.

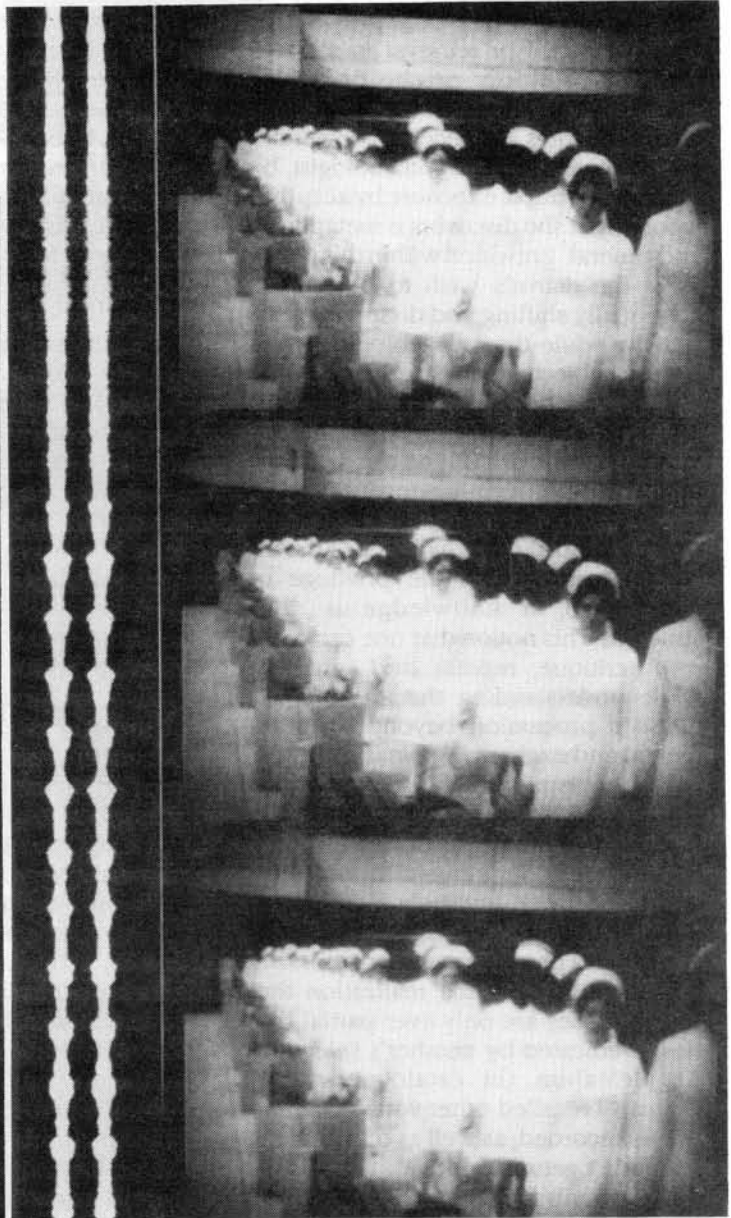
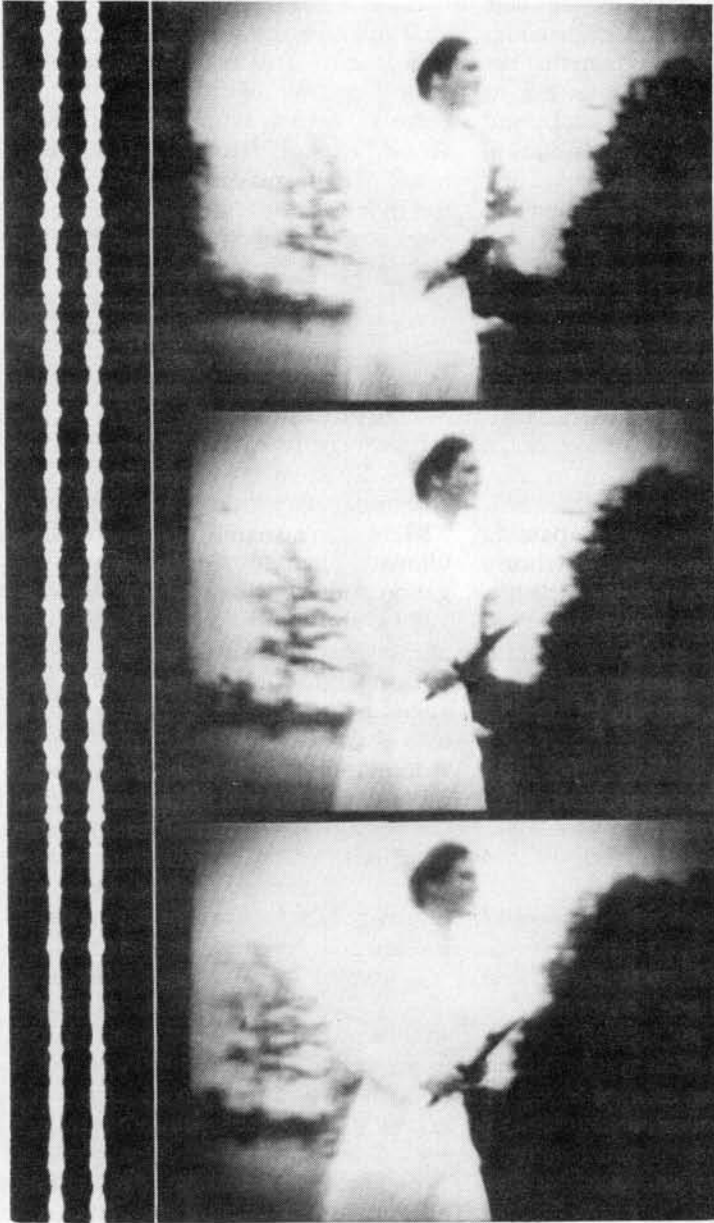
NATURE EXISTS MORE AS A SPACE modified by human activity than an elemental force — in *Dinner*, a walk through a brush forest is interrupted by a park sign which formally explains that this is a “nature walk.” Instead of the direct access to nature and experience suggested by the diary style, we enter a scene twice travelled. Another sign on a bridge warns “Danger: Do Not Trespass” but a figure ventures forth nonetheless. In a playful (and sometimes disturbing) way, Parrell recognizes that the landscapes she presents to the viewer are always already tres-

passed: by civilization, by herself, by her camera through her images.

**BEACHSPLIT** IS, I THINK, PARRELL'S best work, and typical of her approach and themes. The title is apt: the subject of the film is a cozy seascape seen in split-screen. In the beginning of the film, the right side of the screen is a static shot of a sailboat just offshore; on the left side of the screen we follow a relaxed hand-held panning shot of a beach, people walking along the beach, and water. These subjects introduced at the beginning reappear consistently through the film; what varies are the rhythms generated by the movement of the people, water, and, most importantly, the camera, which can be static, calmly panning, or frenetically jumping about. At one point, the camera slowly







**IDENTITY AND DISAVOWAL  
IN MARIAN MCMAHON'S  
NURSING HISTORY**

*BY JOHN MCCULLOUGH*

To the extent that the diarist and the archaeologist perform the ideally mutually-exclusive mirror tasks of inscribing and

describing, they can be seen to be functioning in a process of repression or analysis, burial or retrieval in a space regarded as strictly private or public. The diarist assumes exclusive choice: what she writes and records is synecdochic and precise. The archaeologist, by contrast, attempts exposure by accumulation: what she discovers is metaphoric and general. Entwined within this polarity is the diarist's wish to objectify a continually shifting and dissolving subjectivity while the archaeologist anticipates a subjectivity in the object.

What has been a recurrent role for artists, generally, is the move to incorporate both the diaristic and the archaeological position simultaneously. That is, to play both subject and object has proven a substantial challenge to the binarism upon which the privilege of experience or knowledge is constructed. This notion that one can write *and* critique, repress *and* analyse, while understanding that there is no ultimate procession beyond a fundamental and exchanging binarism, is the primary assumption of *Nursing History*. If Marian McMahon chooses to treat the family home movies as object, it is only because they offer a crucial aspect of her own subjectivity. Inversely, if this pillaging of the family files suggests a narcissism, such a perception must necessarily be tempered with the realization that home movies are only ever partial diaries, predicated by another's selection. As McMahon (in catalogue notes) claims: "I recalled other versions of the events recorded, as well as other events that didn't get recorded..."

McMahon's fusion of experience and knowledge in an attempt to get at the gaps in 'versions' and 'events' is played out, on an abstracted level, in the construction of a hybrid of forms. Pillaging old film, shooting new film and then transferring film to video which is then dumped back onto film and distributed as such, *Nursing History* is a complex refutation of the fatuous debates which, even still, revolve around the aesthetic merits of either medium. McMahon's subversion of *that* debate is allegorically related to the more significant challenge which the film effects as regards the politics of patriarchy. Within the critique of film-as-purity resides a notion that all privilege is ready for a tumble.

The effect of any film-video hybrid is the heightened sense of layering and texturing. Each form, while fusing with the next, clearly leaves its own trace: this can be seen in varying degrees in Rimmer's *As Seen On TV*, *Bricolage*, and *Divine Mannequin*, Hoffman's *River*, or Snow's recent *Au Revoir/See You Later*. In *Nursing History* the effect provides resonance for McMahon's claim that her experiences were misrepresented or elided in the home movies shot, by and large, by her father. What was familiar in the family diary entries — that is, the women "to be kissed, to be touched and to be looked at" — came to suggest itself as a pattern of repression. By reworking the material, contextualizing it with her voice-over commentary and by casting it into relief against unfamiliar formal textures, McMahon succeeds in disturbing the seamlessness of the "official" family history. Where the family footage was predominantly dedicated to marriage ceremonies and is thus characterized as linkage and union ("the passing between these two men"), McMahon's appropriations are intent on disturbance. The endless stream of new brides, originally intended as celebration of a family and tradition, is damned by the observation that this is simply a "walk towards a future that the past has predicted." The accompanying waves on the soundtrack not only are symmetrical to the visuals but also contribute to the irony of these women's moves into dissolution.

Given that identity and history — and their intermittent confluence within the patriarchal landscape — become the focus and intrigue of *Nursing History*, this operation is nonetheless accomplished without recourse to rhetoric and didacticism. That each frame pushes itself into the next, that the film's movement is poetically modulated, is not only an indication of McMahon's technical proficiency but is a precise measure of the intricacy of the film's design. Frames are frozen within frames, pulled out of focus and then re-animated in mimicry of a memory process which seeks to extract some sense from what the filmmaker terms her "uniform past." The recurring images of waves crashing on the shore parallel the never-exhausted compulsion of the diary-process. But they also imply an ongoing erosion, and maybe this is closer to

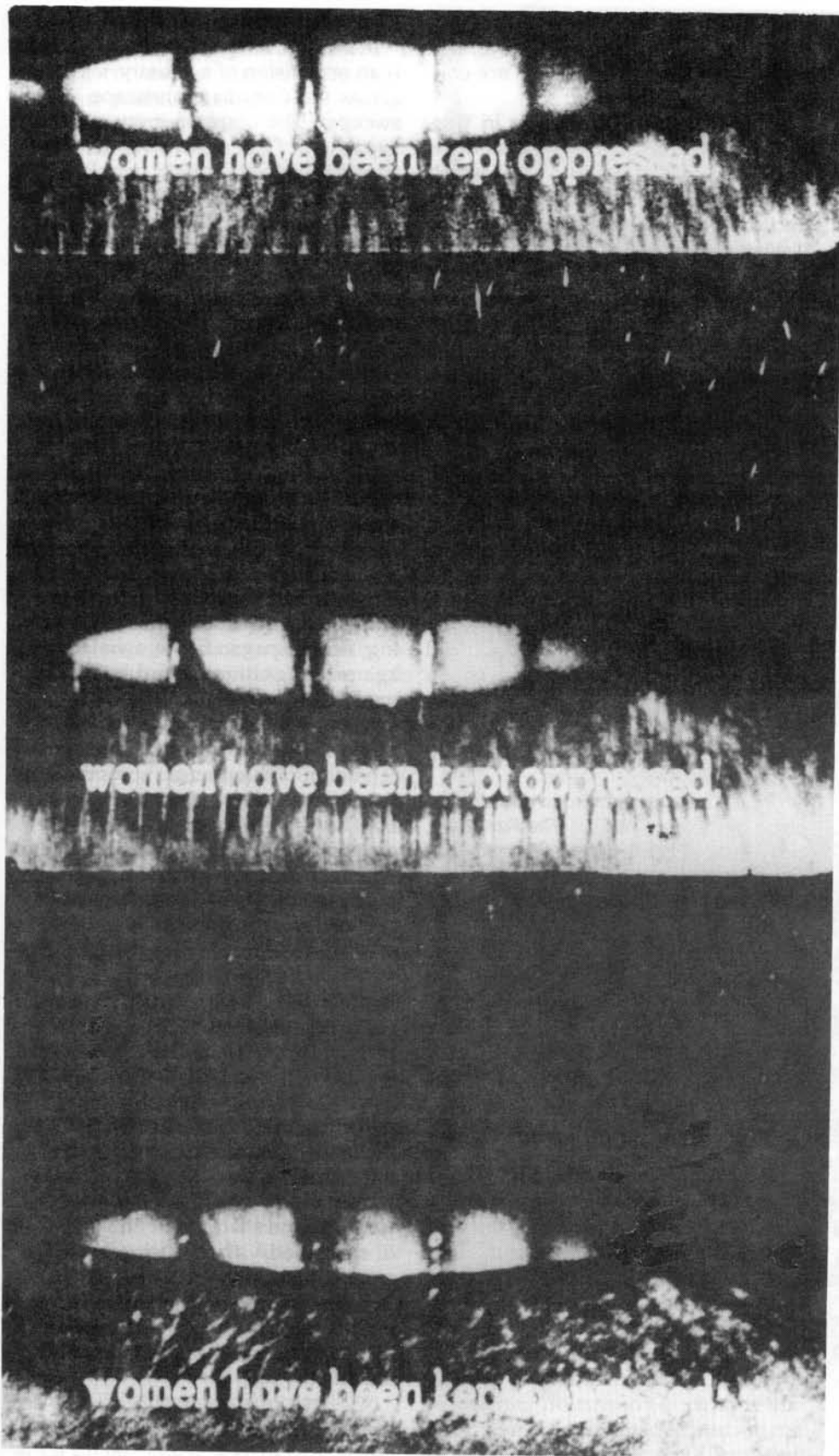
McMahon's intentions. In the treatment of certain images (in particular, the nurse ceremonies) identity and history are entangled in a dense complicity. Repeatedly, it is the complicity of disavowal: "I know but all the same..."

