

## ON (EXPERIMENTAL) FILM

by B. Sternberg

An interesting change in programming habits has become evident; namely, that of intermingling experimental films with screenings of documentaries and narratives. This happened to a film of mine that was invited to the Women's Film Festival organized in Moncton by *Femmes à Focus*. As one of the few experimental films shown, and the only one that day, it was seen by people who had not especially selected an experimental programme, but who were surprised, pleasantly so I might add, by the difference, the change this form presented. Quite a bit of response, discussion, questioning and mulling over occurred. The willingness to consider my film was aided, by being situated amongst films that were easier to see; easier in that their structure/conven-

tions/language are already known by the audience.

This intermingling of genres has occurred also in programmes investigating the documentary itself; for example, *Transmutations: Formal Inventions in Documentary* included experimental films in each of its programmes: Richard Fung and Peter Steven of DEC Films are planning a seminar on politically-intentioned films and are looking at films whose form itself is revolutionary, asking, as did feminist theory, whether conventional forms or language that reflects the status quo can speak of other perspectives. And last year's Grierson Documentary Seminar invited Vera Frenkel with her tape of *Lost Art: Cargo Cult Romance*, a reconstruction in documentary style of an invented historical

event as a foil by which to examine traditional documentary.

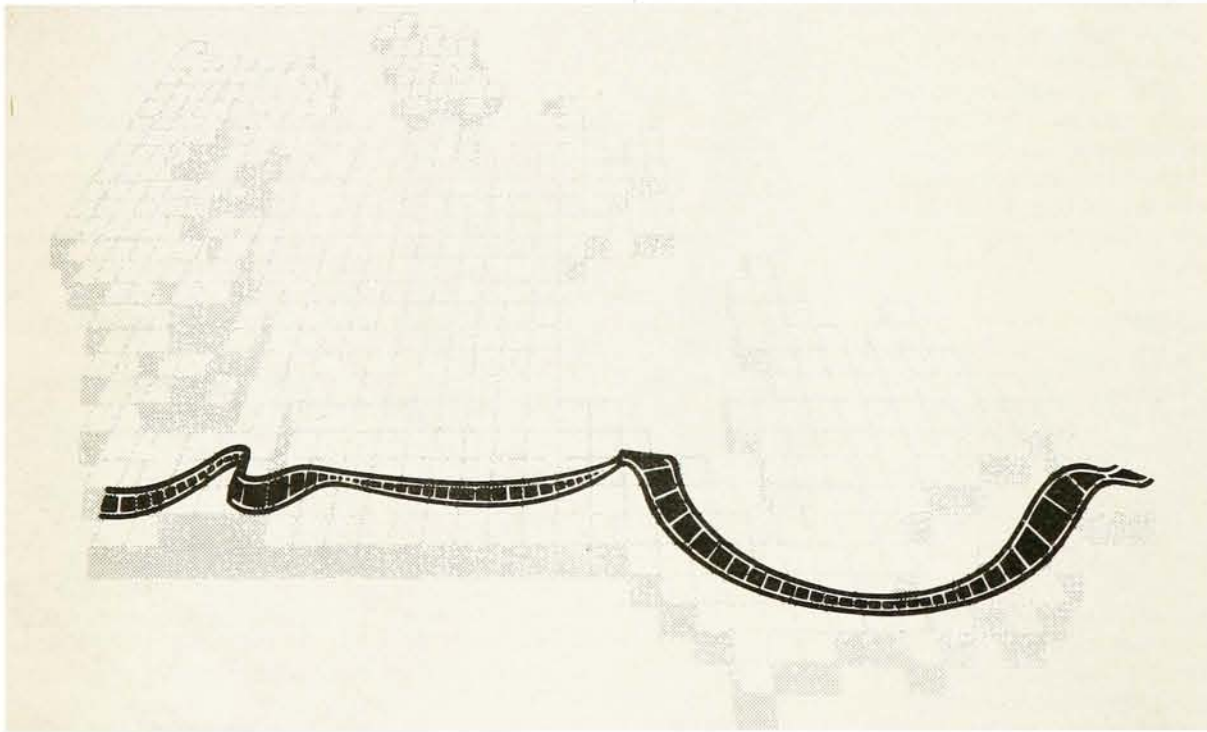
An article by Yvonne Rainer, "Thoughts on Women's Cinema: Eating Words, Voicing Struggles", published in April's *Independent Film and Video Monthly*, addresses the problem of voicing women's experiences without using narrative. She comments: "In relation to the various notions of an avant-garde... [this] emphasis on voicing what has previously gone unheard, gives priority to unmasking and reassessing social relations rather than overturning previously validated aesthetic positions." Later in the article she asks:

*"Should a film whose main project is to restore the voice and subjectivity of a previously ignored or suppressed person or segment of the population, should such a film contain argument, contradiction, or express the director's ambivalence within the film directly, through language, or*

*indirectly through stylistic intervention?... My own solution runs to keeping an extra-diagetic voice, a voice separate from the characters and story, fairly active in every scene... In this film [The Man Who Envied Women] fictional and documentary modes come into play more fully than in any of my previous work, offsetting the calculation of my still-cherished recitations and readings with the immediacy of dramatic and documentary enactment. These last are, admittedly, the strategies that offer the spectator the most powerful sense of the real. But reality, as we do so well know, always lies elsewhere, a fact that we nevertheless endlessly seek to disavow and from which we always retreat. I shall continue to remind us of that disavowal by challenging reality's representational proxies with assorted banky-panky. I hope others continue to do likewise and otherwise."*

As much as experimental film is being included in diverse programmes, it is still omitted from articles on ART!! For example; John Benty Mays' year-end synoptic look at the Toronto art scene in the *Globe and Mail* did not so much as mention the word film nor, as I understand it, will he be including any experimental filmmakers in his upcoming book on 10 years of Toronto art; Diana Nemiroff's extensive preface to the catalogue of the exhibition *Songs of Experience* which thoughtfully outlines various directions, trends, strategies of recent art-making does not draw on any experimental films to exemplify her points despite the fact that she was using examples of work beyond that of the 15 artists in the show and that many experimental films would have been so appropriate and were, in fact, initiatory of the strategy under discussion (not to mention that there were film programmes with the show). Similarly, I noted in reading an article in an ICA publication *Document A 4 Post Modernism* the examples given of postmodernist strategies were strikingly familiar; for example 'bricolage'... has anyone seen any of David Rimmer's films, especially a recent one entitled *Bricolage*????

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The Art Gallery of Ontario presented a retrospective exhibition of Joyce Wieland's work, including her films: *Reason Over Passion/La Raison avant la passion*, *Pierre Vallières*, *Patriotism, Part I*, *Patriotism, Part II*, *Catfood*, *Birds at Sunrise*, *Water Sark*, *Handtinting Solidarity*, *A and B in Ontario*, *Experiment in Living*, *Rat Life and Diet in North America*, *The Far Shore*, *Peggy's Blue Skylight*, *Short Shave, 1933*, *Dripping Water and Sailboat*.

A feature of the presentation of the films, I noted happily, was the scheduled re-screenings on different days and then on different time slots. A welcome change from one-time-only-sorry-you-missed-it programming.

On the first evening of screenings a panel of four presented talks on different aspects of Joyce's work: Kass Ban-

*Cont. on p. 49*

OTTAWA - The Seventh Annual Summer Institute of Film and Television will be held in Ottawa, June 21 to 26.

Among invited workshop and seminar leaders is Burt Metcalfe, executive producer, director and co-writer of the television series *M.A.S.H.*, and Patricia Rozema, director of *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*.