



● Pascale Ogier and Jacques Derrida deconstruct in *Ghost Dance*



● Lora Logic saxing it up in *Crystal Gazing*

Highlights of the 12th Montreal International Festival of New Cinema

Vicarious desperation

by David Clarke

Watching anti-nuke videos was my introduction to the 12th Montreal International Festival of New Cinema.

Later, A-Bombs were much on my mind as I wandered among the mushrooming crowds of curiously coiffed, attitudinally dysfunctional New Wavers who were there to see what was new in the world of cheap films this year.

The two documentaries about the March for Disarmament of June 12, 1982 – *In Our Hands* by Robert Richter and *The March for Disarmament* by Tobe Carey – were effective agit-prop. *In Our Hands* editor Stan Warnow shaped the footage to produce an uplifting film, if one that was a trifle too slick. The approach taken by Tobe Carey and the over-200 independent video-makers involved in the project was presumably dictated by the logistics of such a large co-operative effort, but the video's rough edges make it seem more convincing than *In Our Hands*.

Neither had much lasting impact, however. It was a documentary entitled *Atomic Artist*, by Glen Silber and Claudia Vianello, that was startling and thought-provoking.

This is a film – presented in video format at the Festival – about a sculptor named Tony Price, who fishes for mate-

rials at a junkyard near the Los Alamos nuclear laboratory and uses what he finds in his work. His sculptures have considerable impact in themselves, with the knowledge of what they are made of making them even more effective.

The radiation he is absorbing by using these materials is a major danger to his life, and that makes Price an heir to the Romantic poets whose swoonings and consumption were such an integral part of their work. The gesture of exposing

himself to mortal danger for his art also puts him at the forefront of performance art, and at the centre of the dilemma about nuclear war as subject for artistic investigation.

The vast horror of nuclear warfare might well be a subject that only silence can do justice to, as George Steiner suggested in the '50s was the case with the Holocaust. What human can presume to take on the Bomb?

On the other hand, what price silence?

So along comes Price, and he puts his life on the line. Someone else comes along and records this act.

We are invited to share vicariously in his desperation.

It produces a large anxiety in us, and a nagging feeling afterwards that we have seen something important – but what exactly is hard to say.

Like an Evel Kneivel of nuclear war, Price leaves us feeling cheated, with the demoralizing feeling that nukes eat artistic visions and human sensibilities for breakfast. If *Atomic Artist* is anti-nuke agit-prop, then it has produced the wrong effect. If it is about Art for Art's sake, then using radioactive materials is a funny way to run a business.

As for Tony Price, he is a madman and a visionary and very possibly a genius.

Quebec new waves

Quebec film and video participation in this year's Festival of New Cinema, while by no means extensive, was generally superb.

In video, the series *Images d'ici* offered a retrospective of Quebec video-making the '60s to the '80s. Frank Vitale's *Hitch Hiking* offered a nostalgic look at by-gone days of '60s transience in a *vidéo-vérité* evocation of trans-Canada hitch-hiking. Linda Craig and Jean-Pierre Saint-Louis' *Fait divers: elle remplace son mari par la TV* was a little soap opera about a woman who watches so many soaps she becomes one of the characters, watching a screen of a woman watching a screen of a woman being video-taped. Pierre Rovere's video premiere of *Time Zone* completed the transition into the telefuture where technology has completely assimilated nature.

In film, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's *Au rythme de mon coeur* was a lovingly *intimiste* view of family, friends, country and finally the images them-

selves, soaring free to new dimensions of perpetual rediscovery.

Gilles Groulx' musical fantasy *Au pays de Zom*, a portrait of the perfect Philistine, was an absolutely brilliant idea for a satire that doesn't quite make it. Dominated by Jacques Hétu's music and Joseph Rouleau's voice, the images, except for the closing scene, never get off the ground.

Finally, Jacqueline Levitin's *Pas fou comme on le pense* was a marvelously convincing film about madness. During a four-day get-together 10 psychiatric patients discuss with true insight and honesty, how they themselves experience their madness and how they feel others perceive it. As they re-enact their experiences, somewhere between the fiction and the underlying anguish they describe, there lies a true poignancy which Levitin captures with delicacy and sobriety. Her film showed that images do talk when they have something to say. Levitin's film got a tremendous round of applause, fully deserved.

Many of the other, non-nuke oriented, videos that were screened on the cute little plaster columns provided for the occasion were of a wretched ineptness that only a grant-giving bureaucrat could

love. Video-makers like the director of *Time in Rectangle*, Norio Imai, seem determined to recreate every error, chase up every blind alley, and waste as much time as generations of their independent film counterparts have done. Watching Imai unroll videotape to classical music was a most unfruitful experience.