The video pulse and film flicker, distinctive features of each medium, congeal and raise the surface texture to that of a fabric. This is entirely consistent with the theme of an identity traced, a subjectivity cut from the text of the world. *Nursing History* is not a pantomime of light and dark, a magic show of the movement of light. In a sense it is more substantial than this; what is at stake is beyond the traditional discourses of perception or existence. McMahon is working at the seams of a presence that threatens to cover all her experience: those waves, again. Home movies function, as the voice-over claims, "not to confirm our suspicions but to lay them to rest." To that extent *Nursing History* is defined by suspicion.

McMahon's search for a subjectivity ultimately manifests itself as an investigation and assertion of what her family and father repress. As the super-8 footage is past and silent, the analysis is present and sound; as the family's footage is a document on film, the daughter's is an aesthetic hybrid on film and video; and as the original assumes no reproach, the appropriation is intent on dislocation. But this is not about a family feud, necessarily; the critique is much wider. This repression, this male identity, is only a function of an historical framework: *Nursing History* is an active rejection of the role of handmaid to history. If the waves McMahon records, so indicative of the pressure of any history, resume that metaphoric role, they do it only to the extent that *she* now has access to history. Her identity is presented as a conjunction of retrieved experience and knowledge. But this is not the last word on McMahon, for the film of *her* disavowals has yet to be made.

*NURSING HISTORY* Marian McMahon (1989, 16mm, colour, sound, 10 min.)

**JOHN MCCULLOUGH** is a writer living in Toronto and teaching at York University.



**a language of flesh and roses**

*by leila sujir  
reprinted with permission from  
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**PIERRE VALLIERES 1972**

**how do you make a culture?**

**T**he beginnings: by honouring, passing along that which has been in the background, without an image or name, without a language to speak in.

Joyce Wieland's films gather together what matters — matters of heart, home and country, in a language of flesh and of roses, a language of love. Her concern is to make an ecological vision, one that has respect for all things, *what matters*: plant matter, animals, people, history, politics, art, the landscape itself.

In each film, she re-invents the film language, giving it texture and tangibility — something you can touch. She shifts the syntax, adds the "other" to the lexicon of images, allows the subject to shape the form of the film, and in turn, shapes the seeing of the subject. The forms she chooses also shape how we see the films and thus shape our seeing.

A language represents a way of being in the world and different languages allow different ways of perceiving. The Hopi language, for instance, as linguist Benjamin Whorf points out, is process oriented: verbs rather than nouns. Not, "it is raining," but "raining" and interestingly, the Hopi language more accurately represents the physical world of process. Wieland's films, too, represent a way of being, in a film language which gives emotions a place. She thus represents not just an emotion, in the singular, but articulates a range of emotions, ever-changing, always in process giving a play of emotion: motion, movement, cycle, bringing in maternal instincts, domestic matters, the cycles of birth, death and sex, the seasons, a conjunction of formal matters, form and matter, spirit and matter. The emotions moving through a body of film give a range, a representation that tells not only of intellectual matters, but physicality — the body as matter, perceiving through the body — a proprioceptive cinema and what many feminists have called for — a language which comes out of the body, a language in the feminine.

In this shaping of a film language in the feminine, the inside is taken outward in a gesture of sharing, receptivity, openness, vulnerability; these are qualities which create "open" systems, if a system can ever be considered open. This is not a vulnerability which collapses into self and thus closes into an "I"

centred universe, but a movement outwards in concentric circles, a movement out to include what is "other," not conquest but empowerment.

At the heart of what matters in Wieland's films is the notion of the world as home: the care, "domestic love" which doesn't seek to domesticate, is taken out into the world, giving us at least two distinct visions.

First, there is that which is close to home, the familiar, the home place seen as a moving world, a place of discovery. In Wieland's film, *Water Sark*, a film made at the kitchen table, there is the discovery of the body and the construction of the self through a play of movement. The filmmaker is filming herself in reflective surfaces and filming the world at the table: we see water, light, surface and texture of what is outside and what is reflected back. The movement of the camera is intimate, close to the body, moving with the body and out from it, making a self-portrait.

Secondly, that which is distanced from us, the politics and the history of a place which is often forgotten, not made part of the public memory, is lovingly treated by Wieland, made intimate and close, and is brought home.

The portrait and story of a country are given in the feature film, *The Far Shore*, and in the experimental film, *Reason Over Passion*.

Within the political film document of a Quebec revolutionary, *Pierre Vallieres*, and the political document of the Dare Cookie strike in *Solidarity*, we are brought close to home.

In the film *Pierre Vallieres*, we are situated at the mouth of his utterance so that what he says is mediated by the sensuality of mouth and lips and tongue, by voice, by moustache, nose-hair and his translated words in white text over the moving mouth. We see voice.

In the film *Solidarity*, the close-up on the striking workers' feet allows us to see from the ground up, quite literally. And over the image, there is the word, "solidarity." This connection from these moments — these lived-lives to our own and to others in a history, not just of country but of labour — links to community at large, a connection initiated by this document of the strike at that place, that time: Kitchener, 1973. The metonymy of the framing, along with the word "solidarity" over the image, makes a link

to other strikers, other places.

In the film, *Reason Over Passion*, there is an epic vision of a country, a journey across the Canadian landscape in two sweeps. The constant movement, the expanse of (and expansive) landscape shows a land occasionally peopled. The sound of the Scottish bagpipes combines with the movement of sea. The coupling of that with journey and with public signs of Canada — the anthem, the flag, the political convention, the faces of political figures, in particular, Trudeau's face — gives us an evocation of place and draws our attention to the movement of time: film time and historical time. Wieland foregrounds Trudeau's phrase, "reason over passion," through quotation, making it the title of the film and a quilt. And through the sub-titled permutations of the phrase in the film, Wieland re-inserts and re-makes the phrase, embeds it in the Canadian landscape, so that it is not comment but question that she is making, not propaganda but a variation of agit-prop, agitational propaganda. It is a meditation on the subject of reason, of passion. The concurrence, the melding of word, phrase and image through the repetition of the phrase shows the fit of the phrase and also shows what doesn't fit. The film is dizzying in its capacity to contain a country in an eighty minute time span in a journey where movement is constant. There is a refusal to give destination or completion, even in its ending, a still image of a postcard.

Wieland's film language can be seen in terms of "a language of flesh and of roses," a language coming out of the body, through her choice of subject, the lexicon of the images — the receptivity to what is other; through the framing and shooting itself, a cinema that is linked to the movement of the body; and finally, through the syntax, the join, the fit, what comes after what, what joins to what.

In Wieland's work, her film language is embodied. Each shot connects to another in the way that a limb articulates (the body's speaking), the extension out. Or think of the eye — its movement — and combine that with the sense of touch.

Wieland is a keen observer of our culture. She is able to stand on the edges, able to look at what myths we're constructing, and in her body of work, she re-makes myths to give our country

its story. In her films and her visual art work, she brings together a number of similar concerns so that the works begin to form a series of cross references, giving multiple readings.

Entering the work, one is entering a labyrinth — there is a sense of play for the viewer, a number of possible routes: but how to move through it, how to regard? How to look?

Wieland asks us to look, look out of our eyes. One can move from her print where the mouths are in animated film-strip like sequence, making the anthem, "O Canada," to the film *Reason Over Passion*, where the filmmaker is mouth-ing the words of the anthem. The familiar is thus made strange, changing the ordinary (what many of us sang as school children and still sing at public events). "O Canada" becomes the signature, the voice of a place. What is very public is renewed, made meaningful. "O Canada" becomes a love song, not sentimentality, but sentiment extended out to engage a larger community. As she called it (the emotion), in her solo exhibition at the National Gallery in 1971, *True Patriot Love*; this was also the title of a film script which eventually became the feature length film, *The Far Shore*.

For Wieland, *True Patriot Love* means serving the country and its people, not with national defense but with love. It is a proposal for other ways of being, for being at the heart of what matters.

#### NOTES

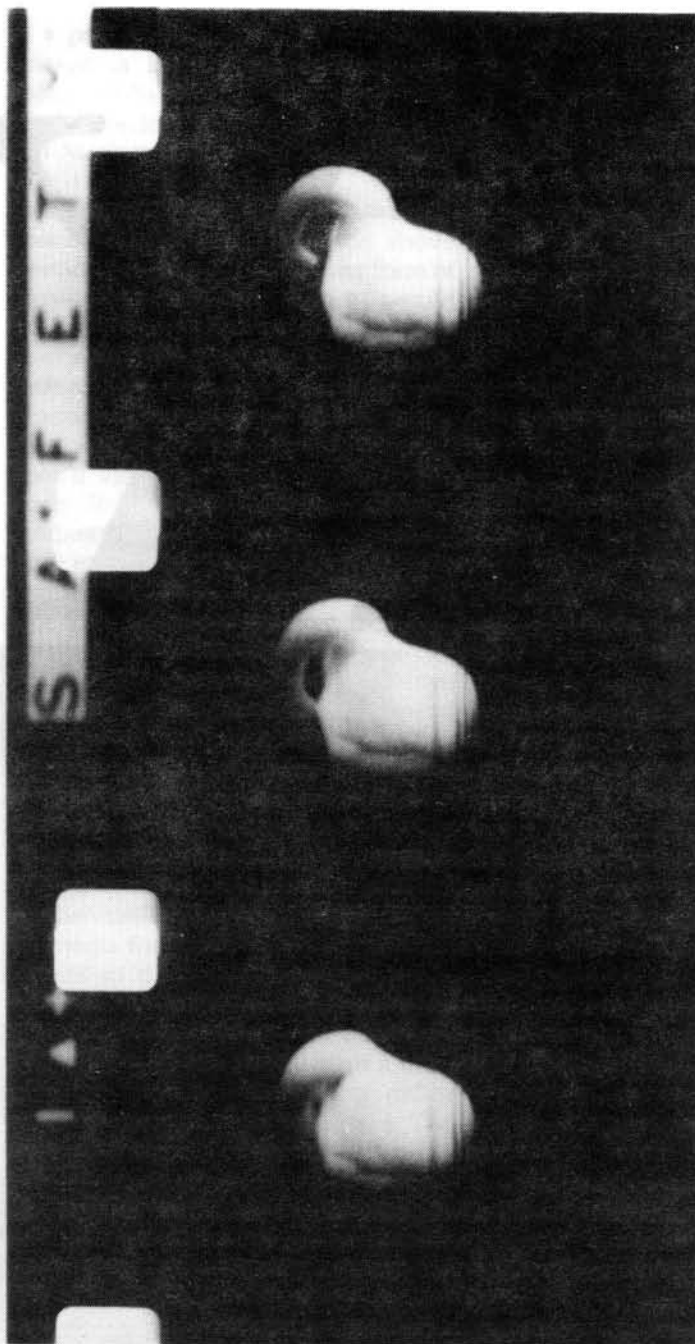
The line, "a language of flesh and of roses," comes from F.R. Scott's poem, "Laurentian Shield." Scott borrowed the phrase from Stephen Spender's "The Making of a Poem."

The references to "what matters" are inspired by Daphne Marlatt's book, *What Matters*.

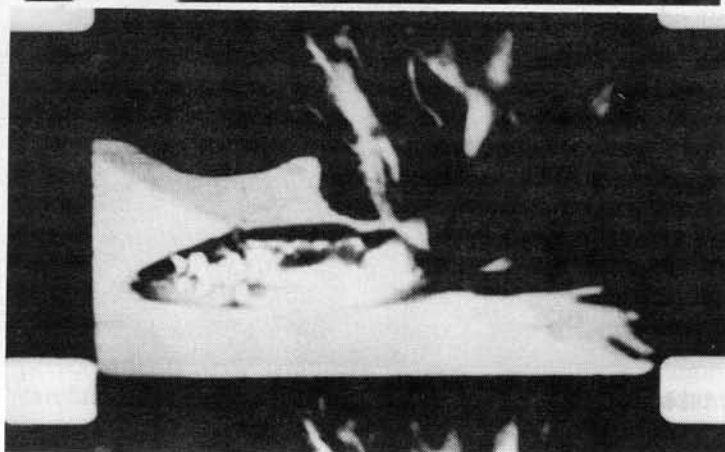
I would like to thank the Alberta Literary Arts Foundation and the Canada Council Media Arts Section for their assistance. And I would especially like to thank Joyce Wieland for her comments and support.

This paper was first presented for a panel at the Art Gallery of Ontario in April 1987 at the Retrospective of Joyce Wieland's Films.

