

## ON (EXPERIMENTAL) FILM

by Barbara N. Sternberg

**Immoral Memories 1** (16 mm b. w., sound, 10 min.) has just been completed by filmmaker Gary Popovich. Gary describes the film's motivation as follows: the film is a personal response to a moment in Nietzsche's life when, in his final frenetic year, churning out five books, he hears a horse in the street being whipped. He races downstairs, throws his arms around the horse's neck to comfort it and then falls down himself, unconscious – the last moment of sanity in his life. **Memories** is an emotional response to the inventiveness and energy in Nietzsche's life and to the inventors of cinema, a life and a medium which propelled us into the 20th century.

The film, Gary explains, triangulates three moments in history: "Nietzsche lived one block away from the church that housed the shroud of Turin – a cloth, a fabric on which an image reflects back to us an extremely popular figure, an idol, one might say a matinee idol; the shroud is the beginning of cinema." The fanciful triangulation is made up of Gary being in the spot where Nietzsche wrote *The Anti-Christ* with the shroud one block away (Christ as a ghost image, fading) while cinema was being invented. "I went to Europe and I found sad, lonely images that peeled away pouring out the energy of a man madly writing a text for the 20th century. As Nietzsche sharpens his pen for his final blows against Christianity, Lumière, using the shroud as a model, trains his images on the construction of the new church. He buttresses the knave under the guise of science, and ushers in the 20th century as a torrential train of images that loosen the Gods' grip on the engine of the earth. The only thing left is to put the collection plate in place at the ticket window."

The film has three actions corresponding to periods in Nietzsche's life: 1844-62, from his birth until he abandoned theology; 1863-82, a period of travel, relationships with various people are important to him, the beginnings of his mature philosophy. This period ends with breaks with Wagner, his mother, his sister and with Lou Salome; 1883-89 is a time of more travel, his mature works of philosophy, loneliness, a need for friendship and his final collapse. Moments in Nietzsche's life are tied in with moments in the history of the cinema (images from Muybridge and Lumière). Sounds interesting...let's see it!

I just finished reading "Fear and Trembling at the Whitney Biennial," an article by J. Hoberman about the film and video components of the Whitney Biennial (*Village Voice*, June '87). While there is much I agreed with, there are a few premises, stated and unstated, I take exception to. When he recreates for us his first adolescent experiences of underground filmgoing "in cruddy

storefronts and the even weirder basement of a midtown skyscraper", I felt with him the nostalgia for those adventures with experimental – then 'underground' – film. Hoberman's adolescent beatnik days of madness, drugs, and sexual liberation are equated with greatness and all else pales by comparison. But when Hoberman continues to judge film (and life?) through that adolescent's eyes, although I'm tempted to agree (yes, that energy, that demanding honesty that naïveté), I wonder if there isn't more to

be said for viewing work with the knowledge, experience, and maturity of age.

We can't remain adolescents forever, nor should we expect experimental film and its makers to. Later in the article, Hoberman cites two films in the Whitney Biennial as being "challenging films by first-rate artists": Yvonne Rainer's **The Man Who Envied Women** and Ernie Gehr's **Signal – Germany on the Air**. Both of these films are by mature filmmakers and neither has the kind of shock/titillation/popu-

lar appeal of Kenneth Anger's **Scorpio Rising** (the film Hoberman repeatedly cites as exemplary of the golden days of the American Underground Movement). These are slow-moving films: the first, the 'theoretical' film Hoberman later laments and the second, of the 'intellectual' structural movement.

Hoberman goes on to state, "Individuals (filmmakers) persevere, but the movement seems moribund." (Is 'death' the hot word right now, and

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continuing to live day-to-day just ho-hum?). Who is it that needs an identified movement? And who says that the movement need be avant-garde in its impulse? Must experimental film be seen/judged only insofar as it challenges the establishment? Why do we even look to the mainstream cinema to note the effects of or to compare experimental film with, anyway? We know that, though both are film, Hollywood's use of the medium is industrial, market-driven and formulaic; experimental films are filmic and individual. Why compare? Experimental films are; they are not 'alternative to'. Experimental films present ways of seeing and experiencing through film. Let's look, see, live, learn, enjoy, be bored, be engaged, be aware, experience.