With *ne plus ultra* quality video technique on display in an abundance of rock videos, *Tape Affair* by Massimo Mazzanti was the only video I saw that measured up. It is the story of a video director and a fashion model who as a last resort use a home video recorder to tape messages of love to each other. Their schedules have made them a Romeo and a Juliet struggling to find each other, and it is a cleverly done work that should win the director a gig with Duran Duran.

The Only Difference Between Men and Boys is the Price of Their Toys is a documentary by Dutch director Steven de Winter that investigates the international arms industry about as well as the C.B.C.'s *Fifth Estate* would on an off day.

Tube Style, Amos Poe Interview and *'50s Dreamer* are videos by the Italian video house Cashbah Productions. They shouldn't win Cashbah any gigs, except maybe with Zeller's fashion department.



● Searching for the noble savage in *Tropiafric*

Turning to film, *Variety* by New York director Bette Gordon was by far the best I saw at the Festival. There is a distinctive Bette Gordon visual style, first witnessed in a short film called *Empty Suitcases* at the Festival a couple of years ago. While not sentimental, it is a loving style - heavy on contrasting shards of colour against Manhattan's blacks, whites and greys. In *Variety* Ms. Gordon uses her visual talents to tell the story of a young woman writer who takes a job selling tickets in a porno theater. As the woman is drawn into an obsessive interest in her dismal new surroundings, she also gets involved with a mysterious stranger. The Hitchcockian intrigue that ensues is a little short on logic, but marvelous in its evocation of atmosphere. The film works better as a study of the porno underworld than as a thriller, though, for it is obviously concerned with getting the facts right first and foremost. The portrayal of an alienated young woman in these circumstances works as an effective feminist critique, devoid of the histrionic overstatements that marred *Not a Love Story*.

Another major film was *Ghost Dance*, by English director Ken McMullen. It was somewhat grandiose, in fact - a sprawling look at all the ramifications of a couple of intriguing concepts, that there are ghosts in our languages, rituals and media, and that they can be evoked. What can't be evoked, though, is a sense of urgency about the matter, and so the film became an ordeal to watch. If McMullen wants to be the Cecil B. DeMille of independent cinema, he should think again. The incisive, modest little film that was *Résistance* was far superior to this flawed work, which nonetheless shows a willingness to take on the world that is a lot more impressive than the in-group smugness of *Crystal Gazing* by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen. This film also ponders language, and it has its moments as its cast portray harried British intellectuals trying to survive in Thatcher's England. Another middling film about language was *Fury*

Abitibi-Témiscamingue

The little fest that's growing

When the plane dropped us off in Rouyn on Oct. 22, the captain was the first to wish the passengers a good film festival. They don't mince words in Rouyn and they see things on the grand scale.

Film is endemic to this distant mining area whose land the Quebec government had cleared not even 50 years ago while Father Proulx's camera filmed the entire, bizarre saga of the colonization of Abitibi. The people here are driven by a violent desire to create. Not to imitate others, but to satisfy a local population's great hunger for culture. And that's one reason why the Abitibi-Témiscamingue Film Festival is such an enormous popular success.

Perhaps one has to get off the beaten paths of culture to truly appreciate the importance a film festival can command. And at Rouyn, for the second year running, the festival was a genuine cinematic feast, with both simplicity and fervor. There were many films; endless talk of films; and a damned good time was had by all.

All that thanks to a small group of organizers (Jacques Matte of course, but also Suzanne Bourassa, Louis Dallaire, Suzanne Ménard, Guy Parent, Danielle Tessier). And a great swarm of spectators, a-feasting, a-brunching, and a-drinking til the wee hours every night at the Théâtre du Cuivre. And seeing films, to be sure.

From Oct. 22-27, the theatre was packed: 15 features and 24 shorts from 10 countries. The organizers managed to lure the big critical guns in from Montreal as well as all the regional press. There were even a few ministers of the Crown, including Communications minister Francis Fox, who noted that the Abitibi Fest was the only new film festival in the last two years to have merited support from the federal Festivals Bureau.

And of course there were the V.I.P.s, the very important guests. Margot Kidder was there to present the French version of Don Shebib's *Heartaches*, starring herself. To Kidder's great surprise, the Abitibi public seemed to love the film. Husband Philippe e Broca was there to present his feature *L'Africain* which opened the festival. French filmmaker Gabriel Auer brought his *Les yeux des oiseaux*, a film about Uruguayan political prisoners and the international Red Ross. Orlow Seunke, the Dutch filmmaker, brought his *Le goût de l'eau* which ran off with the Festival's Grand Prize.