**LEILA SUJIR** is a video artist, writer and curator living in Calgary



STILL BIRDS AT  
SUNRISE  
1972-85



CAT FOOD  
1967-68

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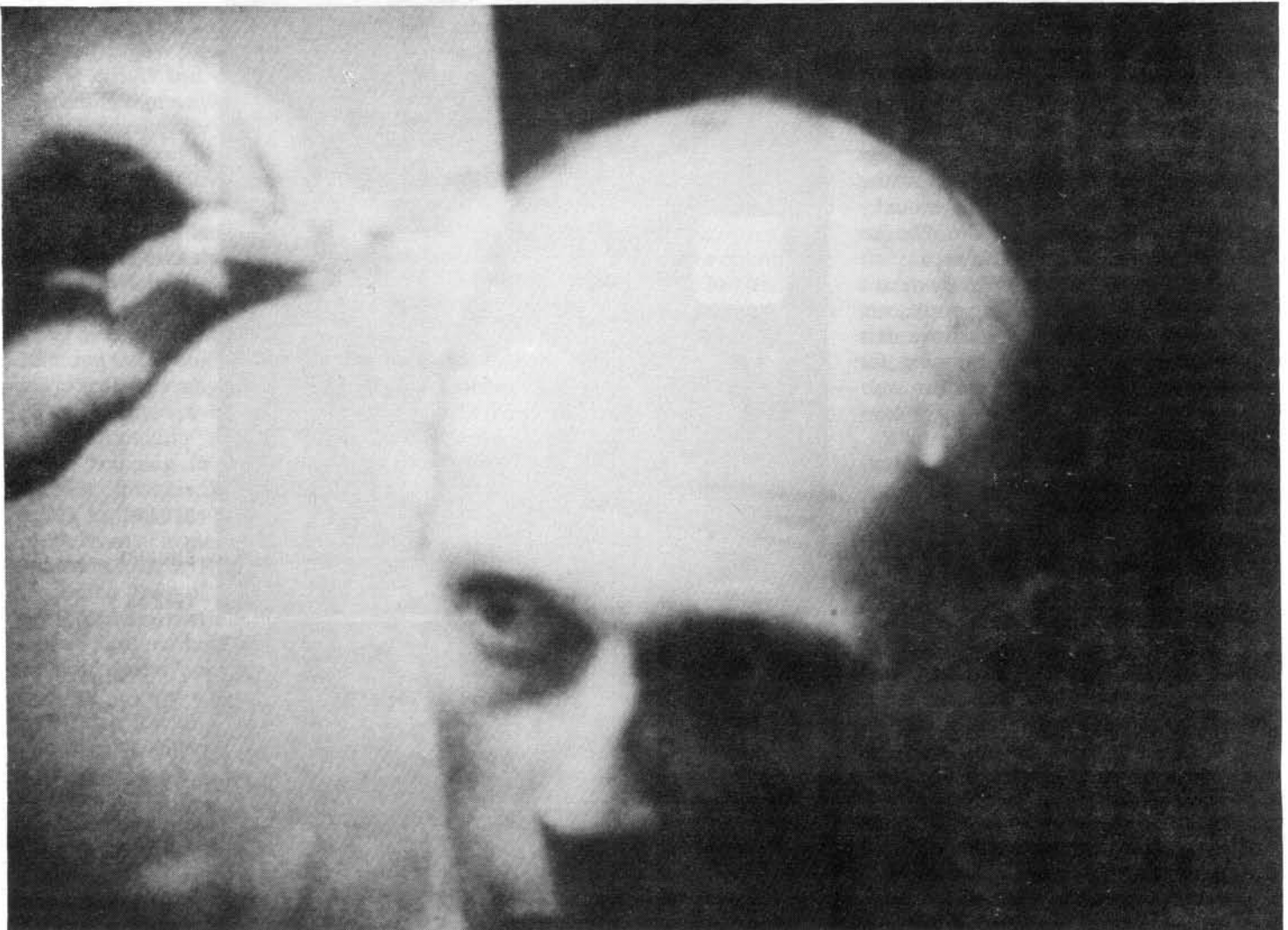
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**X** **PROJECTIONS:**  
**PETER**  
**SANDMARK**

*by Craig Masterman*



NO ORDINARY BOMB 1984

## BRAINCELL BOOGIE 1987



**Peter Sandmark is currently** in the post-production stage of a new film that marks his most ambitious undertaking to date: a half-hour, sync-sound, sci-fi film appropriately entitled: *The Cult of the Nuclear Brain Dead*. It presents us with the story of Kitty Scat — an activist/performance artist — and her nightmarish descent into a subcultural/subterranean world of sex, drugs, and Elvis worshippers .... Although this turn to fiction initially seems to be somewhat of a departure for a filmmaker whose past works have largely been considered experimental, it is nonetheless a film which can be seen in terms relative to Sandmark's output thus far. *Nuclear Brain Dead*, like many of his past efforts (including *Ritual, Dance, Release, Touch* (1981), *No Ordinary Bomb* (1984), *If the Jet Planes Bomb You Down* (1984), and *Braincell Boogie* (1987/88)), does not belong so much to a specific genre of filmmaking, but constitutes a sort of 'hybrid' genre. By that statement I mean that the film tends to allude to either one or more genres simultaneously, without ever adhering to the conventions laid down by a single one (in this case sci-fi).

**I'd like to trace the development** of this approach to filmmaking by examining these works, and to consider the method of correspondence that they undertake as 'hybrid' genres in respect

to a parent genre. What I hope will emerge is an understanding of the course of Sandmark's film and video production to date, and the relationship that *Nuclear Brain Dead* has in respect to that progression.

**Although *Ritual, Dance, Release, Touch*** is the only work of the above mentioned five to not make any form of allusion to an established genre, I would like to open this discussion of Sandmark's films with reference to it for two reasons. First, while it may not be a generic hybrid, it is certainly a formal one. *Ritual* is a film which was made from a videotape, which was in turn made from a performance piece of Sandmark's creation. The complete work reads as an exploration of human aggression. As a total work, it relies on aspects of each of the three media of which it is composed, and so is not simply a document of a performance which could otherwise be experienced in a live context. As the work centres upon the dual nature of touching as either violent or affectionate, the technical aspects of the two media are employed to assist in abstracting the definite character of gestures, and so heightens their ambiguity. This act of combining media forecasts a similar approach evident in the subsequent works, *No Ordinary Bomb* and *Braincell Boogie*. **Second, *Ritual* has at its core** this performance which encourages a multiple reading: touch as being either conciliatory or aggressive in nature. The dual reading given to the performance is complemented by a similar one in respect to the film's soundtrack. The soundtrack is a single drum beat whose rhythm varies throughout the course of the film. This variation tends to alternately suggest the sound of a heartbeat or the sound of a war drum. Its shifting reading echoes that which is given to the gestures of touching contained in the performance itself. This technique of refining the idea to a fundamental aspect carries over in a more developed manner to *No Ordinary Bomb*.

**There are two sources** of information which compose *No Ordinary Bomb*: material (sound and image) that originates from a documentary source, and which deals with the atomic bomb; and personal footage of Sandmark himself carefully shaving off his hair before a

bathroom mirror. The bulk of the documentary material is historical, and familiar to most viewers. We see footage of atom bomb tests, bomb survivors, Tibetan monks igniting themselves in acts of protest, and general war propaganda. The film cuts between the performance and the appropriated footage for its seven minute duration.

**As distinct as these two sources** are, there is nonetheless a direct correspondence between the two that unites them in their concerns and unifies the film itself as a single text. This correspondence exists in the sense that the performance is conceived both as a response to, and a filter of the information which surrounds it. The shaving action functions in respect to the documentary material on several levels of meaning.

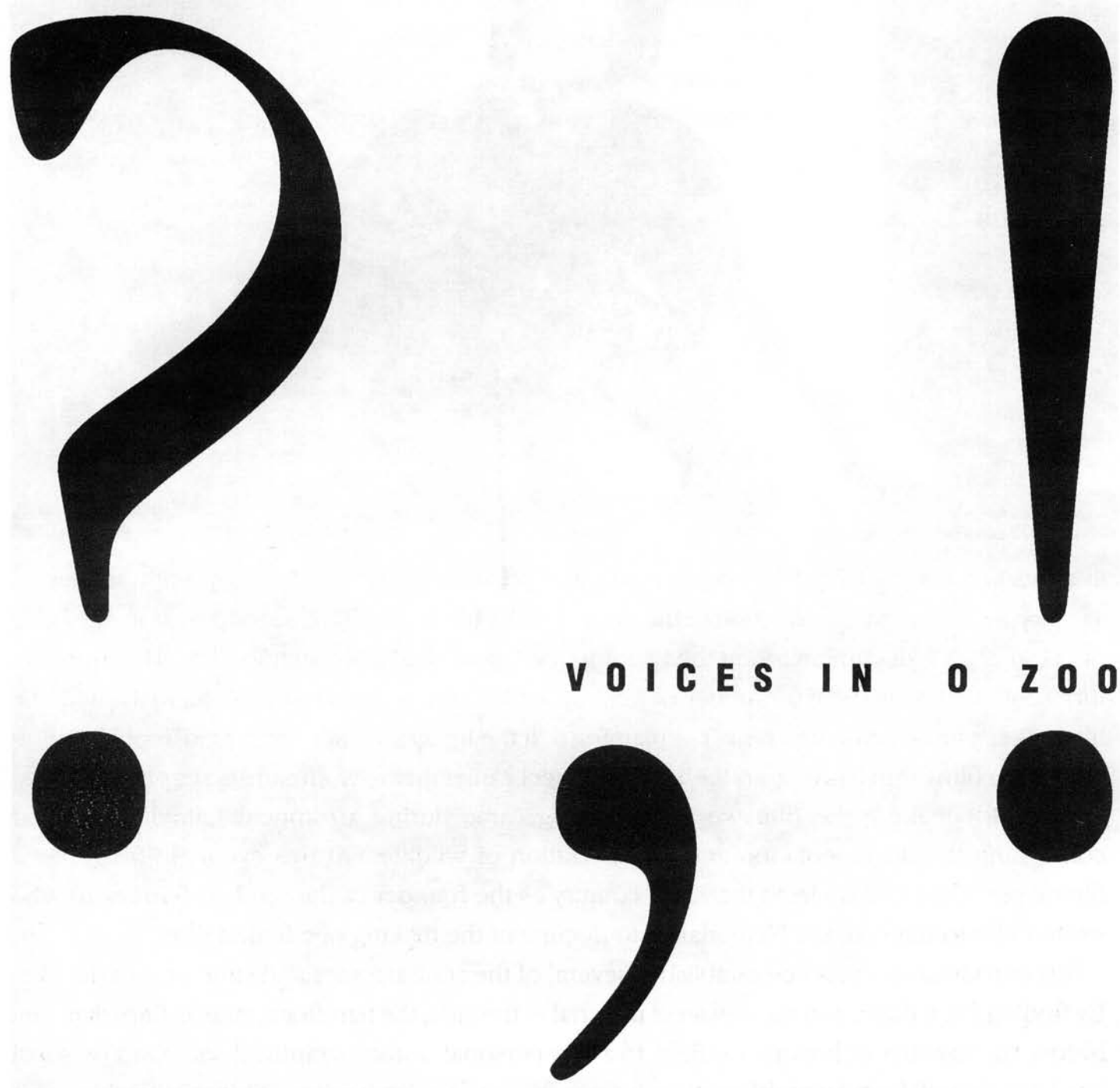
**On one level**, the shaving of Sandmark's head could be read as a reference to the bomb itself, and the notion of the earth's destruction. The razor takes on meaning as a potentially threatening object, and the shaved head in turn resembles the earth due to their shared global forms. The opening image of the film tends to confirm this, as it is a shot of Sandmark's raised hand clutching the razor, about to descend upon his head. Its appearance comes after a passage of black which opens the film wherein a voice-over lifted from a documentary explains how the original footage of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings was confiscated initially, but then released to the Japanese several years later. The voice-over creates a context for the footage of Sandmark shaving to operate within, and so gives it a reading as the confiscated material which is being referred to.

**On other levels**, the shaving makes reference to other sources, all of which are presented in the course of the film. For example, at various points it can be read as a reference to: a) the military — in the sense of a soldier's crewcut; b) the burned survivors of the bombings themselves; and c) the Tibetan monks' protest gesture of self-sacrifice.

**What is most important** to realize about Sandmark's positioning in respect to this information is that he occupies the place that would normally be reserved for the voice-over commentary were this a straight documentary. The performance absorbs all the aspects of



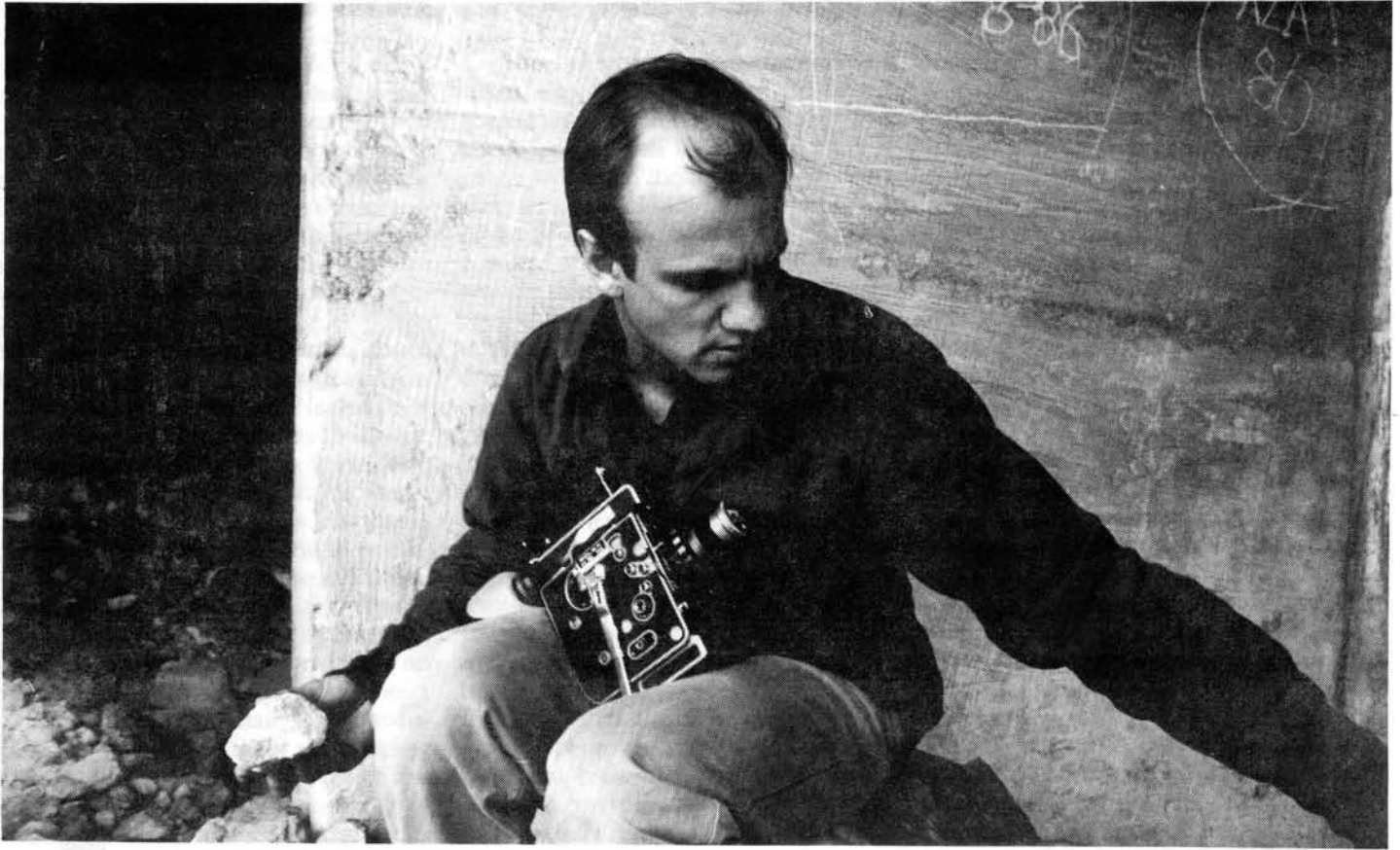




VOICES IN O ZOO

**Philip Hoffman's ?O, Zoo!** opens up questions related to our national cinema, the assumptions behind the Griersonian tradition, and the relationship of image to voice-over. The film's mode of address elicits viewer participation, and confronts us with the processes of identification.

