

ON (EXPERIMENTAL) FILM

• by B. Sternberg •

...speaking to Philip Hoffman about his summer in England 'apprenticing' with filmmaker Peter Greenaway (*Draughtsman's Contract*, *The Falls*):

Philip was especially interested in Greenaway as someone who has bridged the gap between shorter experimental films and (low-budget) feature-length works accessible to a broader audience. Philip wanted to see how Greenaway operates within the commercial industry, yet maintains his control; how he can make films for the 'public' without compromising his conceptual and visual concerns.

Philip is an independent filmmaker (*On The Pond*), *The Road Ended at the Beach*, *Somewhere Between Jalostotitlan and Encaracion*) and a freelance cinematographer. He worked on Kevin Sullivan's *Krieghoff* and *Megan Carey*. And recently on Richard Kerr's *On Land Over Water*. His films have been screened at the National Gallery, Ottawa; Zone Cinema, Hamilton; The Funnel, Toronto; Museum Fodor, Amsterdam; London Filmmakers' Co-op, England. Philip teaches part-time in the Media Arts Department at Sheridan College.

He first met Peter Greenaway at the '84 Grierson Seminar where the idea arose of

going to England to observe Greenaway shooting his newest film *Zed and Two Noughts* while Hoffman made a short film of his own. Philip speaks highly of the experience – the opportunity to look over the shoulder of cinematographer Sacha Vierny, to follow the filmmaking procedure right through, to see what worked, what didn't, how adjustments were made, when to let an idea go, and generally how communication was effected. Philip is still glowing from the warmth of his reception. Besides access to the shoot and the use of his editing facilities, "more than just that," says Phil, "Greenaway appreciated that I am trying to be inventive in film against all odds. He even took prints of my films and showed them around – that kind of cooperation!"

Interest was shown by Kees Kasander of Allart's Enterprises (the Dutch producer of Greenaway's film) in Hoffman's short premiering along with *Zed and Two Noughts* at the London Film Festival in November. Philip returned to Canada at summer's end with his film *o, zoo!* (*The Making of a Fiction Film*) in rough-cut stage and with this deadline in mind.

Unfortunately, he won't make the festival. Although the

film had been accepted into the N.F.B. PAFPPS programme, Ontario Region, Philip was reminded in September that this is a Low-Priority Programme – the film would be printed when there was time, perhaps three months. He was also told that he would have to reapply for completion money and that the programme is 'on hold' for now. Philip was disappointed by a system that is supposed to help, but even more by the lack of interest, respect or enthusiasm shown – they didn't even ask to see the film!

The N.F.B.'s aid to independents IS helpful, but the whens and hows are always uncertain – and that's less than helpful.

Philip has decided to apply to the Arts Councils and hopes to complete the film for the Berlin Festival in February.

More films in the works:

Chris Gallagher of Vancouver is at work on a new film (working title: *Visual Literacy*) which will be about two hours long. Other, shorter, films by Chris include *Plastic Surgery*, *Terminal City*, *9 O'clock Gun*, *Mirage*, *Mirage*, *Seeing in the Rain*.

Joyce Wieland of Toronto, whose latest, *A & B in Ontario*, was screened at the '85 Festival of Festivals is completing two films: *Peggy's Blue Skylight*, *Birds at Sunrise*.

And where can one see these films, you ask????

Discussion of distribution and exhibition, and the relation between these two, is complex, involving as it does the workings of various organizations (galleries, cinemas, cooperatives), funding mechanisms and cultural attitudes. It is a discussion that needs to be aired – next issue – but for now allow me to pick up on a phrase from the previous 'conversation' with Phil Hoffman about the gap between experimental and "films accessible to a broader audience." This is usually taken to refer to the film's accessibility; that is, to the nature of its form and content, and how much or little these conform to the so-called norms of conventional narrative cinema. It may also contain notions of audience experience, education and expectations.

I would say, rather, that ACCESSIBILITY is a matter of AVAILABILITY. It has been well-taken in our society that audiences are developed, and markets created. I didn't know that I wanted to see *Rambo* till \$1,000,000 worth of promotional efforts convinced me! And I only realized how much I cared whether the Blue Jays won or lost when every disc jockey and newscaster, every newspaper and television programme told me so.

With experimental films, it is not the case that they have been rejected or ignored by the public, but rather that most people don't yet know they

exist. And so, how can one choose to see them?

One last item, not totally unrelated to the above in as much as writings play a crucial role in the development of audiences, in education, in history and the formation of values: Blaine Allen, Film Studies at Queen's University, is conducting research for a critical study of experimental film in Canada up to the end of the 1960s. He is now in the process of tracking down films and filmmakers to recover this misplaced piece of Canadian film history. The study will take the form of a series of essays, possibly a book, which will form a critical assessment of the evolution of experimental film in this country.

Note: if you were working in film or know of experimental films from that period, please contact Blaine Allen at Queen's University Film Studies.

Peanut Butter to the rescue in family flick

MONTREAL – In the biggest-ever launch of a Canadian film without a major distributor behind it, *The Peanut Butter Solution* will open in over 60 Cineplex Odeon theatres across Canada in the first two weeks of December.

The Peanut Butter Operation, written and directed by Michael Rubbo, and starring young actors Mathew Mackay, Alison Podbrey and Siluk Saysanasy, along with grown-up actors like Michael Hogan (*Vanderberg, Lost!*), is the second comedy feature of the "Tales for All" series, produced by Les Productions La Fête under executive producer Rock Demers and co-producer Nicole Robert.

The half-million-dollar launch, with gala world premiere screenings in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto during the week of Dec. 2, followed by theatrical release throughout B.C., Ontario and Quebec Dec. 6, is being sponsored by radio stations CKAC in Montreal and CFRB Toronto.

The Skippy Peanut Butter company, with a Nov. 27 national newspaper insert aimed at 3.6 million homes, is offering a free LP of the film's soundtrack and a poster to children under 12. Other merchandising activities include release of two Céline Dion singles of the film's two songs, a novelization of the film, and *The Peanut Butter Solution* colouring book.

Cross-Canada distribution of *The Peanut Butter Solution* is being handled by Montreal distributor Cinemaplus.

**CENTRE FOR THE ARTS
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
FILM POSITION**

Simon Fraser University expects to make a *tenure track* faculty appointment in *Film Production* at the rank of *Assistant Professor*.

This position involves teaching at the intermediate and advanced levels of filmmaking, conducting critical seminars, and participating in faculty supervision of student films. Qualifications should include substantial professional experience in a variety of filmic genres (i.e., experimental film art, documentary, dramatic), a demonstrated ability to teach the craft of film at all levels, and some familiarity with contemporary film theory and criticism.

Candidates should be prepared to accept faculty responsibilities within an interdisciplinary fine and performing arts department, duties to begin September 1, 1986. Preference will be given to candidates eligible for employment in Canada at the time of application. The position is subject to budgetary authorization.

Letters of application, a complete curriculum vitae, and names of three referees should be received by February 14, 1986, and should be sent to:

**Professor Grant Strate, Director
Centre for the Arts
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, B.C., Canada V5A 1S6**

