

Out of the mainstream

by David Clarke

The New Cinema, I'm by no means sure that I know what it is. But after spending a week watching it being displayed at the 10th International Festival of New Cinema, I'm mightily impressed by it. And by the good-natured efficiency of the festival's organizers. By the viewers who turned out some 10,000 strong to watch some 50 films shown over the 10 days of the festival. And by the filmmakers, who seemed to be everywhere, and willing to answer any question.

In short, the festival was very successful in bringing the New Cinema to a large, and obviously very appreciative, public. Cultural authorities, take note: Dimitri Eipides, Claude Chamberlan and the rest of the festival staff are winners. Backing them by allocating them the shekels they need for next year's festival makes every kind of sense. Cast your bread upon the waters.

Now, on to the best part of every festival: arguing about the films.

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Dans le cinéma commercial comme dans le cinéma marginal, les maîtres existent tout comme les vedettes du guichet.

— Nathalie Petrowski, *Le Devoir*, Nov. 2, 1981

Stars are to film festivals as oil rigs are to Arctic landscapes. When they appear it means money, action and adventure. But the environment suffers.

Now, I don't know that I would go so far as to say that Marguerite Duras reminds me of money, action or adventure. But her appearance at the festival certainly caused a stir. Her press conference drew a score of journalists, because in New Cinema circles Duras is a star. A couple of days later, I was having a cup of coffee with a morose fellow of no few years who told me that 28 journalists had been invited to his press conference — and that not one had come. What he said aroused my sympathy for the under-dog, of course, but it also made me wonder why I felt uncomfortable with the programming of such heavy-weight films as *Nick's Movie* (*Lightning Over Water*) by Wim Wenders and Nicholas Ray, or Syberberg's *Hitler*,



● Amos Poe's *Subway Riders*

un film d'Allemagne, alongside the others.

Without trying to banish anyone from the groves of New Cinema respectability, I'd just like to mention that in the course of *Nick's Movie*, Wim Wenders goes off to Hollywood to work on *Hammett*. I'm sure the press-less conference suffers in the audience must have felt a twinge at that. (This is not meant as a criticism of the film itself. *Nick's Movie*,



● Eric Mitchell

which depicts the final days of Nicholas Ray, is as piercing, as truly heart-breaking a film as I have ever seen.)

When underground filmmakers surface to breathe the fresh air of commercial and/or critical success — as Duras, Wenders and Rivette have — then the relationship between their work and the dominant culture becomes incestuous, to say the least. It becomes a struggle for them to maintain creative tension; for the dominant culture is no longer their bitter enemy but their gracious host. This can be a bitter struggle, but it certainly isn't the same battle most of the filmmakers at the festival were fighting. (Then again, some of the filmmakers I talked to were hoping to have their challenges-to-the-dominant-culture's-conventions-of-expression appro-



● Ken McMullen

priated as quickly as they could arrange it. Indeed, I had a disconcerting discussion with one director who started off talking about de-constructing the narrative, and ended up discussing how to sell a youth-action-adventure script.)

In any event, the picture I was wild about — Ken McMullen's *Resistance* — and the pictures I thought were right up there — Bette Gordon's *Empty Suitcases*, Tim Burns' *Against the Grain*, and, of course, *Nick's Movie* — all garnered their fair share of attention.

Resistance, by Ken McMullen, a 31-year-old British filmmaker, is as subtle, complex and richly textured a film as I have seen in many a year. McMullen uses improvisational actors, newsreel footage of the French resistance, video, film, the musical talents of Brian Eno,