PHILIP HOFFMAN Photo by Carl Brown



**BY PAUL MATUSEK** *?O, Zoo!* can be divided into two major parts, separated by a title sequence. The first section is an introduction to the project of the filmmaker. The second section, the body of *?O, Zoo!*, is a documentary on the making of a Peter Greenaway fiction film. The introductory sequence consists of a number of lengthy static camera shots of exotic animals, with the filmmaker's first-person voice-over explaining that the images we see are 'found' footage, originally from films shot by his grandfather, a newsreel cameraman. Hoffman also explains that the impetus for making the film we are watching came during an annual Canadian seminar concerning the documentation and categorization of wildlife. At this event Hoffman met a filmmaker (Greenaway) from the same country as the founder of the seminar (Grierson) who invited him to travel to the Netherlands to document the making of a fiction film.

This introductory sequence establishes several of the central issues and structures of the film. By finding the wildlife and the newsreel material in the attic, the narrator connects Canadian film history, an objective or impersonal field, to a very personal, autobiographical one. On a personal level, the 'found' footage problematizes his memory and understanding of his relationship to his grandfather. Hoffman tells us that he has come to a much different understanding of his grandfather through the discovery of the old man's work than "[I] remembered from our fishing

trips." The transformation worked on the film-maker's memory is left unresolved. Contradiction is redirected outward toward the viewer *via* Hoffman's formal observation regarding his grandfather's shooting style: that the wildlife shots of identical duration (28 seconds) taken from a fixed camera are incongruous with his other "erratic" newsreel footage.

For the viewer, this observation begins to evoke a questioning response to the images shown and their relationship to the authoritative narrational voice controlling the discourse to which the images belong. The initiation of a questioning response places *?O, Zoo!* in the category of the "participatory film" as identified by P. Adams Sitney in *Visionary Film*. Sitney characterizes these

films as autobiographical, concerned with the relationships of sound and image [1] and "address[ing] itself to the decision-making and logical faculties of the viewer." [2] Indeed, the narrator of *?O, Zoo!* invites the viewer to "start counting" at the beginning of each wildlife shot. It is important to note that we are not told why we are to count; we have not been assigned any "logical operation" to perform on the data. Not until after we have counted are we informed that the reason for counting is to compare the durations of the animal

shots. In other words, the narrator's request is very close to an order. Implicit is the statement, "you don't need to know why you are counting, just do it when I tell you to"; at the beginning of the shot of the camel, one could almost imagine the narrator's, "Get set. Go!"

The viewer is faced with an uncomfortable split-second choice of either blindly obeying or recalcitrantly refusing the authority of the narrator. The first option would arouse unpleasant feelings of submission, being manipulated etc., while the second choice would

force the viewer to ask her/himself "if I don't do what he asks, why watch his film at all?" Perhaps this categorization of the viewer positions is too binary. However, it is worth noting that Sitney describes the "participatory film" as emerging from "an evolution within the structural film." [3] It is ironic that a "participatory" film might effectively distance the viewer, or problematize the process of identification.

A third option: after momentary oscillation, my own response to this request was to start counting not so much out of



?O,ZOO! 1986

obedience, but so that I could verify the answer which would undoubtedly be given. (Perhaps this is why I only got to 26, not 28.) But verification itself is complicated. Rate of counting may vary; moreover, the content of the image — the camel chewing — leads the viewer to inadvertently count chews instead of seconds. The narrator's invitation to start counting closely resembles narrative processes of identification. We must suspend disbelief, or submit to the illusion/authority in order to understand and gain pleasure from narrative closure. Similarly, the narrator in *?O, Zoo!* offers us the pleasure of identification by giving us the 'correct' answer (28 seconds), against which we may compare our own answer. Also, closure is attained and meaning restored when he explains that we have been counting in order to conclude that all the wildlife shots are the same length. We can see that meaning becomes more a function of the formal structure of the film than a function of the inherent content of the image. This moment in *?O, Zoo!*, then, sets up the "participatory" structure of the film, and foregrounds the compromises or conditions of our participation.

As mentioned before, the newsreel and wildlife material 'found' by the narrator has specific historical significance in addition to its personal meaning. Canadian documentary film has traditionally been predominated by "Voice of God" narration which represents the source of Truth. Formally, the images are subordinated to the authority of the narrational voice. They act merely as pictorial evidence in support of the meaning imposed on them by the Voice of God. This formal strategy applied especially to the wartime newsreels made under Grierson at the NFB. Newsreels contained 'found' footage and sound expressively edited together with music and narration. [4] The use of 'found' footage as 'evidence' can carry the implicit assumption that because the images are 'found', and not filmed by the documentarist, they are 'more true'. That is, the 'found' images are supposedly free of intentionality since they existed prior to, and independent of any purpose for which the filmmaker could have shot them. 'Found' footage can thus function to conceal the mediational role of the interpreter.

In *?O, Zoo!*, Hoffman is playing with these assumptions and conventions by claiming that the images are 'found' (shot by his grandfather). From certain qualities of the images, we might agree that the newsreel material is 'found' footage (though possibly not shot by Hoffman's grandfather). But the superior resolution of the wildlife footage betrays its inauthenticity; it does not have the deteriorated, grainy, aged look which we might expect from film shot forty or fifty years ago. Aside from the photographic codes, the exotic content of the images — lions, camels, peacocks — are markedly 'other' to the Canadian landscape. However, despite the fact that one source may genuinely be 'found', while the other is obviously highly contrived, the point remains that within the narrator's discourse they are ontologically equivalent. Both are representations, mediated and robbed of their denotative value.

Another discourse relevant to the Canadian documentary tradition which overlaps with the Voice of God is the "Imperial Voice." According to Seth Feldman, this discourse encompasses the contradictions arising from a colonizing power (i.e., Grierson as the British representative sent to Canada) attempting to achieve a "conceptual conquest of that which is found..." [5] Basically, the colonizer undertakes the impossible project of naming and imposing (conceptual) order on the newly 'found' environment and denizens, using the unsuitable conceptual tools brought over from the "Imperial centre": thus the process of containing the Other is never complete.

We may read *?O, Zoo!* as subverting the coherence of the Imperial Voice. Here, the film-maker is positioned as a colonizer, or a 'namer'. Hoffman travels to the Netherlands, a foreign land (and also historically a trading and colonizing nation itself), to document a film being made there. The narrator demonstrates his preoccupation with Nature, the land and beasts of the 'new' world. He comments that his arrival coincides with the new moon. The allusion to the annual Grierson seminar devoted to the naming and categorization of wildlife, as well as the grandfather's footage of animals, further testify to this preoccupation. Even the narrator's invitation to

count marks an intervention of the Imperial Voice. The narrator is attempting to 'make sense' of the 'found' footage. The fact that our counting is thrown off by the camel's chewing exemplifies the inappropriateness of the colonizer's language. The measurement of time (in seconds) belongs to the 'namer's' temporal system. It is meaningless in relation to the content of the images themselves.

In *?O, Zoo!* the process of naming is problematized. The credit sequence shows a black and white slow motion image of a swan, over which the *name* of the film is (super-) imposed. Even the unconventional syntax of the title *?O, Zoo!* suggests an incoherence in the language of the colonizer. The quality of the image, the optical printing, the black and white film stock, and the synthesizer music (digital reproduction) foreground the mediation involved in the representation of the 'found' Other.

The second major part of the film — the diary — is structured by sets of opposing representations of the same moment or event. The first diary entry is taken from a Dutch television representation of the papal visit. Structurally, it is significant to both the succeeding entries and the first part of the film. It is interesting that the narrator would choose to represent his 'first impression' of the 'found' land with 'found footage'. In a sense, both the land (the 'real') and TV broadcast (representation) are equally valid as his impressions of the Netherlands; they are equally 'found' in relation to the newly arrived narrator. Here, as in the first part of the film where the narrator includes his grandfather's footage in a (brief) re-evaluation of his relationship to the man, the ontological difference between the 'real' and representation is blurred.

The next diary entry, which features a religious statue, counterpoints the TV broadcast. The narrator claims that some local children have explained to him why the statue has been defaced — again, related to the papal visit. This second entry gives a very different point of view on the papal visit, a more peripheral perspective on the event, unlike the TV coverage. Similarly, the entry which deals with documenting "scene 68" (of Greenaway's film) is structured by a juxtaposition of 'central' and 'periph-

## A ZED AND TWO NOUGHTS by PETER GREENAWAY 1986



eral' perspectives. A short clip from Greenaway's film is inserted, then the narrator briefly explains that the crew had to go to the zoo to film scene 68 in which a character gets in the tiger cage. We are shown a low angle of a pair of caged tigers "waiting for their call." Apparently they are not 'on camera', not the (film crew's) focus of attention. Thus, Hoffman is choosing to represent a peripheral point of view instead of the 'main interest' — the filming of scene 68.

We are also told that two young boys approach the narrator asking to peek through the view-finder. The low angle of the caged tigers suggest that it is their point of view. The narrator decides that the boys should be his guide because they know the zoo (at least better than Greenaway's film crew). The children take Hoffman outside, away from the 'important' event (i.e., the film crew).

We can see a pattern emerging based on the opposition of adult and child perceptions. The highly mediated representations of the TV and the clips from the fiction film constitute what may be conventionally considered the central point of interest — the adult sphere. On

the other hand, there is the peripheral view associated with a child's point of view which seems more immediate. Hoffman may identify with the latter point of view, but the subject position created is complicated by the fact that as a film-maker he is himself a mediator.

Allowing the children to act as guides is relevant to our discussion of both the Imperial Voice and the Voice of God. The work of Greenaway's film crew parallels the intervention of the Imperial Voice. The crew intends to represent the zoo on their terms, as part of their fiction; thus, they are imposing meaning on the 'found' Other. Instead of imposing meaning on the zoo using his own 'foreign tongue', the narrator chooses to have the children who visit often represent it to him on their own terms. Although the boys' discourse is circumscribed by the narrator's, we may nevertheless say that he is acknowledging the limitations of his Imperial discourse: his inability to know the land because he is not native to it. Similarly, the simple fact that children are chosen as guides undermines the 'authority' of the Voice of God.

On Day 12 children are again the focus of Hoffman's attention. The narrator observes two children playing at a tourist trap in an oversized pair of wooden clogs. He comments that the children are being brushed aside by "their parents" who wish to have their picture taken in the spectacular clogs. The image is composed with the children playing in the large clogs in the foreground, delightfully unaware of the crowds of tourists bustling around them, or even of the adults who briefly interrupt their play.

In the left foreground is a rack of oil paintings. We are asked, "Do you see the painting of the young girl? It is the only one where the subject is looking back." This question belongs to the participatory mode of address. The viewer must scrutinize the paintings to test the narrator's claim. Similarly, we search the image for the photographer for whom, according to Hoffman, the parents are posing. However, we are left unable to verify the assertion because the rack of oil paintings blocks our view. A photographer may, or may not be set up behind the paintings.



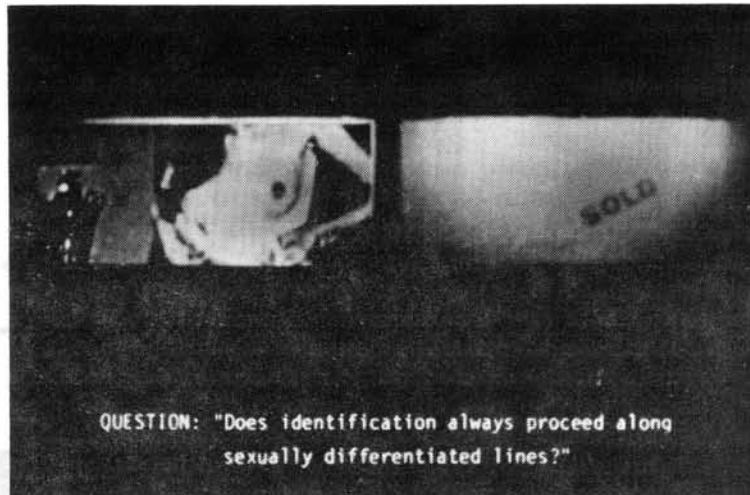
# AMERI<sub>K</sub>A

AND THE DESTRUCTION AESTHETIC

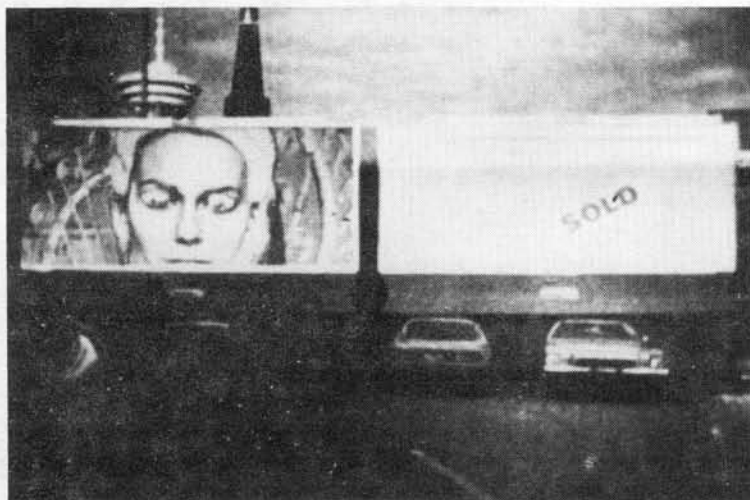


AMERIKA The Wildwest Show 1981

**BY ERIC FERGUSON**  *Amerika*, a major experimental film by Al Razutis, explores, dissects, and challenges western mass-media and the culture which surrounds it. *Amerika* also aims to challenge and ultimately undermine the perceptual habits of its own audience and, at least ideally, the audience of mass-media.



AMERIKA: Motel Row Part 2 1976



AMERIKA: The Wildwest Show



AMERIKA: Refrain 1982

*Amerika*'s methods are diverse and the issues it addresses are often complex. Nevertheless, its many elements tend to converge on a central idea: the notion of destruction. At times the destruction seems nihilistic, but there is method to *Amerika*'s apparent madness. Destruction is used here as a solution to or cure for a condition of accelerating social decline — a way of cleaning the system, but with corrosive cleanser. *Amerika* proposes to fight fire with fire. Images and other elements are borrowed from mass-media sources and then re-contextualized to expose and destroy the thought systems which they create and perpetuate. The apparatus of mass-media is used to similar ends by expanding its technical applications well beyond those found in the popular arena. The section titled *Exiles* concludes with an image which to my mind is the perfect abbreviation for the film — an axe buried in the screen of a television set. The television is a media-saturated culture gone insane, and *Amerika* is the medicinal axe.

