

ON (EXPERIMENTAL) FILM

by B. Sternberg

Questions relating to curating and curatorship are in the air these days, with seminars, articles and a recent issue of *provincial essays* devoted to the topic. Who determines what gets shown/seen and what gets written about or included in historical record? What relation has this determination to the market evaluation of art and/or its socio-political value? What is the relative power between patronage and curatorship, and how do art, politics and government-funding interact? Do curators observe and place into context, or interpret, or do they, in fact, create theses for which the work serves merely as example? And what has this to do with film? Nothing and everything (as usual).

Film, as other reproducible art, is not a part of the collectible art market. It is coincidental that these same art forms are largely ignored by museums? The market in relation to film is the feature-film industry. And what gets shown and produced is 'selected', via Telefilm, by television executives.

As far as I know, there are no curators of film in the major public art galleries, which generally refuse or are unable to include film in the curating of contemporary art. If you think of curating as the procuring of, caring for and exhibition of a collection, there is no curating of experimental film. And there needs to be. Major public galleries should be collecting and regularly screening at least the 'foundational' experimental films, thereby educating the public and providing a context for independent curating of programmes of contemporary film art, and exhibition in artist-run centres.

Artist-run centres arose in Canada to provide artists unmediated access to galleries. Selection committees are composed of artists as opposed to administrators or critics. Experimental films are often presented in programmes selected according to an independent curator's theme or thesis. But does placing individual films in a context aid viewers to see more insightfully or does it limit the viewing experience by giving primacy to the curator's position? Also, what control has, or should a filmmaker have, over the context in which her/his work is seen? And who/what accredits curators as such? Is film taught in art history courses? In the meantime, let's continue to screen films - more and more

- and keep a debate going on criticism and curatorship.

Continuing with excerpts from interviews with film journalist Florian Hopf and Canadian filmmakers:

Joyce Wieland: I teach children painting - I'm a painter, too - and I speak to them about the future. They've done statistics on children in public schools and 75 per cent think there isn't any future. So I like to say "Draw a picture of the future" - draw a little house and let's make a drawing of where you would live. Some of them want to live in space. Their negativity keeps coming in and you always have to keep

going towards positive things. You build a bridge through drawings or a film.

I work with older people, too. They also have to have their eyes opened. They have to have the layers peeled off and even if they're not going to be artists professionally, they have to see that the most important thing is to enrich their lives by seeing.

For instance, one woman who owns her own business

was afraid at first to touch the paper, even to begin to draw. Then she started to see. One day she went outside and she saw the sun reflected on some buildings and she took about half an hour to walk down that street! From then on, she and the others were looking.

Hopf: What are the layers on the eyes of filmmakers in Canada?



National Film Board of Canada

Office national du film du Canada

NEWS

CANADIAN SCREEN INSTITUTE

The National Film Board will contribute \$1.8 million over a five-year period to help fund the newly-formed Canadian Screen Institute, a national organization based in Edmonton which will provide training in film production. In making the announcement, NFB chairman François N. Macerola stated that the Institute represents a "vital step in ensuring that Canadian stories reach our screens, and that filmmakers from across the country have the opportunity to tell the stories."

The Canadian Screen Institute has grown out of the Dramalab pilot which brought together young filmmakers from across the country to train in the various crafts related to dramatic film," said Mr. Macerola. "The NFB participated in Dramalab and will continue to support the Institute because it links training and production opportunities, is closely connected to provincial government initiatives and is a cooperative venture with the independent sector."

NORMAN McLAREN PEACE EDUCATION PRIZE

At a recent international conference on peace and security sponsored by McGill University, world-renowned film animator and director Norman McLaren accepted an award on behalf of filmmakers everywhere who are working through their art to promote peace education. McLaren, who retired from the NFB in 1984, established the Board's first animation studio and through his films acquired a reputation for innovation in

animation techniques and a deep commitment to social responsibility in the cause of universal peace and justice.