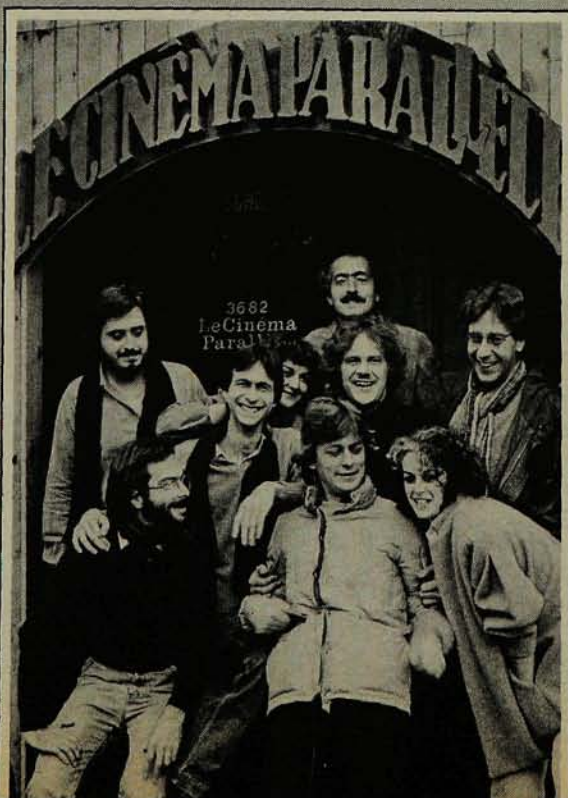
● Claude Chamberlan, Marguerite Duras

and a real psychoanalyst to recreate a psychodrama conducted by an analyst in 1948.

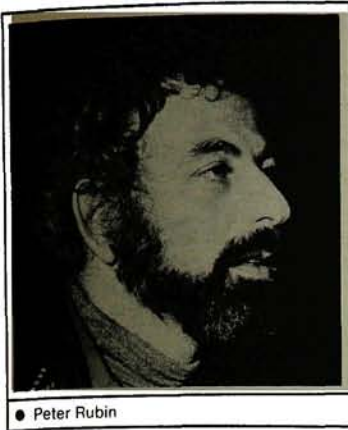
The purpose of the original psychodrama was to help a group of ex-resistance fighters who had become disturbed by the problems of readjusting to peace. The purpose of the film is, on one level, to recreate this event in order to come to some kind of understanding of

The festival

In an era of tight money and intense competition for public funding, the 10th International Festival of New Cinema has made its mark. In all, 48 programs were presented in over 100 screenings, and 10,587 admissions were recorded. Working with a staff of 24, most of whom were volunteers, the Festival covered 38% of its expenditures from sales alone. Putting the rest of the financing together proved more difficult, and a media offensive was mounted early in the year to overcome the disinterest sensed among the grant-giving bodies. At first, it seemed that provincial authorities would have been happier backing a "Semaine de Cinéma Québécois" than the Festival; but the former wasn't able to pull itself together, and no *Semaine* was held this year. The field clear, the Festival finally received \$38,500 from municipal, provincial, and federal agencies. The final tally: 10 days of New Cinema for \$75,000. With only a \$6,000 short-fall, and some revenues still expected, the organizers have given us one of Canada's most interesting, most reasonable festivals.



● Smiles all around for organizers (L to R): Thrassyvoulos Giatsios, Norman Ethier, Denis Couture, Marilyn Bilodeau, Demiti Eipides (far rear), Claude Chamberlan, Daniel Lapierre, Lynne Crevier, Richard Stanford.



● Peter Rubin

what those people went through. At the same time, McMullen is interested in probing the meaning of the act of resistance, the motives of his improvisational troupe, and the nature of film itself.

The film seems unwieldy and in danger of becoming so complicated that it threatens to dissolve into a welter of contradictions and misunderstandings, until one of the actors takes matters into his own hands. By staging his own suicide (over the objections of the psychoanalyst and the director - who enters into the film at this point) the actor shows us the radical implications of an act of resistance to authority figures. At the same time, he exposes, by the spontaneous vigour of his act, how self-involved and timid the other improvisors were really being by sticking to the original premise.

McMullen has constructed an elaborate, wonderful artifice. The delicate dance he performs between the levels of meaning in this film is something to behold: moreover, at the end of it one is left with a strong sensation of an England poking among other people's identities and pasts for something to borrow and call its own. If that sounds like too heavy a burden of meaning for any 90-minute film to hold then that is the measure of McMullen's accomplishment.

Car le nouveau cinéma (le bon comme le moins bon) passe par la littérature avant de faire frémir la rétine de l'œil...

- Nathalie Petrowski, **Le Devoir**, Nov. 2, 1981

My retinas enjoyed Bette Gordon's *Empty Suitcases* no end. There are shots of New York in this travelogue through post-radical, feminist academia - long, lingering shots of the harbour, the roof-tops, the neighbourhoods - that are the most striking images I saw at the festival. They demonstrate pure visual power.

The ears were having a good time, too. The narration of this film, sometimes presented as text on the screen (which kind of confuses things), is intense, and supple, and the words are beautifully chosen for their incantatory power.

