

ON (EXPERIMENTAL) FILM

by B. Sternberg

by Marilyn Jull, Guest Columnist for Barbara Sternberg

In her last column, Barbara Sternberg reported on her investigation into the approach to experimental film taken in our university Film Departments and questioned the role of academia in the decline of experimental film as an art movement. It is certainly true that most university Film Departments give far more attention to narrative and documentary forms than to any "experimental" use of the film medium, to the film medium being used not as a recording device but as an expressive use of time, space and light to create something out of nothing, to add something new to the world, to express an inner vision which can only be expressed through these means. And I have often questioned, then, the absence of such works in the concerns of Art History Departments as well. For, how can Art History professors, in good conscience, offer a program of courses which includes a consideration of 20th Century and/or Contemporary Art, which does *not* include a consideration of film?

The answer seems to be that most art historians know little or nothing about the greatest artworks of the film medium. In a recent article in the *Village Voice*, J. Hoberman stated that "A film critic who takes no account of Stan Brakhage or Yvonne Rainer has as much claim to serious attention as a historian who never heard of the Civil War." And it seems to me, an "art historian", or at the very least, a "20th Century Art historian" who is unaware of the artistic outcomes of at least part of Hoberman's reference is equally open to question. The problem is, however, that most people, art historians/art critics included, associate film with other, non-artistic interests. There is, therefore, a necessity to disassociate film *art* from the rest of filmmaking altogether. One conclusion could be then, that *there should be no film departments in the universities*. The major concerns of University Film Departments – traditional narratives and documentaries – should be studied in sociology departments looking at the forms and effects of popular culture, and/or in various other departments for the purpose of raising social or political issues for discussion, and/or in Communication Studies departments which analyze the manipulative means and effects of the mass media, etc. The great works of filmic art, on the other hand, should be looked at in the

context of the History of the Plastic Arts.

What this means, more specifically, is disassociating film as a recording device – whether it be for the recording of acting and storytelling for illusionistic entertainment, or for the supposedly "objective" recording

of some external event in the real world for educational purposes – from explorations of the film medium which depend upon the relationship between the individual artist and his or her muse in the creation of something entirely new.

It also demands, however, a questioning of what is included under the rubric of experimental film within the filmmaking community itself. For "experi-

mental film", it seems, has come to mean practically *anything* that is *not* a traditional narrative or documentary. But surely we must be able to make distinctions between filmic art and "anything made by any independent individual which incorporates the use of film". This is certainly a question that arts councils should be asking when looking at who they are funding. Should arts councils be provid-

ing money for independent work, made by individuals, which incorporates the use of film, or should they be providing money for the making, promotion and distribution of film *art*?

It is not uncommon to hear certain programmers (for example, some programmers of women's film festivals) say that they are not interested in in-

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→ cluding any films that are "too formalist or painterly", and it is commonplace for film students these days to move away from film more and more as they use video instead, giving the fact of its lower cost as a reason for their choice, seemingly without any consideration to aesthetic difference. Fewer and fewer people, it seems, have any ap-

preciation or concern for the potentials of the film medium as art. Social issues and political comment have replaced visionary insight and revelation, social movements have replaced individual expression, content alone has replaced any sense of necessity regarding the form of the content and the importance of the integrity of the form/content relationship regardless of what the "content" is. And large

numbers of films are being made in which considerations of colour, texture and quality of light are almost totally disregarded. Too many people, it seems, feel that they have something important to say, and that they can use the film medium to say it. Most of these people are *not* artists. It might be fine if they all continued to go out and make their films, so long as they weren't confusing the issue by

calling it *art*. As they *are* permitted, and even encouraged, to do so, it is no wonder that experimental film is given less and less serious consideration.

What is clearly needed is more serious attention being given, by people well studied in the history of art-making generally, and the history of avant-garde filmmaking specifically, to the study of, writing about and programming of film art.

These must also be people who will not be afraid of making distinctions of quality, who will not be afraid to say yes, this is art, and no, this is not - who will not, that is, be so afraid of making occasional mistakes in these assessments that they feel that they must include everything.

Tricker travels around world

MONTREAL - The lead players in Michael Rubbo's **Tommy Tricker and the Stamp Traveller**, produced by Rock Demers, have been cast following an extensive talent search and promotional tour through elementary schools across Canada.

Shooting began in Montreal on July 14 for six weeks followed by two weeks in Hangzhou, China and a final week in Sydney, Australia. **Tommy Tricker** is the seventh feature film in the Tales For All Series of family-oriented films produced by Les Productions la Fête.

Anthony Rogers, age 12, of Ottawa will play Tommy while Jill Stanley and Andrew Whitehead have been cast as Nancy and Albert. Lucas Evans of Montreal will play Ralph and Paul Popowich of Hamilton will be featured as Cass. The screenplay is written and directed by Michael Rubbo.

Two earlier films in the Tales for All Series, **Bach and Broccoli** and **The Young Magician**, directed by André Melançon and Waldemar Dziki respectively, have been awarded silver medals at the Moscow International Film Festival. **Bach and Broccoli** won two other citations from the children's jury.

Daily Soap for TV Quatre Saisons

MONTREAL - Canada's first daily soap opera is in the new season program line-up at Television Quatre Saisons, the Montreal-based French-language television network.

La Maison Deschênes, a 30-minute dramatic series, will air week-nights at 6:30 p.m. starting August 31.

Produced independently by Prisma Productions, **La Maison Deschênes** will cost close to \$6 million for 250 initial episodes through the fall season.

The story centres on the intrigues involving the powerful Deschênes family. The head writer is Leopold St-Pierre.

Taping began in mid-June at the Quatre Saison studios in Montreal.

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