The article seems to bemoan the marginalization of experimental film and filmmakers. Reviewers won't cover "the crazy movies at the Whitney while experimental filmmakers are forced into the starvation and squalor of ghetto life". Yet, when Hoberman reports the inclusion of this film within "academic bulwarks" it is only with regret that "where once raving madmen became filmmakers, it was now the turn of genteel professors." We just can't win! But how much and for how long was avant-garde film taught in film schools? Is it not, within academia, a fringe? Most film schools teach the popular culture of movies and now TV (of the 51 panels at the last joint U.S. and Canadian Film Studies Association Conference, six concerned themselves with analyses of television). So, perhaps it is only fitting that artists subvert, or at least comment on popular culture in their work.

There may have been little strong work in the Biennial or just out there at the moment, perhaps because of the tendency to show immediately everything one makes, but let's discuss/write about what is interesting - and not worry about what to name the movement!

## Open doors at NATPE

MONTREAL - Doing Business With Canadians is the name of a seminar to be introduced at this year's National Association of Television Program Executives Market (NAPTE) to be held Feb. 26-29 in Houston, Texas.

In response to an increasing demand in the U.S. for more information on the Canadian industry, the seminar will be held for the first time at NAPTE on Feb. 25 from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Canadian panelists invited to discuss issues like co-venturing with Canada and obtaining new Canadian product are: Robert Lantos of Alliance Entertainment Corporation, Peter Sussman of Atlantis, Jon Slan of Paragon Motion Pictures, Michael Hirsch of Nelvana Ltd., Paul Saltzman of Sunrise Films Ltd., John Brunton of Insight Production Company Ltd., Sheldon S. Wiseman of Evergreen Raccoons Television Productions, David Patterson of Cineplex Odeon Television, Bill Stevens of Crawleys International Inc., Chuck Green of New Wilderness Productions, Pat Ferns of Primedia and Tony Allard of Allarcom Productions.

Julia Frittaion of Telefilm Canada says enquiries from south of the border and the subsequent seminar, organized by Telefilm, are a direct result of an increased amount of Canadian programs currently seen on U.S. television.

"Certainly programming is one reason for the seminar. Another is that our Los Angeles office lobbied very hard for this," says Frittaion.

A "Canada" booth will be set up at NAPTE with the participation of the Ontario Film Development Corporation, Telefilm and eight Canadian export companies.

Other important television and film markets coming up are Monte Carlo Market (Feb. 8-13), Berlin Film Market (Feb. 12-23), American Film Market (Feb. 25-March 4).

## Fronts West

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and took the first draft into the workshop," says Fefer. There, they worked on a final draft with writer Phil Savath, who Fefer says was great for ideas and support.

**Star Crossed** is about a woman who accidentally gets caught up in a blind date with an alien and, well, let's say it gets complicated from there.

With all this work to do, Vancouver filmmakers will be wanting to get an early start on the day. To that end the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television is presenting a series of breakfast lectures in conjunction with Thorne, Ernst & Whinney. Dale Andrews of that respected firm of accountants spoke on "Helter Skelter, the 1988 Film Financing in B.C." on February 3. Donald Brinton of CanWest Broadcasting talks about Pacific Television on March 9. Steve Sasson of Cannell is scheduled for April 6 and George Chapman of IATSE on May 4. All of these breakfasts take place at the Coast Georgian Court Hotel beginning at 8 a.m.

The B.C. Film and Video Industry Association has received \$16,650 from Pat Carney's Ministry for International Trade. The money goes toward publication of an international marketing guide and directory of film and video buyers around the world.

Three of Vancouver's dark movie houses - the Odeon on Granville Street, The Dunbar and the Varsity (both on the West Side) - should be reopened sometime this month. Famous Players took over the leases on the theatres after Cineplex Odeon moved much of its business into a new seven-screen complex, also on the Granville Street Mall.

Hannah Fisher needs help. The Vancouver International Film Festival director has lost two of her key staff and is looking for someone to fill a new position, director of communications. Righthand woman Sherline Stroud is off to meet new administrative challenges and programmer Amnon Buchbinder has left to make his own films. Hannah would prefer to hire a Vancouver programmer but is also looking elsewhere across Canada. Expect decisions in March.

We'll have to wait until April to find out how many people actually took in the 1987 Festival. Put off by the annual war of statistics between Toronto and Montreal, directors of the Van-

couver Festival won't whisper a word until the audited figures are presented at the annual general meeting.

Paul Smilsky of Centaur Films is back from three months in Saudi Arabia. He directed a 50-minute documentary for Ara International Productions. It was broadcast on both Saudi radio and TV. His next project is underway in Vancouver. **The Trial of Harry Rankin** focuses on one of B.C.'s most controversial lawyers and municipal politicians.

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