*Amerika*'s assault takes many forms. There are 17 distinct, separately titled sections in the film, and some of these (*Refrain*, *98.3 KHz (Bridge At Electrical Storm)*, and *The Wildwest Show*) are themselves segmented and then presented as independent sections.

Two of the first three sections and implicitly the fourth end with atomic bomb explosions — and the image of a mushroom cloud. As tempting as it is to interpret this gesture as some sort of statement against war or nuclear weapons, this interpretation — with the possible exception of its use in *Atomic Gardening* — is really only of peripheral importance in *Amerika*. The explosions function here as a series of cataclysms — indeed apocalypses. Their inclusion has the feeling of both social prophecy and prescription. The implications of the apocalypse in the film's first section, *The Cities Of Eden*, are most intriguing. Placed where it is, apocalypse represents a Fall from Eden and, by extension, the loss of innocence. But what is Eden, and what sort of innocence are we concerned with here? The early twentieth century society alluded to is no paradise, and its people are not entirely innocent — they are slowly managing to get their machines to work and they are marching in large numbers towards universal suffrage. However, in historical terms, this society is at the threshold of an era which it cannot yet comprehend — an era which subsists on its ever-advancing technologies. Perhaps technology is the impetus for the crisis towards which the section builds, and the Fall from Eden is the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil about that technology and the world that it would shape. By destroying Eden, perhaps *Amerika* is rejecting the innocence of the pre-technology-, and particularly the pre-mass-media-world view.

In addition to being a historical predecessor to the society dealt with in the rest of *Amerika*, Eden is a parallel world with its own wars, amusements, and discontents. In a sense it offers an encapsulated view of the whole of *Amerika*, but from a distanced — historical — perspective. The destruction of Eden signals the destruction of our own Eden — the destruction of a more contemporary western civilization which is similarly unable to compre-



hend the dangers inherent in its own technological crisis: the advent of media technology. More than simply a historical preface, *The Cities Of Eden* functions as an omen predicting the impending and seemingly inevitable apocalypse that lurks over the remainder of the film.

In *98.3 KHz (Bridge At Electrical Storm)* we see another sort of destructive tactic at work. In this case the image on the screen and our perceptions of that image are the subjects of our concern. As this section begins, we appear to be in a car driving over a suspension bridge. As time passes our view of the suspension bridge changes and the bridge itself appears to become electrically charged. Through most of the rest of this section we have the sensation of driving through a corridor of violently shifting patterns of light and sound towards another sort of apocalypse. At first, it is the bridge and the world around it being destroyed. However, we quickly become aware that what we are observing is not actually a bridge, but rather an image of a bridge — the colour filtering, the constant colour shifts, and the observable joins in the film quickly undermine any illusions of realism we may have had — and what is actually being destroyed is the clarity of the original image. It seems, then, that we are viewing an apocalypse of the image. This presents us with another problem: deciding whether we are really witnessing a dissolution or rather a metamorphosis of the image. Although it becomes less 'realistic', the image is clearly changing into a distinct visual entity with its own properties and features of interest for the viewer.

More than anything else it is our perceptual and interpretative habits being attacked here. The cinematic vocabulary used and the perceptual and interpretative skills necessary to deal with this vocabulary lie outside the conventions of the dominant western media tradition. By creating this deviant visual and sonic environment, *93.8 KHz (Bridge At Electrical Storm)* challenges its audience and provides an opportunity for liberation from the more confining perceptual habits that accompany the contemporary media experience. Again we see the film's apocalyptic stratagem — the destruction of one system of understanding by way of a violent act — leaving room for a second, broader vision.

A third sort of destruction in the work is the destruction of America itself, or more properly, the image of America presented by the media: an optimistic America filled with shiny glass skyscrapers, luxurious suburban estates, and beautiful people who lead interesting and exciting lives. Rzutis' America is gloomy and desolate and full of signs of a civilization in decay. The ever-present graffiti chronicles the discontent of a desperate age along inner city streets and on the disintegrating walls of condemned buildings and houses. The glamour of Las Vegas is trivialized by our penetration into the city's motel rooms — brothels of TV violence and pornography. Television is everywhere, inescapable, and relentless in its sexism, its violence, and its manipulations. And what of the inhabitants of this wasteland, what are they like? In *Refrain*, we see a confused media-saturated clown. In *The Lonesome Death of Leroy Brown* (2nd half) we see a violent and obsessive beer-swigging, gun-swinging, iron-pumping

thug who gets a disturbing sort of satisfaction — seemingly sexual — while watching a repeated sequence of violence on a television. The only sane people here are the dissidents — the discontented intelligentsia armed with spray paint. According to *Amerika*, the collapse of western civilization is not only inevitable, it is at hand.

Despite *Amerika*'s prevailing pessimism, it appears there is light at the end of this tunnel: "and then We shall start anew ... East of Eden." This statement appears as a caption at the end of *The Cities Of Eden* — the beginning of the film — and is echoed at the very end of the film. Clearly there is an underlying concern in *Amerika* for what will happen after the destruction — beyond the apocalypse. The destruction does indeed seem to be a prelude to the creation of something new. Although this in itself shows a certain optimism, the film reneges on the details of this new start. Considering how intent *Amerika* is on breaking down traditional systems of understanding, it is curious that the film is so reluctant to seize the opportunity to suggest alternatives. We are left to work this out on our own.

Yet this apparent omission is itself an important component of *Amerika*'s methodology. Throughout the film we are challenged in this way — we are made to work for our answers — and almost always the answers themselves are elusive. In fact we are quite often faced with the problem of having to sort out or weave together a multiplicity of meanings in a given section. Ambiguities and complexities are created and then left unresolved. Predictably, as we learn in *Photo Spot*, the filmmaker himself is intent on being uncooperative when it comes to resolving the complications that exist in the film and the world to which the film alludes — he is certainly unwilling and perhaps unable to take us by the hand and show us an easily digested new set of truths. It is as though confusion has been introduced as a tool to bait us into thinking for ourselves. The mechanics of *Amerika*'s presentation seem calculated throughout and we are persuaded that our interpretative efforts will be rewarded. Because so much information is missing, however, piecing together clear and complete interpretations without complications and contradictions is practically impossible. In addition to allowing for the coexistence of multiple meanings, this strategy enables *Amerika* to suggest certain relationships and make certain insinuations without allowing us to feel certain about the conclusions we reach.

An elusive presentation in itself is of course nothing new for an experimental film. What is special here is the film's attempt to communicate what appears to be a vital political message. If the film does have a precise political message, and this is certainly not clear, simpler and more easily digestible formats could have been used, thus greatly increasing the impact of the message. However, simplicity of presentation seems purposefully avoided. Wading through and sorting out the complexities is part of what the film is all about. *Amerika* seems to operate on the premise that the conclusions we reach are all the more valuable if there is a struggle in reaching them.

*Atomic Gardening* is a classic example of this sort of construction. In this section, we watch time-lapse se-

quences of simple forms of plant life growing out of panels of electronic circuitry marked "NATO" that have been submerged in water. The soundtrack is made up of machinery sounds and voices. Some of the voices sound like they are from a military intercom while others appear to be explanations about the operations of various pieces of military equipment. How do we make sense of these seemingly related but oddly juxtaposed elements? What possible relationship could there be between this plant growth and the military? A multitude of impressions come to mind. For example, on one level the plant growth might be a metaphor for a military build-up or expansionism that is threatening to engulf civilization. At times, the rapid growth we observe looks a bit like a mass launching of missiles or even a series of nuclear explosions. Is there a pun here on the 'mushrooming' growth patterns we observe and a mushroom cloud — a recurring image in the film? Looked at in a different way the plant growth suggests weeds pushing up through the cracks of sidewalks — i.e., plant life as an eroding force. However, is it our cities that are being eroded (by either a growing military presence or a creeping mass of nuclear fallout) or does the eroding circuitry panel in fact represent an eroding military technology? Perhaps we are witnessing the obsolescence of successive generations of nuclear missile systems — the circuitry panels are indeed presented as cast-offs, technology being dumped in the ocean. Rather than being weeds, perhaps the plant growth represents some sort of life force struggling with and engulfing the military apparatus.

*Atomic Gardening* is effective and satisfying precisely because it does not make its intentions clear. All of the interpretations suggested above have some merit although none of them on their own can explain the section fully. Although we come away from the section with merely a series of impressions about the military presence in western civilization — interpretative fragments — in the process we have been challenged, forced to exercise our interpretative abilities. It is here that the section's greatest value lies. Unlike the products of television and popular cinema, where the thinking is done for us, *Amerika* asks us to decide for ourselves what is important and how we should think about it.

*(Fin)\** is similarly concerned with challenging our ability to come to terms with a multitude of ideas, but here the challenge is taken one step further. In addition to challenging our interpretative abilities, *(Fin)\** attacks our capacity to gather and comprehend visual information. The three coinciding visual elements (the small frame within the parentheses, the faint larger image, and the moving subtitles in neon sign format at the bottom of the screen) compete for our attention and at any given time at least two of these elements are compelling. The visual conflicts created are both stimulating and overwhelming. For example, at the same time that the famous *Psycho* shower murder is displayed in small frame, the subtitles read, "Question: Did Lacan suck Freud's dead phallus so the village elders could masturbate to his older image ... Answer: Hubris." Where do we focus our attention? Because of the pace of this sequence, juggling these two



AMERIKA: The Lonesome Death of Leroy Brown 1983



AMERIKA: The Lonesome Death of Leroy Brown 1983



AMERIKA: The Lonesome Death of Leroy Brown 1983

elements is practically impossible, but because of the striking nature of the material used we are persuaded to give it a try. In addition to the visual onslaught there are other broader questions raised which further complicate our efforts. In general is it text or image that win our interest? How do our preconceptions about the content of images and the text affect our impressions? What are the relationships between the elements presented, if any, and how do the contents of the elements relate to the motives of this section and the film as a whole? The pace throughout the section is uniformly brisk and we cannot hope to unravel even a fraction of the intricacies of this visual and intellectual labyrinth. Here again the *struggle* to comprehend is of prime importance.

Yet (*Fin*)\* is more than an exercise, it is a demonstration of the operations of our own information gathering and assimilating facilities, the self-probing we are pressured into elsewhere in *Amerika*. Throughout the film there is a fundamental mistrust of the influence of our perceptual processes on the content of our thought — a mistrust of how we see and think in arriving at what we think we've seen. *Amerika* provides an opportunity for us to expose the workings of our perceptual processes and in so doing encourages an attitude of skepticism towards information received through these processes. *Amerika* is not only an attack on western culture and the social and political apparatuses which sustain it, it is also an attack aimed at the pliant mental process which perpetuates the status quo.

Much of the America we encounter in the film is seen from its streets and highways. In *Motel Row* (parts 1 and 2), *98.3 KHz (Bridge At Electrical Storm)*, *The Wasteland And Other Stories*, and *The Lonesome Death Of Leroy Brown*, we are on journeys of discovery, exploring numerous features of America's physical as well as cultural landscape. Of these, *The Lonesome Death Of Leroy Brown* is the most far-reaching in its aspirations. A closer look at this section reveals its structure, the insinuations it makes about its audience, and the conditions faced by women in the shadow of mass-media.

On our journey from Vancouver to New York City we see America through alternating shots from the right and left sides of cars and trains. Despite the changing landscape, we quickly develop an expectation for a structural/materialist film — on a superficial level there are similarities with parts of Snow's *Standard Time*,  $\longleftrightarrow$ , and Rimmer's *Canadian Pacific*. However, as our journey progresses this expectation is undermined. In Detroit the man in the trenchcoat from *Exiles* is reintroduced in several shots and by the time we reach New York other familiar features from elsewhere in the film have re-emerged. When we finally zero in on the woman character from *Exiles*, the structural/materialist aspect of the section breaks down completely. The development here is interesting not only for its manipulations of form and our expectations about form but also for what it suggests about the historical progression of the experimental film tradition. The structural/materialist concerns break down seemingly because of the introduction of the politically charged fragments from elsewhere in the film — the film

can no longer withstand the intrusion of the political concerns and it breaks under pressure. Clearly the suggestion is that the structural/materialist film had to give way to a more politically vibrant cinema, and indeed for the remainder of the section the political concerns are paramount.

When watching the short segment where the camera pursues the woman, we carry with us a number of important impressions from elsewhere in the film. These impressions shape for us the impact of this segment. As the camera follows its subject it starts literally shooting snapshots. The woman's space has been violated and she has become an unwilling participant in a voyeur's photo session. Without a doubt we sense a male presence behind the camera. The persistent camera threatens to corner the woman and transform her into one of the media icons we encounter in *A Message From Our Sponsor*. As in *A Message From Our Sponsor*, the camera scrutinizes its female subject — it watches, chases, and fetishizes. The camera robs her of her 'self' — she becomes a victim of the apparatus of mass media. In a similar way we are reminded of the treatment of the images of women in *Motel Row* (part 2), where the images respond in accordance to men's sexual desires. Will she undress for the camera here as the women do in *Motel Row*, or indeed as she did herself in *Exiles*? (*Fin*)\* demonstrates that the popular cinema is no less guilty of victimizing its female subjects. In selections borrowed from *Psycho*, *Repulsion*, and *The Night Of the Living Dead*, women are murdered, molested, and eaten. When the car begins to chase the woman near the end of the sequence in *The Lonesome Death Of Leroy Brown*, we are particularly reminded of the short part of *Refrain* before *The Wasteland And Other Stories* where a woman is forced into a car on the remote highway. With these images in mind we understand the motivations behind the movements of that threatening camera. We also understand the apprehension the woman is experiencing. We are shown in *Amerika* what a powerful instrument the camera is for exploiting, reducing, and controlling women, and all seemingly for the benefit of that presence behind the camera. In the first part of *The Lonesome Death Of Leroy Brown* we get a vivid account of this horrifying presence on the make.

