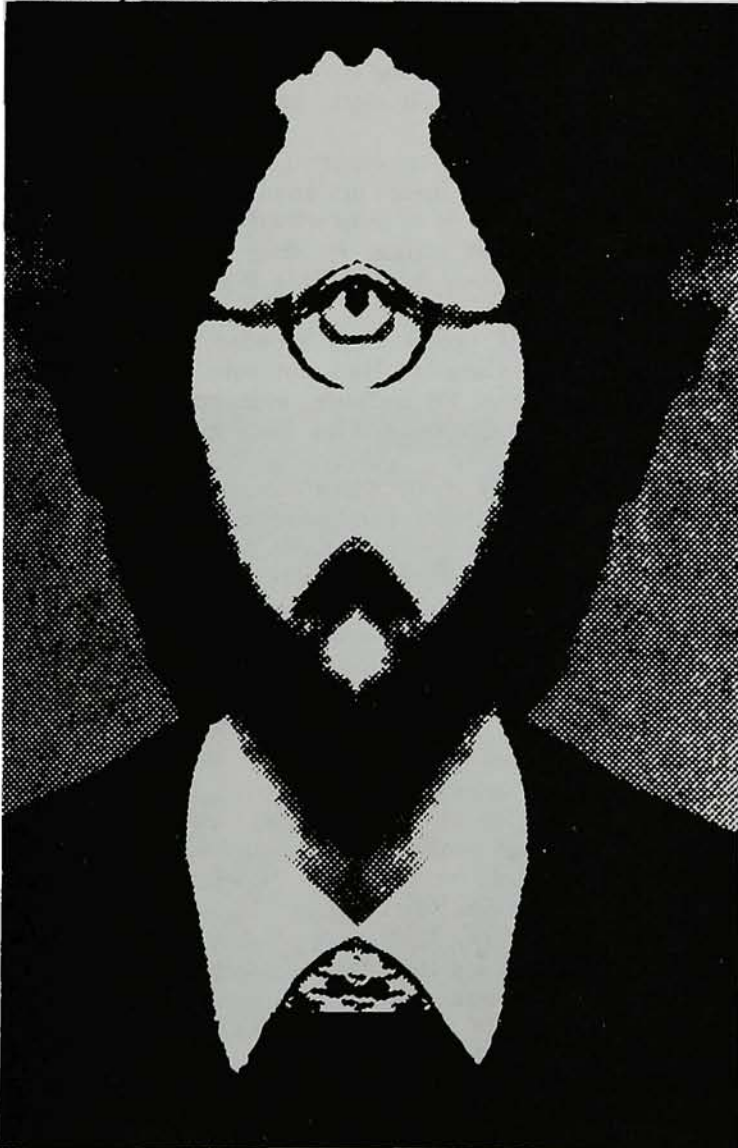


montreal 16 mm

by Jane Dick

The Montreal based International Festival of 16mm films may be on its last legs. This year's show had a severely reduced budget, and no filmmakers were brought in to discuss their films. Jane Dick reviews some of the Canadian offerings and then talks about the festival's aims.

Part of the poster used to promote the Festival.



Once upon a time (and presently just barely) there was an international 16mm film festival in Montreal. Biased sources assert that it was a successful, festive, lively affair of considerable importance. Sources prejudiced in the other direction claim it never was very good at all, nor of much use. Whether the festival will continue may depend on the reconciliation of these opposite poles. The problem is more than just a difference of opinion.

The Fifth Montreal International Festival of Cinema in 16mm was held this year at the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec October 22 to 26. 50 films representing 15 countries received their first Canadian showing there, possibly their only.

The Festival is organized by the Coopérative des Cinéastes Indépendants. The Festival's purpose is to present to the Canadian public 16mm films by independent filmmakers that are relevant and significant "in terms of creativity, originality and social importance." It is non-profit and non-competitive. It is the only festival of its kind.

It is brought to you by the same people who first introduced Andy Warhol and Werner Herzog, among others, to Canada. Some of us are too Canadian to feel the full impact of such foreign influences in film, but felt they are in many countries and felt they should be here.

The Co-op is dedicated to the distribution, exhibition and promotion of independently produced films in 16mm. This they try to do without prejudice. No one filmmaker or style is promoted over another. This in spite of the fact that some Canadian cineastes think they are God's gift to film and try to insist on special attention.

Besides distribution, the Co-op organizes various film programmes, presents retrospectives of Canadian short films to international festivals, and from 1969 to '71, organized three Canadian film tours (Minifestivals) to Europe

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which were well received. Lack of funds cut that venture short. The Co-op also organizes an annual international film festival in Montreal.

Repeat – it is an international festival, directed by Dimitri Eipides, and coordinated by Claude Chamberland. It is funded by the Montreal Arts Council, L'Office du film du Québec, and the ministry of Cultural Affaires in Quebec.

Funds this year were cut by almost two-thirds – a considerable blow to an organization on a shoestring budget as it is – necessitating the regrettable decision not to invite guest filmmakers to the festival as in the past. It's like an egg without salt. Indeed, this year's Festival had a bland local flavour to it – rather like a Montreal festival of international film and not an international festival in Montreal. The organizers are more than suspicious of political and commercial discrimination.

Without jumping into the fire, 'political' refers to the nationalistic fervour to which Canadians of late, especially Québécois, are prone. There are those who believe that the Festival should be used to push Canadian films. Out of 50 films, eight were from Canada, six of these from Quebec – a more than fair sampling.