It's the ideas I didn't like. The film tells the story of a woman's anger after her highly politicized experiences; supposedly her ideas are meant to signify characterization. But I found them banal.

The film itself was very good. The political ideas and literary conceits (i.e. the narrative dressed up to look deconstructed à la Robbe-Grillet) we could have done without.

Tim Burns' *Against the Grain* wins the prize for the single most muddled political viewpoint displayed at the festival, and the most deranged pacing.

Nonetheless, this account of the largely comic adventures of a Baader-Meinhoff acolyte in Australia is told with so much verve that I suppose it ranks as a success. David Cronenberg move over.

The director seems to have changed his mind several times about what he was trying to say in the course of making this film, and toward the end seems to have given up. I wasn't too surprised when he told me that they didn't seem to like his film in Germany, where they take terrorism a little more seriously.

There are some suspenseful moments in the beginning of the film, and a hilarious scene where the fleeing terrorist tells his mother what kind of trouble he's got himself into. And the idea of terrorists delivering their bombs in video-cassettes is pretty amusing, too. But the literary territory this film passes through isn't anywhere near the Frankfurt School. It's where Abbott and Costello Meet Godzilla.

Having criticized *Against the Grain* and *Empty Suitcases* for their thin con-

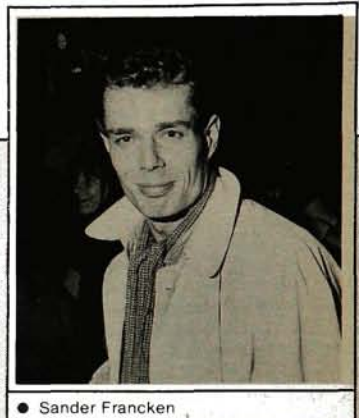
tent on the level of ideas, I still include them among my favourite films at the festival because they showed so much film style - something that was in short supply. I wasn't expecting to find strobe lights and op art, but I did think I'd see more tinkering with the purely visual possibilities of cinema.

Two films which struck me as being quite clever, were at the same time so visually constrained as to be annoying - *Le Voyage en blanc* by Werner Schroeter, and *Underground U.S.A.* by Eric Mitchell. They both featured amusing storylines and some fine acting, but were lacking in visual sophistication. Schroeter may have been reaching for a sort of 'toys-in-the-attic' effect, but the sets were just so understated it hurt the movie. As for Mitchell's film, he unfortunately lacked the money he needed to achieve the visual effects called for by the storyline.

Another aspect of the visually underwhelming film trend I noted was the use of an opaque, neutral, documentary

style in films such as *Video and Julia* by Sander Francken and *A Calculated Extinction* by Arthur Lamothe and Jean-Daniel Lafond. While the former (a satire on home technology) was amusing, and the depiction of psychological terrorism against Canada's Indians in the latter horrifying... well, I just found the films incongruous in the context of the festival.

In a festival displaying such a wealth of options, one has to choose. I found myself avoiding most of the star turns by established directors and the comfortable films with little, or too-conventional, visual style. Whatever I may have missed, I still walked away from the festival with a head bursting with images - so I guess I didn't do too badly. ●



● Sander Francken

The films

AGAINST THE GRAIN

T. Burns (Australia)

AGATHA ET LES LECTIONS ILLIMITÉES

M. Duras (France)

L'ARBRE QUI GÉMIT

M. Hanoun (France)

ARREBATO

I. Zulueta (Spain)

BERLIN, DE L'AUBE À LA NUIT

A. Leroy (Belgium)

I BERLIN HARLEM

L. Lambert (West Germany)

BORED

K. Luner (U.S.A.)

BRUXELLES TRANSIT

S. Szlingerbaum (Belgium)

CALCULATED EXTINCTION (A)

A. Lamothe, J.D. Lafond (Québec)

CECI EST MON CORPS, CECI EST MON ART

M. Poulette (Québec)

C'EST PAS LE PAYS DES MERVEILLES

H. Doyle, N. Giguère (Québec)

CHAMBRE BLANCHE (LA)

J.F. Garsi (France)

COURS DES CHOSES (LE)

J.B. Menoud (Switzerland)

CHANGE

C. Janetzko (West Germany)

CLIMAT

C. Pépin (Québec)

DEPUIS QUE LE MONDE EST MONDE

S. Van Brabant, S. Giguère, L. Dugal (Québec)

DISTORSIONS

J. Godbout, F. Sauvageau (Québec)

DREAM ON

E. Harker (U.S.A.)

DUR DÉSIR DE DIRE (LE)