The "horrifying presence" behind the camera is of course the film's own audience, and in effect, you and me. It is we who are intrigued by the drama before us, and thirsty for it to continue. In *Refrain*, and especially here in *The Lonesome Death Of Leroy Brown*, *Amerika* is insidious in its criticisms of its audience, and by implication the audience of mass-media. In *Refrain*, we watch ourselves watching *Amerika* — we are both frightening and frightened, as well as characterless and confused. In the second part of *The Lonesome Death Of Leroy Brown* we come face to face with one vision of the presence behind the camera (ourselves still?) — and what a truly horrifying presence it is. A man, his face obscured by a nylon mask, points the camera about the room simultaneously controlling and controlled by the images in his narrow world. He is suicidal, but interestingly he is torn between shooting himself directly and shooting the



AMERIKA: The Wasteland and Other Stories 1976



AMERIKA: Atomic Gardening 1981

camera and in effect us — the audience which he represents. Significantly he is captivated by a television sequence which repeats endlessly. Like the stagnant product so relished by popular culture, this redundancy marks each successive turn in the whirlpool descent towards self-destruction.

This section has a curiously Marxist flavour but with some interesting deviations. Media — a proxy for Marx's vision of capitalism — increasingly feeds on and oppresses its co-opted participants and its audience — i.e., the proletariat. In both parts of this section the events build to inevitable crisis points, crises that are answered by violence from the victims of the oppression. However, in *Amerika* simple solutions are avoided with a vengeance and, predictably, we are not indulged with a happy ending. *Amerika*'s politics favour revolution — a social apocalypse — but resist any sort of romantic Marxist vision concerning post-revolutionary society. The Marxist formula is thus incomplete. Yet this gap is consistent with structures found elsewhere in the film and in the film as a

whole: we are taken to the dawn of a new social era here, as we are taken just beyond the gates of Eden, to only the threshold of a post-apocalyptic world. In contrast to both Marxist theory and Christian mythology concerning the apocalypse, *Amerika* offers no guarantee of a post-revolutionary, post-apocalyptic utopia for either the chosen social classes or the blessed. Appropriately, revolution itself is viewed with a certain tentativeness. In the first part of *The Lonesome Death Of Leroy Brown*, the violence is at best only a qualified success: although the camera no longer follows its subject, it still 'sees', the woman is still on the run, and the horrifying presence spills over into the second part with a new intensity. In the second part the violence is again somewhat of a failure because the suicidal figure remains alive afterwards. Just like the recurring violent drama on this figure's television, it remains possible that this story will repeat itself endlessly without effecting any sort of real change.

In *Amerika*, Razutis offers a vision of a society racing towards self-destruction. Its destruction aesthetic is directed at exposing defects in the complex fabric of western culture. In *Amerika*, nothing is sacred, especially the thought patterns and perceptual habits of its own audience — principal villains in perpetuating the apparatus that is instigating social decline. Our challenge is to reject our Edens and the security and comfort of complacency. Our slates are cleaned — our minds are sharpened and our senses intensified — so that our thoughts become ours to control and not media pre-determined, so that we might "... start anew ... east of Eden."

#### AMERIKA

- THE CITIES OF EDEN* (1976, 16mm, colour, sound)
- SOFTWARE/HEAD TITLE* (1972, 16mm, colour, sound)
- VORTEX* (1972, 16mm, colour, sound)
- ATOMIC GARDENING* (1981, 16mm, colour, sound)
- MOTEL ROW (PART I)* (1981, 16mm, colour, sound)
- 98.3 KHZ (BRIDGE AT ELECTRICAL STORM) (PART I)* (1973, 16mm, colour, sound)
- MOTEL ROW (PART II)* (1976, 16mm, colour, sound)
- THE WASTELAND AND OTHER STORIES* (1976, 16mm, colour, sound)
- MOTEL ROW (PART III)* (1981, 16mm, colour, sound)
- 98.3 KHZ (BRIDGE AT ELECTRICAL STORM) (PART II)* (1973, 16mm, colour, sound)
- THE WILDWEST SHOW* (1981, 16mm, colour, sound)
- A MESSAGE FROM OUR SPONSOR* (1979, 16mm, colour, sound)
- PHOTO SPOT* (1983, 16mm, colour, sound)
- EXILES* (1983, 16mm, colour, sound)
- THE LONESOME DEATH OF LEROY BROWN* (1983, 16mm, colour, sound)
- (FIN)\** (1983, 16mm, colour, sound)
- O KANADA* (1982, 16mm, colour, sound)
- (1972-83, 16mm, colour/b/w, sound, 170 min.)**

**NOTE:** *THE WILDWEST SHOW INTERRUPTED BY A MESSAGE FROM OUR SPONSOR* may be rented separately from *AMERIKA*.

# R Recent books and journals on E xperimental/avant-garde film

**COMPILED BY MICHAEL ZRYD** What follows is a listing of books and journals published since 1985 which pertain to experimental/avant-garde film. The definition of 'pertinence' is, of course, as debatable as the definitions of 'experimental' and 'avant-garde' cinema; when in doubt, I have have erred on the side of inclusivity. Nevertheless, this list does not claim to be complete and readers of the *The Independent Eye* who detect gaps are invited to inform the editor(s) for listing in future issues. Asterisks (\*) indicate books which are available by special order; see information at the end of the bibliography. Some books which are outside the post-1985 time frame of this bibliography are included when available by special order.

## Books

- ABEL, RICHARD. *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- ABEL, RICHARD, ed. *French Film Theory and Criticism 1907-1939*. 2 vol. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- AUMONT, JACQUES. *Montage Eisenstein*. Trans. Lee Hildreth, Constance Penley, and Andrew Ross. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- BECKETT, SAMUEL. *Samuel Beckett: Teleplays*. Ed. Stan Douglas et al. Catalogue. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1988. \*ARTEXTE
- BLANCHETTE, MANON et al., eds. *Blickpunkte, I & II*. Catalogue. Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and Goethe-Institut Montréal, 1989. (Section on German cinema.) \*ARTEXTE
- BLAZWICK, IWONA, ed. *A Situationist Scrapbook: An endless adventure...an endless passion...an endless bouquet....* London: ICA Verso, 1989. \*PM
- BOCKRIS, VICTOR. *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol*. New York: Bantam, 1989.
- BOURDON, DAVID. *Warhol*. New York: Abrams, 1989.
- BRAKHAGE, JANE. *From the Book of Legends*. New York: Granary Books, 1989. (Sections on Joseph Cornell and Maya Deren.) \*PM
- BRAKHAGE, STAN. *Film At Wit's End*. Kingston, NY: Documentext, 1989. \*MC
- BRAKHAGE, STAN. *I . . . Sleeping (Being a Dream Journal and Parenthetical Explication)*. Staten Island, NY: Island Cinema Resources and Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1988. \*ANTH
- BRUNING, JÜRGEN AND ANDREAS WILDFANG, eds. *Berlin: Images in Progress: Contemporary Berlin Filmmaking*. Catalogue. Buffalo, NY: Hallwalls, 1989.
- BRUNSDEN, CHARLOTTE. *Films for Women*. London: BFI, 1986.
- CASTLE, TED AND JULIA BALLERINI, ed. *Carolee Schneemann: Early & Recent Work 1960-82*. Kingston, NY: Documentext, 1983. \*MC

- CHA, THERESA HAK KYUNG, ed. *Apparatus*. New York: Tanam Press, 1981. (Articles by Maya Deren, Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, and Dziga Vertov.) \*PM
- CHILD, ABIGAIL. *A Motive for Mayhem*. Elmwood, CT: Potes and Poet's Press, 1989.
- CHRISTIE, IAN AND DAVID ELLIOTT. *Eisenstein at Ninety*. Catalogue. Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, 1988.
- CLANDFIELD, DAVID. *Canadian Film*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987. (Section on Canadian experimental film.)
- CLARK, VÈVÈ A., MILLICENT HODSON, AND CATRINA NEIMAN. *The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Biography and Collected Works. Vol. 1, Part Two: CHAMBERS (1942-47)*. New York: Anthology Film Archives/Film Culture, 1988. (Vol. 1, Part One: SIGNATURES (1917-42) published in 1984.) \*ANTH
- BRUCE CONNER. Catalogue. Santa Monica, CA: Michael Kohn Gallery, 1990.
- CRAFTON, DONALD. *Emile Cohl: Caricature and Film*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- CURTIS, DAVID, ed. *The Elusive Sign: British Avant-Garde Film & Video 1977-87*. Catalogue. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1987.
- DALE, R. C. *The Films of René Clair*. 2 vol. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1986.
- DE LAURETIS, TERESA. *Technologies of Gender*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. (Sections on Chantal Akerman, Laura Mulvey, and Yvonne Rainer.)
- DEREN, MAYA. *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. Kingston, NY: Documentext, 1984. \*MC
- DONALD, JAMES. *Fantasy and the Cinema*. London: BFI, 1989. (Sections on Cecelia Condit, Marguerite Duras, and Jan Svankmajer.)
- DUCHAMP, MARCEL. *Rotoreliefs*. Köln: Gebr. König Postkartenverlag, 1987. \*PM.
- EISENSTEIN, S. M. *Eisenstein on Disney*. Ed. Jay Leyda. Trans. Alan Upchurch. London: Methuen, 1986, 1988.
- EISENSTEIN, S. M. *On the Composition of the Short Fiction Scenario*. Trans. Alan Upchurch. London: Methuen, 1984, 1988.
- EISENSTEIN, S. M. *The Psychology of Composition*. Ed. and trans. Alan Upchurch. London: Methuen, 1987, 1988.
- EISENSTEIN, S. M. *S. M. Eisenstein: Selected Works: Volume 1: Writings, 1922-34*. Ed. and trans. Richard Taylor. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- EISENSTEIN, S. M. *S. M. Eisenstein: Selected Works: Volume 2: Towards a Theory of Montage*. Ed. and trans. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- ELDER, R. BRUCE. *The Body in Film*. Catalogue. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989. \*AGO
- ELDER, R. BRUCE. *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press in collaboration with the Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television, 1989.
- FINKELSTEIN, NAT. *Andy Warhol: The Factory Years 1964-67*. New York: St. Martins, 1989.
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## SPECIAL ORDER BOOKS INFORMATION

- \*AGO Available from the Art Gallery of Ontario, Film Department, 317 Dundas Street West, Toronto, ON M5T 1G4.
- \*ANTH Available from Anthology Film Archives, 32-34 Second Ave., New York, NY 10003. (Anthology also has for sale monographs on Sidney Peterson, Jean Epstein, Barry Gerson, Alexander Hammid, Larry Jordan, Werner Nekes & Dore O, Stan Brakhage, Dziga Vertov, Kenneth Anger, Bruce Baillie, Robert Breer, Ken Jacobs, and Robert Nelson & William Wiley, in addition to other books, catalogues, and journals. They publish a free mail-order catalogue.)
- \*ARTEXTE Available from ARTEXTE, 3575, boul. Saint-Laurent, suite 303, Montréal, QC H2X 2T7.
- \*HM Available from Holmes & Meier, 30 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003.
- \*MC Available from McPherson & Company, Box 1126, Kingston, NY 12401.
- \*PM Available from Printed Matter, 77 Wooster Street, New York, NY 10012.
- \*SFC Available from San Francisco Cinematheque, 480 Potrero Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94110.
- \*STARR Available from Cecile Starr, 50 West 96th Street, New York, NY 10025.

## JOURNALS (ADDRESSES ARE PROVIDED FOR ORDERING BACK ISSUES OR SUBSCRIPTIONS):

### Mainly On Experimental Film

- AFTERIMAGE*. 20 Landrock Road, London N9 7HL. Back issues available.
- CANTRILLS FILM NOTES*. Box 1295L, GPO, Melbourne, Vic. 3001, Australia. An index to issues 1-51/52 (1971-86) is available along with back issues.
- CINEMATOGRAPH: A JOURNAL OF FILM AND MEDIA ART*. Published by The San Francisco Cinematheque, 480 Potrero Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94110. Back issues available.
- FILM CULTURE*. Published by Anthology Film Archives/Film Art Fund, 32-34 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10003. Back issues available.
- MILLENNIUM FILM JOURNAL*. Published by Millennium Film Workshop, 66 East 4th Street, New York, NY 10003. Back issues available.
- MOTION PICTURE*. Published by The Collective for Living Cinema, 41 White St., New York, NY 10013. The Collective also published *No Rose*. Back issues of both journals are available.
- SPIRAL*. PO Box 5603, Pasadena, CA 91107. Back issues available.

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*UNDERCUT*. Published by the London Filmmakers' Coop, 17 West Grove, London SE10 8QT. Back issues available from c/o 47 George Downing Estate, Cazenove Road, London N16 6BE.

### Occasionally on Experimental Film

- AFTERIMAGE*. Visual Studies Workshop, 31 Prince St., Rochester, NY 14607.
- ART & TEXT*. Back issues available from Manic Exposure Pty Ltd, PO Box 39, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, 3005, Australia. Recent special issue on film, #34 (Spring 1989).
- BLOOD TIMES*. 44 East 5th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11218.
- BORDERLINES*. Bethune College, York University, 4700 Keele St., North York, ON M3J 1P5.
- C MAGAZINE*. Box 5, Station B, Toronto, ON M5T 2T2.
- CAMERA OBSCURA: A JOURNAL OF FEMINISM AND FILM THEORY*. PO Box 25899, Los Angeles, CA 90025. Back issues available from Johns Hopkins University Press, 701 West 40th Street, Suite 275, Baltimore, MD 21211-2190.
- CANADIAN JOURNAL OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THEORY*. 7141 Sherbrooke St. W., Montreal, QC H4B 1R6.
- CINEACTION!* 40 Alexander St., Apt. 705, Toronto, ON M4Y 1B5.
- CINEMAPHOBIA*. PO Box 620, Fresh Meadows, NY 11365.
- DESCANT*. PO Box 314, Station P, Toronto, ON M5S 2S8. Recent special issue on film, 64/65 (Spring-Summer 1989).
- FILM QUARTERLY*. University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720.
- THE INDEPENDENT*. Published by the Foundation for Independent Film and Video, 625 Broadway, 9th Floor, New York, NY 10012.
- MONTHLY FILM BULLETIN*. Published by the British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1P 1PL.
- MUSICWORKS*. 1087 Queen Street West, Toronto, ON M6J 1H3. Back issues available.
- OCTOBER*. MIT Press Journals, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142-9949. Occasional special film issues. Back issues available.
- ON FILM*. College of Fine Arts, University of California, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024.
- PARACHUTE*. 4060 St-Laurent Blvd., bur. 501, Montreal, QC H2W 1Y9. Back issues available.
- PARALLELOGRAMME*. Published by the Association of National Non-Profit Artists' Centres, 183 Bathurst Street, Toronto, ON M5T 2R7.
- PERSISTENCE OF VISION: A JOURNAL OF THE FILM FACULTY OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK*. c/o 53-24 63rd Street, Maspeth, NY 11378. Back issues available.
- SPLICE*. Published by the Saskatchewan Filmpool, 1100 Broad Street, Regina, SK S4R 1X8.
- TRASH COMPACTOR*. 253 College Street, Suite 108, Toronto, ON M5T 1R5.



# ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT TO THE 1990 AGM

PAUL COUILLARD

## 1. WHO

Every year, the staff member responsible for administration at the CFMDC comes before the annual general meeting and makes comments about the difficulty of staff turnover that plagues the organization. This is a common complaint in artist-run centres, where salaries tend to be impossibly low, workloads tend to be impossibly heavy, and the employees themselves are trying to simultaneously pursue what they like to think of as their "real" career — being artists. This year is no exception — though I think it could be fairly called an exceptional year. Of the eight staff members currently involved in the organization, six were hired since the last AGM, including all four full-time positions and two other full-time contract positions. The only faces that haven't changed are those of our two part-time staff.

While on a certain level this may sound distressing, take heart. Few organizations could undergo the kind of turnover the CFMDC has experienced without major trauma; yet we managed a smooth transition and steady growth over the past year. I should add here that two former employees, Tom Thibault and Mike Hoolboom, deserve special commendation for all of the work they put into passing on their knowledge and expertise — believe me, they went well beyond the call of duty. The Board also

deserves special recognition for the work it did in hiring an outstanding group of new employees. I can say with confidence that the CFMDC has a remarkable staff made up of talented, dynamic, highly experienced and deeply committed individuals who work well together, do an excellent job of representing the Centre, and are very responsive to the needs of its members.

## 2. WHERE

If staff turnover is a perennial problem in artist-run centres, so too is the question of where we can afford to operate. The expiry of the CFMDC's five-year lease at this location (67A Portland St.) in December of last year led to an enormous expenditure of energy on the question of where we would end up — precipitated mainly by the landlord's demands of a 50% increase in our rent. Through a series of negotiations we managed to end up with a more reasonable 30% increase and a three-year lease commitment which will take us to the end of 1992.

In the meantime, however, we are finding strength in numbers. We have formed a coalition with several other media organizations to explore the idea of purchasing a building. "Space Launch", as our group is called, includes LIFT, Trinity Square Video, Inter/Access and Northern Visions, and we have already received funding from the Canada Council to help us in our continuing efforts.

We are also in discussion with the arts groups working out of 183 Bathurst St. (V Tape, A Space, Gallery 44,

ANNPAC, CARO and FUSE magazine) about forming an even larger coalition. Together we represent an impressive cross-section of the cultural community with a surprising amount of financial clout. The long-term security of owning a building would allow us to solidify our financial position. We would also be able to share common resources such as photocopying, laser printing, fax services and postage equipment. There are strong indications from both municipal and provincial funding agencies that money may exist to turn this dream into a reality.

## 3. WHAT

### EQUIPMENT PURCHASE

The CFMDC made two significant equipment purchases over the past year, both directed toward booking/shipping operations. The expensive one, our film inspection machine, has become an indispensable part of our daily operations. The other, a third Macintosh computer — this one an SE with 40 meg internal hard drive — is about to do the same. This AGM finds us on the verge of the transition to a computerized booking system that we hope will rationalize our operations. The computerization should speed up the Booker/ Technician's job, as well as making it easier to track films and do the number-crunching and statistics generation that were nearly impossible under the old system. We should be able to get a better overall picture of rental and purchase activity, which can in turn help us improve our marketing strategies.

## PUBLICATIONS

### SUPPLEMENTARY CATALOGUE:

A 1989-90 Supplement to the 20th Anniversary Catalogue was produced in the fall of last year, featuring several hundred new films added to the Centre's collection since 1988. By using the same designer who did the original catalogue (Peter Dudar, who is also one of our filmmakers and the designer for the *Independent Eye*), we were able to ensure a continuity of design while making the supplement easier to read by going to a slightly larger typeface. The computers made production of the supplement vastly easier than that of the 1988 catalogue, though it was still a massive job. The production of the supplement was almost entirely covered by revenue generated to produce the 1988 catalogue, so the only significant financial burden to our ongoing operational budget came with mailing costs.

### THE INDEPENDENT EYE:

One of the most impressive initiatives of the Centre over the past year has been the continued expansion of our periodical, the *Independent Eye*. Under the editorial leadership of Mike Hoolboom, a number of issues of the *Eye* were produced, including a west coast issue ("Desire in Ruins"), an issue focusing on non-theatrical screening initiatives which also included a section on film co-ops across the country ("Leaving the Theatre") and a special double issue on West German experimental filmmakers ("Germany: Over the Wall"). With Mike's departure, new editorial policies and strategies are being developed which will result in greater Board and community input, a stronger emphasis on documentary, dramatic and animated work, and a broader advertising and subscription base.

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## MEDIA LITERACY PROGRAM

As Krista Grevstad has indicated in her brief report, she visited 19 schools and conducted 84 workshops across Ontario from Thunder Bay to Saint Catharines. With her term of employment ending on July 31, she is currently working on a number of initiatives to conclude the Media Literacy project, including July in-service workshops at the Centre for teachers interested in using experimental film in the classroom, the publication of a mini-catalogue and teachers' guide specifically geared to high-school media literacy programs, and the development of a series of videotapes for sale to high schools about specific aspects of media literacy.

These videotapes will feature filmmakers talking about media literacy concepts and will use excerpts from Centre tapes to illustrate the ideas. Film excerpts will only be used with the full permission of filmmakers, who will be paid an initial fee as well as additional royalties for each sale. Film to video transfer costs will be paid by the project. An additional grant to continue this project and the production of videotapes has been requested from the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications. Initial approval of this grant has been provided, and it is currently being reviewed by the Minister.

The production of these videotapes is a logical extension of the workshops Krista has been conducting. Reaction to using experimental film in the classroom was varied, though students and teachers alike seemed to be highly responsive to the experience. Krista's approach has been very much an "experiential" one, encouraging students to find their own responses to the work presented rather than looking for a right/wrong answer as to what a film means and how it should be viewed. It would be

great if we could continue taking free workshops to high schools while generating revenues for our filmmakers; unfortunately, limited financial resources make this impossible. The videotapes will become competitively-priced instructional tools that offer a taste of independent and experimental approaches to film. The videotapes will provide a visible presence for independent work, show teachers how independent work can be used successfully in a classroom situation, and may even help to develop a wider appreciation of and market for our work.

## ONGOING OPERATIONS

The success of our ongoing operations is indicated in part by the healthy audited statements we have to present for the 1989-90 fiscal year. The figures indicate a fifth straight year of increase in overall sales and rentals coupled with decreased shipping, customs and lab bill costs to the Centre. There is little doubt in my mind that our operations flow smoothly and that we serve our clients and our filmmakers well. We continue to improve our promotional and resource services as well through projects like the development of mini-catalogues for specific topics and the production of film stills for all of the work in the collection.

## 4. WHY

As Canada's oldest artist-run centre, the CFMDC has played an important historical role in the development of independent film in this country. Our presence helps to validate all Canadian independent film practice, and we continue to act as both a valuable resource for other community-based film groups (such as Northern Visions and Pleasure Dome) and a lobbying voice for issues of

concern to our members. As the Centre's representative for all of our affiliate organizations (including IFVA, ANNPAC, CCA and CARO), I have been involved in lobbying around issues such as funding for the Euclid theatre, NFB co-productions, copyright, increased funding to the Ontario Arts Council and the Media Arts Section of the Canada Council, the GST, Status of the Artist legislation, consideration of film artists for Canadian Biennial programs, and long-term strategies for the archival preservation of independent Canadian film. I am involved in discussions with the Ontario MCC about the future of its ASO program — the source of a significant portion of our ongoing operational funding. There are so many threats facing the future of Canada's arts and culture sectors that it often seems we are simply pouring water on fires, reacting to emergencies as they arise. I believe, however, that a number of service organizations are in the process of regrouping with an eye to taking a more "proactive" approach: identifying goals and developing strategies to make them realities. After 10 months at the CFMDC, I think I have developed enough of a sense of the issues and concerns of its members to ensure that our voice is insistent and assertive.

Lobbying achievements are often intangible — taking the form of terrible things that might have happened but didn't. In this case, however, I think we can see steps forward as well as steps not taken backward. It seems, for example, that we may be winning the battle of having experimental film recognized as an important art form worthy of collection by the National Gallery. It is my understanding that their purchase plans for the coming year will include a number of works by artists whose primary or sole medium is film. If this is so, we owe thanks to Sue Ditta, film and video curator at the Gallery and one of our greatest friends in this struggle. She has already

done a substantial amount to increase the profile of experimental film in this country through her programming work.

## 5. WHEN

Looking ahead to the coming year, there are a number of initiatives which I hope will further the aims and objectives of the CFMDC. We are very close to hiring two additional employees who would work from now until December through the UI Section 25 program (formerly called Section 38). One position, Publications Coordinator, would involve work on the Independent Eye's advertising and subscription base as well as preliminary work on generating funds for our next complete catalogue. The other position, Researcher Archivist, would allow us to find out just what exists in the mysterious wall of boxes in the photocopying room. Those boxes represent over 20 years of CFMDC activity. The Researcher Archivist would also tidy up our filmmakers file, update our filmmaker bibliographies, and possibly even create some oral history archives involving interviews with various independent Canadian filmmakers.

In addition to our "Class Connections" grant to continue the media literacy program mentioned earlier, we have also applied for funds from the Ministry of Culture and Communications to hire a one-year contract position of Special Projects Coordinator. This position would be oriented toward improving our liaison with other (arts, ethnic and geographic) communities, working on projects such as film programs to complement existing festival activities. As an example, we might approach a Literary Festival and suggest that they include a film component exploring film treatments of literature.

In addition, over the summer we plan to make our first request for funding from the Periodicals section of the On-

tario Arts Council toward the *Independent Eye*. A request to the Canada Council will follow in December.

Work on other fronts continues as well, and I believe the voice of independent Canadian film distributors has never been stronger. I am part of a planning committee that is putting together the first-ever meeting of all of Canada's independent film and video distributors, scheduled for November in Montreal to coincide with the Cinq Jours du Cinema festival.

For the moment, the Centre's staff is stable, and our members can look forward to a consolidation and renewal of efforts on their behalf.

## 6. HOW

I feel it is important to add a few final comments of how I see the Centre fitting into a larger picture of film activity. The CFMDC has many parallel organizations, from Cinema Libre in Montreal to more specialized distribution centres such as G.I.V. in Montreal (for women's video) or DEC in Toronto (for films focusing on third-world issues). We have been the catalyst for the development of other groups such as CFDW and AIM, and we have even served as a model for organizations such as V Tape. Despite all of this, however, our history differs from these other groups.

I think the membership of this organization should be aware, for example, that if it chooses the "open" curatorial policy suggested by the Board for new work, it chooses to move in a different direction from most of these other organizations, which are becoming increasingly selective in the work they choose to distribute.

There are other ways, too, in which our fundamental operations differ. We are the only distributor that receives programming money, for example — and the only one to undertake non-distribution initiatives such as the *Inde-*

*pendent Eye*. I am not suggesting there is anything wrong with these activities — though it should be noted that they often create headaches for the Board of Directors in determining how to undertake them in a way that serves both our member filmmakers and the film community as a whole. I am merely indicating that we do much more than simply distribute films, and in that we are unique.

When the Canada Council compares our distribution "success" with that of CFDW or AIM, it is not really comparing the same sorts of beasts. David Poole the Distribution Officer, tells me that his argument on our behalf has taken a different tack. He argues that we are as much a Cinematheque for independent and particularly experimental film with our programming and our publications as we are a distributor. The fact is that while we are the acknowledged experts when it comes to promoting experimental film, we do not have the same record of success for our educational sector as groups such as AIM or CFDW. Those groups concentrate on commercially-viable product — money-makers — which means they have more impressive sales results for educational work. It is much easier to promote 100 titles than to promote 1,100, and I cannot help but add that it is the Education section that suffers most from an open curatorial policy.

The best argument for an open curatorial policy is that it is what the *members* want. Doing what we want is what being artist-run is all about. Historically, the CFMDC has had an open collection, and it should be our own desires rather than those of either funding bodies or parallel organizations that guide our decisions and self-determination. Those decisions, however, must be informed by some overview of what they mean and where they fit. Our 23-year history demands that kind of responsible approach.

## EDUCATION FILM OFFICER'S REPORT TO THE 1990 AGM

JIM MACSWAIN



Thirty-four new films have been added to the Centre's education section (animation, documentary and drama) since I arrived last September. The quality of this work is excellent. Some films are too creative or experimental for the education market (schools, libraries, TV), which is the loss of those institutions. However, it is gratifying to see that some school media services are creative in their buying, and that titles I thought would never be bought are actually being sold. Most of the new titles entered the collection before Showcase '90, the annual buying spree of the education sector.

From what I can gather from Sylvia Lisitza, the director of Canadian Filmmakers Distribution West, who once again was invited to attend this year's Showcase at our booth, trading was down from previous years. At a meeting of the Educational Media Producers and Distributors Association of Canada (EMPDAC), there was a major call to confront the Ontario Film Association, which organizes Showcase, to demand more involvement of distributors in the Showcase set-up.

EMPDAC's major contribution to our concerns over the past year has been in the area of policing copyright violations. After threatening to take the York Re-

gional Police Force to court, they have won an apology in the form of a letter which can be used by all EMPDAC members as a warning to those who contemplate the violation of copyright. Copyright has become one of the main topics of distribution policy as we begin the next round of copyright legislation in Parliament. The Copyright Collective, spearheaded by CARO, is one of the responses to this new legislation, and should be debated and thought about by our membership.

This is especially pertinent as we do more film-to-video transfers. My section — education — previews on video and now buys mainly on VHS. All television sales are master videos, either 1" or 3/4". As we all know, the possibilities of dubbing video are endless, just as in photocopying print. I'm sure that our films on video have been dubbed in the past within the school system and that educators believe they can do this with impunity for classroom use. A "workshop" held at Showcase and run by an educator was adamant that educational institutions should not be penalized by the new legislation. A strong education lobby is also being made to Ottawa regarding copyright legislation.

Libraries which loan out our work on video are also concerned by the new legislation. We may see the creation of a user's fee much like the one currently available for writers whose books are accessed through libraries. It will be interesting to see how distributors and

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the education sector negotiate the new copyright law and what funds the federal government will set aside for implementation. This relates directly to the price of video and what we will charge in the future. Will we drop our price even though we are not producing in bulk to compete with commercial concerns and the low pricing within the home market sector?

