

ON (EXPERIMENTAL) FILM

by B. Sternberg

Toronto has been teaming with film! While not all presentations have been of experimental films, the wealth of screenings at 'other' venues is making for a film-aware environment and public. A great number of the film events have involved experimental film; some exclusively, some in combination with other genres. What is interesting is the variety in venues, programming strategies, curators – the where, how, when, by whom, and for what of the various screenings.

For example, the Bloor Cinema, one of the Festival chain of rep cinemas in Toronto, screened *Scissere*, a feature-length experimental film by Peter Mettler. It also presented a selection of Joyce

Wieland's films and, for the second year in a row, housed *The Best of the Fest*, a selection of the films distributed by the Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre that were premiered at the Toronto Festival Of Festivals.

A five-week series of experimental films was offered free at the Ontario College of Art. This series, organized and curated by Carol Laing, featured informal discussion following each screening with one of the filmmakers whose work was shown. The screenings were open to the public, though its main audience was the OCA student body. This series continued the "Art and Politics" program which last year had taken the form of lecture and discussion. Carol Laing de-

cidied this year to follow the films, loosely selected under headings or themes, by round table discussion.

Stan Brakhage was present at Ryerson, as part of the Kodak Chair series, a new annual program. This year Ryerson invited three filmmakers (Margarethe Von Trotta, Stan Brakhage and Norman Jewison) and three photographers to present their work and a talk.

An eight-part series *Transformations: Formal Invention in Documentary*, curated by William Beattie and Marc Glassman, is being screened at four different venues alternately (A Space, an artist-run centre; The Funnel experimental film theatre; OCA, an art college, and The Rivoli, a club which regularly offers music, poetry readings and the like to patrons at round tables sipping wine or beer). The program includes several experimental

films in the offerings of documentaries of all sorts.

Centrestage Forum at The St. Lawrence Centre, under the guidance of Patterson Higgins, is presenting two evenings with filmmakers, one with Rick Hancox and the other with Michael Snow, entitled *New Perspectives in Canadian Cinema*. Centrestage provides a forum for public awareness on many social issues. Patterson Higgins was enthusiastic to take on this educative initiative in the area of experimental film, realizing that, despite its long history, experimental films are relatively unknown to the general public. Although, for example, Michael Snow was recently awarded the Toronto Arts Award and is an artist of international reputation, most people are unaware of his film work – many of those who have heard of *Wavelength* have never actually seen it!

Toronto's two major art gal-

eries, The Art Gallery of Ontario and The Art Gallery at Harbourfront, are both involved with experimental film this spring: Joyce Wieland's retrospective at The Art Gallery of Ontario includes screenings of all her films. This exhibition will tour Canada. In May, several programs of experimental films which were made in Toronto during the last ten years, have been selected by Blaine Allen, and will be presented as part of the opening exhibition of the new Harbourfront Art Gallery. A lot of film, various venues and a number of independent curators – great! Is it this busy, film-wise, elsewhere in the country? Let us know.

Congratulations to Rick Hancox and Carolyn McLuskie who shared first prize in the recent Festival sponsored by the Chicago Experimental Film Coalition. Interestingly (coincidentally?) Rick's film *Beach Events* was shot on the shores of PEI, and Carolyn's featured the Pacific coast – *ab mare usque ad mare*, alright!

Does the word 'co-op' in the names of the various production co-ops around have anything to do with the word 'co-operation' my son learned on *Sesame Street*? As in working together, helping those who need assistance, sharing? It's hard enough to work to make a living and then make films on the side (if you've managed to get the money together to make a film), but to then have the very co-ops which are government-funded and equipped to make the production of low, low, low budget, non-commercial, independent films possible, put obstacles in one's way,... well, I don't know, but maybe they need to look again at their names. Ironically, the conditions (hence, delays) put on access are made in the very name of the co-operative way; co-operative, that is, on the part of the member-filmmakers who are required to put in volunteer time to merit the use of the equipment. I can understand the desire for a co-operative spirit and that certain jobs need doing by volunteers. My point is, I guess, that the main purpose of production co-ops is to facilitate the making of films by independent filmmakers who meet the eligibility of non-commerciality and that a feeling of co-operation might arise in a more genuine way from filmmakers who have been welcomed openly, helped to do their work and, then, feeling at home, will pitch in to scrub the floors, man the doors, etc. I sure would, if I could only 'get in' in the first place!

Barbara Sternberg •

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