A. D'Aix (Québec)

EMPTY SUITCASES

B. Gordon (U.S.A.)

ENVIRONNEMENT-MOI D'AMOUR

A. Chapdelaine (Québec)

LA FACTURE D'ORGUE

F. Gonseth (Switzerland)

FAUX PAS DE DEUX

L. Lambert (West Germany)

FICTION

G. Holthuis (Netherlands)

FILMING MUYBRIDGE

J.L. Gonnet (France)

FILMING OTHELLO

O. Welles (West Germany)

GAYPOWER-GAY POLITICS

G. Diekhans, G. Grile (U.S.A.)

GUY DAO-SUR LA VOIX

G. Dufaux (Québec)

HITLER, UN FILM D'ALLEMAGNE

H.J. Syberberg (West Germany)

HOMME ATLANTIQUE (L')

M. Duras (France)

HORS D'OEUVRE

Monster & Wiering (Netherlands)

ÎLE DES SIRÈNES

H.I. Rabinovitch (Switzerland)

IN EXTREMO

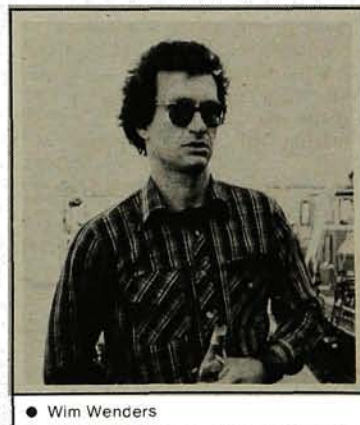
F. Zwartjes (Netherlands)

IN MOTION (En mouvement)

M. Sercombe (England)

I REMEMBER

G. Holthuis (Netherlands)



● Wim Wenders

IT IS COLD IN BRANDERBURG

(Kill Hitler)

V. Herman, N. Meienberg, H. Sturm (Switzerland)

JUSTOCOEUR

M. Stephen (Québec/France)

LOVER'S EXILE (THE)

M. Gross (Japan/Canada)

MAKING OF A PROSTITUTE (THE)

S. Imura (Japan)

MAN WHO COULD NOT SEE FAR ENOUGH (THE)

P. Rose (U.S.A.)

MAX FRISCH, Journal L-III

R. Dindo (Switzerland)

THE MIRROR

M. Zeillemaker (Netherlands)

NICK'S MOVIE (Lightning over water)

M. Wenders, N. Ray (U.S.A.)

NIGHTMARE WOMAN (THE)

L. Lambert (West Germany)

NO FUN

D. Damave (Netherlands)

NO MAN'S LAND

N. Herkens (Netherlands)

NOTRE-DAME DE LA CROISSETTE

D. Schmid (Switzerland)

(LA) NUIT CLAIRE

M. Hanoun (France)

ON EST PAS DES ANGES

G. Simoneau, S. Guy (Québec)

PEOPLE PASS THROUGH ME IN AN ENDLESS PROCESSION

F. van de Staak (Netherlands)

PERMANENT VACATION

J. Yarmusch (U.S.A.)

PLEXI RADAR

D. Chase (U.S.A.)

(LE) PLUS BEAU JOUR DE MA VIE

D. Létourneau (Québec)

(LE) PONT DU NORD

J. Rivette (France)

PROJECTION

J. Ketelaars (Netherlands)

(LA) REPETITION GÉNÉRALE

W. Schroeter (West Germany)

RESISTANCE

K. McMullen (England)

SALOME

C. Bene (Italy)

SOUVENIRS DE PRINTEMPS DANS LE LIAONING

A. Mazars (France)

SUBWAY RIDERS

A. Poe (U.S.A.)

TIERGARTEN

L. Lambert (West Germany)

TULIPE INACHEVÉE (LA)

F. van de Staak (Netherlands)

TWO (DOS)

A. Del Amo (Spain)

UNDERGROUND

E. Mitchell (U.S.A.)

VEGETARIANS (THE)

P. Rubin (Netherlands)

VIDEO AND JULIA

S. Francken (Netherlands)

VIE ET MORT (LIFE AND DEATH)

J. Roelofs (Netherlands)

(LE) VOYAGE EN BLANC

W. Schroeter (Switzerland)

YOU ARE NOT I

S. Driver (U.S.A.)