To mark his contribution to peace education, McGill has instituted a prize bearing McLaren's name which will be presented every year to a student who demonstrates exceptional talents in media studies and manifests the global consciousness and awareness exemplified by McLaren.

FORUM ON WOMEN'S STUDIES

The education sector has long been a major user of NFB films. As part of a program to revitalize exchanges between filmmakers and film users, a two-day workshop was recently held in Montreal which brought together several educators, family life and women's studies coordinators and NFB women producers from across the country and from Studio D. They explored the main issues affecting self-image attitudes and expectations of today's female high school students and discussed how filmmaking and film utilization can help generate attitudinal changes

and challenge the status quo. A report summarizing the discussions and outlining recommendations will be made available to educators across the country.

FILM FESTIVALS

CANNES

The Decline of the American Empire, Denys Arcand's new feature film, has been selected to open the Directors' Fortnight at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival. The film was co-produced by the NFB and Corporation M & M Ltée.

BANFF

Six films produced or co-produced by the NFB have been selected to be part of the official competition at the Banff Television festival: Genie winner *Final Offer: Bob White and the Canadian Auto Workers Fight for Independence*; ACTRA winner *Canada's Sweetheart: The Saga of Hal C. Banks*; *The Great Buffalo Saga*; *With Our Own Two Hands*; *Le Vieillard et l'enfant*; and *The Space Between*, Part III of the *Defence of Canada* series.



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→ **Wieland:** I think commercial filmmakers in English Canada don't have their eyes opened – they don't have a fresh view in themselves to develop, from inside. They look at product from other countries, from the U.S., and they want to emulate that because there's no encouragement from Telefilm to recognize individual vision, personal vision.

Hopf: What are these films from inner vision?

Wieland: It began in New York in the '60s and before, the underground filmmakers, and I saw what they called "ecstatic vision" and thought what could that be – and I wanted it! I would see these people developing from their own vision, from their lives in their studios or wherever, they would see the light and it was always about light. The problem is to go into oneself and find out what one is and to suffer what it is to be oneself. Go to the darkest parts and

brightest parts and find out what you like and want and to validate that.

When you work with students you have to stay with them all the time. It's not just a question of art and finding out who you are and to make this wonderful thing happen out of yourself, it's the responsibility to society and to care about other people. There needs to be much more communication – about joy, about light, about things that are considered frivolous by some political

filmmakers.

It's difficult to get the films shown. We're hindered by middle people – writers, TV people. A lot of people think art separates, but art is to embrace others – whether to convey something difficult or talk about light – to communicate those things without selling out...

Work that comes from the spirit, journeys into the spirit, that's what we need now.

Student entry project for Ontario productions

TORONTO – Students in Ontario film production programs looking for an introduction to the film industry have, for the past six years, been able to find some recognition in CBC Ontario's annual Telefest. New this year, and with a similar insight into the industry, is the Student Entry Project.

The project, which will hold jury screenings May 22-23 with an awards gala May 31 at the Ontario Science Centre, is attempting to take advantage of the fact that approximately 300 film students graduate annually from the production programs at post-secondary institutions throughout Ontario.

Seth Feldman, a York University film instructor, says four films each will be invited from institutions that include Sheridan and Niagara colleges, York, Queen's and universities, and Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. Categories will consist of narrative, documentary, experimental, and animated films, Feldman noting that organizers are hoping to expand the project to encompass screenwriting and film criticism as well.

In the works since February, Feldman said the project's been enthusiastically received by the industry – prizes will be donated by Norman Jewison and Budge Crawley, with a possible appearance by David Cronenberg – and that, in his view, it will fill "a fairly large gap" in opportunities currently available to film graduates.

While the project is still coming together, Feldman says approaches by organizers have also been made to TVOntario's programming director about possible airplay and to the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television (organizers of the Genies and recently-announced Gemini TV Awards) regarding the future inclusion of a project award.

Organizers are also lobbying, says Feldman, for changes in youth unemployment regulations to get graduates on productions faster, as well as a relaxation of rules among technical unions and guilds to permit more apprenticeships.

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