Perhaps the U.S. was over-represented with 16 films, but national origin should not be a point of discrimination for or against a film of quality, should it?

As for commercial discrimination, that almost goes without saying. Financial support tends to go to established filmmakers. Not that they don't deserve it but independent newcomers experimenting with the medium have to fight for recognition and support. That includes promoters of same.

Yet these young upstarts are doing some very exciting things. The selection of films at the Festival covered many topics and styles, exhibiting considerable imagination. From France **Black and Light** directed by Pierre Rovere was a fascinating experiment on the relationship of light and motion. From Belgium, Armand de Hesselde's **Hurry Freddy Please**, besides being totally delightful, superbly so, also created a whole new world of sound using a voice and a microphone – a technique that has incredible possibilities if picked up. The documentaries in particular were innovative and provocative; Mai Wechselmann's **Viggen 37** (Sweden), Agnès Varda's **Daguerreotypes** (France), and Harold Mantell's **The Trials of Franz Kafka**, narrated by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (Czechoslovakia) were all brilliant. But putting a story effectively on film is an art still to be mastered by most.

Prime examples of failure to translate story to film were unfortunately Canadian films. **Sarah's War** (Toronto, 1974) and **Le lendemain d'un été** (Quebec, 1975) both relied too heavily on narrative/dialogue to carry action that should have been visual.

Lothar Spree's **Sarah's War** was technically inexcusable. Its loose-jointed action was inarticulate, poorly edited, and suffered from muffled sound. Billed as the humorous misadventures of a young woman trying to strike out against the establishment and finally resorting to inevitable violence, claiming to deal with the vital question of whom to strike, it is in fact simply a series of unintelligent manoeuvres proving little more than that mindless Sarahs everywhere are bound to lose.

Le lendemain d'un été, directed by François Lebus, was technically very well done. Its plot line was interesting, dealing with chance and the acceptance of contradictions within oneself as three men encounter and spend one night together. It suffers, alas, from stylistic clichés. The soundtrack is boring because too familiar – isn't anyone tired of guitars and humming voices? There is potential for some dynamic action, but the film's reliance on dialogue rendered its scene of confrontation weak.

F's Birthday (1974), also Canadian, directed, shot, and everything else by Robert Flower, handles well a bizarre little story about a young woman and an old bum. Parts of

the film have that half-digested consistency of so many Canadian films and the fantasy is sometimes pedestrian. The acting is uninspired and rehearsed. But the film is well thought out. Camerawork is not overly imaginative but is a successful translation of story to visual image and the film carries itself along.

The most original films at the festival were, almost needless to say, European. Perhaps because they've had more practice at the art than we have. And they seem less self-conscious.

There is at least one (all films were not, also, viewed) notable exception. **Yannis Xenakis**, a documentary from Quebec (1975) directed and edited by Roger Frappier. The quality of this film is at all times excellent, on all counts. Getting us acquainted with musician Xenakis, Frappier shows great respect for the artist and his work, and an abundance of imagination re: the documentary style. The film is ingenuous and fresh. It has a thought-provoking eeriness in its attempt (successful) to visually play Xenakis' music – very exciting, if you're into experimentation – choosing images complementary to his sounds. The film simply shines.

Canadian cinema has a problem. Filmmakers, viewers, critics, and sundry with pretensions to erudition have theorized on this problem again and again. No real need to introduce another theory, is there? Too many cooks and all that. But an opinion is about to be interjected, in spite of those who may frown.

Canadian cinema is incestuous. You were wondering why so many of them look alike? And as nationalistic tendencies increase, so does the problem of inbreeding.

The Festival, though not as dynamic as it might be, affords the filmmakers and buffs of Canada a glimpse of what is going on in 16mm – where most filmmakers start – around the world, and a chance to derive inspiration from other independent artists, to whom they might not otherwise be exposed. With adequate funding the Festival could be a more than worthwhile occasion. It could be downright exciting. Stimulating, in fact.

Claude Chamberland is very concerned about the prejudice against non-nationalistic cinema in Canada, and also especially about what he feels is a deep-seated prejudice against 16mm and independent artists. He feels these are factors which may have deterred some people from attending the Festival.

How to re-educate people to a broader acceptance/experience of film in Canada? He's not sure at this point. Sophisticated Parisiens, for instance, welcome films of this nature with open arms. Perhaps we have not yet come of age.

The future of the Festival? The Co-op plans to continue this annual affair but Claude emphasizes that they must get through one day at a time at this point. If grants are further decreased and no new funds can be allocated, the Co-op will not survive.

Presently, the Co-op itself is running on volunteer efforts. More so now than ever. During October's Festival, the offices of the Co-op were robbed – all their projectors and equipment were stolen. The barren office now looks like a bad joke. Without insurance to cover the loss it's going to be a long hard year.

In the interests of maintaining Canadian and independent 16mm cinema as a growing thing, support for ventures such as the Co-op and the Festival should be seriously considered. Contrary to personal tastes – yes, some artists abhor experimentation, thinking they have already arrived – this type of cinema plays a vital role in the art form. It serves as a constant stimulus and challenge to established forms of filmmaking; a continual reminder that we still have a long way to go.

And international? Absolutely. Fraternalizing with the enemy is sure to put some character on our inbred Canadian film faces. □