Noteworthy Quebec filmmakers present at the Fest included: regional filmmakers Robert Cornélien (*La fuite*) and Madeleine Ste-Marie (*Dompteurs de moutons*), actor Jean-Louis Millette (*Pourquoi l'étrange M. Zolock s'intéressait-il tant à la bande dessinée?*), director Arthur Lamothe (*Mémoire battante*), director Iolande Rossignol (*Laure Gaudreault*), actress Louise Dusault (*L'étaubus, Laure Gaudreault*); director Alain Chartrand (*L'étaubus*), director Hubert-Yves Rose (*Voyageur*); directors Julien Poulin and Pierre Falardeau (*Les vacances d'Elvis Gratton*), director Jacques Augustin (*Habitant glorieux*), filmmaker Daniel Rancourt (*L'acteur, la voisine*), actress Mireille Deyglun (*Bonheur d'occasion*) and director Claude Fournier (*Bonheur d'occasion*).

Jacques Matte and his organizers are already hard at work preparing the third Festival for Nov. 1-7, 1984, again at the 569-seat Théâtre du Cuivre. With over 4000 spectators last year, 3000 in '82, organizers are confidently predicting 5000 for this year. In Abitibi-Témiscamingue, the future looks good for quality cinema.

Jean-Pierre Tadros ●

is a *Feeling Too*, by Cynthia Beatt. It makes a few points about the problem of using a corrupted German language to communicate feelings in a country that shame and war have stripped of a past, but the film's shuffling, mumbling '60s art school style is not exactly stimulating to the eye. Ken McMullen may have reached beyond his grasp with *Ghost Dance*, but he'll be back with something more fully realized before those others have noticed a few fancy notions does not a film make.

Tropiafric, by Karol Schneeweiss and Maria Fisahn, is about some tourists from West Germany showing what rotten, corrupt little people they are compared to the noble savages they encounter. That is about the level of analysis is this pretty, rather amusing little film, which portends somewhat more through its use of deliberately stilted dialogue and lingering shots. Eric Rohmer's social comedies, such as *Pauline at the Beach*, however, use the same techniques more effectively.

Last Night at the Alamo, by Texas director Eagle Pennell, is a moderately successful film about some redneck losers spending the last night at their favourite bar. Maybe the closing of the bar has something to do with the end of the Western myth. It doesn't matter much if it does or not, for this is true-to-life work that stands on its own. The film has the same warmth found in Montreal playwright David Fennario's work, and it was a pleasure to watch in the midst of the more-alienated-than-thou fare that was a staple of the Festival this year.

Any real life that might have intruded on Raul Ruiz's *Les trois couronnes du matelot* would have been out of place in this sterile attempt to produce a Fellini-like fable of a sea-faring wanderer. The metaphysics of this film were obscure, and the visual power of a Fellini was not in evidence. Still, there were moments when the director seemed to have forgotten to try and be cosmic, and they made a few minutes out of the nearly two hours feel like Ruiz might have some of the talent that a man with twenty-odd films under his belt should be expected to possess.

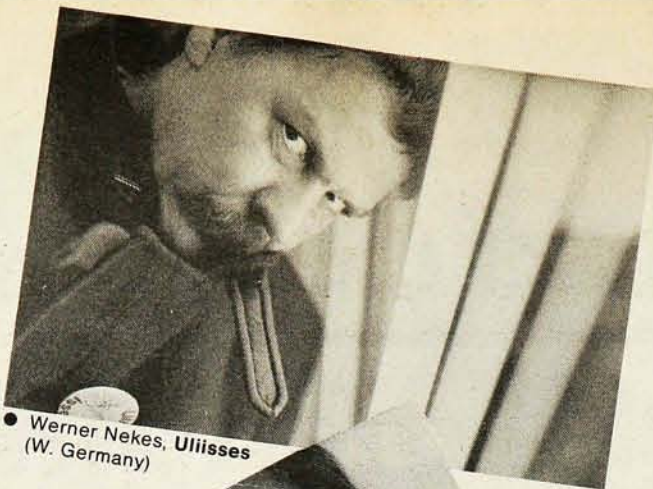
A superb documentary named *Faits Divers* was one of the last films I caught at the Festival, and it dispelled some of the feeling I had throughout that this must have been a poor year for independent filmmaking. A gripping account of life on the police force in Paris' 5th Arrondissement, this film by Raymond Depardon had moments in it that were simply unforgettable. Watching a woman being separated from her child by the police might not be everyone's cup of tea - it certainly wasn't my idea of a good time - but capturing such incidents on film is the essence of fine documentary filmmaking.