Krista Grevstad and I have worked closely together on Media Literacy questions. We both attended meetings on the establishment of the Arts and Education Coalition, which came out of the Ontario Arts Council's Education Section. This coalition has established a mission statement and goals and ob-

jectives. The CFMDC's demand that media arts be included as distinct from visual arts has been received positively. I am hoping the coalition will be effective in challenging the Ministry of Education's basic apathy to the arts in the education system.

Much of my time is spent in writing letters of support or intent to distribute for the many filmmakers seeking funding from Supplies and Services and the Ontario Film Development Corporation. I have never turned down anyone for one of these letters although I'm sure some of these filmmakers will not distribute with the CFMDC. All the scripts and outlines for these films are excellent in intent. If even half of them are made, the

CFMDC will be distributing some fine films in the future.

I curated a screening, "Twenty Years of Feminist Film," for the New Waves in Cinema, which was very challenging and satisfying. Through the programming budget from the OAC, I also organized a tour of our films to the Atlantic region.

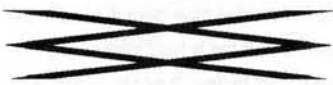
My one concern in working here, as was the concern of those who came before me, is that we cannot give quality time to all the films we are receiving. As a distributor, I am constantly thinking of ways to condense the films into packages that will be of use to a broad base of users. Gillian Morton, the former Education Officer, began an excellent series

of mini-catalogues which I am continuing. The most recent of these is The Arts On Film, which coincides with three new films concentrating on artistic endeavours.

After nine months at the CFMDC, I am beginning to understand the "Ontario lifestyle" and the many players within the film and video community — and where "alternative" film and video fits into the overall equation. In the long run there isn't that much difference from alternative or experimental filmmaking in the Atlantic region, except that Ontario is writ larger as regards funding; i.e. Ontario has an Arts Council with a large funding base which is sympathetic to independent concerns.

## EXPERIMENTAL FILM OFFICER'S REPORT TO THE 1990 AGM

DARIA STERMAC



### SOME WORDS

Upon arriving two-and-a-half months ago I threw myself into the hub of activity — screening films in the collection, poring over the files, the correspondence, and the many notes and memos of my predecessors to make some sense of it all. And indeed, it all fell into place. My days are action-packed now, and the phone seldom stops ringing. Filmmakers and others continually drop in with requests that have a life and death urgency to them — all of which are

handled — and amazingly in the explosive midst of it all I am sane and very excited by all the momentum.

International exposure of our film collection is one of my primary objectives. The transformations in Eastern Europe were so incredible it became apparent that *now* — with the iron curtain torn — Eastern Europe is probably *the* most exciting place we could venture with our work. This also coincided perfectly with the fact that I am from Yugoslavia and thus have the knowledge of a Slavic language and savvy as to how the Eastern Bloc operates. I have launched a large campaign throughout the Eastern Bloc with the intention of organizing a traveling retrospective of Canadian experimental film. This project is a process piece for now but I am positive it will be realized within

the next year or so. There has been interesting feedback already and this project has strong support from both the Canada Council and the Department of External Affairs.

The other — new — foreign destination I am exploring is the Middle East. I have contacted the Goethe Institut in both Cairo and Alexandria as I have been told they have theatres that exhibit international art films. It is important that our ground-breaking films break into new cultural, social and geographic places. This will be an exciting new domain for us to explore.

Europe remains a vital and vibrant connection. Many tours are planned there. Rose Lowder, an experimental filmmaker and curator/organizer *par excellence* is organizing a major retrospective of our work in four major

centres in France in 1991. This will be a highly prestigious and high-profile event and three of our filmmakers have been invited to attend: Barbara Sternberg, Carl Brown and Chris Gallagher. Ontario House's Elaine Rednicki (in Paris), the cultural attaché, has become a major ally. She is a supporter of our work and a woman who has the ability and power to make things happen.

A retrospective of Joyce Wieland's work should take place at the Pompidou Centre in late fall. Germany is also a vital place and recently both Richard Kerr and David Rimmer had successful screenings/tours there. Phil Hoffman is going to Holland and several other filmmakers have tours planned where they will take their work along with the works of other filmmakers.

Back in Toronto, I perform a spectrum of activities that range from the sacred to the profane. I have made myself available for just about everything that pertains to the agony and ecstasy of filmmaking and film distribution. I offer support/advice/guidance in everything

from assisting with the layout of one-sheets to critiquing proposals, from writing letters of support for future masterpieces to brainstorming on distribution, from giving awards at student film screenings to selecting films for potential visiting curators and pushing them continually, going for coffee for all the avid coffee drinkers of the CFMDC and much, much more...

**SOME OBSERVATIONS**

Out of the more than 180 experimental filmmakers in our collection, only 50 are women. As a woman film officer and filmmaker I find this quite disconcerting. Where are the films made by women? Do they not exist? Are women not working in this genre? Are they going to other distributors? If so, which and why? These are pertinent questions I intend to investigate with the hope of attracting new, dynamic works by women into our collection.

Then there is the important issue of video transfers. To me it is now quite a black and white issue. This is 1990. Video machines have made a phenomenal foray into our personal and professional lives. Video is accessible. Many people will only preview on video now — e.g. all the curators in Japan. Video preview copies are infinitely easier to transport. Yes, indeed, video is not film. But the bottom line is that the potential for marketing a film that can be previewed on video is not 100 times greater; it's 1,000. I encourage it strongly — request it from all new filmmakers — but of course I respect that some filmmakers will not wish to transfer to that medium. *Degustibus non est disputandum.*

**SOME DIRECTIONS**

While my curating energy has focused

on international territories until now, it will soon become localized, concentrating primarily on the United States, Canada, and of course good old Toronto, the most expensive city in the Western hemisphere (but eh, we still have Canada as I write this). So it seems all is well.

Krista Grevstad and I are planning a traveling show for the San Francisco Bay area. I used to program there at the Oakland Museum and have some tips on what's hot and what's not.

Ross McLaren, a well-known figure from the Toronto film scene now living in New York City, has offered to co-ordinate some screenings for us in New York. Wonderful, and who better to promote these works than one of our own filmmakers?

The *Independent Eye* simply must continue, especially now when there are so few venues for our writing. I suggest we continue it with committed editors for specific issues under the umbrella of a board or collective.

For filmmakers amenable to video transfers I would like to suggest video compilations to be distributed to alternative film venues such as Re/Vue in Toronto. Please think about this and let's discuss it. And think of your work in a specific context between one and two hours in length.

I encourage *all* filmmakers to take an active role in the distribution and promotion of their work — alone and with me. I cannot do everything for everybody. But with your involvement, movement is most likely to happen. So suggest ideas and I will do the same.

There are truly *many* creative possibilities.

Make yourselves visible.

Let's work together.

So, until you call me, I call you, or we meet at my office or at some screening — I say *shanti, shanti, shanti* and *keep in touch!*

**NEW DIRECTORS,  
CORRECTIONS, APOLOGIES,  
GRANTS, NEW STRUCTURE,  
NEW POLICIES, INVISIBLE  
CINEMA, FILM-MAKERS'  
COOPERATIVE, ANTHOLOGY  
FILM ARCHIVES, INNIS FILM  
AND SPLEEN**



**NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

The CFMDC is pleased to announce the Board of Directors for 1990-91. Board members are chosen from the membership of the Centre at the Annual General Meeting. Board terms last two years, with half of the Board being elected annually; there is no restriction on the number of terms a Board member may serve. The new Board is listed below along with an indication of when their terms expire.

- ANNETTE MANGAARD, Chairperson (1991)
- KIM DERKO, Vice-Chair (1991)
- PADDY MOORE, Treasurer (1991)
- KEITH LOCK, Secretary (1992)
- ELLEN BESEN (1991)
- ROBERT COWAN (1992)
- JOHN GAGNÉ (1992)
- ANNA GRONAU (1992)
- PHILIP HOFFMAN (1992)
- JOHN VAINSTEIN (1991)

**CORRECTIONS/  
APOLOGIES**

The CFMDC apologizes for failing to credit two sources in the previous issue (Vol. 11 No. 2-3, Germany: Over the Wall).

The article "SUPER 8/BERLIN: THE ARCHITECTURE OF DIVISION" by KEITH SANBORN was first printed as a book by HALLWALLS CONTEMPORARY ART CENTRE in Buffalo, New York in 1983.

In addition, Part Two of "DEATH, OBSESSION AND CINEMA: AN INTERVIEW IN TWO PARTS WITH MICHAEL BRYNTRUP" — the interview between Michael Bryntrup and STEFF ULBRICH — was reprinted from *BERLIN: IMAGES IN PROGRESS*, ed. JÜRGEN BRÜNING and ANDREAS WILDFANG, published by Hallwalls Contemporary Art Centre in 1989. The Centre gratefully acknowledges Hallwalls for granting permission to reprint these articles.

## CENTRE RECEIVES GRANTS

The CFMDC is pleased to acknowledge receipt of two project grants from THE ONTARIO MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS. The Centre has been awarded a grant of \$10,000 under the Ministry's "CLASS CONNECTIONS" program toward the creation of instructional videotapes on media literacy. The tapes, which will be produced by KRISTA GREVSTAD for the Centre, will feature filmmakers talking about different aspects of media literacy using excerpts from films in the Centre's collection. The tapes will be marketed to high schools for use in media literacy programs.

The CFMDC has also been awarded a grant of \$15,000 under the MCC's ARTS MANAGEMENT TRAINING program toward the salary of a SPECIAL PROJECTS COORDINATOR for a one-year period. This training position, which will begin in mid-September, will allow a trainee to develop arts management skills under the supervision of the Centre's Administrator.

## NEW EDITORIAL STRUCTURE FOR THE EYE

The BOARD OF DIRECTORS has developed a new editorial structure for the *Independent Eye*. An EDITORIAL COM-

MITTEE made up of CFMDC Board and staff members as well as other interested individuals is being formed to oversee the periodical's publication. Individual issues of the *Eye* will be produced through guest editors selected by the Editorial Committee. The Editorial Committee's responsibilities will include the development of editorial policies, choosing topics and emphases of upcoming issues, choosing guest editors and final approval of all copy sent for publication. Anyone interested in being involved on the Editorial Committee should contact PAUL COUILLARD, the CFMDC's Administrator, for more information.

## NEW EDITORIAL POLICIES

In addition to the development of an EDITORIAL COMMITTEE, the CFMDC BOARD OF DIRECTORS has set out some basic policy guidelines for the *Eye*. There is a general feeling that the magazine should reflect the diversity of independent film production; this will mean more attention to documentary, dramatic and animation work as well as continued coverage of experimental film. This commitment to better serve all genres of independent film production will be reflected in the make-up of the new Editorial Committee. The Editorial Committee also hopes to take a more proactive approach in soliciting material from various minority or marginalized communities.

The Board of Directors recognizes that in keeping with the Centre's role as a distributor and its mandate to promote and provide education about independent Canadian filmmaking, the *Eye*

should publish writing of a high critical quality which is responsible, defensible and non-dismissive of the films and filmmakers discussed, whether or not they are represented in the CFMDC's collection.

## INVISIBLE CINEMA

Invisible Cinema, MARTIN RUMSBY'S ONGOING TOURING EXHIBITION PROJECT, is pleased to announce its fall exhibition schedule. Dates are as follows:

PACIFIC CINEMATHEQUE, Vancouver: October 24

NORTHWEST FILM AND VIDEO CENTRE, Portland OR (USA): October 29

911 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTRE, Seattle WA (USA): November 2

EUCLID THEATRE, Toronto: November 26

ED VIDEO, Guelph: November 28

CATALOGUE in 15 years, a 552 page directory to its huge collection of 2,800 titles. The Co-op has also undertaken VIDEOTAPE DISTRIBUTION, through the sale of independent, avant-garde non-commercial work. The Co-op recently published its first video catalogue.

Individuals and institutions that would like to support the Film-Maker's Cooperative are invited to become associate members in a variety of categories (see below). All members receive catalogues, supplements, and a quarterly newsletter.

Associate Member: US\$25 per year

Sponsor Member: US\$150 per year

Patron Member: US\$500 per year

Corporate Member: US\$1000 per year

The fee for Moving Image-Maker Members (open only to individuals with moving image works in the Cooperative) is US\$25 per year.

Send US money orders payable from a bank with a branch in New York to:

FILM-MAKERS' COOPERATIVE  
175 Lexington Avenue  
New York, NY 10016  
USA

## SUPPORT THE FILM-MAKERS' COOPERATIVE

The Co-op is alive and kicking—but needs your support. Several initiatives in the last year mark a resurgence in its activities. The Co-op published its first

## ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

Individuals and institutions may support Anthology Film Archives, the WORLD'S LARGEST RESOURCE FOR INDEPENDENT FILM, by becoming a member. Anthology, which reopened at

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its present location at the Second Street Courthouse in 1988, functions as a film archive, library and print archive, film exhibition venue, and publisher and distributor of books, catalogues and *Film Culture*.

Regular member: US\$40  
(students and senior citizens US\$25)

Dual member: US\$65  
(for two people at the same address)

Contributor: US\$100

Donor: US\$250

Sponsor: US\$500

Patron: US\$1000

Institutional Benefactor: US \$5000

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**CALL FOR  
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Innis Film is holding a SCREENING 15 NOVEMBER 1990 of "uncirculated" Canadian experimental films, i.e.,

FILMS THAT LIE OUTSIDE TRADITIONAL DISTRIBUTION AND EXHIBITION CHANNELS AND VENUES (including the CFMDC). 16mm preferable by super-8, Std.-8 and 35mm also acceptable. No video, except for preview. Filmmakers who wish to submit works should contact ELIZABETH YAKE, c/o:

INNIS FILM  
INNIS COLLEGE  
2 Sussex Ave.  
Toronto, ON M5S 1J5

Tel: (416) 656-0906 or leave a message at 978-7790.



**SPLEEN**

*Spleen* No. 2 will soon be out. SUBSCRIPTIONS may be purchased for \$5 at:

INNIS COLLEGE  
2 Sussex Avenue  
Toronto, ON M5S 1J5

Phone 978-77909 or 979-6608 first. SUBMISSIONS for *Spleen* No. 3 can be sent to the above address. Written submissions (letters, essays, documents, diaries, rants, etc.) should be typewritten, double-spaced or on computer disk (Mac or IBM-compatible).

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A N D R E W L U G G  
M A R I A N M C M A H O N  
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