Still, on the whole this was not a banner year for the Festival. The quality of projection caused a fair amount of complaining, as did the quality of films overall. There was no lack of enthusiasm on the part of the Festival staff, who continue to be the most sprightly and innovative independent film entrepreneurs around. So here's hoping that next year recession and the fear of war will ease up a little, and the world's alternative filmmakers will be feeling a little perkier. For, God knows, some of the weaker films at this year's Festival - the ones not worth mentioning - were among the dreariest, most claustrophobic and misconceived efforts this critic has ever walked out on. ●

FESTIVALS



● Actor Jean-François Stevenin, *Poussière d'Empire* (France-Vietnam)



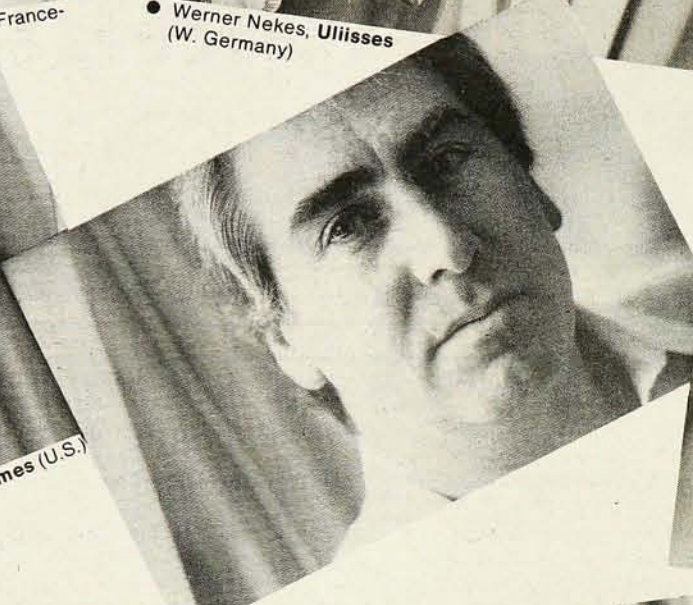
● Werner Nekes, *Uliisses* (W. Germany)



● Stephen Dwoskin, *Shadows From Light* (U.K.)



● Actor Julian Beck, *Signals Through The Flames* (U.S.)



● Gilles Groulx, *Au pays de Zom* (Québec)



● Katherine Matheson, *Comédienne* (U.S.)



● Lâm Lê, *Poussière d'Empire* (France-Vietnam)



● Spike Lee, *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop* (U.S.)

New cinema faces :

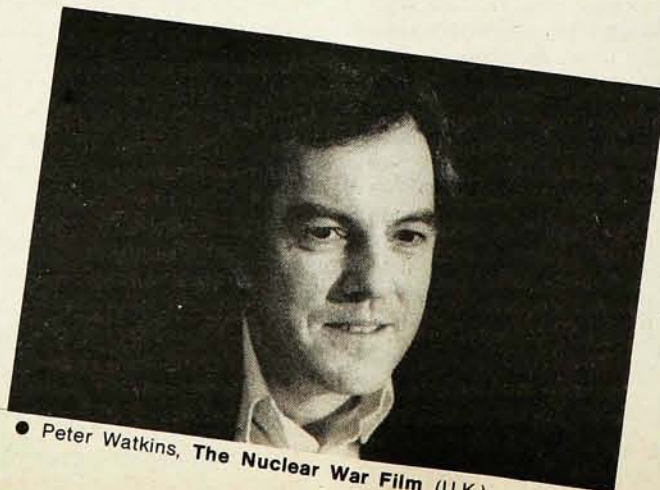
Films are only part of a film festival, and the 12th International Festival of New Cinema was no exception to this rule. The fest also offered press conferences, a cabaret, a seminar with noted French cameraman Henri Alekan and West Germany's Thomas Mauch, a retrospective of the works of British animator Len Lye, as well as a recent selection of contemporary Greek cinema. Photographer Linda Hammond captured some of the directors and actors who accompanied their films to Montreal.

Photographs by Linda Hammond

Linda Hammond is a Montreal freelance photographer.



● Peter Watkins, *The Nuclear War Film* (U.K.)



● Werner Schroeter, *The Laughing Star* (W. Germany)

